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NERA NORTHEASTERN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

The NERA Researcher

Inside this issue

The President's Message

Charlie DePascale

NERA Friends,

The first thought that comes to mind as I think about the year ahead is how lucky I am to assume the role of NERA President at a time when I can take full advantage of the infrastructure that my predecessors, the NERA board, and so many NERA committees have built over the last several years. On one level, that infrastructure involves solidifying the structure of the organization by establishing NERA as a 501(c)(3) institution which facilitates the growing of our crucial institutional membership program, protecting the organization by obtaining liability insurance for the Board and officers and weather insurance for the conference, and establishing accounting practices that not only protect our assets, but also ease the transition between treasurers – one of the most important and demanding positions in this all-volunteer organization. On another level, the NERA infrastructure means the network that comprises the standing committees (with their subcommittees), ad hoc committees, and conference committee whose members are most responsible for ensuring that NERA functions on a day-to-day basis. Finally, the infrastructure also includes the web-based resources and tools that integrate the many recordkeeping tasks that are critical to running the organization and enhance interactions with NERA members. Of course, when an organization has a solid infrastructure in place, you know it is there but you do not spend a lot of time thinking about it. When, as members, you can easily renew your annual membership, submit proposals, review proposals, vote in the NERA election, and register for the conference you do not worry about the engines that make that work. When committee chairs can easily communicate with membership, interact with the Board and other committees, and have a clear understanding of the role of their committee within the organization, they can focus on achieving their objectives rather than devoting valuable energy to tedious tasks like trying to figure out how to send an e-mail to members. And when an infrastructure is solid, a new NERA President and conference co-chairs can focus on taking advantage of all that is in place to foster the NERA mission to encourage and promote quality educational research and create a venue for experienced and new researchers to share their work and ideas and learn from each other.

The theme of the 2016 NERA conference is *Making an Impact – Effectively Communicating the Results of Educational Research*, and a major component of that theme, enhancing communication among NERA members, will serve as a major focus of our work in the coming year. In the last few years, NERA has made it possible for members to publish and share their conference papers through Conference Proceedings (via Digital Commons). For the last two years, online webinars have expanded the reach of NERA researchers beyond the three days we spend together in October and beyond NERA membership (NERA webinars are open to all, regardless of membership status). NERA also has established the foundation for a presence in social media with accounts in Twitter (@NERAconference), LinkedIn, and Facebook. One of our goals this year is to increase the use of each of those resources, and perhaps explore additional modes of communication. Can you picture a NERA Instagram account, interacting with other NERA members with similar research interests via Slack, or building a daily NERA Snapchat story at the conference next fall (#NERA2016)? A second goal is to continue to enhance communication and interactions among members at the conference with tools that allow presenters to easily share their presentations and papers, allow members to provide feedback to presenters and interact

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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

Dear NERA Members,

Another year has come and gone, and another NERA conference was enjoyed by so many of our members. By all accounts, the 45th annual conference was a huge success! Please join us in thanking our past president, April Zenisky, and her conference co-chairs, Kimberly Colvin, Katrina Roohr, and Amanda Clauser for the time and effort put forth in ensuring an amazing conference experience for all attendees. The torch has officially passed on to Charles DePascale and his conference co-chairs, Jennifer Dunn, Molly Faulkner-Bond, and Joshua Marland, and they are diligently working towards building upon the foundation that their predecessors (and those before them) have laid out and organizing top-notch events for our members throughout the year and another successful conference.

Within this issue you will get a preview into some of the activities that our president and his conference co-chairs have planned for this year, both through the president's message and the 2016 conference preview provided by the 2016 Conference Co-Chairs. Additionally, for those of you who missed it, our past president's presidential address at the 2015 conference is also available in this newsletter along with conference highlights provided by the 2015 Conference Co-Chairs. And, as always, there are a number committee updates and news from our members that may be of interest.

At this time, please join us in welcoming Katherine Reynolds, a doctoral student in Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation at Boston College, to *The NERA Researcher* Team. Katherine has taken over the role of co-editor from Bo Bashkov starting with this issue of the newsletter. Welcome! Also, many thanks to Bo Bashkov for ensuring a smooth transition!
Lastly, a special thanks to Barbara Helms for your continued support to the NERA Editors.

Wishing you all a Happy New Year,
Haifa Matos-Elefonte & Katherine Reynolds
The Editors

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with each other, and make the conference program more interactive and accessible throughout the conference. A third goal for 2016 is to evaluate the current structure of the conference (i.e., breakout and plenary sessions, meals, keynotes, receptions, etc.) to determine how best to meet the needs of the current NERA membership.

To accomplish those goals, we have devoted much of our efforts since the conference in October to assembling the 2016 NERA leadership team. As shown on the NERA website, NERA Leadership includes the Executive Committee (President, President-Elect, Past President, Treasurer, and Secretary), Board of Directors, and also a host of appointed positions that include *The NERA Researcher* editors, NERA Webmaster, Mentoring Program chairs, and a dozen committee chairs. It is only through the dedicated efforts of all of these volunteers that NERA is able to function at such a high level year after year. Three team members particularly committed to the success of the upcoming conference are our 2016 conference co-chairs: Molly Faulkner-Bond, Joshua Marland, and Jenn Dunn. I have had the pleasure of working with many of the people on the leadership team over the last four years and look forward to collaborating with the entire 2016 team in the year ahead.

NERA is the people, now 300 strong, who have come together each fall for nearly fifty years to share their ideas, to challenge each other and themselves, and to learn from each other. Beyond the keynote presentations and first-time presentations by graduate students, NERA is the formal and informal interactions among a network of researchers, each committed to doing their part to improve students' education in some way. What each of us brings to NERA each fall is important, but the power of NERA is what we take away. Whether we leave with a new method of analysis, a new insight into a perplexing issue, new friends and colleagues, or as some of my predecessors have described, simply feeling rejuvenated to continue our work, participating in NERA makes us stronger.

Each year for the past 20 years, I have selected a quote to serve as my personal theme for the year. In closing, I will share my 2016 quote with you:

Having knowledge but lacking the power to express it clearly
is no better than never having any ideas at all. – Pericles

Throughout the next year, our team will do all we can to provide you with the venue and power to express yourselves and your ideas clearly – adding another link to the strong NERA chain.

Member News

Jessica York has received a promotion at York University to Director of Education Programs.

Carol Barry and **Haifa Matos-Elefonte** were recently promoted to Research Scientists at The College Board.

Jonathan Rubright recently accepted a position as a Psychometrician with the National Board of Medical Examiners.

NERA NORTHEASTERN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

46th Annual Conference Highlights

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the success of the 2015 NERA conference. Participants attended from all over the country to share their research, chair and discuss sessions, participate in roundtables, collaborate on new projects, and volunteer to help the conference run smoothly. This year's program included 2 pre-conference workshops, 3 in-conference workshops, 10 symposia, 6 invited sessions, 21 individual paper sessions, a robust poster session, 2 roundtable sessions, and 2 data blitz! sessions spread across two and a half days.

We were fortunate to have four inspiring, educational, and engaging speakers during this year's conference. Ronald Ferguson, Nancy Streim, Joanna Gorin, and Preston Green, our keynote and invited speakers, contributed to the ongoing dialogue about teaching and learning, collaborating and supporting, and innovating to solve ongoing problems. Their talks were thought-provoking and well received. We were grateful to our invited interview participants, Ronald K. Hambleton and Daniel Jurich, who discussed equating and related issues in operational testing programs. We would like to thank all the speakers for their part in making the NERA's 2015 conference so informative and enlightening!

The pre-conference workshops on Structural Equation Modeling and Introductory R were led by Sara Finney and Kelly Foelber (James Madison University) and Jonathan Weeks (Educational Testing Service), respectively. The Wednesday in-conference workshop on Youth Participatory Action Research was led by Jessica Watkin and the YPAR research team at Miss Porter's School. Thursday's workshop on Person-Centered Analysis was led by Elisabeth Pyburn, S. Jeanne Horst, Heather Harris, and Monica Smith from James Madison University, and Thursday's workshop on Mixed Methods was led by Felice Billups and Robert Gable (Johnson & Wales University). Thursday's invited sessions provided opportunities for insightful dialogue on a variety of topics including charter school policy, fostering teacher inquiry, and applied measurement concepts.

The Graduate Student Issues Committee (GSIC), chaired by Xi Wang, organized two sessions, one with Skip Livingston, Dena Pastor, and Steve Sireci on writing an effective research reports, and another on exploring different job areas with panelists Sara Finney, Andrew Jones, Charles DePascale, Peggy Van Meter, and John Young. These sessions were appreciated by all members. The mentoring program, led by Ross Markle and Jonathan Rubright, had another successful year and hosted a meet-and-greet happy hour. The 2016 Conference Co-Chairs also presented an overview of the 2016 conference – we're looking forward to it!

In addition to acknowledging the contributors to the program, we would like to thank the many volunteers who shared their valuable time and insight in making this year's conference a success. From reviewing proposals, to discussing and chairing sessions, to those that helped register new and existing members and participants at the front desk, we appreciated your help. We would like to offer a special thanks to Francis Rick and the NERA Communications Committee for their tremendous support. We appreciate the outstanding work of the hotel staff at the Trumbull Marriott Merritt Parkway, in particular Linda Klein and Amanda Trianovich. We are particularly indebted to the 2015 NERA President April Zenisky, Treasurer Elizabeth Stone, and the 2014 Conference Co-Chairs, Javarro Russell, Pamela Kaliski, and Ross Markle, for their support and leadership.

We would also like to thank all of the institutional and personal conference sponsors, as the annual meeting would not have been possible without their contributions. Educational Testing Service, UMass Amherst, and SUNY Albany were able to loan projectors for the conference, and Westfield State University provided printed programs; we are grateful for their support.

Finally we would like to thank each and every one of you for helping to make this year's meeting an engaging and enriching experience. At each conference the members all help to make the conference special for educational researchers from all settings and at all stages in their career. You helped to embody this year's theme of Interdisciplinary Approaches, Collaborating Minds by engaging thoughtfully with one another and giving valuable feedback on new and emerging research, while supporting graduate students and professionals in presenting and sharing their ideas. As conference co-chairs we appreciate the energy and generosity of the NERA membership.

We look forward to the exciting program that the 2016 conference co-chairs, Jennifer Dunn, Molly Faulkner-Bond, and Joshua Marland are planning with Charles DePascale, the 2016 NERA president. And of course, continuing the interdisciplinary and enriching dialogue at the 47th annual meeting!

Amanda Clauser, Kimberly Colvin, and Katrina Roohr
2015 NERA Conference Co-Chairs

NERA NORTHEASTERN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

2016 NERA Conference Announcement

October 26-28, 2016
Trumbull, Connecticut

In some way, shape, or form the purpose of all educational research is to improve education. As defined by AERA, education research examines "the human attributes, interactions, organizations, and institutions that shape educational outcomes" and "drives the development of new tools and methods." Regardless of the quality of that research, however, the goal of improving educational policy, practice, and outcomes cannot be achieved without effective communication. Effective communication is a dynamic, two-way process that involves interaction among the researcher, the research, and the intended audience. All too often in educational research, we limit our role as researchers to delivering a message, regardless of whether that message is received, understood, or applied.

At the NERA conference, effective communication begins with the manner in which we share our research questions, findings, and ideas with our colleagues — the ways in which we learn from others and enable others to learn from us. Moving out from the conference, how do we as individual researchers increase the likelihood that our work will make a positive contribution to education policy and practice? How does NERA as an organization and research community enhance communication among our members and the policymakers and practitioners whom their work is performed to inform?

The Conference Co-chairs and President are busily at work trying to put together a great 2016 NERA conference. To support our theme of effective communication, we have so far engaged Jonathan Supovitz, who directs the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at the University of Pennsylvania, as a keynote speaker. If you aren't already aware of Professor Supovitz's interactive #CommonCore project, we highly recommend visiting www.hashtagcommoncore.com to explore it. This immersive, interactive presentation delves into questions about how social media and social networks are affecting discourse in American policy, and provides some very interesting insights about what kinds of individuals and groups were most vocal about the Common Core State Standards, what they had to say, and who shared their messages.

In addition to Professor Supovitz, we are also working to put together some plenary panels where we engage individuals from a variety of organizations to discuss how they disseminate, interpret, and share educational research in their work. So far we have engaged Sarah Darville, the New York bureau chief for an education journalism organization called ChalkBeat (chalkbeat.org), and we are hard at work reaching out to individuals from other organizations including state and local education agencies, academic journals, mainstream media, and research organizations. We hope that by bringing individuals from these different vantage points into the conversation, we can stimulate all NERA members to reflect on how our research is used, and also how we can share and present it to make it more useful and engaging for different audiences.

In thinking about our theme of communication about educational research, we are also trying to reflect on the ways we communicate and interact about our work within NERA as an organization. Over the next year, we will be working to try and engage the NERA membership more actively on the organization website and other social media venues, in addition to continuing the semi-regular online webinars that were initiated under the presidency of John Young. Additionally, we are trying to think about communication and engagement from the perspective of diversity. Our members provided some thoughtful feedback about how we can expand and diversify our membership by engaging new organizations in the Northeast, and also how to create opportunities for interaction and conversation during the conference. In the coming months, we will be brainstorming how to bring some of these ideas to fruition, so that at next year's conference, as we make an effort to both communicate more and reflect on how we communicate, we have an even more diverse group of educational researchers sharing their perspectives.

Jennifer Dunn
Measured Progress
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Molly Faulkner-Bond
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Joshua Marland
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Network with NERA members using our LinkedIn group page!

"Like" NERA on Facebook!
https://www.facebook.com/NERAconference

Follow us on Twitter!
@NERAconference

2015 Thomas F. Donlon Memorial Award For Distinguished Mentoring

Submitted by the Thomas Donlon Mentoring Award Committee, Lisa Keller (chair-elect), Ann Hassenpflug, Thanos Patelis (chair), and Cathy Wendler.

Dr. Deborah Bandalos, Professor in the Department of Graduate Psychology and Director of the Assessment and Measurement Doctoral Program at James Madison University, is the 2015 Thomas F. Donlon Mentoring Award recipient.

In her five years at James Madison University, twelve years at the University of Georgia, and ten years at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Debbi has impacted the development and careers of many students, faculty, and colleagues. The nomination letters not only commented about her accomplishments as a scholar, but overwhelmingly indicated her support and efforts on behalf of students and colleagues in their professional development and realization of their goals. A comment that characterized Debbi was "she always goes above and beyond her duties when it comes to the academic and professional development of students."

Debbi spent time structuring student work, providing opportunities to gain practical experience, securing funding, engaging students in conversations, and meeting with them formally and informally. Debbi was able to support students across institutions encouraging students in real, practical actions, as well as in their intellectual pursuits. One comment indicated that "she genuinely cares about the well-being of all students in our program. I have seen repeatedly that her advisees benefit not only from her technical knowledge, but also from her wise and kind spirit."

Debbi has been described as a caring person who takes the time to listen to students and engage them on a personal level. "Dr. Bandalos is well known for her measurement expertise, engaging teaching style, and critical thinking skills. Equally impressive are her approachability, enthusiasm, and thoughtfulness in the role of mentor. To her, advisees are like family members."

Debbi inspires students to apply what they've learned in classes by undertaking research projects. She encourages them to propose and present their work at professional conferences, and in particular, NERA. "In each of these courses Debbi had a natural ability to engage and empower her students. She did not simply instruct us on techniques, rather she spent time with us, outside of class, mentoring us through complex psychometric problems and guided us with our own research ideas that often stemmed from her classes. For example, the guidance and "nudge" she gave me and another student during her classes led to an accepted poster at NCME, a paper at NERA, and a manuscript that is currently under review in a journal."

Debbi continues to touch the lives of established professionals and students. She takes the time to discuss any number of issues faced by people in the halls of her university, as well as the meeting rooms at professional conferences. She takes the time to listen, offer advice, and always shows interest and concern for people—exemplifying the characteristics of the Thomas F. Donlon Award for Distinguished Mentoring.

Congratulations to you, Debbi, for your mentoring and commitment to your students and colleagues!

NERA NORTHEASTERN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

2015 Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award for Outstanding Leadership and Service

The 2015 Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award for Outstanding Leadership and Service was awarded to **Professor Helen Marx** of Southern Connecticut State University. The Leo D. Doherty Memorial Award is presented to a longstanding NERA member who "has generously given of self to NERA, to advance its mission and to enable it to thrive." The award, instituted by the NERA Board of Directors in 1981, honors the memory of Leo Doherty who was instrumental in the development and growth of NERA as a professional association for educational research. Leo's leadership qualities, both ethical and compassionate, encouraged others to pursue and achieve their goals. Dr. Marx continues the tradition started by Leo Doherty through her service and leadership to NERA. Dr. Marx has helped NERA in innumerable ways such as helping lead NERA through its difficult transition from the Catskill region to Rocky Hill for its annual conference, serving as Treasurer for three years from 2010-2012, serving as Conference Program Co-Chair, and serving on several other committees. She even saved the 2011 NERA conference from uncomfortable silence by going home to get her drums to help out the Messickists when they were in need of a drummer! The 2015 Committee is very pleased to formally acknowledge Professor Marx and her extensive and valuable contributions to our organization. Thank you Helen and congratulations!

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Choose Your Own (Data) Adventure: Perils, Pitfalls, and Lots of Promise

2015 NERA Presidential Address

April Zenisky, Ph.D.

By way of background, the context for my comments on choosing your own data adventure is related to my work in score reporting and the communication of test results, but my intent is to be a bit broader than assessment. As a researcher in education, what I notice more and more is that agencies are making data available left and right through online mechanisms, and consequently are handing over data analysis and interpretation to users. This applies not only to achievement data but really, to all kinds of data in education. This is being done with what I hope is mostly good intentions, in the name of access, transparency, and empowering stakeholders, but it is a significant departure from past practices. It's this — the dissemination of *data* as an approach to communicating *results* — which I am interested in as a researcher. This strategy has potential to be an information free-for-all, and not necessarily to the benefit of some constituencies, so hence the "choose-your-own-adventure" theme for this talk.

Let me be clear about these online dissemination vehicles for a moment—these dashboards, tools and portals. My focus is not high-end data science or data mining in the truly 'big data' sense, but rather data that any one of us in this room could access now, without any kind of a special license or training. All you need is a device with an Internet connection.

There are resources and data files on www.data.gov and the ED Data Inventory, as well as data tools from NCES. Of course, there is the NAEP Data Explorer. There is also the College Scorecard data, where the scorecard itself is for students and families, but the data itself is available too. The College Scorecard data set is comprised of data for students who received federal financial aid and links the FAFSA system with IRS data (and not everyone applies for federal financial aid, so the data set is actually just a subset of the college student population). There are likewise data tools coming out of the states, and there's even an app for NAEP results. These are the kinds of resources that I'm especially interested in.

What I am going to focus on are the ideas of data and data use in education, particularly at the local level. Data, and data use, are kind of big buzzwords in many circles, and it seems like there's an expectation out there that data is good, and using data is better. This applies to both research purposes and practice.

Let me say that how I come at this is from the perspective of a psychometrician and educational researcher who spends a lot of time thinking about communication and use of assessment data. So, I like data and thinking about how to use it and what it means, especially for people who are not me, and who are not educational researchers.

But as I said, I think that there is an expectation that lots of people in education should use data and it sometimes comes off as an admonition or a top-down directive, with a very narrow definition of what 'use the data' means. And that is interesting to me, especially in educational settings today. Too often it seems like, from an institutional or systems perspective, that if the data is just made available, then it is assumed it will be used, and used well, and used effectively, and good things will happen.

If we step back for a moment, and think about how data and information and results (testing and otherwise) have been reported in a historical sense, the general approach until recently has been largely out of the school of "you'll take what we give you and you'll like it." What I mean by that is that control of data, and hence control of the story about how the data should be interpreted, resided with the agency who own the data.

Think about *A Nation At Risk*, which is regarded as a landmark study of student achievement. In 1983, as a report it significantly impacted how the American public perceived public education. We could critique that report itself, because there were some legitimate issues with commission and the report. But, in 1983, the commission that wrote that report surveyed studies pointing to student underachievement from 1963-1980. And yet, it took *seven years* for someone—the Secretary of Energy—to poke at *A Nation at Risk*, and only then did these issues receive some media attention. But in 1983, reports like this were something of a 'black box' in terms of their empirical analyses, the findings were presented intact as a complete story for public consumption, and replication was not easy.

My point here is that the data reporting in many agencies for a long time occurred within very tightly controlled parameters about what results were shown, what results were highlighted, and how the results were displayed. There has, historically, been a cookbook element to reporting data and results in terms of dissemination. And, in this kind of setting, which is where we as a community of educational researchers were until fairly recently, the idea of "use of data" was limited to what could be gleaned from the message that was made available to the public, because the data itself remained out of the public view for the most part.

From a public relations perspective, this simplifies matters greatly: Here's where you should look, and this is what you'll see, and we will have answers ready for the questions we can anticipate you'll ask.

I started with the idea that I have noticed that lots of educational data is being made available online, and ostensibly, someone thinks that people out there should use data. The way to do that is through dashboards, tools, and portals. Everywhere you look, there's a mechanism for sharing data.

This is a huge paradigm shift, and it's one that allows users to customize what results they see, based on their interests, needs, prerogatives, and biases. This blurs the line between reporting and secondary analysis. In many cases, this signifies a shift from disseminating *results* to disseminating *access* to data.

This brings me to the big questions I'd like to focus on, and what I hope to explore in the context of this opportunity.

In this world we inhabit, where there are some big expectations about data use in educational settings, there are likewise in my mind some big assumptions being made. These assumptions concern the use of data, access to data, and understanding of data. I'm going to address these points through some examples that I have come across, and ultimately, what I am interested in thinking about with you is: what is it that we actually hope to achieve when we publicly share data through portals, tools, and dashboards? And, perhaps more to the point, is 'use the data' actually reasonable?

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To get back to the choose-your-own adventure idea for a second and its relevance to my comments—I loved these books when I was a kid.[1] They were great. There were dozens of them, each set in a wildly different place and time. Formulaic? Yes, you could pretty much predict what choice would lead to what outcome pretty quickly. But I could read and reread them each a few times because the story was different each time, depending on my choices. That's probably why my parents encouraged me to keep on with these books, as they would keep me occupied for a good long while because I had to know every possible permutation of the story.

But in the introductory pages, there was a warning, and that's noteworthy because not too many books start off that way. You are told that you are in charge of the story, and you are smart, but you could metaphorically die. And, in the end, the story depends on the choices you make.

And that is how these portals, and tools, and dashboards work. Not that you could figuratively die working with data, but that you set off from a starting place and make choices. And the choices you make determine what you see, what you learn, and how you feel about what you did when you step away from the computer.

So, when we talk about the very idea of "use the data", that means different things depending on who is saying it and who it is being said to. Administrators have one perspective, and teachers who are on the front lines of instruction have another perspective, and outsiders have yet another view.

What I have found in my work is that we also all have thoughts about how others should use data, and that is where we sometimes run into trouble. This reminds me of the adage of Maslow's hammer (the story of the little boy with a hammer, and everything looks like a nail to him): if you like data and find it useful then EVERYONE should like data and integrate it into their own professional practices. If you're on the side of putting out these kinds of interactive data tools, then of course you expect people will LOVE them.

But, one thing that old adages are good for is exposing assumptions. And the first assumption I'll focus on, as a potential pitfall in choose-your own adventure reporting of results, is <u>use</u>.

To begin, use the data connotes action. Go forth with numbers and do stuff. But why people go to these data sources, and what they are doing there, and how they navigate through them, these are all a function of who the users are, not only as individuals, but in large part what role they occupy in the system (managerial, instructional, personal, peripheral). What makes people in certain roles decide to get into data? I contend that people's use of data is specific to why they are in the data dissemination mechanism to begin with.

I believe that when we talk about use the agencies that are putting such tools out there must consider their users, and be clear about their intent and aims. And I'm not sure that's always happening. So many online dissemination mechanisms work the same exact way, just with different window-dressing.

Differentiation of users in reporting of results has long been something that Ron Hambleton has espoused in his work on score reporting, and what he and I have written about in our collaborative work in that area. Stakeholders from different stakeholder groups are different, and that idea has to filter into the development of these data tools, from the very early stages of conceptualizing them.

At UMass, I'm very peripherally involved in a project working on score reporting and developing a protocol for needs analysis in the context of K-12 score reporting. And I think that getting into that literature of needs assessment is a step that is critically important in talking about data and results in the context of disseminating data in this way.

We define the users nominally—we differentiate families, teachers, administrators, but too often, the tools themselves are kept general and flexible (which is how the programmers I know think). They do not necessarily have a grounding in practice that lets them support specific real-life use cases.

My second pitfall-laden assumption regarding data use in education is *access*. And this is the assumption that I think gets especially overlooked and yet actually has a significant impact on how data use works in practice. In my work it's families and instructors that I most worry about. I sit in front of a computer all day long. I can search out plenty of stuff with Google and am pretty good at navigating most websites, including database query ones (particularly those with a standard sequence of choices, with a drop-down user interface). It is what I do, but that's not the case for everyone.

The first access assumption that I focus on is *equity*. Certainly in 2014, the general estimate is that around 80% of Americans are on the Internet with some margin of error depending on who's reporting and the nature of the data they are using. Regardless, it is clear that many people are online, but not everyone is, and that's an issue. Not that digital data reporting will completely supplant other forms of reporting results, but this could be another way to separate the educational haves from the educational have-nots. A non-data illustration of this is this emerging tendency for many schools to transition from paper notices to the 'digital backpack' – a town near me in Massachusetts just did this, and you probably have heard of others near you. Some districts perceive that the tsunami of paper notices going home with kids is too much paper, and it is also perceived that notices are ignored, so the shift is now to online posting on a district-specific webpage, cutely called a 'digital backpack' with the disclaimer "This page will be updated frequently so be sure to check back often." I am skeptical that a digital backpack will be easier for some families, and I'm concerned that it will also translate into less engagement for some families as well. Similarly, a transition from reporting results to reporting data may further marginalize some users because of access.

Plenty of people are online, but not everyone is, and so equity of access on a very elemental level is a big concern in the context of the "use the data" mindset. So I'm concerned that "use the data" is said from a place of privilege.

Next up are *opportunity* concerns, which are sort of related to equity concerns but to me are meaningful on their own. Opportunity is not only the presence or absence of a device and a connection, but also the structural and environmental capacity to get into the data as deeply or as shallowly as a user wants, and to think through the data and results so they can be used effectively. That takes time! And time is one of the biggest challenges to data use.

The quote I have here is from some survey work I did in Massachusetts related to the testing program I work on. We asked adult basic education instructors what they thought about some score reports we developed, and how they worked for them.

> *"I don't think it matters how easy they are to use.... time is the issue. Time to read them, time to figure out how to integrate results into classroom practice with multi levels and where differentiated teaching is necessary."*

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1. The books I am referring to is the Choose Your Own Adventure series, authored by Edward Packard and published in the 1980s and 1990s. Books in the series included *The Mystery of Chimney Rock*, *Lost on the Amazon*, and *Journey to Stonehenge*, among many other titles (184 in total).

This particular response crystallized the difference between where I was coming from and where the teachers were, and has stuck with me for a few years. When the expectation of "use of the data" is communicated, then we need to put supports in place to foster effective data use and ensure that even getting to and into the data is not an unfunded mandate on people's time.

The third and final dimension of access issues I want to raise with you concerns *familiarity*. I talk about dashboards, portals, and tools almost like they are monolithic in form and function, and in some ways lots of them kind of work similarly. However, and this is a big 'however', oftentimes they work just differently enough to make you crazy. For many people, maybe many of us, this is really no big deal, because if you are reasonably adept with data you can transfer knowledge readily from system to system, but that itself is an assumption that does not hold across user groups, particularly when we are considering relatively infrequent users of data dissemination tools. In schools, too often with a new publisher or principal or senior administrator like a superintendent, there is yet another system to learn, and I think that is a part of the problem that presents as a barrier to access.

So what do we do? I first believe that access needs to be acknowledged as a problem. From the top—we need to talk about the ways that differential access *and* barriers to access pose a challenge to data use. Some of the specific access challenges are specific to each potential user group, and these generally impact use at the local level, in some schools, in some districts.

What I would like to see, and we have tried to encourage it in Massachusetts with our adult education testing context, is the sharing of use cases and collaboration. We have sought to identify promising practices with the score reports that are happening in certain programs, in hopes of building a toolbox of approaches to using data. I do think this is one way to help mitigate how the assumption about access can impact data use.

The third and final assumption connected to "use the data" that I want to address concerns what we mean when we say users must *understand the data*. To me, this is a big pitfall. There is a lot made of how different stakeholders might be lacking in different types of "literacies", but I think that is kind of an easy way out because it puts the onus on the users to correct their own deficiencies: "If you only had X literacy, you could unleash the power of the data."

One assumption often made is that users do not use data because they don't understand it, and sure, that is the case sometimes. However, being trained in stats and data management is just part of it. We need to make sure that the tools, portals, and dashboards that are made available are intuitive and clear. Working with data is like anything else—it requires an investment of time and energy to critically reflect on the information and separate the wheat from the chaff and then integrate the good stuff into whatever comes next (in some cases, that is action, in some cases, not).

We hope that when data is made available through dashboards, tools, and portals, that it makes sense to users given their roles, which means that ultimately that it has value. And that depends as much on the mechanism for data dissemination as it does on the user. To me, in talking about this final assumption of understanding, I believe that understanding connects very closely to not only to users' knowledge but also the process through which they work with data. In the context of my talk tonight, process in large part is defined by the mechanisms made available. To that end: I'll frame my thoughts here in the form of more questions: Do the tools themselves operate with a clear logic so that the analyses of interest can be carried out? Can users find the results they need and work within the data that's made available to answer the questions they have? Can the results obtained be traced back to the choices made? Are the statistical caveats and limitations of data communicated so as to support appropriate interpretations and curtail the inappropriate ones?

The way I think we need to address this is coming at it from the communications and systems side, from the perspective of empowering users to get into data. We have to have good dashboards, portals, and tools. I want to see additional collaboration in systems development, where use cases are prioritized. That seems to me to be a pretty important strategy for improving understanding, to start at the beginning and build tools that work for users.

So, where are we? I've focused a lot on pitfalls and perils, but this all feels negative, because assumptions are often negative. I'm going to go back to where I started, and make a different choice for the last bit of my thoughts.

Earlier in my talk, I started out with two questions: Why are agencies disseminating data? Is the idea that people "out there" will use the data a reasonable expectation?

I think we have to recognize that disseminating data is not going away. It is a strategy for communication like anything else. And, it is reflective of our changing society, and how people interact with information.

But I believe we have to differentiate how people interact with information when they are working with data. Some users will want the process to be more explanatory and instructive, while others have questions that necessitate the process for them be more exploratory and constructive. These are very different approaches.

The former lends itself to tools that are more prescriptive in the process, to provide results that answer questions that might be more readily anticipated through needs analysis. Being aware of needs and common tasks allows for those elements to be incorporated in the design process of portals, tools and dashboards. Results obtained this way should be shown in a way that supports and indeed fosters known user actions, which we can know through research! For some users, the value of working with data is that it offers a means to a very specific end, maybe to help a kid sitting in front of them.

The latter, on the other hand, represent a different kind of data use, where use of the data is more highly dependent on the user's peculiarities. Sometimes we cannot know the questions people want to answer *a priori*, so some tools necessarily must be more flexible. For those users, the value is as much in the process as the results, which is something of a more research-based orientation.

So where I stand is that these orientations must inform the choices we make in advancing public use of data, and maybe what we hope for is really that the tools we produce be differentiated and reflective of data use in the real world—sometimes explanatory, sometimes exploratory.

There are some promising practices out there, and the first example I want to highlight is from Ohio. Some of the specific tools are behind a login so I cannot really get in to explore them fully, but the structure of question-based resources seems promising. They have differentiated audiences for resources (families, teachers, and the public), and for example, they have organized resources for teachers by common teacher questions. Maybe this is obvious, but too often things are not done this way. Since I'm not the target audience but a researcher interested in the process of data use, I'd really like to know how (and if) these are used, quite honestly.

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Another creative approach to advancing data use is the data tool from the Data Quality Campaign. Their methods are interesting. First you pick your stakeholder group, then choose your action item, and explore from there. This is a creative approach to the adventure of working with data.

There *are* promising practices out there, I believe.

So yes, I believe that "use the data" is a reasonable expectation but only when it is appropriately supported on the back end. That means use cases have to be understood, and users considered carefully. Are agencies making unfair assumptions? And what that means is we need to see and do more research about data use and gathering data on the development side to enable users to use data on the front end.

I am hopeful that we can do this, and that with research, meaningful data use in education *can* be more than a buzzword and a trending topic. I believe that we can build tools that let users engage with data through a reasonable process that builds capacity, rather than close off using data to all but a select few. Then, "use the data" actually becomes a choice itself that has value, and it becomes a valued means to an end, in the adventure that is educational research and practices.

Issues in Teacher Education Call for Papers

Special Issue: Putting Theory to Work in Teacher Education for Social Justice

Guest Editors: Kathryn Strom & Adrian D. Martin

Submission Information:

- Manuscripts should be 3000-5000 words, not including references.
- Submissions should include two manuscript versions: one with author information and one with author information removed for blind review.
- Please email Kathryn Strom at Kathryn.strom2@csueastbay.edu for questions or to submit your manuscript.

Deadline: April 1, 2016

Special Issue Description:

The technical, transactional views of education promoted by prevailing neoliberal research and policy perspectives fail to acknowledge the complexity of processes such as pedagogic decision-making (Martin & Kamberelis, 2013; Strom & Martin, 2013) or the role of contextual conditions, such as poverty, in student learning (Berliner, 2013). Moreover, the current wave of market-driven educational reforms has created a culture of high-stakes testing, narrow curriculum, and systematically defunded schools, which further harms already marginalized student populations. Together, linear research methodologies, neoliberal policies, and the resulting effects on the educational system reinforce the role of the institution in schooling in maintaining and expanding societal inequalities (Hursh & Martina, 2003). To disrupt the entrenched patterns of policy, research, and practice, new ways of theorizing about teaching and teacher education in non-linear ways are required.

In this themed issue of *Issues in Teacher Education,* we argue that non-linear theories and philosophical concepts can help us *think differently* about teacher education to counter dominant cause-and-effect models of teaching and learning and advance social justice and equity in the education stratosphere. However, we are not suggesting to turn to philosophy as it has traditionally been employed in education—that is, as standing in direct opposition to the work that occurs in classrooms (Anderson & Freebody, 2012). Instead, philosophy should be understood as having a recursive relationship with practice. Theories (whether explicit or implicit) and related concepts affect what we do; and our actions and resulting effects of them in turn deepen our understanding of those theories. The use of philosophy or theoretical frameworks in teacher education, then, should productively inform and connect with professional practice (Abrams, Strom, Dacey, Dauplaise, & Abi-Hanna, 2014). In other words, the philosophies should be *put to work.* They should have a material impact (Barad, 2007)—they should *do something* (Strom & Martin, 2013). They should help us think different thoughts, actively problem solve, and help us transform our practices and our selves. By "thinking with theory" (Mazzei & Youngblood-Jackson, 2012), we interrupt dominant frames of thought that function as ideologies; and by "putting them to work," we can affect issues of equity and social justice at both the individual (micro) and institutional (macro) levels.

Papers accepted for this issue might focus on "putting theory to work" in any of the diverse aspects of teaching and teacher education to produce thought that breaks from the positivistic, neoliberal mainstream in pursuit of goals of social justice. These might include conceptual or empirical works addressing issues of research, practice, and policy. For example, manuscripts might employ diverse non-linear theories, such as cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk 2010), actor network theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005), feminist materialism (Hekman, 2010), queer theory (Sedgwick, 1990) or the adoption of one (or more) among the many theoretical constructs developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), to produce different ways of thinking about P-12 pedagogy, curriculum creation, teacher activism, or teacher education coursework. Other manuscripts might explore the ways that applying theory to research methods enables different ways of investigating complex phenomena related to issues of teaching for social justice, such as rhizoanalysis (Waterhouse, 2011), diffractive analysis (Barad, 2007; Lenz-Taguchi, 2012) or situational analysis (Clarke, 2003). Ultimately, all of the papers should address how thinking with particular theories or philosophical concepts and "putting them to work" enables researchers, teacher educators, and P-12 teachers engaged with a social justice agenda to affect social and educational change. We encourage all members of the educational landscape (practitioners and scholars) to submit their work for consideration.

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NERA Communications Committee Report

Monica Erbacher
James Madison University

Hello NERA members! It was wonderful seeing and meeting many of you at this past 2015 NERA conference. NERA relies heavily on member involvement and the Communications Committee is no exception. Committees are a great opportunity not only to give back to NERA, but also to influence the projects and tasks the NERA community becomes involved in throughout the year! Please consider getting involved in one or more committees in the future.

Who are we?
With a new year comes new committee members. This year, the Communications Committee consists of the following team:

Monica Erbacher, James Madison University, Committee Chair
Duy Pham, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, E-mail Coordinator
Bo Bashkov, American Board of Internal Medicine, Webmaster
Chastity Williams-Lasley, Duquesne University, Social Media Coordinator
Jonathan Steinberg, Educational Testing Service, Advisor/Former Chair
Jeanne Horst, James Madison University, Advisor/Former Chair

We would like to thank Joshua Marland for his hard work as E-mail Coordinator over the past year, as well as Jeanne Horst for her fantastic work as Chair and Jonathan Steinberg for his continued guidance.

What do we do?
Our team fields communication requests for all of NERA. Requests may include e-mails for all or part of the NERA community, posts on Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn, or additions to the bulletin boards on the NERA website. To make a request, please download the Communication Request Form on the NERA website: http://www.nera-education.org/downloadables.php. Complete the form and e-mail it to both Monica Erbacher as well as the appropriate coordinator. The same form is used for all forms of communication (e-mail, social media, and website).

Our mission is to distribute important information to the NERA community efficiently (i.e., without overloading members' inboxes). To carry out this mission, we have different outlets for various types of information specified in the Communication Request Form. For example, official NERA news, NERA conference news, and *NERA Researcher* news are the only types of information that may be sent out via e-mail. These types of information are also appropriate for our social media outlets and our bulletin boards on the NERA website. Job postings and non-news conference information (e.g., pictures) are not appropriate for e-mail and can only be posted via social media or the bulletin boards. Additionally, whenever we can combine announcements into a single e-mail, we will do so.

Check out our Social Media and Web Outlets!
If you have not already done so, please join our Facebook and LinkedIn pages and follow us on Twitter! Keep an eye on the NERA bulletin boards as well as the social media outlets for job postings, conference pictures, and other news. We look forward to serving the NERA community this year. If you have any concerns, suggestions, or questions about other ways the Communications Committee can serve you, or if you would like to get involved, please contact Monica Erbacher at erbachmk@jmu.edu. We wish you all a happy 2016 and look forward to the next NERA conference!

Monica K. Erbacher
Chair, Communications Committee

Membership Committee Update

Thank you to everyone who participated in our "Bring-A-Friend" program in 2015! We had over 40 new members attend the conference recommended by our current NERA members! We had two winners who recommended the most new members, Dr. John W. Young from International Baccalaureate Organization, and Dr. Thomas Levine from the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut. Congratulations to them and a big thank-you to all of our current members!

For the next year, five committee members are completing their service and leaving the committee: Jason Kopp, Avis Jackson, Sheetal Sood, Whitney Smiley, and Andrew Wiley. We are very grateful for their important contributions to the committee during their service. We are also thankful to Felice Billups for her great support as a broad liaison during the past year.

Nina Deng, Measured Progress
Immediate Past Chair, Membership Committee

Membership Data Report

In 2015, we had 614 new and returning MERA members, consisting of 406 professional, 191 student, and 17 retired members. These numbers mark a significant increase from 412 members in 2014. It demonstrates excellent work by the 2015 Membership Committee. We had 295 members attend the annual conference, consisting of 191 professional, 96 student, and 8 retired member attendees.

NERA NORTHEASTERN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Update from the NERA October 2015 Board Meeting

Mary E. Yakimowski, Ph.D.
Sacred Heart University

The following excerpt represents some of the presentations and discussions of the NERA Board and Officers at its October 21st, 2015 meeting at the Marriott Hotel in Trumbull, Connecticut.

The meeting started with the NERA President, April Zenisky, welcoming all to the meeting.

A report on behalf of the 2015 Program co-chairs, Katrina Roohr, Amanda Clauser, and Kimberly Colvin was provided. Katrina noted that there were eight platinum sponsors, two gold, and ten silver sponsors, for a grand total of $15,000. Katrina went on to indicate that NERA received 191 proposals this year, and 23 (about 12%) were rejected; we also had five invited sessions. Some additional highlights offered were:

- The Conference Program Committee created sessions tied to a theme.
- For the 1st time, the 2016 Conference Program Team has a dedicated section.
- To date, there were 260 registrants, and we *did* fill the NERA block of hotel rooms.
- Efforts were made to not over order meals this year. This can be difficult because food guarantees have to be made at least five days prior to the start of the conference.
- In terms of the Vieth system, the information was retrievable in MS Word, so it was a pleasure to work with and modify.

In her Treasurer's Report, Liz Stone noted that NERA has 583 members comprising professionals (n=387), students (n=180), and retired individuals (n=76). Of note was that weather insurance was not purchased this year, we received an additional $550 in donations (beyond sponsorships), and Westfield State should be acknowledged for printing costs associated with the program. She reminded the Board that PayPal has an interactions fee. Thus, membership fees are not refunded in compliance with the newly approved Board's Refund Policy.

Currently, there is $59,955 in the checkbook. During last year's conference, about $20,000 was spent and the same is anticipated this year. Further savings were reached as Survey Monkey is no longer needed since Vieth offers a survey application. Additionally, the *NERA Researcher* is no longer in the budget as this newsletter is distributed electronically.

April reported that Steven Holtzman, Infrastructure Committee Chair, indicated that NERA no longer pays for Go Daddy. Setting up the Hare system for elections this year was a little complicated, but it ended up working well. Steven also wanted it mentioned that the Board may wish to pursue an expansion of Webinar offerings as we only had one last year which was facilitated by ETS.

John Young indicated appreciation to his committee for putting together a slate of two individuals for president (Liz Stone and Craig Wells), and four individuals for director (Andrew Jones, Salika Lawrence, Ross Markley, and Jessica York). He further extended his appreciate for all who ran on this slate.

Craig Wells presented the Awards Committees report on behalf of all chairs. The overall recommendation made by the chairs was that some nominations really need to come from the Board. He also noted the importance of a chair-elect and to have the processes specified in the handbook.

Thai Ong, the chair-elect for the Graduate Student Issues Committee, was in attendance and presented the GSIC report. He indicated that there will be two graduate sessions at the conference, including a reception. After discussion, the Board then requested that GSIC recruitment strategies go beyond the students from the University of Massachusetts and James Madison University.

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Carol Barry reported on behalf of the Communications Chair, Jeanne Horst, to the Board that the group has a new social media coordinator. It was further reported that the while the Vieth email email system's filters do not work properly, the election that was conducted worked well. The committee is aware of their responsibility to identify new leaders when slots open up; thus, they are working on identifying new leaders.

Felice Billups, presenting the Membership Committee's report on behalf of Chair Nina Deng (who recently gave birth to her 2nd child) explained that the overall priority is to repopulate this committee as five of the nine members will be moving on. In addition, they wish to explore numbers of new, continuing, and lapsed NERA members. She indicated that now that we have a database, this can be accomplished.

April, on behalf of Salika Lawrence's Teacher-as-Researcher Committee, had five members who diligently worked on modifying the process including revising the scoring rubric. There were six nominations, but one was deemed to not qualify as a "teacher".

The Board discussed this at some length. Members sought clarification as what is meant by "teacher". For example, do we want a "teacher" to work solely in a traditional role providing instruction to pupils within a classroom, or do we mean "educator" who is a practitioner that may include a reading specialist, a department chair, or an assistant principal? The Board then requested the committee propose a definition of "teacher."

Rochelle, the founder of Conference Ambassadors, reported that she has five volunteers this year, while last year she had 10. She feels that the role of the ambassadors should continue. The Board pondered if the Conference Ambassadors could have a role within the Membership Committee. The Conference Ambassadors' workload occurs just before and during the conference. It bgean by sending out an initial e-mail to all first time conference attendees (n = 70). During the conference, ambassadors look out for newcomers, circulate the conference area, and facilitate networking. The Board then opted to place this group under the Membership Committee on a trial basis.

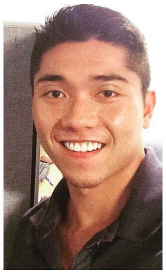
Rochelle also reported on behalf of Haifa Matos-Elefonte and Bo Bashkov, co-editors of the *NERA Researcher*. The new editor will be Katherine Reynolds from Boston College.

The Webmasters, Tia and Bo, were acknowledged by April for their work on the web. April and other Board members agreed that the site looks great and works well. Similarly, Ross and Johnathan were also acknowledged for their efforts with the Mentoring Program. According to the report presented by April, there are currently 17 mentees and 18 mentors.

On behalf on the Conference Proceedings/Digital Commons Committee chaired by James McDougal and Jessica Finch, Javarro Russell noted that there were only a handful of postings this year.

Finally, under "new business," President-elect Charles "Charlie" DePascale discussed his plans for 2016. He shared that the theme would be: Making an Impact: Effectively Communicating the Results of Educational Research. Essentially he wishes to focus on how we share research with our colleagues, how we increase the likelihood for our research to be known, and how NERA, as a research community, support these actions. Already he has invited Jonathan Supovitz from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education. There are also plans to organize a panel on mapping the educational ecosystem. He then reminded the Board that next year the conference will be held a week later.

With no additional agenda items, the meeting adjoined at 12:00pm.

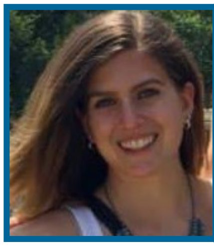


The Graduate Lounge

Thai Ong
James Madison University

Our Mission: The mission of the Graduate Student Issues Committee (GSIC) is to support the involvement and professional development of NERA graduate student members and to reach out to new graduate students to increase diversity of institutions represented at NERA.

New Members: The Graduate Students Issues Committee (GSIC) has elected two new members: Catherine Mathers and Emily Ho! Welcome to the GSIC!



Catherine Mathers is a first year masters student in the Psychological Science Program (Quantitative Concentration) at James Madison University.

Emily Ho is a fourth year doctoral student in the Psychometrics and Quantitative Psychology program at Fordham University.

Summary of Results from the 2015 NERA Graduate Student Survey: This year, we received 18 responses to the GSIC survey. The feedback we received on the survey is helping us plan the GSIC sponsored in-conference sessions for the 2016 conference and the GSIC student social. Here are two highlights from the survey:

- We received positive feedback about both GSIC in-conference sessions: "Exploring Different Job Areas and Developing Effective Job-seeking Skills" and "How To Write an Effective Report".
- We also received positive feedback about the GSIC student social. Some respondents suggested we have the social on Thursday rather than Wednesday given that most students tend to arrive on Thursday for the conference.

Call for New GSIC Members

Serving on the GSIC is a great way to get involved with NERA and build relationships with other graduate students! GSIC members collaborate with students from various institutions to plan GSIC-sponsored sessions and events. New members are selected each year after the NERA Conference.

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

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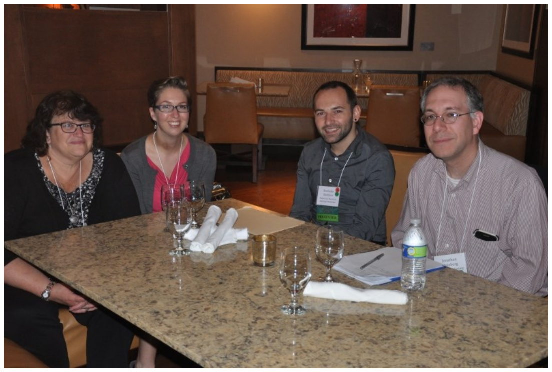


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