



From the Desk of the President

Greetings! This past year, I served as president-elect of the Association. It was a wonderful professional experience. I want to thank Presidents Eva Baker and Gloria Ladson-Billings for their support and encouragement. The transition to president was much easier than one might imagine, the result in large part of open dialogue between your presidential trio and the AERA Executive Director, Felice J. Levine. I look forward to working in the same fashion with Lorraine McDonnell, President-Elect.

My first days as president were quite eventful. One call from a national newspaper led to a long discussion with a reporter about the merits of education research. It was clear from his questioning strategy that he wanted examples of research that could solve problems in education. Translations of research into improved practice with documented results were at the heart of his line of inquiry. Such translation-oriented questions are indeed important. In fact, our discussion represented progress; on another occasion our conversation had focused solely on matters of quality research (more on that topic later).

“Why don’t other fields of research have the same translation problems?” he asked. What an assumption, I thought. I responded, “Yes, I agree. For example, research economists, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, medical anthropologists, and environmental scientists do not share our translation challenge!” I am confident he understood the point. But I could not resist going further. I stated, “In fact, some fields of study avoid the challenges of real problems out of a concern about compromising neutrality and objectivity rather than determining how best to undertake transparent and well-warranted research.”

Nevertheless, the issue of translating research on human development, broadly defined, into usable formats that inform action in legislative bodies, legal decision-making structures, educational system administrations, and other educational policymaking and programmatic entities is not trivial. Building this capability is very important to the advancement of education research. What are the forums for communicating well-established research literatures in education to appropriate communities of practice and policymaking? AERA has been a voice in this regard. *Research Points*, edited by Professor Lauren Resnick, is widely distributed to policymakers and educational leaders. I was surprised to learn that many members do not know about the project. I encourage you to go to the AERA website (www.aera.net) and read the *Research Points* produced to date.

AERA communicates with other audiences as well. The Association supported the development of an amicus curiae brief submitted

to the Supreme Court last October that focused on the education research related to the matter of race-conscious school assignments. The decision to file a brief was undertaken only after careful scrutiny of the research by experts at a workshop. The Association’s response was consistent with a longstanding struggle to integrate science and the law. In *Laboratory of Justice* (2004), David Faigman stated: “Science and technology today are so pervasive that the Court cannot continue its slapdash ways. The Constitution’s framers were products of the Enlightenment. They expressly sought to bring the science of their time into the document that would govern the times to come. . . . The scientific revolution is everywhere; it cannot be ignored with impunity” (p. 364).

In *Community Schools v. Seattle School District #1* and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled on whether the voluntary efforts of local school authorities to consider racial balance as one of many factors in the development of student bodies is constitutionally allowable. The outcome of the Supreme Court case was announced as I finished this column. The Court decision was not consistent with the research outlined in the AERA amicus curiae brief. Although the outcome of the case is disappointing on many fronts, I want to acknowledge that the scholarship on this topic was produced by many education researchers affiliated with AERA. Our Association supported the translation of this research literature into a usable format for consideration by the highest court in the land.

Some of you may be wondering where the research community should go from here. The Court decision represents a major paradigmatic shift in legal precedent. When Justice Kennedy’s opinion is taken into account, it is the case that five justices—not four—did see a compelling interest in racial integration and held that race can be a factor, even though Justice Kennedy did not approve of the Seattle or Louisville plans as narrowly tailored. Understand my point. Many scholars have research programs that are linked explicitly or implicitly to post-*Brown* educational institutions (policies and practices) and related human behavior and interactions. I encourage you to read the media briefing materials associated with the case at <http://aera.net/Default.aspx?id=1456>. In addition, James Anderson’s 2007 AERA Distinguished Lecture provided an insightful historical perspective related to the Court decision. The lecture is currently available as a webcast at the Association website; the published version appears in this issue of *ER*. My sincere hope is that the Court ruling will stimulate AERA members to reflect on their research programs and pursue more, not less, research of excellence.

The 2008 Annual Meeting provides a unique opportunity to discuss past, current, and future research in light of the Court decision. James Anderson (Annual Meeting Program Chair) and I have had two productive meetings with program chairs. We encourage you to participate in the Annual Meeting as a reviewer, presenter, discussant, or attendee. The 2008 Meeting theme is "Research on Schools, Neighborhoods, and Communities: Toward Civic Responsibility." We especially encourage members and other colleagues with research programs consistent with the theme to develop proposals and submit them for consideration. New York is a wonderful site to discuss and debate research and related social policy and practice.

As an organization, we should constantly seek to improve the quality of education research. I am pleased to say this is indeed a reality. A joint charge has been given to the Annual Meeting Policies and Procedures Committee and the Research Advisory Committee to examine the quality of the AERA annual meetings and report back to Council this year. My hope is that this group will offer insights into how we can continue to build on our

strengths. The demand to participate in the Annual Meeting has reached record levels. We must respond by ensuring meeting participants the opportunity to engage the very best research and related professional development. In addition, AERA is partnering with the National Academy of Education to study the state of doctoral training in education research. This study is vitally important in light of critiques of the quality of doctoral preparation programs focused on education research. I envision a study that is consistent with rigorous standards of research. This kind of research has the potential to make a serious contribution to the field.

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REFERENCE

Faigman, D. L. (2004). *Laboratory of justice: The Supreme Court's 200-year struggle to integrate science and the law*. New York: Henry Holt.