

In Memoriam

Richard A. Dershimer, Former AERA Executive Officer Dies



Richard Alvin Dershimer, AERA's first full-time Executive Officer, died Wednesday, November 21, 2007, at his home in Charlottesville, Virginia. His death came four months after he signed on with the Hospice of the Piedmont as a terminal prostate cancer patient. He was 80 years old.

Dershimer served as AERA Executive Officer from 1964 to 1974. During this time, he worked with AERA Presidents Lee J. Cronbach, Benjamin S. Bloom, Julian C. Stanley, John I. Goodlad, David R. Krathwohl, Roald F. Campbell, Robert M. Gagne, Robert Glaser, Robert L. Ebel, and Patrick Suppes.

Under Dershimer's leadership, AERA separated from the National Education Association to become a freestanding educational research organization. In 1964, AERA was still affiliated with the National Education Association (AERA was technically a department of NEA), with a part-time executive officer. By 1967, Dershimer urged that AERA Council adopt the recommendation of a blue ribbon Committee on the Future of AERA and become a separate entity to advance its potential as the visible voice for educational research. In 1968, by a 10-to-1 ratio, the membership voted their agreement to become an autonomous association. "The decision to seek our independence from the NEA was an attempt to dramatize that we aspire to be a society of scholars not a professional education association, or a professional union," he wrote in one of his 1968 "From the Executive Officer" columns regularly published in *Educational Researcher*.

From the outset of his appointment, Dershimer urged AERA to advocate for advancing educational research and for an enlarged federal commitment to funding the many subfields in educational research. The February 1967 issue of *Educational Researcher* published excerpts of responses by Dershimer and Julian Stanley, who was then AERA President, to a series of questions about federally funded educational research programs posed by the Research and Technical Programs Subcommittee of the House Committee on Government Operations. Dershimer's book *The Federal Government and Educational R&D* (D.C. Heath, 1976) documented the increasing prominence of educational research in policy decisions during the Johnson and Nixon administrations.

During Dershimer's tenure, the Association's membership increased from 3,156 to 12,000. He encouraged researchers from other disciplines, including sociology and anthropology, to join so that AERA would be representative of the total educational research community. In 1968, Division F—History and Historiography—was established.

Similarly, the scope of the AERA Annual Meetings expanded. In a comparison of the 1956 and 1966 Annual Meetings, Dershimer

noted that 43 papers were read and 105 persons participated in 1956, in contrast to 240 papers and 542 participants in 1966. By 1966, breakfasts, receptions by other organizations, a popular placement service, and graduate student seminars were part of the Annual Meeting. This growth gave an indication of future trends, he accurately predicted.

Dershimer concentrated on enhancing educational research in a variety of ways. For example, in 1966 he secured major funding from the Charles Kettering Foundation to launch a summer center for educational researchers and otherwise support the expansion and improvement of AERA publications and other activities directed to the advancement of basic knowledge in educational research. The following year, *Educational Researcher* published a supplement devoted exclusively to information storage, retrieval, and dissemination to inform educational researchers about the revolution taking place in these areas—triggered, in part, by the introduction of the portable microfiche reader. "Transfer of information is an inseparable part of research and development," he wrote.

Dershimer was born in Erie, Pennsylvania, on November 29, 1926, a son of Ralph and Goldie Hinchcliffe Dershimer. He graduated from Erie's Academy High School in 1944 and from Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa, in 1949. He was inducted into the U.S. Army Air Corps in January 1944 and served in the U.S. Occupation Forces in Wiesbaden, Germany, before receiving an honorable discharge in October 1946.

After graduating from Cornell College, Dershimer began a career in education, teaching high school history in Gilmore City, Iowa, for 2 years. Upon completing his master's degree at Teachers College, Columbia University, in 1952, he worked in the Army Independent Schools, teaching in Lintz, Austria, for a year and serving as principal of a large school in Verdun, France, for 2 years. When he returned to the United States, he enrolled at Harvard University, completing his doctoral degree in 1957.

Dershimer was appointed an Associate Professor at the University of Delaware in Newark, where he led an organization providing services to school principals throughout the state. He then worked as a special assistant to the Pennsylvania State Superintendent of Public Instruction, where he won a \$471,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to launch an innovative project that he described as a forerunner of the Head Start program. His career at AERA followed.

After the 1974 Annual Meeting, Dershimer left AERA and began a study of family systems therapy. He directed the family counseling activities in a Teacher Corps project conducted by San Jose State University, the Far West Laboratory for

Educational Research and Development, and the Alum Rock School District. In 1979, he moved to Syracuse, New York, and helped establish a hospice called the Caring Coalition. He developed a program to prepare medical professionals and lay volunteers to work with hospice patients, served as President of the New York State Hospice Association, and developed workshops on grief counseling for hospice personnel. His book *Counseling the Bereaved* (Pergamon Press, 1990) provided advice to grief counselors based on his philosophy that bereavement care should be dedicated to the enhancement of life. After moving to Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1989, Dershimer served on the Board of the Hospice of the Piedmont, including a 3-year term as President.

Music was Dershimer's avocation. He played acoustic bass in jazz bands, including several Washington, D.C.-area bands affiliated with the Potomac River Jazz Club.

Dershimer is survived by his wife, Greta Gailewicz Morine-Dershimer, Professor Emeritus at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education and former AERA Vice President of Division K (1988-1990), and by two sons and three stepsons and their spouses, two stepdaughters and their spouses, seven grandchildren, and the many members of his large extended family. He was predeceased by his first two wives, Alice Exline Dybvig Dershimer and Joan Carter Norton Dershimer.

AERA friends of Dershimer and Greta can communicate with Greta by e-mail at gm4p@virginia.edu.



Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research

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