



THE STANDARD DEVIATION

Fall 2002

Washington Educational Research Association

University Place, WA

<http://www.wera-web.org>

What's In This Issue?

- ESEA Impact
- Conference Highlights
- A letter from the President (or WERA)
- WERA Reads

Hot Website

Those who attended the spring 2002 WERA conference heard from Jeremy Kilpatrick about the most recent national research on learning mathematics. The complete text of the book he edited "Adding it Up" is now available to be read online at the National Academy Press website.

<http://books.nap.edu/books/0309069955/html/index.html>

ESEA: The Debate Gets Nasty Enemies of Social Justice or Realistic Educators?

A recent issue of *Education Week* (October 9, 2002) featured several articles on the impact of the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) on state testing programs. The titles alone are enough to show the degree to which this legislation will affect public education -- "Budget Woes Force States to Scale Back Testing Programs," "States Revise the Meaning of *Proficient*," and "The Changing Definition of Proficient." In the latter article, it is reported that "Louisiana will consider students proficient if they score at the state's *basic* achievement level. To avoid confusion, the state changed the label of its proficient category to *mastery*." Taking a different approach, scores from Maryland's new state test "will yield two sets of scores, one measuring students' mastery of the state's curriculum, the other measuring Marylanders against national standards." ("Maryland Test to Show National Standing" *Baltimore Sun*, September 5, 2002)

The US DOE reaction to these approaches became clear when the *New York Times* reported that following a meeting between U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige and 40 state school chiefs, Paige sent a letter to the states saying that those who wanted to "tinker with state numbers" were "enemies of social justice" and "apologists for failure." ("States Get Warning on School Standards" October 24, 2002) Stay toned for more fireworks!

The WERA Mission

(Adopted 5/24/01)

The mission of the Washington Educational Research Association is to improve the professional practice of educators engaged in instruction, assessment, evaluation, and research.

WERA Services

- WERA provides professional development through conferences, publications, and seminars.
- WERA provides forums to explore thoughtful approaches and a variety of views and issues in education.
- WERA provides consultation and advice to influence educational policy regarding instruction, assessment, evaluation, and research.

Memories of WERA's Spring 2002 Conference

Keynoter James Kilpatrick



Keynoter Jeanne Paratore



**Bob Silverman with award
for service as WERA President**



**Pete Dodson Panel on
Defining Successful Schools**

Research-Based Practices in Literacy

Jeanne Paratore

- Engage children in purposeful, authentic reading tasks.
- Use high-quality literature.
- Provide intensive, explicit, word study instruction.
- Provide explicit, strategic comprehension instruction.
- Provide explicit, strategic writing instruction
- Provide whole, small group, and individual instruction.
- Engage all children in the regular-education curriculum.
- Provide extensive, in-class reading time.
- Integrate instruction in reading and writing.
- Engage in continuous, multiple methods of assessment.

Research-Based Practices in Math

James Kilpatrick

- Do not base instruction on extreme positions that students learn, on one hand, solely by internalizing what a teacher or book says or, on the other hand, solely by inventing mathematics on their own.
- Provide rich activities with numbers and operations from the very beginning, especially for children who enter without these experiences.
- Devote substantial time to mathematics instruction each school day.
- Programs that emphasize “classroom mathematical knowledge” should be established to prepare teachers to teach mathematics to students.

WERA / OSPI Assessment Conference

December 4-6, 2002

Seattle Airport Hilton Conference Center

“Learning to Communicate / Communicating to Learn”

Keynote Speakers

Ron Brandt – Board of Directors MCREL Educational Lab on
Powerful Learning and Science of the Mind

Thomas Guskey – University of Kentucky on
Standards-Based Reporting of Student Learning

This is going to be a great conference, so get it on your schedule **now!**
We have negotiated a very good room rate at the Hilton.

Get your registration in soon!

There will be 8 half-day pre-conference sessions on December 4th
including:

- Panel on standards-based reporting of student achievement
 - Keys to making effective presentations
 - Collaborative conferences
 - Myths and reality of assessment

There will be 55 breakout sessions such as these, and much, much more!

- OSPI updates on math, arts, writing, health & fitness, literacy, science
- Effective high poverty schools
- Do's and don'ts of working with the press
- Communicating with students and families of color
- Recent WASL research
- Math Helping Corps
- Alternate assessment for students with disabilities
- Update on the A+ Commission

Announcement and Call for Presenters

WERA Spring Conference

“Closing the Gap: High Achievement for All”

March 12-14, 2003

Seattle Airport Hilton Conference Center

Keynote Speakers

Pedro Noguera, Harvard University

Judith K. Dimon Professor in Communities in Schools

“The nature of the problem, the root causes, and possible solutions to closing the achievement gap.”

Alan Schoenfeld, University of California, Berkeley

“Standards, testing, and equity in achieving sustained beneficial change.”

If you are interested in presenting at this conference, please contact Ric Williams at
rwilliams@everett.wednet.edu or Pete Bylsma at pbylsma@ospi.wednet.edu.

A Letter from the WERA President

Duncan MacQuarrie

I trust you had time to relax this summer and that you are now fully involved with the new school year. This year comes with new opportunities as well as challenges. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) including the re-commitment to the previous testing requirements, but especially the new accountability provisions, has ushered in a new federal role in education. Better known as “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB), this act will increase federal support for staff development and school improvement that should help address some of our state budget woes.

However, this legislation will also require that the state assessment program be redesigned. That effort will require our best thinking in order to preserve the program’s strengths while minimizing the intrusions that will be inevitable as it is expanded to meet the requirements of NCLB. Understanding and adjusting to the new Title I “annual yearly progress” requirements, particularly dealing with the consequences of a school’s failure to make such progress, will be no small task. In addition, we will be asked to rethink our understanding of “scientific based research” evidence and required to pay more attention to such evidence as new programs are designed or adopted.

The WERA Board has consistently made a commitment to offer conferences and training sessions that promote improved practice in the areas of instruction, assessment, research, and program evaluation. Our two conferences (the Annual Assessment Conference jointly sponsored by OSPI and our Spring Conference) have grown more than any of us could have imagined ten years ago. They consistently draw not only those staff from the central office responsible for the district testing program, but teachers and principals who are trying their best to cope with the consequences of the state and national education reform agenda. This year’s conferences are no exception. The theme for the fall, “Learning to Communicate / Communicating to Learn,” is certainly timely. It has never been more important to help the public and policy makers understand what our schools, teachers, and students can and can’t do. At the same time, we need to better understand what our various “publics” are asking of us. The spring conference will address the important issues associated with the discrepancies in student performance -- in the current jargon referred to as “achievement gaps.”

Among this year’s other projects, the WERA Board has committed to support the continuing development of the Data Display for Data Analysis software package designed to assist with the portrayal and analysis of state assessment results at the building and district level. WERA will again sponsor two research or evaluation grants, one awarded to investigators affiliated with the University of Washington and another to staff from the Evergreen School District. As in past years, we will sponsor a wide variety of training opportunities before each of our conferences. We will also continue to offer specialized training from time to time in the use of productivity tools such as Excel, Access, and PowerPoint.

The Board and I are committed to working with other organizations to improve our professional practices particularly those associated with research, program evaluation, and assessment. We look forward to seeing you at our conferences and hope you might be able to participate in one or more of our training sessions.

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WERA Looking for a New Publications Chair

The current WERA publications chair needs replacing! (The current chair is old, creaky, and in need of new upholstery.) Although I have enjoyed being publications chair these past few years, starting in the summer of 2003 I will be moving into the position of president of WERA and will be unable to also continue working with publications.

The WERA publications chair works closely with the Board and the WERA executive secretary. WERA publications include *The Standard Deviation*, which comes out twice a year, and occasional white papers which are authored by members and edited and prepared for publication by the publications chair. The chair also works with the WERA webmistress to assure the most up-to-date and accurate content is available on our website.

Although this may seem like a lot for a volunteer position, spread out over the year it doesn't take up that much time. (Of course the new chair may wish to be more ambitious!)

If you are willing to take on this service to WERA members, please contact me or any of the Board members listed on the back page. (MP)



WERA Reads!

This issue, Sue Shannon, Senior Researcher for the OSPI Office of Research and Evaluation, reviews *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School. Expanded Edition.* (2000). National Research Council. John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown, & Rodney R. Cocking, (eds.) Washington, D.C. National Academy Press. ISBN 0309070368.

Educators looking for suggestions to help them improve student learning and close the achievement gap will find this book a valuable resource. This synthesis of the research on learners and learning as well as teachers and teaching draws from research on cognition, learning, development, culture, and the brain. The research provides for a better understanding of learning, including memory, the structure of knowledge, problem solving and reasoning, early foundations of learning, metacognition, and how thinking emerges from culture and community. Educators will find insights that will challenge assumptions and promote rethinking many traditional practices.

How People Learn presents three key principles for learning that have strong implications for instruction.

- Focus on students' pre-existing understanding, their prior learning and misconceptions which become a foundation for new, more formal understanding of content.
- Teach for in-depth learning in at least some content.
- Help students become independent learners through "metacognition" by emphasizing the importance of their internal dialog.

How People Learn is a good choice for faculty book study. Colleagues who read, reflect, and discuss this research together will undoubtedly have a better chance of making sense of the theory and its application to their work, while they strengthen their own professional community.

**(Each issue of the *Standard Deviation* features a book review by a WERA member.
If you would like to write a review, please contact the editor.)**

Interested in Item Response Theory?

Duncan MacQuarrie

Item Response Theory (IRT) concerns mathematical models representing the relationship between abilities (or other hypothesized traits) and the likelihood of responding correctly to test items. If you have been mystified by references to Item Response Theory and would like a quick primer on the foundation of much of today's achievement testing (the WASL score scale is built on one of the IRT models), then this online version of Frank Baker's book *Basics of Item Response Theory* is for you. Originally published in 1985, this text was also accompanied by a software package dealing with IRT that ran on then-state-of-the-art Apple and IBM PC computers. The 2001 online edition (in PDF format) and a significantly upgraded version of the software can be downloaded from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation by going to www.ericae.net/irt/baker.

The introduction to the online version contains very clear and easy to follow directions for downloading and installing the accompanying software. Once the software has been installed, there is a nice introductory module that runs you through an orientation to the various menu options that are used with each of the instructional units. While you could use the text directly online, I found it more useful to download the PDF file and place the 171 pages in a binder. The book is organized into eight chapters that progress from a very simple introduction to item characteristic curves (ICRs), moves to a basic introduction to three mathematical models, and then progresses to increasingly more complex topics. At the end of each chapter is a computer session that provides interactive exercises design to explore relevant IRT concepts.

You need not work through all the chapters and computer exercises for this text to be worth downloading. If you are only interested in being able to understand discussions of IRT based testing the first five chapters will be a great help. The last three chapters may go further than you need, but they will expand your understanding of some of the more complex issues in IRT test development.

Online version of Baker, F. (2001) Basics of Item Response Theory. ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, University of Maryland, College Park, MD. (www.ericae.net)





ANNOUNCEMENT

WERA RESEARCH AND EVALUATION GRANT AWARDS FOR 2003

WERA will again be offering grant awards for original work in educational research and program evaluation.

These competitive grants are for up to \$6000 for each successful proposal. Research may last up to 18 months. The purpose of the WERA grants is to support studies that focus on instructional improvement, classroom assessment, educational measurement at both the district and state level, and the evaluation of educational programs.

Research and evaluation proposals focusing on issues associated with school reform that include partnerships with school districts and/or other educational agencies are particularly encouraged.

The application form will be ready for the December Assessment Conference. If you cannot attend and would like the form sent to you, contact Len Winchell by email at lenwwa@aol.com and he'll email you the form.

The grant application deadline is February 7, 2003 and the successful awards will be announced at the WERA spring conference in March 2003.

WANT SOME HELP WITH GRANT WRITING?

WERA president Duncan MacQuarrie will be conducting a breakout session at the December conference on how to write a successful grant proposal.

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