

OVERVIEW

A More Ambitious Agenda

Ron Brandt

Just a decade ago, American educators were captivated by "effectiveness." David Berliner, Jere Brophy, Barak Rosenshine, and other researchers identified and reported the behaviors of teachers whose students stayed on task and scored high on standardized tests. Some were able to establish that when other teachers were trained in these behaviors, their students, too, scored higher. Administrators and staff developers, impressed that research was at last producing a body of professional knowledge they could use, set up courses for teachers. They looked forward to new discoveries that, when properly communicated, would make teaching even more effective. But then the stream of research on teaching suddenly dried up. What happened?

I asked that question of Lee Shulman (p. 14), the charming and witty Stanford scholar who headed Michigan State's Institute for Research on Teaching in the early 1980s. Explaining why few researchers now investigate teacher behaviors, such as wait time and use of praise, Shulman said it was probably because "we learned as much as we were going to learn from asking that kind of question."

Shulman doesn't disown the research he helped promulgate; like Jere Brophy (p. 4), he insists that it established a sound base for the kinds of studies now being conducted. Both men, though, acknowledge the limitations of the "process-product" research, including its dependence on test scores as the measure of learning. These days, using extended case studies, researchers are focusing less on generic behaviors and more on the teaching of particular subjects.

Not all the authors in this issue accept the contention that effective teaching research laid the groundwork for the kinds of research now being done; some see the new as repudiating the old. Richard Elmore (p. 44) observes that, whereas the research on teaching was reassuring to traditionalists because it called for only marginal changes in classroom routines and school structure, today's research implies major changes in both.

Richard Prawat (p. 9) notes that the themes addressed by

current researchers include the role of students' prior knowledge and experience, the social and cultural context of learning, and the striking differences between successful learning out of school and the way we try to engineer it in school. He predicts that future researchers will grapple with a tangle of issues inherent in the question of how we create a community of inquiry in the admittedly artificial environment of the classroom. This set of "terribly complex" issues, he concludes, is dramatically different from that of the '70s and '80s.

A major reason for the rapid shift in researchers' perspective is our growing understanding of what learning really is and how it occurs. Gaea Leinhardt (p. 20), senior scientist at the Learning Research and Development Center in Pittsburgh, explains that modern researchers conceive of learning as an active process of sense-making and knowledge construction that takes place mostly through social participation in authentic tasks. Those who accept that definition recognize that the relatively simple models of teaching and learning assumed by the effective teaching research will no longer serve.

So how do we go beyond that research? Where is the professional knowledge base that we turn to next? Well — unfortunately, as Gaea Leinhardt says, we know relatively little about the kinds of classrooms in which learning flourishes because "there are very few of these classrooms in operation."

If that's true, some might say, contemporary researchers are pursuing an impossible dream. Having abandoned the sensible idea of trying to replicate the behavior of teachers who produce high achievement, they are now enchanted by a romantic vision of classrooms as learning communities — with few existing models to guide them.

The new agenda is indeed ambitious. It is elusive and frustrating to those who look to research for practical guidance. But researchers really have no choice but to persevere, because now they are working with much richer conceptions of learning and teaching — and effectiveness. □

Educational Leadership (USPS 168-760) is published monthly September through May except bi-monthly December/January by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1250 N. Pitt St., Alexandria, VA 22314-1403. ASCD editorial office and advertising: (703) 549-9110. Member of the Educational Press Association of America. Contents listed in *Educational Index*. Microfilm and xerograph copies are available. For information about these copies, write to University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106, or to Bell & Howell, Old Mansfield Rd., Wooster, OH 44691-9050. Second-class postage paid at Alexandria, Virginia, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Educational Leadership*, 1250 N. Pitt St., Alexandria, VA 22314-1403. Printer: Byrd Press, Richmond, Virginia.

Educational Leadership is intended primarily for leaders in elementary, middle, and secondary education but is also for anyone interested in curriculum, instruction, supervision, and leadership in schools. ASCD publications present a variety of viewpoints. The views expressed or implied in this publication are not necessarily official positions of the Association. Copyright © 1992 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved. ISSN 0013-1784. April 92/Stock No. 611-92003.

Copyright © 1992 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.