

From the Editors:

Practicing What We Teach:

Researching the Teaching of Educational Psychology

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The nature of Educational Psychology is such that the fulfillment of its primary purpose--the improvement of education--depends largely upon the effective communication and use of its findings to and by a wide variety of people outside the discipline itself; thus, it depends on the teaching of educational psychology, not only to pre-service and in-service teachers, but also to administrators, policymakers, parents, and the public. Yet surprisingly little research has been published in this area, especially as regards communication with the latter groups, and what little research there is appears scattered throughout a variety of educational journals. It is the purpose of this journal to foster research and the sharing and discussion of ideas in this essential field.

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The stated mission of this journal is to increase "our shared knowledge base about the teaching of educational psychology" by publishing "reports of quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method, empirical research; reviews of literature in a specific field; data-supported descriptions of effective teaching practices, or conceptual pieces" on this broad topic. In this premier issue of *Teaching Educational Psychology*, we want to take the opportunity to write about why we think teaching educational psychology is important, why we do research on the teaching of educational psychology, and most of all, why we felt the need for a journal in this field and what we hope this journal will do.

What's special about educational psychology?

The need to do, and share, research on the teaching of educational psychology is based in the structure and purpose of the discipline itself. Since the infamous conflicts between Dewey and Thorndike a century ago, (Hilgard, 1996), educational psychologists have continually debated the nature of the relationship between and the appropriate proportion of emphasis on the science of psychology, on the one hand, and the practice of education on the other (Good & Levin, 2001; O'Donnell & Levin, 2001). At times, the pendulum has swung so far toward one direction or the other that the very existence of the discipline, as distinct from either parent field, has come into question (e.g., Ausubel, 1968; Ball, 1984; McCaslin & Hickey, 2001). Yet throughout a century of debate on the appropriate topics, methods, and uses of research in educational psychology, the

overarching purpose of the discipline has remained remarkably constant: to improve education. In his introduction to the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, E. L. Thorndike (1910), justified the existence of the discipline, and the journal, as providing "thinkers and workers in the field of education with knowledge of the material with which they work" (p. 6). In 1948, a specially convened committee of APA's Division 15 (Educational Psychology) urged educational psychologists to re-assume their "responsibility for the directions in which education would go," (Berliner, 1993, p. 21). As Wittrock asserted in 1992, "Educational Psychology is distinct from other branches of psychology because it has the understanding and improvement of education as its primary goal" (p.138). In her latest edition of *Educational Psychology*, perhaps the best-selling textbook in the field today, Anita Woolfolk states unequivocally that, "Both in the past and today, educational psychologists study learning and teaching and, at the same time, strive to improve educational practice" (Woolfolk 2004, p. 9).

Thus, unlike many sciences, and even many branches of psychology, the fulfillment of the very purpose and goal of educational psychology depends upon the effective communication and use of its findings to and by a wide variety of people *outside* the discipline itself, all those who regulate, administer, and actually practice education--it depends, in fact, on the *teaching* of educational psychology.

Teaching who, where and how?

Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary says that the word *teach* "applies to any manner of imparting information or skill so that others may learn." Certainly, educational psychology is often taught, and taught effectively, in the traditional undergraduate college classroom. Indeed, a class in educational psychology has long been considered one of the "foundations" of pre-service teacher education (Anderson et al., 1995; Woolfolk, 2004), and much of our own work in this area has been done in this context (e.g., Knapp, 2000, 2005; Seifert, 2005; Seifert & Mandzuk, in press). However, especially in the rapidly changing landscape of education today, in-service teachers, too, need structured opportunities to learn and think about such matters as student motivation, assessment, and the impact of various forms of student diversity on learning, all traditional topics in educational psychology. Due to a desire for more "practical" learning, plus the inconveniences of timing and transportation, many in-service teachers choose to learn not in college classrooms, but through non-traditional forms of instruction, including intense summer or weekend workshops, distance learning, proprietary software programs, or on-site, collegial professional development groups (Landrum, Cook, Tankersley, & Fitzgerald, 2002). Yet we know relatively little about how to teach educational psychology in these new contexts (Alexander, 2004; Liaupsin, 2003), nor about how to help teachers learn principles of learning and instruction as they teach in their own classrooms, potentially ideal sites for situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) through teacher action research (Hubbard & Power, 2003) and design experiments (Brown, 1992).

And teachers are not our only potential "students." For at least a decade there have been calls for educational psychologists to "teach" our most reliable findings and best-supported theories to policymakers and politicians at all levels (see, for example, Walberg & Haertel, 1992 and Berliner, 2003), in the modest hope that our work can help "illuminate some of the educational issues" facing society today (Berliner, p. 2). Indeed, In the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), the government of the United States has committed itself to developing educational policy based on "educational practices supported by rigorous evidence" of just the sort offered by educational psychology. We urgently need to learn more about how to communicate the basics of our discipline, its methods, theories and findings, clearly and effectively to these "others"--

administrators, school boards, and legislators--so that they "may learn" the knowledge they need to make good decisions about educational policy. And in this case, as in many other educational contexts, motivating the students to learn may be an essential first step in good teaching.

Jeanne Ormrod (2003) maintains that we need to extend our teaching even further, that "to have the greatest impact on educational decision making, we must enter the picture not at the problem-solving stage, and not even at the problem-identification stage, but at the very beginning, at the acquisition-of-beliefs stage" (p. 2). She suggests that we "bring basic concepts and tenets of educational psychology into mainstream national culture" by going to PTA and School Board meetings, writing Letters to the Editor in the local newspaper, and learning to value articles in "magazines and journals with a large readership" such as *Reader's Digest*, *Parents Magazine* and *Psychology Today* as much as we value articles that are "highly abstract and steeped in jargonese" in professional "journals and other venues that only we ourselves read" (p. 5). Yet again, we know little or nothing about how to so "teach" our subject to the public, to the taxpayers, voters and parents to whom the policymakers are ultimately responsive and responsible.

A final group of potential students for our discipline are the students in our K-12 schools. Given long-established findings regarding the importance of metacognition and self-regulation to learning (Brown, Bransford, Ferrara & Campione, 1983; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001), it seems likely that older students, at least, could greatly benefit from a class in practical educational psychology, including structured opportunities to reflect on their own developmental paths, ways of learning, and patterns of motivation. Such a class might best be offered outside of the school setting, in an after-school or community-based program, to avoid potential self-consciousness in the students and perhaps even conflicts of interest on the part of the teachers. Yet we have not found any reports in the literature of attempts teach educational psychology to this population or in such a setting.

All this is only to say that we hope the scope of the "teaching" reported and discussed in this journal will be as wide as possible, encompassing not only the traditional undergraduate or graduate course in educational psychology, but also "teaching" in the broader sense of enabling a variety of people and groups understand and use the basic principles and theories that our field has painstakingly developed over more than a century of research and

scholarship. We want to spark discussion and inquiry into how knowledge in our field can best be made accessible, understandable and useful to teachers and educators, certainly, but also to policymakers, parents, children and others, that they "may learn," and benefit from the learning.

Why Research the Teaching of Educational Psychology?

Given the importance of educational psychology to the field of education, and the importance of "teaching," through whatever means to whichever audience, to the effective use of educational psychology, surprisingly little research has been done in this area. In reviewing the abstracts, and when the abstracts were ambiguous, the actual article content, of all articles published in the last ten years (1996-2005) in *Teaching of Psychology*, the official journal of APA's Division 2 (Society for the Teaching of Psychology), we found only 16 out of 745 articles that reported on findings from or in any way addressed the teaching of educational psychology. A search of the PsycINFO database for those years, using the phrase "teaching educational psychology" in all default fields, turned up 11 more articles that, using the same screening process, we found had addressed this area, eight of them in the 1996 special issue of *Educational Psychologist* on the Teaching of Educational Psychology, which was organized in response to the report of a special APA Division 15 committee on the teaching of educational psychology published the previous year in that same journal (Anderson et al., 1995). A search of the ERIC database using the same strategy found no articles at all, so a more exhaustive search was done, using the keyword phrase "educational psychology" in combination with other phrases such as "teaching methods," "teacher education," and "higher education." This search yielded an additional 23 articles that dealt with teaching in educational psychology in 19 different journals, ranging from relatively familiar ones like *Teaching and Teacher Education* and *Journal of Educational Research* to less-expected ones, such as *Gender and Education* and the *Rural Educator*. Fifty articles in the last ten years is not very many in a area of such importance and in which so many educational researchers practice daily. In addition, every article we found concerned the teaching of educational psychology to pre-service or in-service teachers; only the lead article by David Berliner (2003) and replies from the special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy* that we edited ourselves, which incidentally did not show up in any of our searches, mentioned

any other populations as needing to learn or understand ideas in our discipline. All but three of the articles we found dealt with educational psychology as taught in the traditional college classroom setting--two of the exceptions looked at distance learning, while one addressed the value of field experiences. We know we have probably missed a number of articles, indeed two of our own articles in this field did not come up in any of our searches, but these search results make it clear that research in teaching educational psychology is both lacking and sadly scattered.

But beyond the standard academic reasoning that a lack of research in a given field is sufficient justification for pursuing it, we see three more important reasons for doing and sharing research in the teaching of educational psychology. First, as discussed above, we agree with Berliner (2003) and Alexander (2004) that our discipline has much to offer, both in the design of effective instruction and assessment in a variety of educational settings and in the larger arenas of educational and social policymaking. Yet we do not appear to be very effective in communicating what we have to offer to those outside our field. To put it bluntly, educational psychologists are often seen, even by our own students and certainly by the public at large, as writing and talking about abstract, impractical issues in abstruse and incomprehensible ways (Berliner, 1992; Peterson, Dickson & Clark, 1990; O'Donnell & Levin, 2001); as Ormrod (2003) says, "we scare many people away from educational psychology not by what we say but by how poorly we say it." We need to find out how to "do it better," and one way to find things out is by doing research on them.

Which leads to our second reason for researching the teaching of educational psychology: to maintain our intellectual integrity as a field. Anderson et al. (1995) advanced this argument over ten years ago, pointing out that, if educational psychologists assert that "teachers and their pupils benefit" from the insights offered by contemporary educational psychology, then they "must also make a commitment as a field to support this position by legitimizing research on the teaching and learning of educational psychology" (p. 155). What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. If, as maintained earlier in this editorial, the overarching purpose of our discipline is to improve education through psychological research, then surely it would be the rankest hypocrisy to hold that such research is unnecessary or irrelevant to the improvement of education in our own discipline, our own classrooms. In short, as a discipline, we need to

start practicing what we teach, or why should anyone else listen to us?

But most importantly, we need to do and share research on the teaching of educational psychology because we can learn so much from the endeavor, both as individuals and as a field. The potential for a fruitful interaction between the theoretical study of educational psychology and the actual practice of teaching was recognized more than a century ago by E. L. Thorndike, who said, "Education can and will itself contribute abundantly to psychology School-room life itself is a vast laboratory in which there are thousands of experiments of the utmost interest to 'pure psychology'" (Thorndike, 1910, p. 12). While certainly there are many educational settings in which to observe or perform the naturalistic "experiments" Thorndike here describes, the "laboratories" of this sort that we can most easily access, know most intimately, and have the most responsibility for, are our own classrooms. By studying our own and each other's efforts to use our theories in our teaching, we can gain important insights into why and how these theories translate well or poorly into practice, because, while much can be learned about education "from the outside" so to speak, the view from the "inside" is also vital. To attempt to understand teaching without teaching ourselves and trying to understand our own teaching seems to us like trying to understand bicycle riding without ever getting on a bike; one might gain a thorough theoretical understanding of the process, but something important would be missing. By researching and sharing research on the teaching of educational psychology, as educational psychologists we participate in what Dewey originally envisioned as the complete, iterative cycle of research in the field, outlined in his presidential address to the American Psychological Association:

While the psychological theory [c]ould guide and illuminate the practice, acting upon the theory would immediately test it, and thus criticize it, bringing about its revision and growth. In the large and open sense of the words, psychology becomes a working hypothesis, instruction is the experimental test and demonstration of the hypothesis; the result is both greater practical control and continued growth in theory (Dewey, 1900, p. 120).

So, what about the journal?

It is our hope and intention that this new journal will contribute to an increase in the quantity, depth, and knowledge of research on the teaching of educational psychology, by providing a central forum for its publication and discussion; this is one reason we have elected to offer the journal free and online, to optimize access for anyone interested in our field. As the initial journal editors, we recognize that good research and scholarship in this area will occur in many forms, thus we welcome articles reporting on relevant research using a variety of methodologies, from randomized experiments to case studies of individual students or classes. We also welcome scholarly commentaries, analyzes, syntheses or critiques of research and knowledge in this area, from meta-analyses and literature reviews to well-supported opinion pieces or simply thoughtful letters, bringing up an issue that needs investigation or responding to an article previously published; in fact, we have set aside a whole section for such Letters to the Editor, hoping to stimulate ongoing conversations on the ideas expressed in this journal.

Finally, we hope to serve as a sort of virtual town square, an online community for the members of TEPSIG, the AERA special interest group in this area, and for others who are particularly interested in the teaching of educational psychology. Thus we solicit descriptions of upcoming conferences or calls for submissions to special issues in related journals, as well as announcements of and links to other publications in our field or related areas of interest, with the only requirement being that they are specifically relevant to the teaching of educational psychology, as broadly construed above. To submit any of these items for inclusion in this journal, or to discuss or ask questions about the appropriateness or formatting of such submissions, simply contact us on the website (<http://www.coe.uga.edu/tep/>) or via email at tep@uga.edu. We look forward to hearing from you.

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