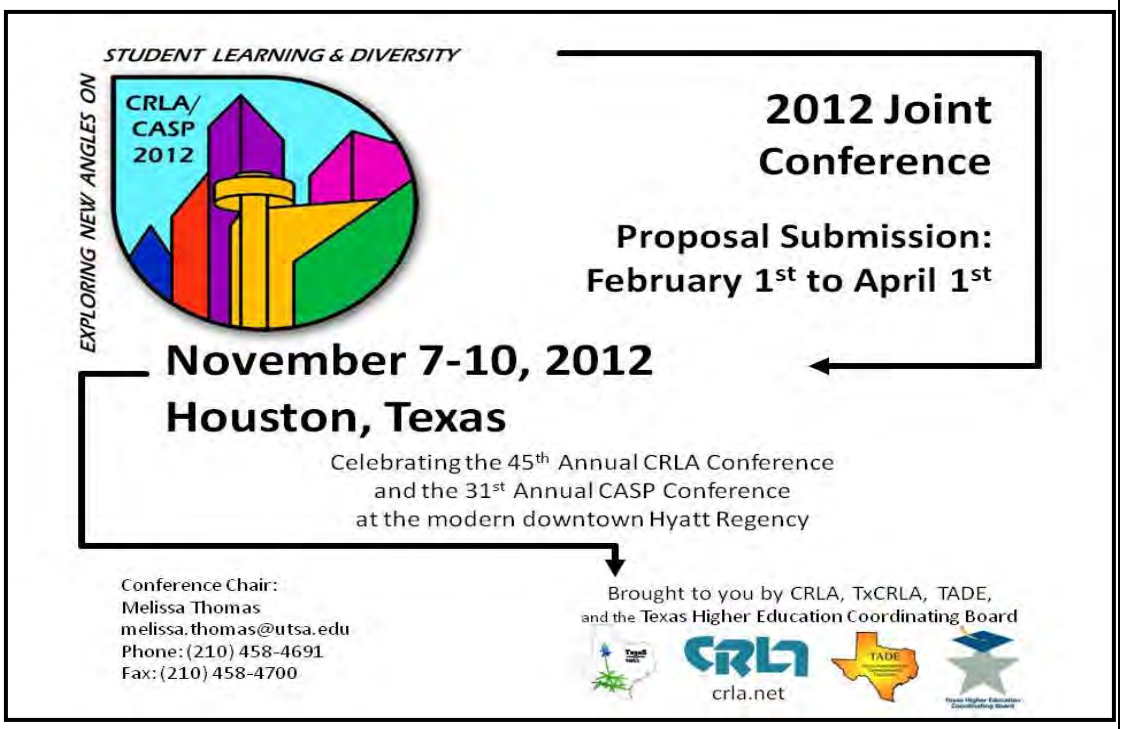
Research and Evaluation
Special Interest Group Newsletter

College Reading & Learning Association February, 2012



Looking Ahead to Houston

CRLA's annual conference is in Houston this year, from November 7-10, 2012.

This year's conference will be held in conjunction with the College Academic Support Programs (CASP) conference, so it's one you definitely don't want to miss!

For more information, check out the conference web site:

http://www.crla.net/conference/

The Call for Proposals is now open through April 1. Please consider submitting a proposal related to Research and Evaluation, and related to the conference theme: **Exploring New Angles on Student Learning and Diversity**.

Also, please consider volunteering to review proposals on topics related to the Research and Evaluation SIG strand.

If interested, please email Melissa Thomas, CRLA President-Elect and 2012 Conference Chair at **melissa.thomas@utsa.edu** to volunteer to serve as a reviewer for conference proposals.

Continuing the Conversation

At the 2011 R&E SIG meeting in San Diego, Dr. Eric J. Paulson of Texas State University presented on his research and the cross-over possibilities of self-efficacy instrumentation he has worked with that can be used both for research and classroom purposes. The article that follows summarizes the work presented in San Diego, and continues the conversation on the relationship between research and practice. Dr. Paulson's co-author is William Barry, a doctoral research assistant and student in the doctoral program in developmental education at Texas State University.

Research and Practice: A Two-Way Street

By Eric J. Paulson and William J. Barry

Concerns about the gap between practical and theoretical research are certainly not new, and discussions about how we should consider the relationship between evidence and practice is widely debated on a number of levels (Biesta, 2007; Davis, 2008). However, with the exception of some focused research paradigms like teacher/action research, we seldom explicitly discuss the links between classroom tools and research tools. Yet, the relationship between what is diagnostically useful in a classroom and what is an effective data collection device in a research context is real and—importantly—reciprocally useful. Effective educational tools from the classroom have authentic application in research situations. Likewise, instruments developed for research purposes can provide instructors with classroom tools that are both generalizable and reliable. These are broad generalizations, of course. The point is that a two-way street exists between classroom tools and research tools. This two-way street is worth exploring, for classroom instructors and educational researchers alike.

As an example of such usage, at the Research & Evaluation SIG meeting at the 2011 CRLA Conference, Eric (first author) brought in a self-efficacy scale, an instrument that he has used effectively in both classroom and research contexts. Most often associated with Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), self-efficacy is the measure of belief individuals or groups have about their capability to achieve specific tasks. There are dozens of research publications utilizing self-efficacy scales as the primary or only research instrument. From a general familiarity with these studies, Eric was aware of the effectiveness of this particular research tool, and began using it in developmental reading classes. With it, students provided an assessment of how confident they were in their abilities to successfully execute reading strategies such as: *While reading a textbook chapter, I can connect the information to things I already know;* or, *While reading a textbook chapter, I can organize the information in a way that helps me understand the chapter*. This was a fairly direct "research-instrument-to-classroom-tool" adaptation.

Its use in the classroom as a measure of beliefs in capability—the "CAN-do" question—was useful, but missed out on whether students actually did the things they said they were capable of, as measured by the self-efficacy scale – that is, whether they "DO do" the things they "CAN do." So, after many discussions with students about the differences between ability and frequency, Eric added a section to the regular self-efficacy scale that, in a way appropriate to his students, asked how often the students *actually* do the different items on the scale. With this added piece, the adapted scale provided information about students' level of confidence that they could use various reading strategies, and information about how often they actually put those strategies to use. Because this dual-focus self-efficacy scale adaptation provided such useful information in the classroom, when developing an instrument to use with a research project that included measures of developmental readers' self-efficacy and strategy usage, it was an easy decision to bring the adapted scale from the classroom to the research study. So, while the first usage of the self-efficacy scale went from its use in research contexts to the classroom, the adaptation later went from the classroom back to the research study. It was a small change to the scale—and one that certainly has been made by others in different contexts—but it made a difference. Precisely because the tool had been used, tested, and adapted in the classroom context, it had greater effectiveness once re-applied in the research context. In this way, the classroom-research connection served classroom teaching needs *and* research needs: a two-way street.

We sometimes fail to appreciate the way classroom experience can impact research quality as much as we do the often-lauded impact of research findings on classroom practice. In other words, while "evidence-based practice" is an immediately recognizable refrain, "practice-based research" is not quite as familiar. However, the benefits need not be less important. If we use the two-way street between research context and classroom context, carrying effective tools with us as we travel, then we also increase the relevance and quality of our theory and our practice in equal measure.

Part of an approach to understanding how to increase research validity and teaching effectiveness can include the awareness, and deliberate application, of the two-way street that connects these domains. Turning the two-way street into a super highway will only strengthen both destinations.

References

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: a social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Biesta, G. (2007). Why "what works" won't work: Evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit in educational research. Educational Theory, 57: 1–22. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-5446.2006.00241.x

Davis, S. H. (2008). *Research and practice in education: the search for common ground*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

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Check it Out

Some of the most current issues related to college literacy and learning

- CCRC's latest report, "A Contextualized Intervention for Community College Developmental Reading and Writing Students," by Dolores Perin, Rachel Hare Bork, Stephen T. Peverly, Linda H. Mason & Megan Vaselewski. Get the abstract or full report at http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=1007
- CCCSE's latest report, "A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success." Get the full text at http://www.ccsse.org/center/
- *US News & World Report's* recent article, "States Push Remedial Education to Community Colleges," available at http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2012/01/13/states-push-remedial-education-to-community-colleges
- Bruce Vandal's *Getting Past Go* blog posting, "The Impact of Common Core College Readiness Exams," available at http://gettingpastgo.org/blog/2012/01/27/the-impact-of-commo

Gearing Up for the 2012 R&E SIG Meeting

What's on your mind related to Research and Evaluation? In preparation for the 2012 R&E SIG meeting, please let me know what topics and events would be most useful.

Here are the six most requested topics from last year's survey of interests as well as feedback from the 2011 SIG meeting. Please email me at sarmstrong@niu.edu to indicate your interest level in these topics by ranking them from most interesting (1) to least interesting (6). Or, if there are any additions to this list, please include those as well.

Common Core State Standards and Assessments
Program Evaluation
Action Research
Placement and Diagnostics
Acceleration
Performance-Based Funding