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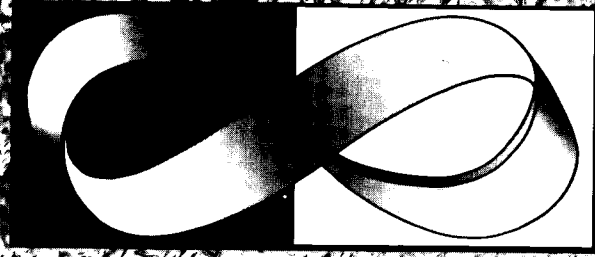
ABSTRACT

A conference was convened to bring together representatives of educational research planning efforts underway in federal agencies and professional and scientific organizations. This report identifies the principal emphases and tentative agreements from the sessions. The clear sense of the conference was that the educational research system has encountered powerful constraints and limitations, which have hampered many research efforts. In spite of this, educational research has made many important contributions to the improvement of education and can continue to contribute if adequate resources are allocated. Improvements to the synthesis of research findings, the institutional framework for research, and the communication of research findings must be made, and new, highly trained researchers must be recruited. An overriding idea of participants was that educational research planning must emphasize focus and selectivity to concentrate on areas that the public and profession believe to be important. Emphasis on more rigorous methods and designs and better peer participation and review will be very important. Undergirding any successful research planning must be attention to the capacity of the education research system and an increased emphasis on communicating the findings of research to the profession, the public, and the educational policy world. The National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement have important roles to play in these efforts. Appendixes contain the conference agenda and a list of attendees. (SLD)

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National Directions in Education Research Planning

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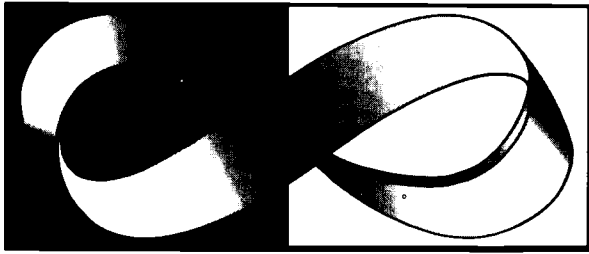
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**NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
POLICY & PRIORITIES BOARD**

National Directions in Education Research Planning

**A Conference Co-Sponsored by the National Educational
Research Policy and Priorities Board
and
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education
June 17-18, 1998**

**Report on the Conference by
Michael Timpane
Conference Moderator**

**National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board
U.S. Department of Education**

U.S. Department of Education
Richard W. Riley
Secretary

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
C. Kent McGuire
Assistant Secretary

National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board
Kenji Hakuta
Chair

Eve M. Bither
Executive Director

December 1998

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National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board

The National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board (NERPPB) is authorized by the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination, and Improvement Act of 1994. The Board was established to work collaboratively with the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) to forge a national consensus with respect to a long-term agenda for educational research, development, dissemination, and the activities of the Office. The Board regularly reviews, evaluates, and publicly comments upon the implementation of its policies by the U.S. Department of Education and the Congress. From time to time, the Board commissions papers from outstanding scholars and researchers on issues pertaining to educational research and improvement. This publication derives from a conference, National Directions in Education Research Planning, which was co-sponsored by the Board and OERI on June 17-18, 1998 in McLean, Virginia.

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Acknowledgments

The Board and OERI wish to thank the individuals, agencies, and organizations participating in this conference. Special thanks to the Spencer Foundation and to the conference moderator and author of this report, Michael Timpane.

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I. Introduction

This conference was convened by the U.S. Department of Education's National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board (NERPPB) and Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) to bring together leaders and representatives from a dozen or more research planning efforts underway in federal agencies and professional and scientific organizations. The purpose was to put those efforts in communication with one another and with the educators and policymakers who could use the fruits of educational research to enhance learning and suggest priorities and collaborations for future work. The agenda and list of attendees are appendices A and B, respectively.

It was the sense of the conference organizers that this is a time of both risk and opportunity for educational research. Educators and policymakers are eager to have clear evidence and conclusions from research upon which to build more effective policies and practices. However, they are not convinced that education research can produce such information on a timely and consistent basis, and they may well punish or abandon the enterprise if it does not—or worse, does not choose to—respond to their needs. That said, the opportunities for progress that the conference identified or accelerated seemed numerous and feasible:

- to strengthen mutual capacity for identifying priorities and setting agendas;
- to establish appropriate and consistent standards for research designs and methods, as well as quality assurance processes;
- to begin to synthesize and aggregate findings among programs of study;
- to identify specific steps to strengthen the educational research system—its institutions and its people;
- to build communities of scholars and new connections between the worlds of research, policy, practice, and the public—to create, eventually, a stronger culture of learning, a voracious appetite for knowledge to improve education among all parties to this dialogue; and

- to begin to identify the education research planning responsibilities most appropriate to each principal agency and institution—beginning with NERPPB and OERI but extending to the other significant participants as well.

The conference delved into the nature and significance of each of these challenges, and began to discover a framework to guide joint efforts to address them in educational research plans and programs.

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II. Summary of the Proceedings

As it is with conferences such as this, the comments and recommendations cannot be readily documented, validated or even necessarily agreed to by all participants. They are nevertheless the considered views of well-informed, often expert, leaders and participants in educational research; in many cases, they are mutually reinforcing, almost consensus statements. They should be considered authoritative but not final; weighty but still needing further deliberation, evidence and argument.

This report is neither a stenographic nor even a chronological recapitulation of the statements made in the day and a half of conversations. It is, rather, one participant's authorized rendering of the principal emphases and tentative agreements of the sessions, paraphrasing cogent interventions, making connections and drawing conclusions that were implicit in the discussion but could only be discerned in retrospect, with the stenographic record and group session reports in hand.

Both at the conference and in this account, most comments were and are meant to reflect upon the history and performance of the educational research system, albeit from the vantage point of one or another institution or experience. Thus, the comments are not about any particular enterprise within the system.

Opportunity and Promise

The clear sense of the conference was that the educational research system has had powerful constraints and limitations on it, which have hindered, sometimes crippled, numberless researchers and projects. The wonder is that educational researchers have been able to accomplish what they have. The prospect is that more confidence and opportunity could pay off handsomely, if the support is strategically provided. The past century's record buttresses this claim. Educational research as been used time and again, at critical junctures, to improve teaching and learning. Important examples range from John Dewey through constructivism, to Edward L. Thorndike through behaviorism and educational testing, to the diverse social scientists who influenced the design and evaluation of Great Society education programs. In our time we have seen the impact the students of cognition and organization have made upon pedagogy, assessment, and other school reform strategies. At the same time, there have been many hard

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lessons to be learned. Educational improvement occurs slowly and in small increments no matter how powerful the research base behind it. Deep disagreements among prominent researchers are continual and perhaps inevitable. Professional educators have never become enthusiastic consumers of research, and weak designs and measures, combined with these doubts and disputes, have produced too many research results whose values and political implications are more prominent than their scientific validity. There are, moreover, important contemporary proofs of the capacity of educational research to make an important difference in education. Recent important examples include:

- the National Research Council (NRC) report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, crowning a generation of solid research in many venues;
- the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the latest, most comprehensive and most significant of a generation's progress in building comparative international assessments of learning and instruction; and
- the continuing contributions of both developmental and cognitive science research to our understanding of learning and consequent design of curriculum frameworks and instructional strategies.

The instance of reading research seemed to the conferees particularly pertinent. Here is a field transformed by a high-powered, highly focused, speedily accomplished and clearly communicated research planning effort undertaken by federal research managers in the early 1970s, and then developed over 25 years in federally funded reading research centers. It was spurred on by the International Reading Association's *A Nation of Readers* in the 1980s, and nurtured by new discoveries in cognitive and developmental studies. Over the past decade, it was revisited by the research program at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), implemented in Success for All and other successful early reading programs; and synthesized and applied to policy, practice, and the next generation of research, in the NRC's recent report.

The current moment of opportunity and risk for educational research has distinctive new features. The quest for measurable, accountable results will be a permanent policy feature, at every level, sought by policymakers, parents, and the public. And this is not a trend confined to education. Many realms of policy are becoming increasingly results-oriented. The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) at the federal level, the growing demand for international comparative data, and the broad insistence upon assessment and accountability at all levels of education reflect a broad and persistent public policy shift. Education

may have some unique characteristics that must be taken into account, but it is not and will not be immune from this profound trend. Educational research will be rewarded if it contributes (and is seen to contribute) new knowledge and insight in this arena, and punished if it does not. It will take particular courage and some diplomatic skill to succeed: to support and sustain appropriate developments while at the same time standing, with solid research knowledge, against wrong-headed, damaging proposals. And the tolerances will be slight. The pace of social and educational change is accelerating and the stakes are growing. Insights ranging from cognitive science (in the case of pedagogy) to political and economic theory (in the case of vouchers) raise questions about the basic structure of schooling. Policy paradigms are moving away from centralized control mechanisms to reliance on incentives and capacity building as the significance of education grows in the worldwide economy.

Even so, there are still too few resources available for educational research to do all that it could to improve education. There are strong logical arguments for more resources, ranging from the link to economic development to the inability so far to design more effective approaches for poor and minority students who need them most and whom our society and economy need as well. There are also arguments by analogy from other fields, like health and science, where sustained research expenditures, both public and private, have paid off in better lives for all.

At the same time, there are hidden consequences of long-term patterns of scarce funding: the compromises researchers make in their designs to accommodate limited resources; and the inability of research managers to amass resources for sustained, necessarily multidisciplinary, attack on important, slow-yielding problems. One of two equally unsatisfactory outcomes usually ensues: too few resources get spread too thinly and for too short a time on too many topics; or, by contrast, very large investments are made in a few highly visible, large-scale, overly-ambitious, uncoordinated programs of research and evaluation which fail to find significant effects or to attribute them to causes. The net result is to weaken the reputé of programs, investigators, and by association, educational research itself. Rarely is there the opportunity for persistent, cumulative pursuit of questions—from theoretical work and hypothesis-building, to small-scale experiments or other controlled trials, to demonstration designs, to large-scale field trials using randomized assignment or other methods of evaluation.

Inasmuch as progress in children's learning is inherently a long-run proposition, this situation will take a long time to fix, even if more resources become available. The 1997 report of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) makes the most recent and persuasive case for the swift and steady build-up of resources for educational research—to \$1.5 billion per year

ultimately. PCAST suggests that the necessary investments must encompass methodological enhancements based on new technological and statistical techniques, the production of a large new generation of researchers, and the strengthening of the institutions that will carry forward the enterprise.

Challenges and Risks

There are, of course, numerous obstacles to progress. The most prominent is that educational research has yet to find a way to relate effectively with the teachers and other educators or policymakers whom it serves. It is perceived by these partners to run the narrow gamut from nonconsultation to tokenism—at every stage, from agenda setting to research design and execution to interpretation and implementation of findings. To those in the field, educational researchers seem not to be united around the theme of student learning, but seem rather to be working within discrete disciplinary boundaries and not communicating across them or with the field.

Viewed from the opposite perspective, the deepest problem may be that many schools are not learning organizations with a commitment to continuous improvement; and most teachers have not thought of themselves as lifelong learners and knowledge-based, reflective practitioners. This is the demand side of things: education is not a research-hungry system.

To some extent, these disparate perspectives are inevitable. Researchers expect to solve problems on a generalizable basis over extended periods of time, while teachers and school people are naturally preoccupied with the here-and-now of classroom instruction and individual learning; and the incentives and rewards researchers and teachers face differ accordingly.

These perceptions of disparity are changing, but slowly. Most teachers have not been trained or encouraged to be constructive learners from research. With heavy workloads and scant time or opportunity to make a serious effort to absorb and incorporate research findings into their daily routines, they settle for second hand reports or, alternatively, existing lore and practice. Thus we have a vicious cycle—education has not consistently valued research knowledge nor fostered the culture and institutions to strengthen it. As a result, it often cannot get the knowledge it now seeks, and so it continues to undervalue research. Researchers, for their part, neglect to shape their inquiries to respond directly to the problems facing teachers, devalue lore when they should honor and learn from it, do not train teachers to be participants in and consumers of inquiry, and take their norms and rewards from academic disciplines rather than the profession they serve.

A similar tale can be told about the relationship of educational research to policy-makers and administrators. Most educational policymakers are simply not used to making research-based decisions to the extent occurring in other realms where the evidence is from "hard science." When they do make such decisions, as in the cases of, say, class size or the adoption of specific reading programs or the construction of entire programs of school reform, they may either ignore research findings or go beyond what the shaky research evidence can bear. Administrators face similar dilemmas, as they decide whether research results should guide decisions or if administrative convenience or simplicity should carry the day.

The reportedly shocking lack of sustained research on the learning problems of poor and minority youngsters seemed to be a case in point, especially considering that major federal programs of long standing, like Title I and Title VII, have been promoted as knowledge-based and frequently evaluated. The opportunity presented by the Obey-Porter program for comprehensive research-based school designs in Title I might well be missed. The problems seemed to be twofold: policy and evaluation research that proceeded ahead of adequate understandings of how children learn and thus produced little sustained program improvement; and the inability of researchers, policymakers and educators to create together a program of studies that would, over time, yield the basic knowledge and instructional designs that might improve learning. As often as not, neither practitioners nor policymakers are able to judge the significance of any particular research enterprise or result. Educational research on the one hand has not established clear, widely acknowledged standards for the design and conduct of research. On the other, it countenances work that is value-driven and neither significant nor rigorous. Well-meaning researchers sometimes pull their punches when their findings are discouraging, not wanting to damage programs or the children they serve with results that they know are partial at best. Dubious findings and implications can be peddled, while high-quality work is not adequately appreciated or used.

Two recent initiatives will help alter and diminish these long-standing patterns of miscommunication and mistrust:

1. The NRC, with support from the U.S. Department of Education, has convened a distinguished panel of educators and policymakers to construct a Strategic Educational Research Plan (SERP); and
2. Congress has instructed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to constitute a panel to suggest standards of evidence in educational research—to answer the questions: What constitutes evidence that can be trusted in policy, practice, and as the basis for future research? How can teachers and parents decide what programs, using what methods, are most powerful for which children? Sustained

efforts of this sort are essential to deal with what seemed to be a primary obstacle to current and future progress.

Several more significant problems must also be addressed:

- There is need for a systematic program of synthesis of research findings. This is particularly important since we now know that the search for “silver bullet” panaceas will be in vain. Education is a field where both knowledge and progress will be only slowly and partially achieved, and always in the context of specific children in specific educational environments. Educators need clear straightforward statements of “what the research says” even as they accept the responsibility for adapting its implications in their context. Scholarly syntheses appear regularly in the many subdisciplines of educational research, but they are rarely drawn together across disciplines or focused on the needs of the users in policy and practice.
- The dissemination of results to the worlds of practice and policy is caught up in its own vicious cycle, since it is seen to be diverting already scarce resources from the research endeavor.
- Unsurprisingly, given the scarcities and confusions in the system, the institutional framework for research is flawed. The conference presenters showed that responsibilities for one focus or function may be spread across several federal agencies, and among governmental, academic, and professional organizations. OERI’s centers and labs are not preeminent in the field, partly because they have lacked the resources. Procedures and standards for project initiation and conduct vary widely from agency to agency. The tension between field-initiation of research projects and agency responsibility for priority setting and resource allocation, quality control, synthesis and communication of results has not always been resolved. NERPPB has been given limited coordinating authority by Congress but has just begun to exercise it, with results yet to be determined.
- Educational research has several communication problems: with educators, with its public, and with policymakers. It has not been aggressive and opportunistic, and has not sold many potential supporters on its real accomplishments, nor upon its growing relevance to the solution of education’s chronic and emerging problems. It has not used the media extensively to communicate with its public. It has not developed a robust set of intermediary institutions—be they regional, state or local agencies; partnerships with practice, professional network development or

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“extension agent” programs—or, most currently, “virtual” institutions utilizing the Internet.

- Educational research has a human capital problem: too few young, highly trained scholars. This is true with respect to education school doctoral programs, and even more so to the supporting disciplines of psychology, sociology, political science and policy studies, economics, anthropology, linguistics, history and philosophy, and applied statistics. Moreover, too few of these few are minority scholars or other persons focused on problems of poverty, race, and second-language learning. To make the matter more difficult, the dynamics of contemporary academic advancement work perversely, deny young scholars the intellectual autonomy they need to take chances in their research—steering them instead into safe, specialized, usually conventional disciplinary pursuits and away from the risky, multidisciplinary, and collaborative inquiries needed to solve most educational problems. The need for transformative activity, going beyond just adding knowledge to restructuring it and discovering new significance in it, is little understood or rewarded.

III. Implications for Educational Research Planning

The dozen or more educational research planning efforts reviewed by the conference were of varying scope and duration. Some were taking on one major area of study. Some were concerned with directing or strengthening systems for the production and utilization of knowledge. Some were starting, some were in midcourse, and some were completed and fully implemented. Whatever their status, they had shared notions of the essentials of educational research planning:

1. The overriding sense of the conference was that educational research planning must, sooner rather than later, emphasize focus and selectivity. Its inquiries should be concentrated on those areas that the public and profession believe are important as well as those that will become important. The touchstone issue must be student learning, with a particular but by no means exclusive emphasis on the challenges presented by ever-growing diversity and inequality. Selection of specific areas of inquiry must proceed from assessment of what is known and not known, and of what research opportunities are presented. Criteria for selection must be clear enough to build strategies consisting of related projects executed over time, and sometimes to exclude or redirect worthy but not strategically significant proposals. Otherwise, as experience has shown, academic log-rolling will likely prevail. Candidates for the short list of research priorities seemed rather obvious: continued focus on reading and language learning; expanded attention to mathematics; the dynamics of teacher performance and effectiveness in schools and classrooms; and new emphasis on technology and telecommunications, international studies, and learning in family, community, and workplace settings.

The elements of successful research planning strategies are already present in many of the existing efforts represented at the conference, such as NICHD in reading, the Office of Naval Research (ONR) in cognitive-based training activities, and the several National Research Council (NRC) initiatives. And these elements should as well characterize the more broadly conceived or newly launched efforts of the Council of Scientific Society Presidents (CSSP), the National Academy of Education (NAE), the American Educational Research Association (AERA), and others.

Once the problems of the field are clearly specified, research plans should set forth an extended array of basic and applied work, theory building, investigations in clinical and field settings, surveys and case studies of field experiences, and syntheses of completed studies. The result will be programs of study that gain the respect of the scientific, professional and policy communities, and thereby guarantee substantial resources now and in the future.

2. Hand-in-hand with this focus and strategy must come emphasis on more rigorous methods and designs, with particular attention to:

- rethinking, reimagining the possibilities of experimental field trials given new technical tools, the complexity of the puzzles we seek to unravel, and the persuasive power of randomized trials with policymakers and the public;
- designing processes (“engineering”) that systematically apply insights of research to the development of discrete education programs; and
- creating a universe of reliable syntheses of all-important areas of educational research.

3. Another necessary element of successful planning will be thoroughgoing peer participation and review, with “peer” denoting both the relevant community of scholars (operating in study sections or other continuous deliberative bodies) and professionals from the field (teachers especially), participating fully in priority-setting and project selection, in the design and execution of collaborative research and in discussions about the significance and implementation of results. Researchers and professionals must develop a better understanding of their mutual responsibilities in performing research and moving it into practice, indeed a mutual understanding about when research-based knowledge is “good enough” to inform practice and policy.

4. Undergirding any successful research planning program must be two essential supporting activities:

- perennial attention to the capacity of the education research system: its human resources, and its institutions and financial resources—an inventory and descriptive analysis of the system would be a good first step; and
- an entirely new approach to communications, taking the word on educational research to the profession, the public, and the policy world.

The conference's review of educational planning and related activities suggested the shape of a new, or at least redefined, role for NERPPB and OERI, and its research centers, regional laboratories, and other assets:

- convening periodic meetings on educational research planning and on such underlying issues as standards of evidence and methodological progress, since there are no naturally occurring forums for such discussions which transcend specific missions and agendas;
- encouraging and coordinating communications strategies, to place the accomplishments, promise and challenges of educational research before its professional and public audiences;
- monitoring the educational research system, and building human and institutional resources;
- instigating syntheses of all important fields of educational research, to sum up progress continually and draw implications for policy and practice; and
- building linkages between research endeavors and teachers in the field, through consultations, network building, professional training programs, translation of research findings into program designs and promising implications for the organization of instruction.

The agencies should, in other words, inhabit the space between the research community, the political community, and the world of practice, and help all agencies, associations, institutions, and individuals involved in educational research and improvement to add more value to their own work and to the joint endeavor of learning. The goal can be clearly stated: in the future, we must be able to count on educational progress that is based on ideas that have been validated by well-designed, well-executed research, and translated into success by well-qualified professionals.

About the Author

Michael Timpane is senior advisor for education policy for RAND. He has served as vice president and senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; as professor of education and president of Teachers College, Columbia University; and as deputy director and director of the National Institute of Education. He has conducted research on educational policy as a senior staff member at the Brookings Institution, and served as director of educational policy planning for the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Appendix A: Agenda

National Directions in Education Research Planning

A Conference Co-Sponsored by

The National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board (NERPPB)

and

The Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)

U.S. Department of Education

June 17–18, 1998

McLean Hilton at Tysons Corner

7920 Jones Branch Drive

McLean, VA 22102

June 17, 1998

8:00–8:30 a.m.

Registration

9:00–9:30 a.m.

Greetings and Opening Remarks

Kenji Hakuta

Chair, NERPPB

Kent McGuire

Assistant Secretary, OERI

Conference Purposes, Assignments, and Activities

Michael Timpane, RAND

Conference Moderator

9:30–11:15 a.m.

Panel 1: Domain-based Research Planning

Diane August, Committee on Developing a Research

Agenda on the Education of Limited-English-

Proficient and Bilingual Students, NRC

William Sibley, National Science Foundation

Catherine Snow, Committee on Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children, NRC
Reid Lyon, National Institute for Child Health and Human Development
Thomas Romberg, National Research Center for Improving Student Learning and Achievement in Mathematics and Science

Respondents:
Jomills Braddock, NERPPB
E. Lea Schelke, National Education Association

Organizing questions: How can and should education research planning be successfully accomplished? What has been or can be its impact, in theory building, in methodological advances, and in applications to practice and policy?

11:15–11:30 a.m. **Break**

11:30–1:00 p.m. **Panel 2: Comprehensive Approaches to Research Planning**

Elizabeth Carvellas, Council of Scientific Society Presidents
Daniel Goroff, Harvard University (PCAST)
Gerald Sroufe, American Educational Research Association
Alexandra Wigdor, National Research Council
Michael Kirst, Board of International Comparative Studies in Education, NRC

Respondents:
Alba Ortiz, NERPPB
Paul Schwarz, Principal-in-Residence, ED

Organizing Questions: How can and should education research planning be successfully accomplished? What has been or can be its impact, in theory building, in methodological advances, and in applications to practice and policy?

1:00–2:30 p.m. **Lunch**

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Keynote Address:

The Future of Education Research: Priorities, Possibilities,
and Risks

Marshall Smith

Acting Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of
Education

2:45–4:30 p.m.

Small Group Sessions

Moderators:

Patricia Albjerg Graham, Spencer Foundation

Frederic Mosher, Carnegie Corporation

Emerson Elliott, National Council for Accreditation of
Teacher Education

John Bruer, NERPPB

Organizing Questions: What specific lessons should
be taken from the morning sessions for the future conduct
of research planning? How should issues of quality and
priority be addressed? Are there opportunities for better
collaboration, coordination, and communication of research
and planning? What policy changes are needed?
(Recorders from OERI for each group)

4:30–5:00 p.m.

Reporting Out to Full Group

Moderators and Recorders

June 18, 1998

9:00–10:30 a.m.

**Panel on Necessary Policy Initiatives and
Implementation Issues**

Kent McGuire, Moderator

Denis Doyle, Doyle Associates

David Shaw, President's Committee of Advisors on
Science and Technology

Bella Rosenberg, American Federation of Teachers

Frank Newman, Education Commission of the States

William Morrill, Mathtech

Respondent:

§ Patricia Ann Baltz, NERPPB

Organizing Questions: Where should education research planning go from here? How can education research activities be more effectively funded, organized, and managed? How can discourse about the need for more and better research become a more extensive and significant part of education policy development?

10:30–10:45 a.m.

Break

10:45–12:00 p.m.

Summary, Next Steps

Discussion

Kent McGuire, OERI

Kenji Hakuta, NERPPB

Ann Clark, NERPPB

Michael Timpane, RAND

12:00 noon

Adjourn

Appendix B: List of Attendees

National Directions in Education Research Planning

June 17–18, 1998

McLean, Virginia

Martin Apple
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