Dear EDLE Alumni, Students, Faculty, and Friends,

This semester, I am serving as the Acting Coordinator of the EDLE Program as David Brazer is on a sabbatical study leave. This is an exciting and busy time for our office as we gear up for our Spring Annual Leadership Conference while heavily engaged with the various phases of our recruitment efforts for a number of upcoming cohorts. Hopefully, with spring around the corner, we will be spared further interruptions to class schedules due to inclement weather.

In this issue we highlight several research projects that our faculty members are involved in, reflecting the diversity of interests and expertise in our program. We invite you to share with us your accomplishments in the field and scholarly pursuits. All of the faculty and staff in the Education Leadership Program look forward to seeing our students at our 12th Annual Leadership Conference, “Making Collaboration Work through Research-based Practice” later this month.

- Farnoosh Shahrokhi

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**EDLE Vision**

The Education Leadership Program is dedicated to improving the quality of pre-K – 12 education through teaching, research, and service. Candidates and practicing administrators engage in course work devoted to experiential learning, professional growth opportunities, and doctoral research that informs practice. We educate exceptional leaders who act with integrity as they work to improve schools.
It seems that almost on a daily basis we are reading and hearing about issues involving schools, students, and communities. Sometimes the focus of the news is on discipline and student grading and other times views regarding the use of social media are expressed. EDLE students study these situations as well as those presented in the course to develop their leadership skills. Quite often the students practice decision making and communication skills focused on both case study scenarios and current events. The discussions are always lively and involve “friendly” debates as students explore alternatives that they feel best resolve these often complex issues. The students find themselves reflecting on concepts presented in other coursework such as Education Law and Supervision and Evaluation as well as their personal code of ethics and experiences associated with their internships. Additionally, the students explore the association and importance of effective and efficient communications aligned with school and community profiles.

Along with investigating the most appropriate written format and content of school communications, students work directly with community members in an interview format to develop plans that address the effectiveness of school visions. In these ways, students become completely immersed in expanding their knowledge and abilities to respond to school and community needs.

This course also provides the opportunity for students to analyze and reflect on the implementation of their School Improvement Projects. In these discussions, students focus on the evaluation of the decisions associated with the development of the projects and their current status. The stories shared include the successes and challenges that accompany leading and managing a project that impacts school and student improvement. This opportunity, along with the others described earlier, emphasizes the development of knowledge and skills to effectively lead schools and communities.

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On the bitterly cold morning of December 7, 2010, the Education Leadership Program was honored to receive a delegation of 25 principals and directors from the People’s Republic of China. The delegation traveled to several states visiting schools and schools of education. Mason was their last stop before heading home. Dean Mark Ginsberg welcomed the group in anticipation of his own personal trip to China later in the month. Associate Provost Madelyn Ross addressed the delegation in fluent Mandarin Chinese that elicited audible reactions of surprise and enthusiastic applause.

The principals and directors were most interested in how we prepare candidates to take on leadership roles, including assistant principal and principal. David Brazer, Farnoosh Shahrokhi, Alan Sturrock, and Jim Upperman all made brief presentations about various aspects of the program. There were many questions and animated dialogue at the end of the presentations.

As of this writing, we are anticipating a more extended visit of a new group of 25 principals in April. Over the course of five days we plan for them to visit local schools and engage in professional development that includes understanding leadership in the context of schools as organizations, working on school improvement, supervising and evaluating teachers, designing professional development for and with teachers, and reaching out to the community. We look forward to creating more partnerships with education leaders in China in the years to come.

-S. David Brazer
The Professional Development Model for International Education

Jessica Turner

Since 2005, the Center for International Education (CIE) at George Mason University has engaged over 190 teachers from over 20 different countries in advanced professional development programs. Through these programs, CIE seeks to foster intercultural communication through the sharing of ideas and expertise. Dr. Farnoosh Shahrokhi has partnered with CIE since 2006 through the Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program.

This fall, the Center for International Education took its international professional development activities to a new height, hosting fifty-nine language, humanities, science, mathematics, social studies and technology teachers from eleven countries. Funded by the US State Department, The IREX TEA Project, The Greek Teacher Professional Development Project and the U.S.-Russia Teacher Professional Development Project, each included three program components: academic coursework in intensive seminars; field experience in multicultural public schools; and cultural immersion in diverse arts, history, and communities of the United States. In combination, these three program components provide international educators with a vast array of ideas, tools, technologies, and perspectives for introducing and sustaining innovative and educational practices in their home school communities.

As a result of these efforts, CIE has articulated a Professional Development Model for International Educators (PDMIE). Founded upon the core values of innovation, collaboration, research-based practices, social justice and ethical leadership, the PDMIE offers international educators opportunities to gain new perspectives, develop advanced skills and enhance their repertoire in new pedagogies. The goals of the PDMIE include:

- Exchanging cross-cultural knowledge and understanding.
- Cultivating effective teaching practices for international and multicultural settings.
- Fostering technology integration in teaching and learning.
- Developing self-reflective teaching practices.

The faculty involved in the programs have begun a comprehensive Joint Research Project and include: Dr. Supriya Baily, Dr. Rebecca Fox, Dr. Wendy Frazier, Dr. Anastasia Kitsantas, Dr. Anastasia Samaras, Dr. Farnoosh Shahrokhi, Dr. Beverly Shaklee, and Dr. Debra Sprague. This Project is the first of its kind and will seek to investigate the effectiveness of the PDMIE as well as the teaching practices of international educators. Participants in each of the programs completed pre-, mid-, and post-program assessments and they took part in focus groups and individual and paired interviews. Using this data, along with faculty reflections on the program and the teachers’ coursework, participating faculty are conducting a variety of research projects; including investigations of teachers’ ideas about internationalism and international-mindedness, the integration of ICT, teacher self-efficacy and self-regulation, co-teaching experiences and the efficacy of the PDMIE. The faculty will publish and present their findings in a variety of contexts.
Teaching For Meaning: A Progress Report
Robert G. Smith

If teachers teach for meaning (TFM), will their students score as high on state criterion referenced measures as the students of teachers who teach discrete, isolated basic skills? Answering this question has been central to work in which I have been involved intermittently for the past 16 years. The work began with concern that in responding to the accountability provisions of state testing in Texas in the 1990’s, teachers in the Houston area school district in which I served as an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction were reducing their curriculum and instruction to the objectives of the state tests. Adding to the disquiet was the conviction that the state tests failed to capture the most important concepts and applications in our curricula.

My experience in talking with teachers, then and now, was that they would prefer to teach for meaning and believe intellectually that teaching in that way will adequately prepare students to do well on state assessments. When testing time nears, however, emotion rules and the workbooks and the drill and practice procedures come forward out of concern that their students might be disadvantaged if they strayed from teaching the state objectives as discrete, isolated skills and facts.

In the mid-90’s, I secured a three-year federally funded, state awarded grant that provided resources to train elementary school teachers in teaching for meaning and in collaborative inquiry procedures (Smith & Knight, 1997) devoted to developing TFM. The grant also supported resources applied to assessing the degree to which teacher displays of fidelity to TFM were associated with the state test scores of their students.

Teaching for Meaning in High Poverty Classrooms, a 1995 study published by Michael Knapp and his associates, was the inspiration for the design of the grant. Using norm-referenced standardized tests as the outcome measures, the study was conducted in selected metropolitan school districts. The authors concluded that the students of teachers who taught for meaning and the students of teachers who taught discrete, isolated basic skills, scored about the same on basic skills. However, on more advanced thinking, the students of teachers who taught for meaning performed better than the students of teachers who taught discrete, isolated basic skills.

Unclear is whether Knapp’s findings would extend to performance on the high stakes criterion-referenced measures used by most states. It also appears that while several programs exist that provide meaningful instruction, a particular challenge lies in identifying and evaluating the classroom processes associated with TFM or teaching for understanding (Silver, 2009).

We were assisted in implementing and evaluating the grant by Stephanie Knight, a professor at Texas A & M University (now of Pennsylvania State University). Out of that project, a Teaching for Meaning Observation Form (Knight & Ackerman, 1997) emerged over the course of additional studies conducted in both Houston and Arlington (Knight & Smith a, 2004). The definition of TFM reflected in the observation form and in our studies encompasses instruction characterized by making connections among:

- Student lives
- Student cultures
- Big ideas of the subject taught

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Teaching for meaning also refers to the degree to which these connections occur in a supportive, well managed environment characterized by intrinsic rewards and differentiation.

In general, our studies found indications that students of elementary teachers who had participated in training on teaching for meaning, and students of teachers who displayed greater fidelity in teaching for meaning, performed as well or better on state criterion referenced tests than students of teachers who had not participated in such training (Knight & Smith b, 2004); that elementary teaching behaviors are related to knowledge associated with teacher professional development for teaching for meaning (Woods, 2000); and that high school teachers known to be effective in reducing student achievement gaps were more likely to display teaching for meaning behaviors than teachers thought to be less effective in reducing student achievement gaps (Knight & Smith, 2004).

Last year we received approval from the Fairfax County Public Schools and the George Mason University Human Subjects Review Board to conduct another TFM study, this time with middle school mathematics teachers. Employing a descriptive, correlational design, the study called for at least two observations using the Teaching for Meaning Classroom Observation Form of at least one class of each grade 7 and 8 mathematics teacher in a selected school. The results of the observations would be analyzed with spring 2011 results on the Standards of Learning mathematics tests taken by the students in each of the classes observed. Multiple regression analyses would be conducted on each individual classroom’s TFM score and the class 2011 SOL mathematics test results, using the spring 2010 SOL mathematics test results as a covariate. The same analysis would be applied to the total sample. Analyses using the total TFM scores and individual dimension results would also be conducted to determine the relative relationship to achievement of each of the dimensions within the scale. Additionally, analyses of the SOL results would be conducted for students enrolled in separate courses (i.e., Geometry, Algebra I, Math 7 and Math 8), and would be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, LEP and economic disadvantage.

Venkata Patnam, a GMU graduate research assistant and a PhD student in mathematics leadership, and I completed 30 observations of middle school mathematics teachers this fall. After establishing an 87% inter-rater agreement rate (Kappa = 0.72), we found on average very high engagement rates; high rates of discussion; moderate rates of treating concepts and generalizations, teaching skills in context, reliance on intrinsic rewards, praise and encouragement, linkage to prior or future content and differentiation; and low rates of appropriate references to culture, and linkage to other content areas. We also found a fair degree of variation in observation rates, except on those variables with very high or low rates.

We must wait for the spring or summer, of course, to receive the math SOL scores to complete the investigation of the relationship of teaching for meaning and student performance on the grades 7 and 8 mathematics SOL tests.

References
I have the great pleasure of being on sabbatical this semester. It often seems to me that those outside the university hear the term sabbatical and they think of an extended vacation. It’s not quite that; rather it is a time to engage in intensive research and writing without the added responsibility of teaching and attending various meetings.

My sabbatical project takes me back to a handful of professors who had a profound impact on my administrative and academic careers to find out firsthand what they believe to be their greatest contributions to practice. As of this writing, I have interviewed Edwin Bridges, Larry Cuban (superintendent in Arlington Public Schools from 1974 – 1981), Elliot Eisner, and Lee Shulman. My personal journey of discovery with my former professors has helped me to understand their contribution to the concept of professional learning communities (PLCs). Eisner and Shulman are ideal guides for administrators to explore PLCs as a vehicle for instructional leadership.

Although the notion of PLC may seem to be a fairly recent innovation, Shulman articulated the rationale for teachers working together in learning communities in a paper written more than twenty years ago and republished in the last decade: "Most reform agendas rest on the assumption that teachers are capable of learning . . . and that teachers can improve with experience. Changes are needed in . . . classrooms and schools to make them suitable settings for teacher learning. Teacher collegiality and collaboration are not important merely for the improvement of morale and teacher satisfaction . . . ; they are absolutely necessary if teaching is to be of the highest order and thus compatible with the standards of excellence demanded by the recent reforms. (Shulman, 2004, p. 311)

Interesting, but what should teachers be learning and how should they be learning it as they collaborate with one another? The contemporary answer seems to be they need to learn about assessment and how to interpret test scores and other measures of student achievement. But those activities seem to beg the question, What should teachers do with the information? Shulman’s answer is the development of pedagogical content knowledge (a phrase he coined but describes as “horrible”)—the intersection between content knowledge and one’s understanding about how best to teach that content to others. Test scores provide evidence of student learning, but for PLCs to be effective, they must also help teachers expand and deepen their understanding of teaching and learning processes, their knowledge of the content they are entrusted to teach, and their repertoire of effective methods specific to different kinds of content. Teachers are helpless unless they understand why student achievement is below goals educators have set for them and what they can do about it.

PLCs commonly simplify and accelerate the process of addressing achievement gaps by focusing on test scores and grabbing off-the-shelf strategies to improve them. Thus, adult learning is often short-circuited in what is intended to be a learning community. Eisner provides insight into the perspectives and processes needed to infuse learning into PLCs. In order to address achievement gaps, teachers must first know how to look at classrooms—their own and their colleagues’—so that they can know the differences among mediocre, ac—

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CEPTABLE, AND EXEMPLARY TEACHING AND LEARNING WHEN THEY SEE IT. ONE CANNOT IMPROVE THE CLASSROOM UNTIL SHE OR HE OBTAINS A HIGH LEVEL OF PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE THAT STEMS FROM A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF HOW CLASSROOMS WORK. EISNER CALLS SUCH A PERSPECTIVE EDUCATIONAL CONNOISSEURSHIP. THE GOAL IS FOR TEACHERS TO BECOME CONNOISSEURS OF THE CLASSROOM, JUST AS THE WASHINGTON POST COLUMNIST TOM SIETSEMA IS A CONNOISSEUR OF FINE DINING.

CONNOISSEURSHIP GERMINATES AND GROWS WITHIN A COMMUNITY THROUGH FREQUENT AND INSTRUCTIONALLY-FOCUSED COMMUNICATION. DIALOGUE IS CRITICAL FOR INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE DEVELOPMENT, THUS MAKING POSSIBLE PROGRAM, GRADE LEVEL, DEPARTMENTAL, AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT. EISNER CALLS THIS KIND OF COMMUNICATION EDUCATIONAL CRITICISM, A RISKY TERM BECAUSE OF THE FALSE NOTION THAT CRITICISM IS ALWAYS NEGATIVE. AS AN ART EDUCATOR, EISNER TURNED TO ART ANALOGIES DURING OUR INTERVIEW TO EXPLAIN HOW CRITICISM COMMUNICATES WHAT IS LEARNED FROM CONNOISSEURSHIP:

THE AIM OF CRITICISM IS THE RE-EDUCATION OF THE WORK OF ART. PEOPLE COME TO A SITUATION, WHETHER A HUMAN INTERACTION OR AN OBJECT AND THEY TRY TO SEE IT, EXPERIENCE IT. HOW MUCH THEY SEE DEPENDS ON THEIR LEVEL OF CONNOISSEURSHIP. BUT ONCE THEY SEE WHATSOEVER IT IS THAT THEY SEE, THEN THE PROBLEM—IF THEY’RE GOING TO USE IT EDUCATIONALLY—IS TO WRITE ABOUT OR TALK ABOUT OR COMMUNICATE WHAT’S THERE THROUGH LANGUAGE. . . . THE CONNOISSEUR PERFORMS AS A MIDWIFE TO PERCEPTION AND IT IS CRITICISM THAT DELIVERS THE CHILD, SO TO SPEAK. YOU NEED TO TALK ABOUT AN OBJECT OR A PERFORMANCE . . . IN A WAY THAT ENABLES OTHERS TO NOTICE WHAT YOU CLAIM IS THERE . . . .

Imagine talking and/or writing about what happens in classrooms in place of art, and Eisner’s point is made for educators.

What has the educational leader to do with PLCs, pedagogical content knowledge, and educational connoisseurship and criticism? Shulman suggests the need for leadership when writing about an internal contradiction in schools:

THE DEMANDS BEING MADE ON TEACHERS CALL FOR THEM TO ACT CRITICALLY, DECISIVELY, AND SELF-CORRECTIVELY UNDER CONDITIONS THAT DO NOT PROMOTE OR SUPPORT THOSE PROCESSES” (SHULMAN, 2004, P. 317).

PLCS MAY BE A USEFUL TOOL FOR DEVELOPING LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS THAT IMPROVE WITH TIME, BUT THEY WILL NOT SUCCEED UNLESS PRINCIPALS CREATE AND SUSTAIN CONDITIONS THAT ALLOW ADULTS TO LEARN AND ACT ON THEIR NEW KNOWLEDGE. DOING SO REQUIRES SUBSTANTIAL COURAGE BECAUSE NEW PERSPECTIVES ARE NOT ALWAYS WELCOME AND MAY LEAD TO UNORTHODOX METHODS FRAUGHT WITH RISK.

BRIDGES AND CUBAN explained to me what some of the risks are and how to address them, but that explanation must wait for a future newsletter.

REFERENCES


SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH CONTINUED…

“In order to address achievement gaps, teachers must first know how to look at classrooms— their own and their colleagues’—so that they can know the differences among mediocre, acceptable, and exemplary teaching and learning when they see it.”

S. DAVID BRAZER

ABOVE: MASON POND, FAIRFAX CAMPUS. PHOTO BY CREATIVE SERVICES, GEORGE MAIN UNIVERSITY
In the context of an enduring college-level and university-level commitment to teaching, research and service, the College of Education and Human Development also holds the following core values:

**Collaboration**

Collaboration is an important human activity that involves shared responsibility in promoting healthy, productive lives and educational success. We commit ourselves to work toward these goals in genuine partnerships with individuals, families, community agencies, schools, businesses, foundations, and other groups at the local, regional, national and international levels.

**Ethical Leadership**

In all professions represented by the college, leadership is an essential component denoting ability and willingness to help lead professional practice to higher levels. We commit ourselves to practice ethical leadership through deliberate and systematic attention to the ethical principles that guide all leaders in a moral society.

**Innovation**

We have a history of creating dynamic, innovative programs and we are dedicated to continue creating innovative approaches in all areas of our work. We commit ourselves to seeking new ways to advance knowledge, solve problems, improve our professional practice and expand on our successes.

**Research-Based Practice**

The best practice in any discipline is based upon sound research and professional judgment. We commit ourselves to basing our instruction, scholarship and policy recommendations on well-established principles that, wherever possible, emerge from research and reflection on its implications for professional practice.

**Social Justice**

Social justice embodies essential principles of equity and access to all opportunities in society, in accordance with democratic principles and respect for all persons and points of view. We commit ourselves to promoting equity, opportunity, and social justice through the college’s operations and its missions related to teaching, research, and service.

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NEW EDLE M.ED. COHORTS

- Summer 2011
  - Southwest

- Fall 2011
  - AFA (Arlington and Alexandria targeted)
  - Prince William
  - Advanced Studies in Teaching and Learning (ASTL)

If you know of aspiring school leaders who might like to join one of these cohorts, please have them contact:

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