



Research Forum April 27, 2011

Closing Comments

Dr. Liz Townsend

Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Education

What did the Centre for Education Research Forum (CER) on Educational Research 2011 display about educational research?

Participants at the 8th annual CER Research Forum on April 27, 2011 could ask this question to reflect on their own learning. The UPEI community, members of the public, the PEI Minister of Education and others may be interested in responses to this question if they are watching the evolution of educational research at UPEI and beyond.

Between an opening keynote presentation and closing panel, participants could select from 15 presentations that were organized in three concurrent sessions. Three points offer a brief answer to summarize what the 15 presentations displayed about educational research.

First, the Research Forum displayed a *wide range* of educational research. There was growing educational research strength across the Island. Presentations addressed a considerable span of age groups, from early childhood pre-schoolers, to high school students with disabilities to Inuit adult learners becoming teachers. Topics ranged from using advisory groups to promote student engagement in schools, to the development of professional learning communities, and teaching and learning with students from refugee backgrounds. The strength in growing diverse research programs is also a challenge. Many were small projects, some isolated to a single site and population, and most with new researchers whose expertise is growing through their self-directed research development or through masters and PhD studies. One can imagine that the development of graduate studies at UPEI has been a strong influence on educational research development on PEI. Future events may see the evolution of larger research teams, and educational research across the life span, including secondary and post-secondary education, adult education and educational programming with seniors or other groups.

Second, the Research Forum displayed a *major, research strength* in early childhood development and elementary teaching and learning. UPEI can be proud to support an emerging team and collaborators who are gaining national and international attention as well as funding. This is a signature research program with great potential to extend investigations of literacy, student engagement, critical reflection, systems issues, curriculum frameworks, theories and English as an Additional Language (EAL) students. The strength of an identifiable research

program remains challenging. Researchers are under pressure to move beyond crisis-driven research about school-based problems. Hopefully this research program will grow as individuals find common ground to build a large, experienced team on PEI and beyond, to publish in peer-reviewed journals, and to attract major funding, including support to build a strong research network. One can imagine that the Centre for Education Research has helped to galvanize this research program since CER has provided working space and a place to profile this work. Yet the researchers are primarily UPEI teachers with responsibilities other than research.

Third, the Research Forum displayed a *potential research area* in building collaborative partnerships, networks and research communities. Presentations included knowledge translation methods, research tools, or communication methods in e-learning, teacher networks, and the use of distance technologies to conduct historical research. There is clearly expertise in PEI for using distance technologies for teaching and learning. Possibly there is a research program waiting to be developed to examine how children, adults and seniors learn to use and apply these technologies in daily life, or to examine the differences in using e-learning across diverse populations or geographic areas. This area may continue to be a rather invisible, taken-for-granted byproduct of research – the dissemination and knowledge translation that all researchers attempt to do. Yet some may see the educational research questions and seek research funding for acting locally with global connections.

The forum displayed diversity in the growth of research, a major research strength in early childhood and elementary education, and a potential research strength in e-learning and other distance technologies. With the display of research at the Forum, UPEI can reflect on the role of the Centre for Education Research in fostering educational research at UPEI and across the Island.

The Research Forum was a very interesting and well organized event. Thanks to everyone who contributed!