

1987 AAHE Research Forum

**THE CLASSROOM RESEARCHER'S  
RESEARCH AGENDA**

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

**What is the Purpose?** Involvement and critique from educators in dialogue with researchers is a critical element for achieving clarity about what research will benefit educational policy and practice. The AAHE Research Forum is convened annually to involve individuals committed to research and scholarship in higher education. The Forum stimulates educators' involvement in creating a research agenda that speaks to current educational concerns. Since each year's agenda is developed around the conference theme, educators and researchers can continually rely on the Forum agenda as an up-to-date source of research questions of common interest that flow from the year's most central educational issues. The Forum enables educators to provide leadership and support for those researchers who share educators' interests, who speak clearly to educators about their findings, and who actively respond to educators' most pressing questions.

Since 1985, the AAHE Research Forum has provided leadership from educators for bridging the gap between research and practice, and enables educators and researchers to define the kinds of contexts that need to be reshaped within colleges and universities for research findings to result in immediate benefits to students.

**Why AAHE?** AAHE has traditionally brought together a wide range of interested educators, and has been successful in defining current issues that stimulate a broad spectrum of higher education constituencies. A recent survey shows the AAHE annual conference to be the most stimulating meeting of its kind. There are other forums where research results are presented and discussed, but many of them are not regularly attended by or directed toward higher education administrators and educators. AAHE membership has the desire and potential to stimulate research among its members, and to engage the research community in continual dialogue about research questions and findings that directly relate to educational practices for governance, for teaching and learning, and for student development.

### **What is the Forum Format?**

1. **The Panel.** A panel comprised of experts on the year's conference theme frame the issues. The 1987 panelists are K. Patricia Cross, Harvard University, and Wilbert J. McKeachie, University of Michigan.
2. **The Questions.** Forum leaders stimulate the audience to create an agenda by presenting research questions generated the previous afternoon by 50 members of the conference leadership who work in areas related to the conference theme.
3. **Audience Participation.** Discussion follows the panel and allows for more focused critique and discussion of ways to link research and practice. The audience reviews, critiques, expands, and improves the questions via a worksheet.
4. **Dissemination.** Results from 92 participants are analyzed after the conference to comprise the 1987 research agenda, which is mailed to participants. The history and rationale for the American Association for Higher Education Research Forum and the 1986 Research Agenda are described in M. Mentkowski and A. W. Chickering, "Linking Educators and Researchers in Setting a Research Agenda for Undergraduate Education," *The Review of Higher Education*, 1987, 11(2), pp. 137–160.

# TEACHING

Teaching refers to those activities faculty members pursue when working with groups of students in regular courses and classes. Teaching, as it is currently practiced, typically aims to transmit information, concepts, inquiry methods, and the perspectives of a given discipline or area of professional preparation. Teaching is also understood to be oriented toward developing specific skills, more generic and transferable competences, and other personal characteristics and abilities.

## Purposes and Planning

What are my goals? What are my intended outcomes?

What are alternative ways to organize what happens in class?

What variables can be changed?

How does my teaching style influence the learning objectives I set for my course?

How do I achieve congruence between my goals and the students' goals?

What is my responsibility with regard to informing students that one of my goals is to change their attitudes?

## Student Characteristics

What level should I teach to (e.g., intelligence, level of information or sophistication)?

How should I teach to a variety of students? What differences in approach due to learning styles, cultural backgrounds, purposes, should I use?

What strategies can I use that are most effective in teaching adults?

How does one's teaching affect males as compared with females?

How can I ensure that I am not creating a "chilly climate" for my female students?

How should I address the under prepared student (under prepared means incapable, or unexposed, or trained not to achieve or culturally threatened by learning.)

What approaches can I use to help professionally-oriented students recognize the value of liberal education?

How can I relate the level of my offering to the fact that my course is required?

## Motivation

How do I create a culture that strengthens motivation to prepare, to teach, and to do the work of learning?

How do I create a culture that strengthens motivation for my own preparation as a faculty member?

What strategies will help refresh faculty members' enthusiasm for their subject matter?

What do I gain as an instructor from teaching with students in a collaborative manner?

How can I become more self-reflective about the values, attitudes and assumptions I bring to the classroom?

How can faculty be influenced to want to examine the effectiveness of their own teaching?

### Content

How can I be sure the content of my course reflects the "cannon" of my discipline? That students are learning the requisite skills?

How can I select content that connects with my students' motives, preparation and personal background?

How can I facilitate student input on content?

How can I take advantage of what students already know?

How can I effectively use my own personal experience to illustrate a theme or concept?

How can I raise the level of student thinking, i.e., can "thinking" be taught?

How can I effectively communicate ideas and concepts in my own discipline and their relationship to other disciplines?

How does the orientation of my course (i.e., vocational, liberal arts, quantitative, theoretical) influence what teaching methods I use?

How can values be taught, particularly in areas typically dissociated from them?

### Process

How can I engage the students and what I offer in an interactive process?

How can I become more sensitive to the experiences and characteristics my students bring to class?

How can I learn what my students are actually experiencing in preparing for class and during class sessions?

What effect does my interaction with students outside the classroom have on classroom climate?

How can I help students relate their experiences in the field (e.g., internships) to issues discussed in the classroom?

How can I create a “safe” classroom in which students can risk openly in the learning process?

How can my teaching encourage students to take revision seriously?

How can I structure my course to use a “problem-solving approach” effectively?

## LEARNING

How might we enhance student involvement in learning? We need to develop learners who design and participate in an active learning environment which fosters intellectual growth, respect for diversity of learners and learning styles, and competence in a variety of educational delivery systems.

### Nature of Learning

To what degree is learning inherently social? That is, are collaborative (group based, collective) learning situations central to learning?

How and where and when does learning occur? In the classroom? When the teacher is talking? When the teacher is silent? When does it matter where learning takes place?

How effective is active learning?

What kind of learning is aided by case-study and problem-centered approaches?

What is the special role of students' experience, both in and out of the classroom, in learning?

How likely is learning to occur well after (e.g., several years) the teaching has taken place?

What is the appropriate role of "service-learning" (i.e., service to the community) within and outside the classroom?

### Student as Learner

How does knowledge about the learner (e.g., individual differences in personality traits, learning styles, background characteristics) contribute to the learning process from the point of view of the learner and the teacher?

Who are the students and what do they already know? How might I question students, to try to find their learning patterns?

What do students expect to gain from course content and for what uses?

What are the characteristics of good student-learner role models?

How do students come to think like an historian, a philosopher, a statistician, etc.?

### Student Involvement in Learning

What are appropriate roles for my students in shaping educational experiences, and the classroom research process?

How do I negotiate what students want to learn and what I think they should be learning?

How does engagement (involvement) promote learning?

What are measures of engagement? How engaged are the students in the material of the course and how do I really find this out?

How do I support, rather than interfere with, those students who are intrinsically motivated?

How do I negotiate critic/coach roles to engage students?

What role do negative student responses (e.g., anger, frustration) play in inducing engagement?

How is student self-assessment an integral part of learning?

What are the generic abilities that students need? How might I identify skills like imagination, and do research on them?

What is the proper balance of challenge and support that will prompt students to create new frameworks?

Does humor promote learning?

What is the effect of class size on learning?

How can I get students actively involved in learning in large lecture classes?

How does the physical environment help and hinder learning?

## ASSESSMENT

Assessment of individual student learning is a process for generating, judging, and communicating information about student performance. Essential elements are to identify performance outcomes that drive assessment, and to describe what the learner will be able to do with what he/she knows. Assessment involves insistence on multiple sources of evidence, by multiple assessors, from a variety of modes. Giving feedback to the student or institution on strengths and areas to be improved turns the process into a powerful pedagogy for student and program development. Student performance information can be aggregated and used as the basis for institutional assessment designed to establish effectiveness and improve programs.

### On Assessment Procedures

How can I use classroom assessment procedures to promote learning in an individual classroom for the teacher and for the student?

How can I use classroom assessment procedures to provide generalizations useful to other classrooms and learning contexts?

What effects do my comments on students' papers have?

Are there certain assessment strategies better suited to one discipline than another?

How can I assess those difficult learnings of students such as creativity?

Does teaching students to self-assess promote learning?

What strategies can I use to assist each unique student in developing effective tools for self-assessment?

How do my test questions influence how my students study?

How do my assessment practices influence long term retention?

Are there ways in which my classroom tests inhibit learning?

How does advance knowledge of my criteria influence how my students perform?

How can I demonstrate that General Education objectives are being met in my course?

How can placement tests and course proficiency tests be made more compatible?

### On the Assessment Context

How does classroom assessment effect the student-teacher "partners-in-learning" balance?

To what extent do my grading practices influence teaching, learning, and testing procedures?

How will statewide assessment practices influence my teaching-learning environment?

## On Students and Assessment

Why are adult learners who appear independent to me in personality and attitudes not as independent in class?

Who is the information I gather for?

What are the students bringing to my classroom, and the learning enterprise that is my course? How can I find this out?

Where is the locus of responsibility for learning? How do I go about enabling students to see the learning and evaluation processes as mutual ones (teacher/student)? How do I keep the learning ball in the student's court, and keep the ball in motion?

What kinds of information help me understand how students are learning? How do I go about making appropriate choices of teaching methodologies most appropriate to each student? How do I make appropriate choices of ways to assess student learning and the choice of context? How do I make appropriate choices of the amounts and kinds of feedback to students? How do I make the best of limited time, given that all these efforts take time?

How does the generation of Student Self Reports influence students' appreciation of the course?

What is the relationship between self-assessment and feedback? Does it differ for the beginning, the developing, and the advanced student?

How do I identify and then develop my strongest modes of reaching students, and how do I go about reorienting my teaching for students whose approach to learning clearly doesn't match my teaching?

How do I identify and assess for abilities that develop over a very long time line? How do I assess for skills that are not really recognized until applied much later?

## MAKING THE CLASSROOM RESEARCHER A REALITY

### Faculty Questions

How might we redefine the traditional term “research” to include methods of “inquiry” that would be drawn from the teacher’s own discipline?

How might viewing ourselves as students—learners serve the same end as taking on the additional role of researcher?

How does a classroom researcher use the data he or she gathers to generate questions for further research?

How might students become co-researchers of their own learning?

How might the concept of “learning criticism,” as analogue to “literary criticism,” be used as a classroom research technique?

How might approaches used in marketing research be used as a classroom research technique?

How do I share what I’m learning and ground it and deepen it, through interaction with other classroom researchers? How does the researcher give away, give feedback on, or deepen his or her discoveries with other classroom researchers?

How might we ensure dissemination of classroom research that could serve as models to stimulate more?

### Faculty Characteristics

What faculty characteristics make for effective classroom research?

An interest in teaching well? Some sense of how to carry out an inquiry?

An ability to be reflective and flexible about teaching?

An ability to work at understanding reliably what goes on in the classroom?

An ability to use multiple modes of feedback?

An interest in cooperation and collaboration with other faculty?

An interest in learning from the research and expertise of others?

An interest in what students can do in response to appropriate learning? What skills and abilities students need beyond the capacity to pass the final?

## Institutional Conditions

How can we help faculty members and administrators think about teaching as a profession that includes theory, practice, and continual self-assessment for improvement?

How can we encourage recognition of multiple outcomes from classroom research for individuals, groups, institutions, disciplines, and the profession of teaching?

How do we help classroom teachers interpret the results of their research?

How can the institution support, recognize, and reward classroom researchers?

How can we apply collegial review process to teaching and to classroom research?

What role should classroom research play in faculty evaluation? If it does play a role, how should the research be judged?

How can we strengthen attention to classroom research in graduate education? How do we generate commitment in the graduate schools, discipline by discipline, to promote the discipline as well as doing the discipline?

How might we incorporate the teacher-researcher concept in teacher education training?

What kind of instructional development staff, release time for faculty and staff, and space are required to support faculty members as classroom researchers? What external consultants might help faculty carry out their own classroom research?

How should we define the roles of student and faculty members in defining expectations and outcomes from faculty research?

The “American Association for Higher Education Research Forum, 1987: The Classroom Researcher’s Research Agenda” was created in two stages. First, 50 members of the conference leadership generated questions per topic during an invitational pre-conference session on March 1, 1987. Second, 92 participants in the all-conference AAHE Research Forum on March 2, 1987 elaborated and improved upon the first iteration. A participant list follows.

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