2007

Reflections on MWERA 2006: Teaching and Researching in an Electronic Era

Craig A. Mertler
Bowling Green State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/mwer

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Reflections on MWERA 2006:

Teaching and Researching in an Electronic Era

Craig A. Mertler, MWERA Program Chair
Bowling Green State University

I am writing this reflection one week after our 2006 Annual Meeting. I must admit that, in my opinion, this year's theme—*Teaching and Researching in an Electronic Era*—seemed to work very effectively. In addition to our Thursday and Friday Keynote Addresses and the Presidential Address, 43 additional presentations dealt in some way with the topic of technology across education. This figure represented approximately one-fourth of all accepted proposals. While it is impossible for everyone's research agendas to "fit" a given conference theme, I would like to thank our membership for contributing so strongly to this year's theme.

Dr. Ron Owston of York University in Toronto kicked off our Annual Meeting with his Fireside Chat and Thursday Keynote Address, where he discussed the impact of the World Wide Web on instruction and learning. He shared with us the vision of Sir Tim Berners-Lee, developer of the Web and "author" of the first-ever website—that it serve as "an information space through which people can communicate…by sharing their knowledge in a pool" and that the Web should *not* be "a big browsing medium," nor "a glorified television channel." As we examine the multitude of uses for the Web, I believe that all of his visions—the good, the bad, and the ugly—have certainly come to fruition! As an aside, how interesting was it for us to learn that Berners-Lee's original presentation of his "research" was presented as a poster!

As educators, the Web has had an impact on all of us, in terms of what we do and how we do it. However, I believe that it is crucial to remember that Web browsers have only been with us since 1993—a mere 16 years! We simply do not have that much information about teaching and learning with the Web. Dr. Owston posed three questions, possible answers, and follow-up questions, to the audience:

1. What are the *inequalities of access to learning* and can they be overcome? We don't need more research on the access gap itself, but we need strategies and programs to overcome the gap which should then be evaluated.

2. What do we know about *costs of learning* with the Web? Cost-effectiveness studies have not yielded very convincing results. However, one thing we do know is that hardware costs have plummeted, especially with the advent of the $100 computer.

3. What about *improved learning*? What is needed is not more research comparing the Web with face-to-face learning, but to study ways of designing Web-based learning in order to maximize its relative benefits.

Of course, the issue of "digital natives" versus "digital immigrants" will certainly begin to play an important role in these issues, as Rodney Greer also discussed at length in his Presidential Address. Related to this notion, Dr. Owston concluded his presentation with a substantial challenge: How to make classroom learning as engaging as games. Of course, this is all too relative. My idea of video games includes Space Invaders and PacMan (I realize I'm now divulging my age!)…which would undoubtedly bore today's youth to tears!!

In his Friday Keynote Address, Dr. Fred Conrad, of the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research followed up on Dr. Owston's notion of various uses for the Web. He focused on the interactive capabilities of the Web when used for the collection of data, specifically resulting from Web-based surveys. A multitude of interesting issues arose during his presentation, including various formats for progress indicators during survey completion as well as the accuracy and timing of those indicators, keep the inclusion of definitions for respondents (and the various formats that can be used to provide these definitions), and the use of computer-generated human interface technology (how many of us logged on to Ikea's Web site to pose a question to Anna in the week or two following our conference!? C'mon…be honest!).

Dr. Conrad's discussion of the impact of different forms of survey completion progress indicators, the effectiveness of various forms of respondent-initiated definitions (and the relative amount of "work" required of respondents to access those definitions), and the notion of a respondent's *in*activity that prompts an action by the survey itself shed an entirely new light on Web-based surveys. His address really brought to the forefront some cutting-edge technology and advances resulting from his research, in the area of Web-based surveys. It truly seems that Web surveys, due to their interactive nature, are somewhat akin to a "self-administered interview," in that they combine the best features of an interview and a self-administered survey.

Rodney Greer (along with his colleague Dr. Lance Ternasky) touched on many issues raised by our Keynote Speakers during his Presidential Address. He discussed the changing face of instructor–student and student–student communications—or was it the changing "faces" of students, nowadays often blocked from their instructors by their laptop screens! I truly found Rodney's discussion of "digital natives" and "digital immigrants" to be very intriguing. That discussion has already encouraged me to look at my undergraduate students a bit differently over the past week than I had in the past.

These individuals touched on so many issues critical to "teaching and researching in an electronic era." I know that, from a personal perspective, they provided me with so

much to contemplate—e.g., how to more effectively integrate technology into my instruction, how to "engage and not enrage" our students, and how to redesign and redirect the focus of my work in survey methodology. I came away with so many ideas! I only hope that the 2006 Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association had a similar impact on those of you who attended.

Let me close by stating an obvious fact, followed by a perhaps not-so-obvious fact. Clearly, serving as Program Chair was a great deal of work to which any of my predecessors can attest. At the same time, however, I can honestly say that it has been one of *the* most gratifying experiences of my career thus far in academia! MWERA continues to be a fabulous organization filled with great people! Let's carry on this 30-year trend by continuing to support our organization and participating in our 2007 Annual Meeting in St. Louis! See you there!

Mid-western Educational Research Association Reviewers for 2005-2006

We want to thank the individuals listed below who served as reviewers for the past year for the Mid-western Educational Researcher.

Kimberly Allen*
University of Missouri – St. Louis

Sonja Bagby
Carrollton City Schools, Carrollton, GA

Bambi Bethel-Leitshuh*
University of Missouri—St. Louis

Patricia Boyer
University of Missouri – St. Louis

Kelly Bradley
University of Kentucky

Emily Bouck*
Michigan State University

Yun Chi-Chen*
Pennsylvania State University

Tom Cody
Western Illinois University

Steven F. Corfman*
Antioch College

Sharon Damore
DePaul University

Matthew Davis
University of Missouri – St. Louis

Adrienne Dixson
The Ohio State University

Ros Duplechain
University of West Georgia

Stacyanne Headley*
The Ohio State University

Cher Hendricks
University of West Georgia

Mary Beth Henning
Northern Illinois University

Richard Hofmann
Miami University

Jan Holt
Northern Illinois University

Sema A. Kalaian
Eastern Michigan University

Barbara Kawulich
University of West Georgia

Charles E. Kline
Purdue University

Dorothy Kupsky*
The Ohio State University

Mary Leahy
College of DuPage

Donna McCaw
Western Illinois University

Glenda Moss
Indian University—Purdue University Fort Wayne

Timothy Murnen
Bowling Green State University

Isadore Newman
University of Akron

Jim Olive*
University of Dayton

Lynn Papenfus*
Kent State University

Sung Choon Park*
The Ohio State University

Kelli Paul*
Indiana University

John Poster
University of Michigan

Hema Ramanathan
University of West Georgia

Jill Reddish
University of West Georgia

Ronald S. Reigner
University of West Georgia

Tom Smith
Northern Illinois University

Cathy Spidell*
University of Akron

Kathleen Sullivan-Brown
University of Missouri – St. Louis

Jennifer Weber*
University of Kentucky

Kathryn Wiggins
DePaul University

E. Jane Williams
The Ohio State University (retired)

Ted Zigler
University of Cincinnati

Judith Zimmerman
Bowling Green State University

Names in italics are Editorial Board members
* indicates graduate student reviewers