

2005 Presidential Address: Our Future is What We Collectively Determine

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The landscape of education has changed dramatically over the past few years. Our constituencies are calling for more and more accountability and when they are not satisfied, they enact legislation that includes new mandates with little or no new funding. NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act) and ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) are pieces of federal legislation that affected public schools in ways never imagined. With the renewal of HEA (Higher Education Act), IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and the Carl D. Perkins Act, colleges and universities are experiencing new expectations from their many constituencies.

Accrediting organizations changed their standards over the past 10 years. Instead of focusing on the 'inputs' to the educational system, the focus has evolved to one on student learning outcomes, both the university student and the P-12 students they teach. This has led university officials and teacher educators to look for multiple ways to provide evidence of student learning. No longer are grades in courses or cumulative grade point averages sufficient evidence.

The accountability movement we are experiencing is based on the assumption that education needed 'fixing.' When asked to provide the data or details, most constituents indicated that their concerns were based on anecdotal evidence, chats with their neighbors or what they heard on the radio or television. Unfortunately, some educator's initial responses were to provide anecdotal evidence in return. This led to the call for educators to provide research based evidence to support their point of view. Initial definitions of research based evidence were heavily slanted to quantitative research, as if numbers alone were the ultimate solution. When asked for examples of studies using research based evidence, the studies cited were not conducted by educators. Rather, they were conducted by researchers, trained in other disciplines, with a peripheral interest in education. In recent years, the definition of research based evidence has expanded to include mixed methods research studies and some qualitative research studies, but the focus still remains on quantitative research studies.

In all of the discussions about education, one voice that was lacking was that of career and technical educators and researchers. We have always focused on the improvement of student learning and documenting that improvement. However, we

did that as part of our academic disciplines, not as career and technical teacher educators and researchers.

In 2004, the name of the American Vocational Education Research Association was changed to the Association for Career and Technical Education Research. For many, this change was long overdue, for others it was a concern. Change is unsettling but as professionals we knew it was time and the organizational name change was only a beginning.

Some members of our organization were questioning this organization's very existence, some suggesting that we cease to exist. Others saw our organization as having solid purposes and believed that the education discipline could learn a lot about pedagogy and research from career and technical education.

The Association for Career and Technical Education Research has four purposes that are critical to our future and some may say more critical today than ever before. The purposes are:

1. to stimulate research and development activities related to career and technical education;
2. to stimulate the development of training programs designed to prepare persons for responsibilities in research in career and technical education;
3. to foster a cooperative effort in research and development activities within the total program of career and technical education, with other areas of education and with other disciplines; and
4. to facilitate the dissemination of research findings and the diffusion of knowledge.

As these purposes were reviewed, it was clear that our organization had a purpose but needed a better way to disseminate the research that was being conducted by all career and technical educators. In collaboration with the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), the decision was made to create a pre-conference focused on career and technical education research. It was determined that it was critical that the research being done in career and technical education needed to be shared with our peers – in a time frame when we can all be present. It was very important to us to have more than a few paper sessions during the ACTE meeting, it was important to spend an entire day focused on the presentation of research. It was important for all of us to attend our discipline meetings as well as the research sessions. It was time to showcase career and technical education research to ACTE and to our public constituencies.

In thinking of our organization's acronym - ACTER - several attributes of the organization and our members came to mind.

A – stands for action and attitude. Last year we took action to reinvigorate this organization. We did this by establishing a research pre-conference at ACTE where

an entire day was devoted to showcasing the latest in career and technical education research. A new listserv was established and the organization's website was updated. Members were asked to become involved in a variety of ways and everyone that was asked responded positively. The organization's membership maintained a positive attitude about the future of education and the organization. What career and technical education research contributes to the body of knowledge in the discipline of education is critical in today's world. What we do matters and we need to continue to share our findings with others. Other educational professionals are learning from us and together we are creating a better educational system for the youth of our country.

C – stands for collaboration. The 2005 executive board worked collaboratively as a team to establish the research pre-conference and to showcase career and technical education research. Organization members and officers worked together to nominate and select our award winners. The most obvious collaboration was between ACTER and ACTE to collaborate in the establishment of the pre-conference and the details involved in showcasing this effort to the public.

T – is for trust and tenacity. Trust is essential when working and collaborating with others and each member of the executive board trusted that each officer would carry through with his or her responsibility. Tenacity is critical to the success of any effort – it is the ability to carry through until everything is settled and completed. This was most evident to our members when the conference was moved from New Orleans to Kansas City.

E – represents enthusiasm. ACTER members were enthusiastic about the research pre-conference we were going to establish and about the future of our organization. All ACTER members supported our new research endeavor with research submissions, a willingness to review proposals, and willingness to evaluate the actual presentations. At no time was the organization lacking in volunteers. The support provided by ACTER members led to a successful research pre-conference with ideas on how it could be expanded and improved. An added benefit of our first successful research pre-conference is that ACTER is now looked to by ACTE as the resource for the most up-to-date research being conducted in career and technical education. This happened only because of the enthusiasm of ACTER members.

R – represents research. The research papers presented at the pre-conference and in this journal are clear evidence that quality research that provides research based evidence is being conducted in Career and Technical Education and that our discipline has something to share with everyone. Excellent research projects are being conducted by career and technical educational professionals and are being 'discovered' by other educators.

In 2005, the Association for Career and Technical Education Research faced many challenges and changes and the organization became stronger. ACTER members answered the call to become officers and are excited about their role in the organization. For the first time ever, ACTER planned and executed a successful

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research pre-conference at ACTE. Research paper presentation submissions tripled and the acceptance rate for the conference was slightly over 67%.

ACTER had a dream to establish a research pre-conference and members worked hard to make that dream a reality. Belva Davis once said, “Don’t be afraid of the space between your dreams and reality. If you can dream it, you can make it so.” Collectively we set our sights on what we wanted to accomplish and developed plans to reach our goals. We dreamed bold dreams and as Johnnetta Cole said, “It is those with the boldest dreams who awaken the best in all of us.” Ms. Cole asserts “that you can’t know where you’re going if you don’t know where you’ve been. Let history and past experience instruct rather than determine your destination.” We let the AVERA history and past experiences guide our dreams for the future of ACTER. The time and effort expended as we determined where ACTER was headed resulted in a reinvigorated organization, excited professionals, and a new respect for the research being conducted by all career and technical education professionals.