

## *Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning*

Responses to "Classroom Research and Its Role in Raising Academic Standards," by  
Terry Nienhuis, 3/1/96

The piece on classroom research is directly on target: monitoring what students are learning should be our primary goal. However, I felt a sense of terror in reading this: sure, this sounds easy as you describe it, but how much of a chasm is there between my comfortable, traditional way of teaching--which seems to work in its way--and the amorphous and chaotic-sounding pulse-taking of this new approach. I'm trained in my field, but my field is NOT teaching: my field is represented in my department's mix of lower division courses and my own specialties for upper division and graduates. Obviously I need to read the book you have recommended--though I suspect you've recommended it before and I've not managed to shift it very high up on my list of priorities yet. Thanks for the reminder. Perhaps I can add my voice to department discussions of classroom research.

*Anonymous*

Thanks for the opportunity to respond to your call for Classroom Research as an essential component in "raising the bar" on campus. During the fall semester, Maurice Phipps, Cindy Phipps, Susan Kask and myself conducted a cross-disciplinary study on "how students in our classes perceive the value of the cooperative learning activities utilized by the faculty to enhance their learning." We are still in the process of analyzing the data but the preliminary findings indicate some meaningful differences in what the faculty and the students perceive as effective and important strategies in learning. For example, many students do not like to work in teams with other students although they indicate they value teamwork in the workplace. How do we overcome the resistance of students working with each other in order to have them practice real-life skills that the student knows are important. Each of us is doing our own disciplinary research but we realized we must do classroom research, as well, in order to effectively teach our discipline. Both types of research endeavors are important if you are going to "raise the bar."

*Scott Higgins--Health Sciences*

I agree. One of the common ways of improving a sense of community and scholarship among K-12 faculties is to share the reading of a thought provoking book. This is what Fairview Elementary School has done for the last few years. So, I agree with the idea of having faculty read this book. Having said this, let me add a caution. Another way of thinking about higher standards is that we ought to strive to close the gap between our highest and lowest achieving students. Of course we should do this by working to boost the achievement of our lowest achievers. Unfortunately, these are usually not the students we want to work with, and this lack of desire may be more at the heart of our standards issue than are the ideas in Angelo & Cross's book. You see, if we frame the standards question differently, we get different suggestions. I believe we need an extensive debate before we identify too narrow a plan. The Faculty Senate Subcommittee on Instruction is suggesting that such a discussion begin in the Faculty Council on Instruction and Curriculum. We feel that this is such an important issue that we need as many people as possible participating in finding a way to improve our students' learning. We also see this as the perfect issue to be debated and acted upon through the faculty governance structure. For all faculty interested, this is the scheduled topic for discussion at the Instruction and Curriculum Council meeting at 3:30 on April 1, in Stillwell 102.

*Casey Hurley--Administration, Curriculum, and Instruction*

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**Responses to "Classroom Research and Its Role in Raising Academic Standards," by Terry Nienhuis, 3/1/96, continued**

One only needs to review the content of Terry Nienhuis's essay on "Classroom Research and Its Role in Raising Academic Standards," to see the widely divergent areas and roles into which faculty members are moving to accommodate higher standards and excellence in education. It goes without saying that the influence of research extends far beyond the suggested arenas of the classroom situation proposed by Terry. Indeed, it appears that there is virtually no area of college life in which those appropriately trained in research methodology could not make a valuable contribution to the practice of teaching and learning. But given the number of variables in the classroom setting to control, to say nothing about the innumerable pedagogical objectives that the faculty member must meet, is the classroom the best situation to gather data "for fixing the problem of poor student learning habits and find a solution that really works"? Or, given the heterogeneous character of our students--that is, nontraditional students, "special learners", transfer students, and, too, the liberal policies regarding the entering cognitive behavior of freshman--is not the construing of a research design a formidable task? When, then, do faculty members act on "drawing the line," beyond which they cannot do classroom research? I'll say it bluntly: don't do it when the classroom situation is comprised of a large number of students and/or the group of students in the classroom is a heterogeneous one. In brief, it will be a rare occurrence in which productive research can be conducted in the classroom. One must look, therefore, for other situations on the WCU campus to conduct research, "to find out what is going on in the minds of our students."

***William Chovan--Psychology***