

SYMPTOMS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE ORGANIZATION AS FERA COMES OF AGE (1977)*

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The first Intrastate Invitational Conference on Testing met in St. Petersburg in February of 1957, eight months before Sputnik. So this is, indeed, our 21st Invitational Conference.

When this paper and its topic were first discussed, it was suggested that we might consider who we were in those first years and who we are now. My own file starts with the 1958 meeting. That second-year membership list included the names of 36 persons from 11 counties, the Department of Education, and Florida State University. Your program today lists 132 scheduled program *participants*. I would guess that 30 to 40 counties are represented as are all of the universities, the Board of Regents, the Department of Education, and probably some of the junior colleges. We are bigger, but as we keep being reminded, "more is not necessarily better."

I think, though, that in this case more *is* better. Among those who attended in 1958, there was not a single director of research or director of testing and, of course, there were no evaluators. There were probably no more than one or two people in that group whose primary responsibility was testing or evaluation. Most were of the "general supervisor" type. (For you younger members, the General Supervisor was a rare and wonderful kind of person who supervised the testing program, was a resource person for the elementary and secondary school teachers in all content areas, searched out truants all over the county, and in his/her spare time, did odd jobs around the county office.

Today, Florida has a substantial cadre of professional personnel trained in educational measurement, research and evaluation. I don't know how much credit belongs to this organization, but I choose to believe that FERA is

responsible, at least to some extent, for the high level of competence that exists in this state.

There was some confusion a few years ago about the exact age of the conference. This stemmed from the fact that the Invitational Conference was started by Walter Durost and met for two years before the Florida Educational Research Association was created. Those two meetings, and other events, convinced several people that there should be a FERA. We started out as the Research and Testing Section of the Florida Education Association. With this affiliation, our annual meeting was held at the time and place of the FEA convention. We continued to hold the Annual Invitational Conference in addition to the annual meeting and then, after a few years, we dropped away from the FEA meeting and combined our own annual meeting of the Research and Testing Section with the Invitational Conference.

We continued as a section of FEA for a while and then, some place along the line, we decided we could stand alone and dropped our affiliation with it. Finally, last year, the officers of this association signed the necessary papers to make us the Florida Educational Research Association, Inc. I am not sure what all of this might have to do with professional development, but it shows we are legal by two definitions now—age and corporate status.

There are some people who remained largely anonymous during our early years, but without whom FERA would not have survived. Among these were Ed Henderson, Dave Ried, John Kirby, Molly Sample, and all past FEA staff members. These people provided the organization with both moral and financial support in the years when \$2.00 dues were hard for everyone to find. The organization owes them much.

One of the characteristics of our annual gathering since the early years has been our sharing of responsibilities for our own education. We planned conference programs in terms of the needs expressed by the members for solutions to common problems. We didn't ignore the expertise which existed in other states, but we were

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operating on a lean budget and leaned heavily on the talents within Florida when we planned the programs. We weren't poor in spirit, and we knew that all some people needed was a formal invitation to come to Daytona Beach, or some other attractive site, in January. We did our best to help ourselves overcome the critical problems of research and testing and to increase our skills and knowledge.

You may recall that it was during the early 60's when people began to harass us as a profession. Dr. Banish Hoffman took on Educational Testing Service, and the American Association of School Administrators took on the entire measurement profession by publishing the now famous treatise "Testing, Testing, Testing." FERA mounted a counteroffensive and in January, 1963, spending all the money in its treasury to bring in some outsiders to help out in our conference entitled "What's *Right* with Testing?" We had among others, Henry Chauncey, then President of the ETS, and John Hills, then director of Guidance and Testing in Georgia.

The 1964 meeting, I think, was the first time we deliberately planned instructional sessions as part of the Invitational Conference, inviting a subset of the membership to a one-half day pre-session on data processing. In addition, we devoted the entire Saturday morning session to a single topic—"Models for Educational Predictions." An overview and five separate aspects of the prediction problems were presented. The conference program explained:

"This Saturday morning program has been developed to meet the often-expressed request that the conference provide presentations of methods of treating important problems in educational research and that illustrations of the methods be provided for members to take home. The field of predictions is clearly central to all research because researchers generally wish to generalize their findings to other populations or to the same populations at some future time. Therefore, the presentations of five models of handling predictions have been planned and each of the people on the program has prepared examples and illustrative materials which can be used readily by the participants in this conference."

If one wanted to check dates, he would

probably find that the instructional pre-session model we initiated in 1964 was later adopted by AERA. There is probably no cause and effect in the relationship, just perfect correlation.

The 1964 conference had two other "firsts." One was an opportunity to view the IBM 1230 Test Scoring Machine, then brand new. Frank Benham had been a school psychologist in Sarasota/Bradenton, and had joined IBM. He managed to bring the first operating 1230 to Tallahassee for our meeting. The other "first" was the Friday evening banquet. In those days, in Tallahassee, you couldn't buy a drink. Hence, on a conference Friday evening, there were no places to go, no good places to eat, no night clubs, no other places of cultural replenishment. We decided to have a banquet and speaker and at least keep people busy until about 9:30 p.m. The Friday evening session has become a tradition and a high point of the conference.

By 1968, our membership had grown close to 240, with about half that number showing up at the Invitational Conference, which was now also the FERA Annual Meeting. To accommodate the varied interests of the participants, the program committee proposed some 20 to 25 concurrent interest groups, seminars and workshop sessions—in place of general sessions and prepared papers. These were small groups, each with a prearranged leader. They spent two or three hours discussing various topics. These topics included:

1. The exploration of differentiated staffing
2. Research activity in the junior colleges
3. Research implications of IPI
4. Models for study of behavioral modification
5. Pupil personnel services and guidance
6. Technical problems in research design
7. Computer assisted instruction
8. Non-parametric statistics
9. Computer simulations and modeling
10. Problems in evaluating innovations

In 1970, FERA adopted a still different conference model and began running concurrent paper-reading sessions. That's been our general conference procedure ever since: general sessions paper sessions, lots of eating, drinking, and talking.

The bulk of our programs are still handled by "insiders"—members of long standing. We are interested in what our colleagues in other districts and universities of the state are doing and this is one of the best places to share those things. You

can come to FERA to brag about what you have done and display the results of your Solomon four-group design study or you can come to tell about your failures and ask the membership to help you figure out what went wrong. One of the important parts of our development is that as we grew older, we grew together, grew at the same rate, and grew a little wiser.

We brought "outsiders" in to provide us with information we didn't have in Florida. We brought in other outsiders because there are times when an outsider can say things and be heard when an insider will be ignored. And, last, we have invited people from the outside just because we like them and want to share our conference with them.

It was suggested that the positions held by presidents might reveal something about our development, so I have looked over the list and find that we have had university faculty and district school people as leaders in about equal numbers. I tried to find something which these people had in common which will represent the professional development of the FERA. Aside from the fact that they are all good professionals, there was nothing to be found. I should point out that we elected Annie Ward as president long before it became fashionable or required to have women in high office.

What *can* we point to that would attest to the professional development of FERA?
SIZE. Yes we are larger than we were 20 years ago. Bigger is not necessarily better, but in this case, I think it represents professional development. Our membership represents 85 to 90 percent of the students in Florida schools. All of the universities have members on our rolls and many of the junior colleges are represented. Hence, through our

conference and through our journal we pretty well cover the state.

FINANCIAL STATUS. We have been asked about our apparent dedication to poverty. We had nothing to start with, assessed our membership \$2.00 a year for dues and in 1975 had to borrow \$400 from a wealthy philanthropist to get the journal away from the printer. We don't believe in deficit financing, we just practice it.

CONCERNS. We have been and continue to be concerned about Florida's problems as they affect the lives of the children for whom we are responsible. You have only to consider the sessions you have attended at this conference, and those yet to come, to see what I mean. To cite one or two, we have "Problems and Potential of a Statewide MIS," "Re-evaluation of a Countywide Assessment Program," "Design and Evaluation of Instruction," "Hospitality Hour; Courtesy Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich; please bring your tickets."

We are taking new looks at problems. The topic in 1958 was "Identifying and providing for the needs of the academically talented and gifted child." Tomorrow there is a symposium entitled "Redefinition of Giftedness."

We are using new and different techniques. Last year, there were papers presented on the applications of Guttman's smallest space analysis—a technique unheard of 15 years ago. We have papers dealing with theoretical measurement and evaluation problems and applications of well-known techniques in the attempted solutions to old and new problems. This year's program is full of symptoms of development.

FERA has come a long way. It's in good hands and should continue to grow.