



Office of Educational Research Bulletin (ORB)

NEWS AND NOTES

Mark your calendars for the following March 2006 events at the COE!

Fien Lecture Series: Luis Moll, associate dean for academic affairs and professor of language, reading and culture at the University of Arizona, College of Education will be presenting on *"The Cultural Mediation of Thinking: From Funds of Knowledge to New Activity Systems"* this Monday, March 6, 2006 at 3:30 p.m. in the Terrace Room of Norman Hall.

Samples of Moll's work may be accessed through Maria Coady's E-Reserves page: Go to the UF Libraries Homepage; find Course Reserves; go to Coady's account (search by instructor's name) and click on her Fien Lecture Series 'course,' where three articles by Moll and colleagues are posted for your review.

College Research Incentive Fund (CRIF)

2006: applications are due to Susie Welch at 125 Norman by 5:00p.m., Friday March 10, 2006.

B.O. Smith Professorship: proposals due to Susie Welch at 125 Norman by 5:00p.m., Friday March 24, 2006.

March Brown Bag: Hosted by Doreen Ross, School of Teaching and Learning, *Scientifically Valid Research and the Scientific Method: What are the implications for us as a research community?* A conversation based on Norman Edmund's USDOE-IES work titled: "Report on the Relationship of the Scientific Method to Scientifically Valid Research and Education Research." (Look for a copy of the report in our upcoming brown bag announcement.) Wednesday, March 22, 12:00 to 1:00p.m., in 158 Norman. Bring your lunch; beverages and cookies will be provided.

Guest Faculty Column - New ORB Feature:

The OER is pleased to announce a new forum for COE faculty to voice concerns and opinions regarding critical issues in education today. There is

no shortage of challenges currently touching all levels of educational policy, research, and practices. We invite your contributions to these ongoing debates. Our first Office of Educational Research Bulletin guest columnist- and March Brown Bag facilitator- Doreen Ross, shares her thoughts on the recent FLDOE announcement regarding teacher merit pay. *What do you think...?*

MARCH 2006 GUEST COLUMN

Improving Our Schools through Merit Pay: A Flawed Policy

Dorene Ross, School of Teaching and Learning

Florida policy makers have decided to reward the most meritorious teachers (top 10%) on the basis of their individual performance as instructors, based when possible on students' gain scores on the FCAT as a way to recruit and retain high quality teachers and improve the quality of our educational system. If this plan has merit, one would think that educational professionals would herald it. Yet this has not been the case. A question our policy makers should ask themselves is why teachers and principals are speaking out against this plan with almost one voice. The most likely explanation is that those who actually do the work in schools recognize the idea as a seriously flawed and unworkable response to the problems of recruitment and retention of high quality teachers.

Consider just a few of the many concerns about the implementation of this merit pay system that might be raised. 1) In judging 10% of the teachers as meritorious, we judge 90% as non-meritorious. What if 75% of the teachers are meritorious? Is this a system that will encourage or discourage the majority of teachers? 2) FCAT is given in February. Should we reward the teacher who taught the children from March to June or the teacher who taught the children from August to February? 3) One of the research based reading programs advocated for use in low performing schools,

regroups students several times a year on the basis of their reading performance. If a high-performing student has been taught by two or three different teachers, which one should get "credit" for the child's score? 4) A strong school is created by collaboration among faculty who share what they know about effective teaching to enhance the performance of every learner. How can this kind of culture be created or sustained by asking teachers to compete against one another for salary? 5) Similarly, our most effective schools marshal every available resource to facilitate the academic improvement of struggling learners. If children's scores go up, who should get the credit—the reading classroom teacher? The after-school tutor? The staff member who mentors the child? The social studies teacher who teaches the child how to distill the main points from a textbook? The reading coach or special education teacher who provided supplemental reading instruction during the school day? 6) The base salary for teachers in Florida falls well below the national average. Is it reasonable to believe that a merit plan that will benefit 10% of the teachers will impact our efforts in recruitment and retention?

The current merit pay plan is ill-conceived. It is clear that our policy makers fail to understand the collaborative efforts required to impact student achievement. Teachers who are competing against one another for scarce resources are less likely to help one another by sharing their professional expertise. Additionally, a system that rewards few cannot possibly draw people to the profession. Even if the merit pay plan were structured in a way to reward collaborative effort within schools, it is too narrowly focused on FCAT. The skills assessed by FCAT are important but they are not the only skills and abilities that should be taught in schools.

There is already too much focus on test performance, which unfortunately is only loosely correlated to real life achievement. Teachers and students are already working hard. If we respected teachers we would ask them what they need to improve teaching and learning. In my conversations with teachers they repeatedly argue for more time and more resources. A better idea for retaining teachers and improving our schools comes from a local principal who suggested we should pay teachers for 12 months a year and give them time to work together--time for professional development, time for rigorous analysis of students' learning in the previous year, and time for collaborative curriculum planning. This is an idea that is respectful of teachers, their knowledge, their commitment, and their dedication. This is an idea that is respectful of teachers, their knowledge, their commitment, and their dedication—and one that is more likely than merit pay to have broad impact on FCAT scores.

FEBRUARY AWARDS AND SUBMISSIONS

Congratulations are in order for **Mickie Miller (Alliance)** for her USDOE award to support the Cascading Tutoring Model Project, and to **Gail Choice (STL)** who submitted and received funding from the City of Gainesville for her America Reads proposal. Best wishes to **Charlie Hailey (Architecture)** and **Maria Coady (STL)** for their Research and Graduate Programs Opportunity Seed Fund proposal. For more details about these awards and submissions, see the tables on the next page.

Ana Puig

College of Education – *Funded Projects* – February 2006

Principal Investigator: R.D. Miller
Funding Agency: U.S. Department of Education
Proposal Title: Florida CHESP at UF: Cascading Tutoring Model Project
Project Period: 01/01/06 – 08/31/06
Annual Award Amount: \$22,000.00

Principal Investigator: A.G. Choice
Funding Agency: City of Gainesville, Fla.
Proposal Title: America Reads
Project Period: 03/01/06 – 05/31/07
Annual Award Amount: \$10,000.00

College of Education – *Submitted Proposals* – February 2006

Principal Investigator: A.G. Choice
Funding Agency: City of Gainesville, Fla.
Proposal Title: America Reads
Requested Amount: \$10,000.00

Principal Investigator: Charlie Hailey Co-PI: Maria Coady
Funding Agency: RGP Opportunity Seed Fund
Proposal Title: Research/Design/Build for Florida's Migrant Communities Collaborative Research and Service Learning Between Architecture and Education
Requested Amount: \$48,789.00