

A Message from the Editors

Geography Education Research and Research Funding

Research that is of high quality and that presents meaningful results requires resources. Requests for Proposals (RFPs), invitations to participate in innovative programs, and floating an interesting research idea past a private or governmental funding agency are the means that we normally consider. On this side of the editors' desks, it is apparent to us that the resources required for quality research in geographic education come from a range of sources.

The most common source of funding that moves a research project to completion is human capital. Yes, most research that is submitted is completed by a scholar or scholarly team. The researchers have used their own time in completing the research. There are few citations, such as "This research was funded by a major grant from ..." on the title page indicating that external resources were used. One could argue whether or not research should rely on the personal capital of the researcher in terms of time and skill. However, in geographic education the reality is that personal capital is what gets a research project underway, sees it to completion, and presents it as a manuscript. It seems that the personal/professional resources for research in geography education are going to be dominant in the foreseeable future. (The equation: total personal/professional capital in terms of time and necessary resources is greater than those procured by research funding).

There are sources of research funding that may be classified a "big money" and others that may be considered as "small money." The terms "big" and "small" are relative to the researcher's needs and expectations. A "small" award of funding may make a "big" difference to an individual researcher's ability to complete a project. We would like to reflect on the "small money" first.

The "small money" sources of funds are those that are available at the school, school district, or university departmental levels for educators to research a particular question of interest at the local level. For example, a school district wide survey of the use geography teachers make of web based materials in their teaching may be completed. The research is local, addresses a local research question, and is important to decision making about such options as professional development workshops, assistance in using technology, and perhaps to establish longer range priorities regarding instructional support. Those research questions may not result in major funding, but they do

represent costs and in-kind contributions of time and materials. Carrying out such a local research project does entail funding, although it may not be the object of a “research grant.”

A source of funding that is often larger than local support for research is consortia of school districts and state government with its affiliated agencies. While funding priorities are often attached to legislative initiatives, geography education does have a place at the distribution table for consortia and State funds. Nearly every state expends substantial funds each year for projects that are not specifically research, such as development of an assessment, examining the appropriateness of a curriculum sequence, changing teacher certification requirements, as well as others. With many of those initiatives there are research questions that arise, such as what will the impact of this change be on pre-service teacher education students, or on the rotation cycle for the selection and acquisition of curriculum materials. The research questions that are embedded within larger changes at the consortia and State levels often do not get asked. Why not? Oftentimes they are not asked because there is not a mechanism that differentiates the service side of geography education (providing professional development, presenting workshops, focusing on how and what to teach issues, which are all important) from the research side of geographic education (such as: Why does the timetable devoted to geography instruction have few hours in some school districts and significantly more hours in other school districts? What are the effects of this differential on materials acquisition? What are the effects of the differential on outcomes relative to a State standard?) While those research opportunities and questions are difficult to identify, there are dozens of them floating unanswered in most states. There may also be funding to use in addressing such questions that are brought to the attention of the decision makers in schools and state agencies.

The “big money” source for research in geographic education is the Federal Government in the United States and private foundations and professional societies. Among the federal agencies are the National Science Foundation, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, U.S. Department of Education, and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. Each of the agencies fund programs in geography and earth science that may have a geography education research focus, or have a major research component directed toward geography education. The National Geographic Society Education Foundation funds research in geographic education. Other foundations, including the Spencer Foundation, are receptive to research proposals from a wide range of topics, including geographic education. The list of foundations that could potentially fund research in geographic education is substantial in the private foundation and philanthropic reference books on funding sources.

There is a problem, however. The geographic education research foot-

print has not been implanted across the research funding agencies to any great extent. There are examples of materials development, specifically ARGUS, ARGWorld, and the Online Center for Global Geography Education, each funded by NSF, Mission Geography funded by NASA, and professional development for higher education geography teachers and researchers by the Geography Faculty Development Network, funded by NSF. Each of those projects has a project evaluation component and in many ways encourages further research. It is an important beginning for a geographic education footprint on the research community that could result in more proposals and engage more scholars in the discussion of those projects and the research questions suggested by either the implementation or impact evidence. The result would ideally be an increase in well designed research proposals within those agencies and foundations that have funded geography education activities in the past, but extending to agencies and foundations that may have not considered a geographic education research proposal simply because they have never received a request for funding.

What are our suggestions? Realistically, geography educators have numerous worthy things to pursue, and preparing research proposals is just one of them. At the local and state levels, we need to be alert for opportunities to extend our research capacities into the questions of local and state concern.

Both at the local and state levels, but especially at the national level of funding, geography education researchers also need to look for ways that collaborative research efforts can be undertaken. The editors of this journal observe that lone scholars researching single topics submit many of the manuscripts that arrive for review. In a time of email and web-based research protocols that have been tested and demonstrated their efficacy, it seems that networks of geography education researchers working on mutually agreed upon topics would be achievable. We need to encourage our graduate students and others through modeling a collaborative research paradigm that benefits both the individual researchers and geographic education in the broadest sense.

We have specific offices and talented persons at two of our professional societies, the National Council for Geographic Education (Dr. Osa Brand) and the Association of American Geographers (Dr. Michael Solem), who are in positions to assist the movement of proposals into the review process for agencies and foundations. They are positioned to play an important role in helping extend our geographic education research footprint both more deeply and more broadly within the funding community. The National Geographic Society Education Foundation is open to ideas and suggestions that will both improve and broaden the impact of geographic education. Collectively, increased geographic education research will make a significant contribution to the fields of geography and education. Perhaps the time has arrived for the

discussion to focus on a process that will enable that to happen.

The discussion in this editorial has been focused on the United States. In the next issue, we will extend our focus on research funding to other regions of the world.

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