

# PERFORMANCE &

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Send editorial items to the editor, Richard A. Swanson, University of Minnesota, 1954 Buford Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108. Telephone 612-376-5065. A broad range of contributions are accepted for the *Journal*, brief news items, opinion articles, letters to the editor, data-based articles, papers of a theoretical nature, tips for technologists, poems, humor, and other original items. Manuscripts submitted for the Research and Theory Department will be refereed. The *Journal* generally cannot handle manuscripts over 2000 words (eight double-spaced, typewritten pages). The APA style of documentation is prescribed. Author guidelines are available from the editor.

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## The Agony and Ecstasy of Research

There is an unnerving tediousness to the researcher's mind. It is illustrated in the story about the cautious professor striving always for scientific accuracy. One day on a train, a friend pointed to a flock of sheep grazing in a field. "Look, those sheep have just been sheared," he said. The professor studied the flock. "Sheared on this side, anyway," he noted.

Those of us who are both researchers and practitioners are sometimes annoyed at our own responses to situations. When I happen to have on my *practitioner hat* while my colleagues are in the *research mode*, I often say "It's time to act." Conversely, at other times when those around me are ready to act and I am sitting there with cool objectivity, I'll recommend alternative hypotheses and methods of determining truth. How comfortable it must be for those who are securely lodged in one camp or the other.

Organizational pressure and rewards to commit oneself to practice are intense and almost always immediate. Asking most human performance technologists to do high quality research is like asking a kid at the candy store with a fist full of change to put some of that money away for a rainy day. In the case of the kid, there is candy to be consumed. For us there is organizational and human pain to be treated. The agonies of delayed gratification, much patience, and loneliness—the price that must be paid by the researcher.

The ecstasy of research is analogous to a sound investment plan. Some time in the future, quietly and regularly, the royalties come flowing in. Once received, they may serve to dissuade a portion of the ever present demand for short-term fixes.

Not all of us are researchers, nor should we be. And, not all truth is discovered by researchers or through the formal research process. We all have a contribution to make. I happen to believe that technology is as much the basis for science as is science the basis for technology. Technology has often provided us with answers long before science has provided the explanation for the answers. Practitioners have unique potential in advancing our profession.

In my opinion the NSPI marriage of research and practice, more than anything else, makes our professional society unique. Marty Smith cared enough about the NSPI research and practice marriage to put together this theme issue of the *Journal*. He thinks the marriage is in trouble and has assumed the role of a gentle, but directive, counselor. Has our commitment to research declined? This issue of the *Journal* provides us with some cold facts. The facts say something about where we have been and where we are now. Beyond commitment, has our tolerance of research declined? The dataless articles in this issue discuss the realities of conducting research and the politics of integrating research findings into organizational decision-making. They address the issues of tolerance and commitment.

Without intending to sound like a sensationalist, I believe that NSPI and the *Performance & Instruction Journal* are in the midst of basic decisions about their futures. These decisions are largely focused on the roles of research and practice that are discussed in this issue of the *Journal*. The questions to be answered are:

1. If our future is not directly linked to sound theory and research, what is it linked to?
2. If our future is not directly linked to sound theory and research, how do we differ from our professional competitors?

It is important that each NSPI member ponder the contents of this issue of the *Journal*. I have, and I am with Marty. P&I

Richard A. Swanson  
Editor