In Memory of Michael Pressley: A Role Model for 21st-Century Educational Psychologists

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This article honors the contributions of Michael Pressley and examines 5 roles that were critical to his work as an educational psychologist: teacher, scholar, critic, builder, and mentor. We draw on Michael's life to illustrate how he carried out each of these roles and propose that educational psychologists in higher education in the new millennium should assume all 5 of these roles throughout the majority of their careers.

This special issue of *Educational Psychologist* is a tribute to Michael Pressley. Michael died in 2006 from cancer. Before his final bout with cancer, he was optimistic that he had beaten or at least held at bay for many more years this adversary that he first encountered during his 20s. Michael was in his early 50s, working as a professor at Michigan State University, when he died. Even though his untimely passing shortened his academic career, Michael made seminal contributions in a variety of different areas, including memory (e.g., Brainerd & Pressley, 1985), cognitive strategy instruction (Pressley & Levin, 1983a, 1983b), reading comprehension (e.g., Block & Pressley, 2002), effective literacy instruction (e.g., Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001), motivation (e.g., Pressley et al., 2003), and verbal protocol analysis (e.g., Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

In this special issue, his colleagues and we examine Michael's work, influence, and legacy. We also provide suggestions for extending Michael's efforts by making recommendations for future research, policy, or practice. We were not able to address all of his scholarly contributions within the confines of this special issue. Instead, we chose four areas that we think Michael would have selected for examination. These included memory (examined by Joel R. Levin, one of Michael's mentors and earliest collaborators), cognitive strategy instruction (examined by Karen R. Harris, Patricia Alexander, and Steve Graham), reading comprehension (examined by Michael's longtime friend and colleague Cathy Collins Block), and the study of effective teachers

and schools (examined by his Michigan State University collaborators Lindsey Mohan, Mary Lundberg, and Kelly Reffitt).

In the first article in this special issue, Joel R. Levin traces Michael Pressley's early development as a scholar, starting as a student at Northwestern University, moving to his work with Levin and others at the University of Wisconsin, and extending into his first academic position at California State University at Fullerton and beyond. The article focuses on the work that Michael, Joel, and their colleagues did in the area of memory, specifically examining how strategies involving elaboration (including elaborative interrogation) and pictures (including the keyword method) develop and can be effectively induced or taught. A series of studies looking at the interaction between specific memory strategies and students' metacognitions, monitoring, and associated behaviors were also included in this examination. This exploration captures Michael as a scholar (showing the reasoning behind the studies) as well as a person (showing the person behind the reasoning).

One reoccurring theme that cuts across most of Michael's work involves the importance of strategic behavior to learning. All of the articles in this special issue examine Michael's research on strategy development and instruction to some degree, but this inquiry is embedded within specific domains (i.e., memory, reading instruction, and effective teachers and schools). Karen R. Harris, Patricia Alexander, and Steve Graham explore Michael's contributions to strategy development and instruction more broadly, concentrating on how his work shaped how we think about strategies, the importance of multiple strategy use in learning and performance, and the attributes of effective strategies instruction.

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The third article, by Cathy Collins Block, explores Michael's most important contributions in the area of reading instruction. She includes a historical examination of Michael's most important works in reading, showing how he moved from relatively simple interventions to promote specific aspects of comprehension to highly sophisticated approaches designed to impact children's comprehension more broadly and permanently. The article also chronicles Michael's growth as a scholar and researcher, showing how he came to embrace and champion the use of multiple research methodologies to study reading. Perhaps just as important, the article highlights two of Michael's most important strengths: his ability to influence national policy in reading and his skills in translating reading theory and research into practice.

The final article in this special issue concentrates mostly on the work that Michael completed during the last 10 years of his life. He devoted a good portion of his scholarly efforts during this time to studying what highly effective teachers and schools did to promote reading and writing development. This research involved intensely studying teachers and schools where students made impressive literacy progress. Lindsey Mohan, Mary A. Lundeberg, and Kelly Reffitt track Michael's work in this area, showing how his initial study of excellent teachers evolved into the more complex study of excellent schools while providing an overview of the grounded psychological theories for teaching reading and writing generated as a result of this research.

In addition to introducing the special issue, our article proposes that Michael Pressley provides an excellent role model for educational psychologist in higher education in the 21st century. We draw on Michael's career to illustrate some of the different "hats" that educational psychologist should, in our opinion, wear in the new millennium.

THE VARIED ROLES OF THE 21ST-CENTURY EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST

In his address for the 2004 E.L. Thorndike Award from the American Psychological Association (Pressley, 2005), and in an interview that appeared in the journal, *Educational Psychology Review* (Flowerday & Shaughnessy, 2007), Michael talked about the different types of tasks he engaged in on a regular basis. We use these two sources as a starting point for describing possible roles for educational psychologist in the 21st century: teacher, scholar, critic, builder, and mentor. We draw on personal accounts from Michael's life to introduce and give shape to each role.

We do not present an exhaustive list of possible roles, and it is important to note that all working educational psychologists currently fill one or more of these roles. We suggest, however, that 21st-century educational psychologists in higher education should assume all of these roles throughout the majority of their career. For individual educational psy-

chologists, this can be a particularly powerful professional approach, especially if they actively work to connect these various roles so that they support and build on each other. As Michael noted, this was one of the keys to his incredible productivity and impact (Flowerday & Shaughnessy, 2007). Of course, the emphasis that an educational psychologist places on each role will and should vary according to personal inclinations, capabilities, and job responsibilities.

By examining each of the identified roles in the context of Michael's life, we add some distinctive flavor to the possible shape of these roles. We are certain that not everyone will agree with the notion that an educational psychologist in higher education should assume all of these roles. Likewise, others will disagree with the direction that some of these roles take in this article. That is fine, as we hope that the ideas presented here, taken from the contours of Michael's professional life, generate healthy discussion about educational psychology in academia in the new millennium.

Teacher

Michael loved sharing what he knew. He had little patience with professors who did not like to teach or who devoted little effort to their courses. His advice to beginning educational psychologists on teaching included, "Embrace whatever you are asked to teach. Get to know the course and conventional coverage in it very well . . . begin thinking about how the material could be presented better, and try some of your ideas out" (Pressley, 2005, p. 147). He viewed teaching as an integral part of his job and devoted considerable effort to it, starting work on classes during the summer. Although Michael shared information through lectures, he also liked to engage students in activities designed to help them understand the material (e.g., how educational research and policy interact) as well as develop productive habits of mind (i.e., integrating ideas, analyzing them critically, etc.). He also gave assignments that were meant to lead to publications, and many did.

Michael further shared what he knew by consulting frequently with teachers, policymakers, and other researchers, and he viewed this as part of his teaching responsibilities (Pressley, 2005). As with his classroom teaching, he was thoughtful about how best to present information to audiences that often contained members with a wide range of background knowledge. This frequently involved explaining educational science without oversimplifying the explanations.

Throughout his career, Michael viewed teaching as one of the central missions of educational psychologists. We agree and believe that all educational psychologists should share in this mission, even those who do not have university teaching responsibilities (i.e., they should frequently seek opportunities to share what they have learned with others). An important flavor that Michael brought to this role was his emphasis on sharing the fruits of educational science with practitioners

so that it was understandable, without "dumbing the explanation down" (Pressley, 2005, p. 139).

Of course, teaching is more than just courses, consultation, and invited talks. It involves developing programs of study as well. In this regard, Michael felt strongly that educational psychologists should play a direct and much greater role in teacher education (Flowerday & Shaughnessy, 2007). He actualized this in his last two professional positions: first as the director of an innovative teacher education program at Notre Dame University and second as a faculty member in Teacher Education at Michigan State University.

Why did Michael feel so strongly about this issue? First, he thought that educational psychology was in decline (fewer students per course and fewer schools requiring educational psychology credits) and that its survival depends on providing offerings that teachers or teachers in training find useful and that teacher educators find compelling (Flowerday & Shaughnessy, 2007). In other words, the offerings of educational psychologists must move beyond theory and research to practice and application. Second, he was concerned that "many teacher educators prefer a romantic view of the child to one that is informed by development and cognitive science" (Flowerday & Shaughnessy, 2007, p. 12). Michael attempted to counteract this view by becoming a faculty member in teacher education.

Although we realize that not all educational psychologists study school-age children in their research, we agree with Michael that educational psychologists as a group need to become more heavily invested and involved in teacher education as well as teaching and learning in schools and other educational settings. This will undoubtably mean spending more time in schools, as Michael did, as well as a more productive integration between educational psychology and teacher education.

Scholar

Michael was an extremely prolific scholar, publishing more than 350 articles and chapters, 14 authored books, and 19 edited books (Graham & Harris, 2006). However, it was not about the numbers. It was about studying important questions, leading the field in new directions, and conducting quality research (Pressley, 2005).

As with teaching, Michael viewed scholarship as fundamental to being an educational psychologist in higher education. Again, we agree and would argue that this should be a primary mission of all college and university professors. However, we say this with some trepidation. Both of us have served as editor of an educational psychology journal (Steve with *Contemporary Educational Psychology* and Karen with *Journal of Educational Psychology*). In these roles, we have seen some phenomenal papers, but too often submitted papers contain poorly conceptualized and flawed work. Another problem is that some faculty members engage in scholarship only when high-stakes rewards and consequences are in play

(i.e., tenure and promotion). Clearly, the field of educational psychology needs to address both of these issues if we expect all or even most of our fellows to be lifelong active scholars who create important work.

The way Michael approached working with doctoral students may prove to be helpful in attacking this problem. This included (a) having the student establish a problem with him that was worthy of study, that captured the student's interest, and that they could explore together deeply; (b) encouraging the student to devour the problem—reading, conversing, and thinking about it constantly—and coming to understand the most relevant and conceptual work in the area; (c) becoming competent with the research methodology needed to study the problem; (d) collaboratively conducting research with Michael to study the problem, with the student gradually taking greater responsibility as he or she advanced through the program; and (e) conducting research that can potentially be published in the best journals (Flowerday & Shaughnessy, 2007).

Although we believe that it is critical to provide beginning scholars with the types of scaffolding that Michael routinely provided to his students, the high-stakes reward and consequence structure for scholarship in colleges and universities will likely need to be reexamined if we expect all professors to conduct meaningful scholarship over the full course of their careers. For instance, greater support in conducting research and rethinking the time line to tenure may be critical for many assistant professors. You do not have to be as productive as Michael Pressley, though, to make an important contribution to scholarship in educational psychology. As Barbara Keogh, professor emeritus at UCLA, once told us early in our careers, if you produce one or two good works each year, you will leave an incredible legacy. We think this is especially true if you work on the same or related problems over a long time.

Critic

Michael not only thought that educational psychologists in higher education should produce new knowledge and share it with others but also thought it was important that they also serve as critics (especially in terms of policy at the national and state level). The most notable examples of this in his career involved reading and his reasoned belief that a balanced approach to instruction was imperative (Graham & Harris, 2006; Lundeberg & Graham, 2007; Pressley, 1994; Pressley, Duke, & Boling, 2004) When whole language was the predominate approach to reading instruction, Michael championed a more balanced approach to instruction—one that also valued more explicit and systematic instruction, including phonics instruction, as part of the learning process. More recently, he acted as the counterpoint to what he termed the "National Reading Panel/No Child Left Behind/Reading First" approach. He felt that this reading reform movement also provided an unbalanced approach to reading education,

as it placed little emphasis on literature experiences and writing in the early grades, noting,

> I'm continuously explaining that excellent, evidence-based reading education does not mean only instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies. . . . Rather a strong evidence-based argument can be made for instruction that balances teaching of such skills in the context of rich literature and composition experiences. (Flowerday & Shaughnessy, 2007, p. 7)

There are many different levels at which an educational psychologist can act as a critic, which includes providing a critical analysis of an article, a line of research, a specific theory, an instructional approach, educational policy, and so forth. Likewise, the audience to which a critic directs remarks can include practitioners, other scholars, policymakers, and the general public. Critiques can be delivered informally in face-to-face meetings with others or more formally through written publications, electronic media, or public presentations and forums. When Michael felt strongly about an issue, as he did about balanced reading instruction, he applied all of these methods, using multiple outlets to share his critiques and ideas with pertinent stake holders.

Michael not only served as a critic on big policy issues but also willingly played the role of devil's advocate in academic discussions with colleagues and students. For instance, "if an academic discussion focused on the need to do more to help children in inner city schools, Mike would invariably argue for the need to consider poor children in rural communities" (Graham & Harris, 2006, p. 383). He thought that ideas must be examined and reexamined from different angles and perspectives.

Analysis and critique, if done fairly and reasonably, are essential to the vitality and continued growth of an academic field. Old and new ideas alike need to be weighed deliberately and carefully. This consideration is especially important in a field like educational psychology, where some of our theories, research, and ideas are translated into actions by policymakers, teachers, parents, and the developers of instructional materials and tests. In many instances, these actions directly impact our children. Because of the serious nature of this business, we think that educational psychologists should see this as one of their most important roles.

Builder

Michael was not only an ardent critique but also an impassioned builder. We offer three examples of this. One of the things that he was most proud of was the work that he did as an author on the basal reading program, *Open Court* (published by McGraw-Hill/SRA). With this program, he strived to make his vision of a balanced reading program a reality.

A second example of his work as a builder involved Michael's commitment to translating theory/research into practice. This was evident in the *Open Court* program, as he

took contemporary comprehension and strategy instructional theory and research and translated it directly into practice. His work in this area, however, went well beyond the *Open Court* series. No one to our knowledge, now or in the past, translated theory/research into practice as well as Michael. For example, over the course of his career, he developed an impressive array of books and articles that made the fruits of theory and research concrete and usable in the classroom. His translation activities also included his involvement with the PBS television series *Reading Rockets,* a yearly conference for administrators and teachers he organized with the help of the National Geographic Society, and a column on literacy that he and Nell Duke at Michigan State University did for *Instructor* magazine.

A third example of his role as a builder involved the innovative teacher education program at Notre Dame that he directed and helped to develop. In this program, students took coursework and workshops during the summer at the Notre Dame campus (coursework in the program was taught by top scholars from around the country that Michael recruited). The students then spent a year working as teachers in schools in impoverished neighborhoods (e.g., Watts in Los Angeles), continuing to receive coursework and support from Notre Dame as they taught. This sequence of summer coursework and teaching with support in poor neighborhoods continued during a 2nd and final year in the program.

One of the things that we most admired about Michael was that he built his ideas into programs and materials that others could use (most notably by translating theory/research into practice). He was not content to be just a critic, but he wanted to create viable alternatives. One of the great things about building something is that it makes builders more sensitive and realistic critics, as they acquire a greater appreciation of the challenges involved in giving form and substance to ideas. Being a critic is not enough, however. It is important that educational psychologists build their own concrete structures along the way.

Mentor

In May 2006, we were scheduled to visit Michael and his family at their home in East Lansing, Michigan. Instead, we ended up attending his funeral. It was an incredible testament to his life, with students, friends, and colleagues sharing how he had changed and touched them personally. One of the things that stood out most to us was the number of people attending the services who indicated that Michael had been their mentor. This included assistant to full professors from a wide array of academic disciplines. Over and over again, as we visited and talked with those attending the funeral, we were told how Michael had helped a person when he or she was first getting started and had continued providing support over the years.

Since his funeral, we have continued to run into other academics with the same story to tell. It boggles the mind. How

could one person serve as a mentor to so many people? The answer, we think, is very simple. Michael loved people, and he was generous with his time, always willing to talk with you about your work and how to make it better (Graham & Harris, 2006). Michael was equally generous with his support, taking many young scholars under his wing, introducing them to other scholars and providing them with opportunities to publish their work in the many books and special journal issues he edited. In addition, Michael rarely published alone, as he worked collaboratively on writing and research projects with those he mentored.

Michael's role as a mentor reached its heights with his doctoral students (he graduated 16 over the course of his career). He cared about what they wanted to do and frequently bent his own research efforts to encompass their interests. He met with them often, providing critiques of their work, encouraging their plans, and supporting their academic efforts. He also treated them like family. They were frequently at his home, and he talked about them often.

Becoming a good teacher/scholar/critic/builder/mentor is not an easy task. This is something most of us could use a little help with along the way. Michael gave such help freely and frequently. We think that all educational psychologists should do the same.

THE WHOLE PACKAGE

How does an educational psychologist become a teacher/scholar/critic/builder/mentor? We offer two observations.

Although we indicated earlier in this article that an educational psychologist in higher education should assume all of these roles throughout the majority of his or her career, it is unreasonable to think that a newly graduated Ph.D. student or even an assistant professor is going to play all of these roles right from the start. For an assistant professor on a traditional academic line, a sensible goal would be to develop and perfect teaching skills and assigned courses; begin or continue to implement a line of high-quality research; and act as a critic during academic discussions at meetings, in classes, and when writing articles, chapters, or books. The amount of emphasis placed on each of these roles will necessarily vary according to the academic position. Once these roles are solidly underway, other roles such as mentor and builder should be added. This is not meant to suggest that this is the path that best suits everyone—Michael served as a teacher, scholar, critic, builder, and mentor from the start. Rather, most of us will need time to make each of these roles our own.

Our second observation is taken right from Michael's life. He attributed much of his success to making multiple aspects of his life connect. His teaching, research, critical

observations, products, and materials, as well as mentoring of students and young scholars, were tied together around specific themes, such as effective reading instruction. For example, starting in the 1990s he taught courses on reading research and policy, conducted research on effective reading instruction, critiqued reading policy in the United States, helped develop a basal reading program incorporating his and others' research findings, and mentored numerous beginning scholars interested in literacy and literacy instruction. Not only did he connect these academic roles, he connected his professional and personal life as well. For example, he stated in a recent interview that his interest and critique of whole language instruction was more than academic, as his only son "did not learn much in his extremist whole language first grade!" (Flowerday & Shaughnessy, 2007, p. 11).

Finally, the articles in this special issue recognize and celebrate Michael's contributions to education and educational psychology. We hope that they stimulate additional research that builds on his legacy. Just as important, we hope that these articles provide some insight into the person behind the research.

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