Editor's Note

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As some of you may know, this issue of when prescriptive statements are appropriate has become sort of a personal crusade/witch hunt for me over the past few years. My colleagues and I have examined volume after volume of educational journals and concluded that intervention and experimental research are becoming increasingly scarce (Hsieh *et al.* 2005), and the rate at which authors are making prescriptive recommendations based on observational, nonexperimental research is increasing (Robinson *et al.* 2007). In my opinion, we are at a crossroads in educational psychology research. We need consensus concerning our standards for causal claims. Are we concerned when authors, reviewers, and editors publish articles where nonexperimental research is used as evidence for causal conclusions, and even prescriptive suggestions? How will we be viewed by other disciplines, educational practitioners, the media, and the lay public if we continue to build our theories and recommendations on the sandy soil of anecdotes, observations, and self-report data, no matter if the data are subjected to “magical” causal modeling analyses or if they are simply rich, thick, and meaty with description? It is my hope that this special issue will help to move us toward consensus concerning such standards.

I would like to thank Jonna Kulikowich and Rayne Sperling for serving as guest editors. I would also like to thank the contributing authors and Art Graesser and Steve Yussen for providing commentaries. In addition to this special issue, and the session during the 2010 American Educational Research Association (AERA) meeting, a few months ago, my colleague, Tasha Beretvas, and I hosted a “Prescriptives on Prescriptives” meeting in Austin, TX, (funded in part by the Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk, University of Texas, and also from an Institute of Educational Science Postdoctoral Training Grant #R324B080008), to address the issue of what types of evidence are needed for prescriptive statements. (As a side note here, I should mention that we applied for funding for a larger, more inclusive version of this meeting from the AERA Educational Research Conferences Program and to this date have been rejected three times.) Invitees included Jack Fletcher, Lynn Fuchs, Gene Glass, Larry Hedges, Joel Levin, Erika Patall,

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Gregg Schraw, Sharon Vaughn, and Russ Whitehurst. Also in attendance were our Meadows Postdoctoral Fellows, Nicole Pyle and Gareth Morgan. Our task was to develop a set of prescriptives concerning the conditions under which prescriptive recommendations are appropriate in educational research. Instead of producing a list of such conditions, the group decided that prescriptive statements are rarely appropriate in empirical research articles. Rather, authors should simply state study conclusions, whether they be causal, correlational, or descriptive conclusions. Prescriptive recommendations should be left for other scholarly outlets where authors can synthesize the efficacy studies for a particular intervention. (We hope to publish our full list of recommendations from the meeting in another journal soon).

For example, this journal, EDPR, has an article category called “Research into Practice.” It was created 10 years ago when Editor Ken Kiewra asked me to serve as feature editor for these articles. Joel Levin and I had tried unsuccessfully to create a new journal that would publish only such articles, so I was thrilled to accept Ken’s offer. The idea was to serve educational practitioners by having educational researchers describe how a particularly well-supported intervention could be implemented. To date, this idea has never really taken flight. Instead, misinformed authors use this type of article category to submit manuscripts to EDPR that report original empirical research. Unfortunately, such manuscripts are rejected outright. Let me repeat here how we defined such articles 10 years ago: “Research into Practice. These are articles written for practitioners that summarize research on educationally relevant topics and prescribe implications for practice” (Kiewra 2001, p. 319). I would still welcome such manuscripts.

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