

# **A Tutorial for NNER Newcomers!**

## **Welcome to the NNER**

*Rodrick S. Lucero, Colorado State University*

### **Abstract**

*This article is based on a presentation given at the 2010 NNER Annual Conference hosted by Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. ISU, a former “normal” school, and seat for teacher preparation for the state of Illinois, was a most appropriate location for rich discourse around the challenges facing education today. It was also a wonderful setting for the celebrations that tend to be neglected in difficult times. The “Newcomers” session at the conference was an opportunity to share the mission and the agenda of the NNER with those who are searching for collegial and institutional relationships in a collaborative environment of renewal. It was also a time to celebrate the many accomplishments of the network. The conference itself provides a forum for conversation and “networking” around issues of national concern, and of local urgency. It is within the rich discourse of the conference that solutions are proposed and debated and educators challenge and engage each other to reflect upon effective practice. McLaughlin & Talburt (1993), noted, “Networks are a way of engaging school based educators in directing their own learning; allowing them to sidestep the limitations of institutional roles, hierarchies, and geographic locations; and encouraging them*

*to work together with many different kinds of people. Participants have opportunities to grow and develop in a professional community that focuses on their development, providing ways of learning that are more in keeping with their lived professional lives.”*

### **Welcome to the National Network for Educational Renewal!**

The Annual Newcomers session at the NNER Annual meeting has become a time to share with those who are curious about our work or who are new to the Network, answer questions, and engage in conversations that will advance the agenda toward the betterment of schooling in the United States. At the annual conference, I offer to meet with the newcomers to the organization to provide some background information about the NNER. I also strive to demystify and intensify newcomers’ understanding of the conference and define the multi-faceted mission of the network.

The core of the network is to engage all stakeholders in the ongoing renewal required of all effective educational enterprises. The NNER is an organization that provides a framework for PK-16 education that brings together, in conversation, those most engaged in renewal efforts who are committed to making a difference at the level of application. The educational foundations upon which the NNER are founded are deep and compelling and promise to inform practice and in so doing, the national conversation. Those intimately involved in this endeavor include Faculty in Schools of Education, Faculty in the Liberal Arts, and School District partners. This tripartite formula is about

...facilitating networks...and creating “public spaces” in which educators can work together in ways that are different from those typical of their institutions, as well as from much that is considered standard professional development. It may be building structures that encourage a respectful dialogue between and among school and university personnel, or modeling more collaborative stances towards learning and support, enunciating important ideals...or leaving room for

emergent goals. (Lieberman and Grolnick, 1994, p. 25)

As we begin the “tutorial” spirit of this article, it is essential to break down the unintentional boundaries established by network-specific vernacular and acronyms. Embedded in the spirit of the NNER is an inclusive spirit that reaches to those who are moved by the agenda, and are committed to quality education for every child. Therefore, it is most appropriate that we begin the conversation by sharing the definitions that have so much meaning to our work. Here is a short, inexhaustive “glossary” (for lack of a better word) for negotiating the network vocabulary.

**NNER** The National Network for Educational Renewal was founded in 1986 by Dr. John Goodlad to contribute collegial support and national visibility to the simultaneous renewal of PK-16 schools and the education of educators.

**The Goodlad Institute:** The Goodlad Institute grew out of and assumed responsibility for continuing and expanding more than two decades of work by the Institute for Educational Inquiry (IEI). The Institute continues the broad research program of the IEI and works collaboratively with the NNER on projects of national significance. The Goodlad Institute "...aims to energize a new national conversation about what high-quality education means in a democracy and how to achieve it."

<http://www.uwb.edu/academic/centers.goodladinstitute/about-us>

AED	AED (Agenda for Education in a Democracy) is the mission-driven, research based agenda reflected by the "moral dimensions"
CER	Center for Educational Renewal, the precursor to the NNER
IEI	Institute for Educational Inquiry, now known as The Goodlad Institute for Educational Renewal
Moral Dimensions	The four "moral dimensions" for the agenda, articulated by Goodlad's views on educational renewal (explained below.)
Simultaneous Renewal	The concept connects each of the four moral dimensions. It is the idea that everyone involved in the renewal of public education will benefit by their involvement. It is in this concept that individuals find meaning in the work and strength to persevere through the sometimes complex, and difficult negotiations inherent in effective partnerships.

Tripartite Council	Each setting within the NNER is represented by a triad of leaders from the primary stakeholders in teacher preparation. The tripartite council includes a representative of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University level, and by a representative of the local PK-12 school/school district. This tripartite council advises the Governing Council on NNER activities, conference topics, and policy statements.
Governing Council	This body includes one representative from each of the NNER settings. This group works in conjunction with the Executive board and the NNER Executive Director in guiding the future of the NNER, while maintaining the integrity of Goodlad's mission.

As a reader, you may have already taken note of the fact that the word “reform” is de-emphasized, if not wholly ignored in this dialogue. “Reform” connotes a message that what has been done in the past has been wrong. The NNER prefers the word “renewal” as a way to honor the rich tradition and history of educational practice, and to acknowledge that educational engagement and improvement are fluid, in motion, and sensitive to the needs of an ever-changing citizenry. It is in this spirit that the NNER works to research, apply, evaluate, and then improve upon what is working in the classrooms of America.

John Goodlad has taken the notion of “renewal” a step further, making the concept of “simultaneous renewal” a central concept in the work of the agenda. This notion is utilitarian and realistic as we recognize that the human spirit is much more engaged and motivated to action if there is benefit in the outcome. It is also a philosophical notion in that the work must be collaborative and engage all stakeholders if the conversations and the networks are to influence the entirety of the institution. Additionally, and most important, this notion also connects the “moral dimensions” of the agenda.

The NNER provides support for a variety of initiatives across the country, addressing the “moral dimensions” for effective education as defined by John Goodlad (1990). The initiatives at each setting are self-defined, as meaning can only be derived in the local context. However, there are some guiding principles that direct the work. These moral dimensions are the foundation upon which the agenda is built. The four-part purpose of the NNER includes:

Equity and Excellence    providing access to knowledge for all children

Enculturation            educating the young for thoughtful participation in a social and political democracy

Nurturing Pedagogy    basing teaching on knowledge of the concepts taught, established principles of learning, and sensitivity to the unique potential of learners

Stewardship of the Profession    taking responsibility for improving the conditions for learning in PK-12 schools, institutions of higher education and communities

[www.nnerpartnerships.org](http://www.nnerpartnerships.org)

The moral dimensions are interpreted by the key stakeholders in every NNER setting, with the primary focus for implementation revolving around the real world application of the theoretical framework. How will these constructs be applied, in a real classroom, with real children, in a real school?! It is upon this exciting paradigm that the NNER builds its work and continues promulgating the “agenda.”

The “moral dimensions” form the core focus, philosophically and practically, for the major groups within the organization holding the responsibility for the development, evolution, dissemination, and interrogation of the agenda. These include the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER), The Goodlad Institute for Educational Renewal (GI) (formerly known as the Institute for Educational Inquiry (IEI)), The Agenda for Education in a Democracy (AED) Scholars, the Leadership Associates Program, and The National League of Democratic Schools. These divisions utilize the strength of the network to guide collaborations in the meaningful actions needed in their local contexts. The day-to-day work in each organization might look different, as their descriptions would indicate. However, it is important to note that their collective work is focused on the advancement of the agenda.

It might be helpful to share a bit of the historical context related to the development of the NNER. In 1985, John Goodlad founded the Center for Educational Renewal at the University of Washington. The mission of the center was to inquire into educational policies and practices that support and strengthen education for a democracy. The NNER was born out of the center’s mission and came into existence through grant support that funded the ongoing processes of self-evaluation, reflection, and change (simultaneous renewal) within those partnerships that chose to align themselves with Goodlad’s theoretical underpinnings. The NNER took the mission of the CER to another level, and as such the CER was decommissioned, and the NNER took over the work of putting forward an agenda for education in a democracy. The NNER is a membership network dedicated to the simultaneous renewal of member institu-

tions that prepare teachers. Goodlad refers to those partnerships engaged in the network as the “proofing sites” for the ongoing research and training conducted by the IEI (The Goodlad Institute).

Critical to the early success of the NNER was the establishment of 20 postulates which, “...imply conditions necessary to robust teacher education programs.” In addition, these postulates, “...imply specific responsibilities for individual institutions and agencies as well as necessary collaborations” (Goodlad, 1994). Lieberman and Grolnick (1994) describe the value of the postulates:

...the work of the National Network for Educational Renewal, is organized around postulates (or values) for schools and schools of education, and works to connect problems of practices with ideas that are derived from these postulates. This network, perhaps the most complex of all we have studied, in trying to change entire institutions, works with a variety of clients. Its agenda is crafted by the individual school partnerships, comprising the network, in combination with outside knowledge of what changed institutions might look like, provided by the network staff. (p. 31)

The next step forward was the establishment of The Institute for Educational Inquiry (IEI) by Goodlad in 1992. In 2008, the IEI became The Goodlad Institute for Educational Renewal, and it continues to operate as the Seattle-based Institute envisioned by Goodlad. Its mission is to strengthen the role of education in renewing the social and political democracy upon which the future of humankind depends. The NNER and The Goodlad Institute are aligned to advance the agenda laid out by Goodlad.

The establishment of the Professional Development School movement is a great example of the work of the NNER. Professional Development Schools (PDS), called “partner school” sites throughout the network, operationalize the spirit of the Tripartite Council. These remarkable partnerships are largely recognized as foundational to effective teacher preparation, as they reflexively engage all stakeholders and participants in the moral dimensions and



the advancement of the democratic ideal. Partner Schools serve as clinical laboratories for effective instruction that involve University professors as theoretical and pedagogical experts; School administrators as curricular leaders in their buildings; PK-12 teachers as the practitioners of theory; university students as the beneficiaries of the marriage between theory and practice; and ultimately, and most important, the PK-12 students who are the recipients of and participants in a thoughtful, intentionally developed, focused, curriculum reflective of Goodlad's moral dimensions. It is in this description that we can see the inherent complexities of the NNER work, and the tremendous benefits possible as each participant becomes simultaneously renewed through participation.

Partner Schools take teacher preparation from the halls of the University and place it in the local PK-12 classrooms where teacher candidates can immediately apply their newly acquired skills and reflect upon their successes as they assess their teaching as it is shared with real students, in a real school, under the tutelage of a master teacher! The ensuing discussion about "the lesson" is where the deep learning happens as students of teaching reconcile the theory they have been taught with the reality of a school environment. One of the basic tenets of effective learning is that of relevance. I can find no better example of relevance in learning than in this process for teacher preparation. It is here, when a teacher candidate delivers his or her first lessons, that teacher preparation programs establish rigor. The interface of one teacher and a classroom full of eager (or not so eager) students is one of the most rigorous situations we can imagine, in any profession! So, within the context of the NNER supported Partner Schools we see relevance and rigor for teacher candidates training to teach, to model, and to make a significant impact in a world few of us can imagine.

Currently, the NNER coordinates networking efforts within over 20 distinct settings. These constituents include 42 universities throughout the United States and Canada, more than 100 school districts, and over 750 partner schools!

As a network, we strive, on a daily basis, to prepare the very best educators to work with children in schools and communities. The NNER works hard to establish networks and provide communication pathways through which we might collaborate, share, debate, and ultimately move our collective voices forward. American public education is not in peril, it does not require “REFORM.” The puzzle pieces are in place for the best educational system on earth. Our system, however, will always require “RENEWAL,” a critical element in all human endeavors. There is no panacea, no outcome to be reached, only a daily process taken on by teachers and students to inquire, reflect, and practice with deep moral commitments and excellence! Those who call for privatization as the key to reform might be better informed when they see the exemplary work being done in a Partner School Site. Perhaps then that perhaps, they will lend their voices to ours as we embrace the continual processes of “RENEWAL”!

It is, indeed, a great time to be in public education. The challenges are huge, but the collective spirit of those with whom we work is bigger than the challenges. We are poised to meet the needs of every child, in every school, in every community in this great democracy! It is, indeed, a great time to be in public education!

***Welcome to the National Network for Educational Renewal!!***

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**Rodrick S. Lucero** is currently serving as an Associate Professor at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado, and serves as the Associate Director for the School of Teacher Education and Principal Preparation. He also serves within the Master Teacher Initiative on the Colorado State Campus, sharing pedagogical expertise with university colleagues. He has also served as a high school teacher and a high school administrator throughout several school districts in Colorado during his 27 year career. He has been a member of the NNER and involved with the advancement of the NNER agenda for over 15 years.