

**Research Reading Guide of the Month**  
**NOVEMBER 2003**

Locke, L.F. (2003).

**Complicate Your Understanding.**

Whether you are a practitioner, a student, a researcher, a teacher educator, an administrator, or some combination of the five, a primary purpose for reading research should be to develop more sophisticated ways of thinking about your work. The word "sophisticated" as used here can be taken to mean, "more complicated." The word "should," simply indicates that the injunction reflects my personal belief.

I do not mean to disparage other purposes for reading research, such as looking for practical applications that can immediately change and improve what you do. I want only to establish a priority for what you should be looking for. Improving your understanding of what you are doing as a physical educator, getting a better handle on how things work in the classroom, on the field, or in the gym, is the most powerful form of learning. Beneficial changes in practice may be inspired by particular ideas or findings found in studies, but those changes have to be created from your understanding of your own world. Look for things that add detail, create nuance, offer alternative views, add new possibilities, or, in a word, that can "complicate" how you understand physical education.

A broad definition like that means that the valuables to be collected will not always be as simple as a better teaching tactic. For example, you can read research to collect valuables such as the following: new ways of defining old problems, explanations for events that had never occurred to you, clarifications of complicated relationships between actions and outcomes, tools for quantifying ephemeral events, precise language for describing things you have informally observed, potentially useful questions you had never thought to ask, lines of argument to support educational objectives that you value, and challenges to a long-held assumption. Those are valuables that make things more complicated for you. They also are the sources of new understanding, and improved forms of professional action.

You do not need to be lectured about how complicated the work of physical education can be. That you already know. All I want to add is the notion that complicated work demands complicated thinking, and that is exactly what characterizes research studies. They are efforts to sort through the tangles of reality, searching for the regularities and rules that give order to things. Reading about how that was done in an investigation allows you to share the experience, and adopt those complications into your own thinking.

Perhaps you will find it too much of a stretch, but I like to think that the purpose for reading research has as much to do with getting smarter about my work, as it does with finding answers to resolve my problems. Whether it be in the research annotations found on this website, or in the pages of a research journal's unabridged report, the valuables are scattered in there for the finding and retrieving. Just be sure to absorb some of the complications along with the more simple particulars. You already are doing (or, are preparing to do) some of the most difficult and often perplexing work in the field of education. Don't be afraid to grow your professional sophistication.