



Research Reading Guide of the Month
APRIL 2005

Locke, L.F. (2005).

Ways to Make Research Serve Teaching, III.

While the reading guide is on vacation, we have been attending to the problem of figuring out how to put research to use in physical education. As I noted when this series began in February, transferring an idea from the pages of a report to the gymnasium floor or playing field sometimes can be more difficult than it appears. Thus, there is good reason to devote some space in *Unlock* to suggestions for being smart about putting research into practice.

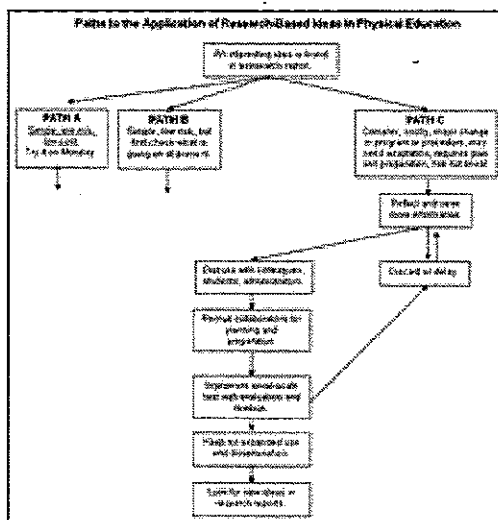
The February issue provided the framework I am using to display and discuss several alternative routes for what is commonly called "research application." If you do not remember that set-up piece (or did not have an opportunity to read it) this would be a good time to go back to the main page and retrieve it by clicking on the *Unlock Archive* button. In addition, that will refresh your recall of the first of the application alternatives, **Path A**. The review effort won't take long, and it might make it easier to digest what follows here.

Last month we explored the second of three forms of application suggested in the three-track model. **Path B**, called "First, check what is going on at present," was a route for trying out ideas that were clear, relatively simple, and low risk, but that made sense only if you had reason to be dissatisfied with what you already were doing. The protocol for application on that path called for a quick scan of one or two classes (perhaps with the help of a colleague or feedback from a videotape) just to be sure that a change truly was called for and thereby worth the extra effort involved.

This month I want to examine the third and final route displayed on the application model, **Path C**, called "Pause, reflect, consult, and collaborate." This is the path for caution and gathering more information before you jump in. Unlike the ideas considered for paths **A** and **B**, the candidates for path **C** involve changes that may be more complex, that might have significant costs to time, energy, and resources, and that, in some cases, have not yet been worked out in full detail.

In particular, **Path C** is the route to take if the innovation requires substantial changes in your program or teaching procedure, involves figuring out adaptation to local conditions, works only if you can recruit cooperation from other people, and demands substantial planning and preparation. Putting ideas like those into practice can involve some measure of risk to your professional reputation and personal relationships and can disturb the comfort of program stability. Those same ideas, however, are among the applications of research that can be most exciting and satisfying and that can make the most difference for your students.

Some research studies have implications that are unclear or complicated and that call for both careful reflection and the gathering of more information. For the same reason, such studies produce ideas that also call for consultation with colleagues who can help "de-fuzz" what is unclear and clarify what application might mean in the context of your workplace. Any change that involves significantly more work on your part, the use of scarce resources, or the tapping of political capital demands a prudent approach. **Path C** is intended to capture that sort of caution.



(enlargement on following page)

What is not shown in the diagram is the rich potential in this approach for growing branches back to the other paths. For example, some ideas for innovative change may require a period of self-assessment or program review (**Path B**) before serious collaborative planning can begin. Sometimes, particular aspects of an idea can safely be given an immediate trial (**Path A**) as a preliminary before further investment of time and effort. Remember that like all such graphics, the model of alternative paths establishes general directions and must not be taken as a universally applicable map.

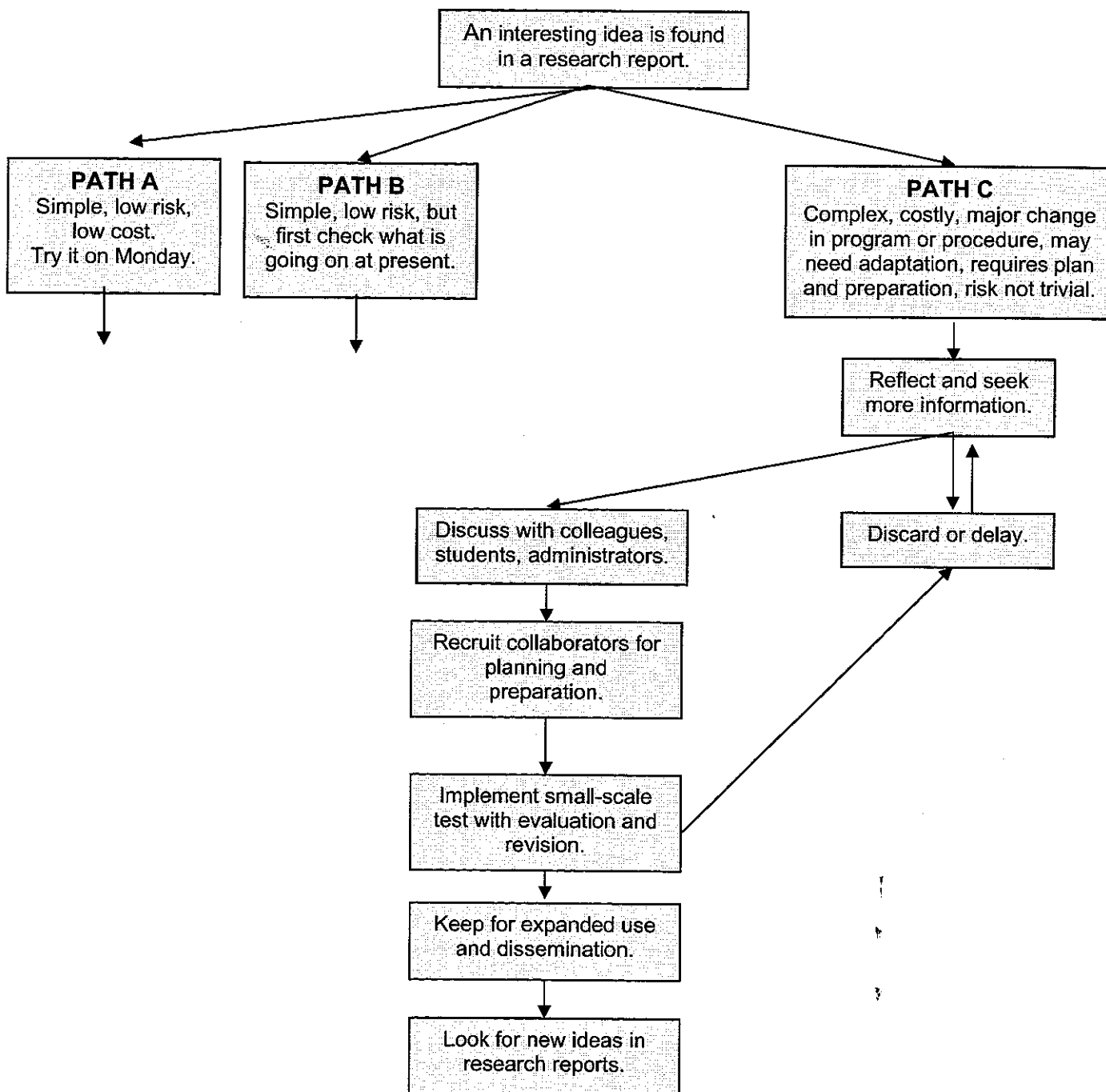
In my own career as a teacher I can vividly recall my effort to move what I had seen in research evaluations of “cooperative learning” into my own classes and seminars. I had the good fortune of having several colleagues (one a doctoral student and one a faculty member) who already had worked with that innovative form of pedagogy. Quite possibly it was more by blind luck than out of any personal wisdom on my part, but I decided to seek their consultation before attempting application of what I had been reading.

Looking back, I can honestly say that the conversations with those friends prevented what almost certainly would have been (at best) a long period of frustration or, at worst, an outright disaster for both me and my students. Cooperative learning is complicated stuff and is the perfect candidate for proceeding cautiously down **Path C** – with more than a little help from your friends.

In closing this brief series of suggestions for figuring out ways to apply research-based ideas, I want to sound two warnings that should be taken to heart. This is especially true if you are in the early years of settling into a career as a physical educator. First, changing existing regularities in the school workplace is not always a welcome activity. Not every colleague will immediately support every proposal for changing program, policy, or teaching procedures, even when the idea appears to have solid support from research.

Such resistance, however, is not always a fatal impediment to trying out new ideas, nor is it always inappropriate! A degree of respect for the feelings (and wisdom) of others a realistic anticipation of objections that might arise can smooth the bumps along any of the three application paths.

Paths to the Application of Research-Based Ideas in Physical Education



A second fact of school life is that you always should be wary of the unexpected and unintended consequences that can flow from any change in the routines of teaching and learning. The process of implementing research-based ideas in your gymnasium may be stimulating, engrossing, and empowering. You may even be successful in producing exactly the desired effect. But in the midst of all that may be positive about change, it always is wise to observe this rule. Any change you introduce in the way you interact with students, colleagues, administrators, or parents will produce at least some unintended consequences. A school is far too complicated a social institution to allow one change to produce one, and only one, effect.

Some of those unintended outcomes will be negligible or at least neutral in impact; others will be as welcome as an unexpected bonus in your paycheck. A few, however, can be undesirable or, in rare instances, dangerous. The appropriate response to the rule of unintended consequences is obvious. Keep your eyes and ears open; don't get romanced by what you hope will happen and pay close attention to negative feedback no matter what the source. With that kind of wary but hopeful monitoring, I think you will find that applications drawn from research can yield real benefits and, just as importantly, a lot of fun and satisfaction along the paths of **A**, **B**, and **C**.

Comments on this guide will be welcomed at lflocke@hotmail.com.

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