

GETTING TO KNOW OUR INCOMING PRESIDENT

Dr. Karen R. Harris



Bio:

Dr. Karen R. Harris is the Mary Emily Warner Professor of Education at Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. Previously, she has been a faculty member at Vanderbilt University, University of Maryland, and Purdue University. A Fellow of both APA and AERA, she has served on Division 15 committees and as the former Editor of the *Journal of Educational Psychology*. The theme for her Presidential term is “Impacting Education Pre-K to Gray.”

She notes:

While the history of Educational Psychology goes back to the 1890s (with influences back to the time of Plato, Aristotle, and others), I became an Educational Psychologist when I entered the masters program in Educational Psychology at the University of Nebraska, which I completed in 1978. Since my first course in foundations of learning, I have been a “theory junkie” – I cannot stop studying theories and have never found a theory from which I cannot learn or that does not potentially impact our field in important ways. I have followed the field of Educational Psychology for over 3 decades, and I am proud of what we have achieved. Like many in our field, today I feel a sense of urgency as I consider the complex challenges faced by communities, families, schools, teachers, and students.

I am also concerned about the challenges that face our field. No longer the only theory and research arm in education, we must take care to remain central to the field of education. In doing so, we must maintain and enrich the ways in which Educational Psychology enhances and impacts education from pre-K to gray. In the late 1960s, movement toward increased ideological and technological integration was evident across a number of fields, including ours. By 1989, however, Gage wrote his seminal piece on the paradigm wars and their effect on the study of learning. We have made much progress since that time, but much remains to be accomplished. Continuing to understand and integrate what we know across theories, methods, and paradigms will allow us to advance the field by assisting policymakers and practitioners to define, acquire, interpret, and ultimately use research. Relationships, built on trust and respect, are essential to our future and the future of our field. We must set aside paradigm biases and reject false dichotomies as we review research for publication or funding, develop the next generation of researchers, support early career researchers, and work with each other and the larger field.

All of our major theories today embrace meaningful learning in communities that are educationally purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative. In fact, despite characterizations of some theories that have become common, virtually all theories have embraced these principles for decades. During my term, I will continue to emphasize what so many of you have advocated: when we treat competing viewpoints with thoughtfulness and respect, a powerful repertoire for teaching and learning across the life span can be developed. As Dubin argued in his book *Theory Building* in 1978, contiguous problem solving – where interdisciplinary efforts based on disciplinary research add up in a manner not otherwise likely – requires our attention, even as we continue focused research emanating from differing theories and paradigms. Together, unlike the blind men, we can make sense of the elephant.

Karen R. Harris,
APA Division 15 President 2014-2015