



9-1-2004

### Richard A. Rossmiller: A Prophet Even in His Own Land - An Interview

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#### Recommended Citation

Geske, Terry G. and Verstegen, Deborah A. (2004) "Richard A. Rossmiller: A Prophet Even in His Own Land - An Interview," *Educational Considerations*: Vol. 32: No. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.1230>

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# Richard A. Rossmiller: A Prophet Even in His Own Land

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## An Interview

**Terry G. Geske and Deborah A. Verstegen**

### Introduction

In May 2004, Richard A. Rossmiller received the Alumni Achievement Award from the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison honoring him for his many accomplishments. Accompanying this award was the following statement acknowledging that:

*Emeritus professor Richard Rossmiller's work on K-12 school finance is legendary. In fact, his seminal research on the cost of high quality special education services has been cited in textbooks for the past 25 years. During his distinguished career as professor of educational administration at UW-Madison, Rossmiller inspired countless students, directed the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, presided over several national organizations, served on numerous editorial boards, and was frequently asked to share his expertise on finance and equity issues in Federal and state courts.*

The interviewers were fortunate to be two of those countless students inspired by Richard Rossmiller, who served as major professor for their doctoral programs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In an effort to draw upon the many experiences he gained over a long and stellar career in addressing some seemingly intractable issues, we recently conducted this interview with Professor Emeritus Rossmiller.

### Conversation

*Geske and Verstegen (G&V):* Let's start at the beginning. Could you tell us something about your early childhood and initial school experiences?

*Richard A. Rossmiller (RAR):* I was born and raised on a dairy and truck farm in southeastern Wisconsin. I grew up during the Great Depression and have clear memories of my mom and dad struggling to make sure they had enough money to pay the interest on the mortgage so that they would not lose the farm through foreclosure. Nevertheless, it was a wonderful place to grow up—we were never hungry. I learned early the value of hard work and teamwork, and I

cherish the memories of that period in my life. My mother had been a school teacher and was not satisfied with the one-room school serving our area; so my parents paid tuition for me to attend a two-room state graded school in the nearby community of Honey Creek where my grandparents lived, and I have very fond memories of the times I spent with them.

My high school education was at the Racine County Agricultural School where I was active in all sports, played in the band, and was active in the Future Farmers of America, earning Wisconsin Farmer and American Farmer degrees. I entered high school in the fall of 1942; so nearly all of my high school experience was during World War II. I gave little thought to college until during the last week of my senior year, the superintendent informed me that, as class valedictorian, I was entitled to an honor scholarship to any public university in Wisconsin. I decided to attend the University of Wisconsin at Madison and eventually decided to major in Agriculture and Education and become a vocational agriculture teacher since I still expected to return to farming some day in the future.

*G&V:* Would you describe some of those experiences that brought you to the professorship?

*RAR:* I came to the professorship after serving for about ten years as a teacher and administrator in the public schools in Wisconsin and Illinois. I started as a teacher of vocational agriculture in 1950. I had served as President of the Wisconsin Association of Future Farmers of America in 1949-1950 when I was attending the University of Wisconsin; so vocational agriculture was a natural choice. I taught vocational agriculture for two years at my old high school, Racine County Agricultural School, and met and married my wife, Lois, before entering the U. S. Army for two years during the Korean War—although my service time was spent at Thule Air Force base in northern Greenland where I repaired radar sets and computers. When I was released from the army in 1954, the school board where I had been teaching asked if I would become superintendent. For some reason I have never been able to explain (since I had no preparation for the position and had never taken a course in administration), I accepted the position. I served three years as superintendent and then decided to take advantage of my GI Bill entitlement and returned to the University of Wisconsin-Madison where I received my Ph.D. degree in Educational Administration in 1960.

I accepted an appointment as Hall Principal at Evanston Township High School to fill in for the incumbent who had taken a leave to complete his own doctoral studies. Evanston Township High School was organized on a "school within a school" model with four schools called "Halls," and I was principal of West Hall. I had been there for about a semester when the school board of a newly created K-12 district in the suburban Milwaukee area (Muskego-Norway) contacted me to ask if I would be interested in becoming their superintendent. The district had been formed by consolidating a number of elementary districts and a high school district. I accepted the position and found it to be an exciting and challenging job with many novel problems involved in pulling together and harmonizing the disparate policies and procedures that existed in the previously independent districts.

I had been in the job only a relatively short time when I was invited to interview for a position as an assistant professor at UW-Madison. My wife had experienced some health problems after our second son was born, and I decided to accept the position (despite the substantial pay cut it entailed) and so began my career in higher education in

November 1961. My original appointment was one-half time in the Education Department of the Extension Division and one-half time in the Cooperative Educational Services unit of the School of Education which provided research services to Wisconsin school districts. In the summer of 1962, the Department of Educational Administration was looking for someone to teach school finance during the summer and, since none of the senior faculty members was interested in teaching the course, I was chosen. I had not taken a course in school finance in my graduate program, but my doctoral minor was in public finance; so I decided to teach the course in school finance as a subset of public finance, giving more attention to the economics of education, an area that was developing rapidly at that time. I dealt with sources of public revenue and how school finance fits into the overall public finance picture as well as traditional subjects such as state school aid programs.

*GV:* Would you describe some of the early research projects you conducted once you became a faculty member in the Department of Educational Administration?

*RR:* Shortly after I joined the faculty, I became involved in a research project with Professors Leroy Peterson, Howard Wakefield, and Stewart North in which we examined various school finance models and the effects they might have if they were to be applied in Wisconsin. Shortly after that project was completed, Professor James Lipham and I got into a discussion about how school boards went about resolving conflicts. This led to a proposal for research on school board decision-making, with particular reference to decisions about the school district's budget. We enlisted Professor Russell Gregg as a partner in this endeavor and submitted a proposal that eventually was funded under the Cooperative Research program for research dealing with how school boards arrive at budget decisions and how various items are negotiated.

We found that school boards, often inadvertently, engage in budgetary decision-making throughout the school year. Many of their decisions on routine items have budgetary implications, and many of the aspects of the budget are determined well before the time the budget is formally adopted—for example, teachers' salary schedules or contracts for supplies of oil, gas, and electricity. The decisions made by school boards during their formal budget decisions typically were not of great consequence to the district's educational program, but discussions about minor items were often quite heated. By 1964, my academic appointment was entirely in the Department of Educational Administration, and I was teaching school finance, school law, and the introductory course in Educational Administration on a regular basis.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) passed in the mid 1960s provided, among other things, grants for research training. The emphasis on evaluation of Title I programs led me to believe that school systems would soon be seeking individuals competent to fill the role of director of research if they were to comply with these mandates. I submitted a proposal to identify, with the help of leaders in urban school systems, individuals who might be interested in coming to UW-Madison to spend a full year of study on campus, return to their home school district for a year as an intern, and then return to Madison for a third year of study during which they would complete their doctoral dissertations, ideally basing the dissertation on the experiences and activities in which they were engaged during their year as interns. The proposal was funded, and we sponsored three

successive groups of candidates (5 individuals each year), all of whom completed the program. They served internships in a variety of places, including Dade County, Philadelphia, Dallas, and Milwaukee.

Shortly after the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, several faculty members in the Department of Educational Administration got together and concluded we could and should develop a program that would do a better job of preparing people for leadership positions in urban school districts. We enlisted several faculty members from other academic departments to join us in writing a proposal to identify, with the help of superintendents and other top administrators in four urban districts, individuals whom they regarded as promising candidates for school leadership positions. The individuals who were chosen for the program came to campus for a year of concentrated study, returned to their districts for a year of internship, and then returned to Madison for a final year of study in which they were to complete their doctoral studies and their dissertations.

*GV:* How did your interest in the area of school finance develop? Would you describe your activities with the NEFP during the late 1960s?

*RR:* During the summer of 1968, I received a call from Professor R. L. Johns at the University of Florida. I had become acquainted with Professor Johns during my doctoral studies when he taught a summer session at UW-Madison. Professor Johns asked if I would join a group at the University of Florida that was to design and conduct a national study of educational finance. I accepted his invitation and took a year's leave of absence to go to the University of Florida to develop the design for the National Education Finance Project (NEFP). As a direct result of this involvement, I was asked to conduct two of the project's sub-studies, one dealing with the cost of educating handicapped children, and the other dealing with the measurement of fiscal capacity in state school finance programs. I was selected to do the study on handicapped children (now identified as children with disabilities) because I was the most junior member of the research team, and after the other investigators had expressed their preferences, the only topic left was the cost of educating handicapped children.

My initial plan was to identify from the literature what experts in special education recommended in terms of program configurations and then translate these various configurations into cost estimates. I soon discovered the experts were not in agreement on what an "ideal" program would look like. Consequently, I decided to seek out knowledgeable authorities who were familiar with special education programs in the United States and ask them to identify states that they thought were doing a reasonably adequate job of providing programs for handicapped children. From their recommendations, we selected five states, primarily for their geographic distribution. We then went to each of the five states and asked state education agency personnel in the special education area to help us identify a sample of five districts representative of urban, suburban, and rural areas.

At that time (1968-1969) children were identified for placement on the basis of their handicapping condition and, by and large, were segregated on the basis of their handicapping condition; that is, there were classes for educable mentally retarded, trainable mentally retarded, deaf or hard of hearing, blind or partially sighted, physically handicapped, etc. A research team visited each district to collect data by visiting classrooms, talking with teachers and administrators, observing resource configurations and materials, and the like. The research team also collected data on expenditures from the district's

business office to determine how much each district was spending on educating children with various types of handicaps, and how much they were spending for children who were in the regular school programs, as a basis for computing what has become known as the “cost index.” Although this was a rather tedious job, it produced what have proven to be rather reliable results concerning the expenditures in educational programs for students with disabilities despite the fact that it was a selected sample based on expert opinion, not a statistically random sample.

We found that the additional expenditure involved in educating handicapped children, taken as a group, was about 1.9 times greater than that for children in the regular school program. There were no generally accepted estimates of the incidence of various handicapping conditions at that time; so to estimate that the overall cost index, I took the index number we found for each of the handicapping conditions and multiplied it by the estimated incidence of each handicapping condition. Using the lowest incidence estimates, we found a cost index of 1.85, and using the highest incidence estimates, the cost index was 1.92.

It has been gratifying that in three subsequent studies, the cost indices were all in the same ballpark. In the Rand study, done in the late 1970s after the passage of P.L. 94-142 (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act), the overall cost index was 2.17. In the mid-1980s, a study directed by Mary Moore found a slightly higher cost index of 2.30. In the most recent study, conducted by the American Institutes of Research, the cost index was found to be 1.90. So it’s clear that the overall cost indices have not changed a great deal in the last thirty years, and that many of the differences could be attributed to the additional costs associated with the requirements of Public Law 94-142, such as the requirement for an individualized educational program for each child, child find requirements, and placement in the least restrictive educational environment.

*Q&V:* Please give us your perception as to how things have changed in terms of educating the disabled since enactment of PL 94-142.

*RAR:* There have been some extraordinary changes in the education of children with disabilities over the course of the 20th century, even prior to passage of 94-142. As late as the 1920s, children with various kinds of handicapping conditions were systematically excluded from schools, and there were court decisions upholding their exclusion. By the time the NEFP study was conducted, children with handicapping conditions had become a well-established part of the educational system, but they were being served, for the most part, in segregated classrooms. We saw very few attempts to integrate children with disabilities into regular classrooms in the schools we visited during the late 1960s. The exception would be students with specific learning disabilities where the child might spend some part of his or her day in a regular classroom.

Although advocates for children with disabilities may not be entirely happy with the progress that has been made, I think it is really quite remarkable to see the changes that have occurred, particularly with regard to integrating these children into regular school classrooms to the greatest extent possible. The problem that I have observed is that we had at least a generation of teachers, perhaps even two generations of teachers, who had been imbued with the idea that children with disabilities should be excluded from regular classrooms and placed in special programs. Most classroom teachers had no specialized knowledge or training in how to deal with children with various types

of disabilities who were being “mainstreamed” into their classrooms. I believe this has resulted in many problems, both in terms of teacher morale and in terms of acceptance of mainstreaming as a required practice. This attitude still exists, to some degree, particularly among older teachers who feel they really don’t know how to deal with these children and that they ought to be in special programs. Nonetheless, there has been considerable progress.

*Q&V:* Given these initial research findings, and the overall weighting of 1.9, what was the response across the states in terms of formulating policy based on this research?

*RAR:* The initial response to the findings of our study was enthusiasm on the part of the states for becoming more precise in their funding of programs for children with disabilities. Many states conducted their own studies, which is what I recommended, rather than simply using the results of the NEFP study. The most serious problem I observed was that states tended to develop too many categories and too many weights. This created an incentive for schools to place children with disabilities into the disability categories that provide the highest amount of state aid. This has changed over the years in that funding now relates less to the disability and more to the way the child is actually served; that is, the extent to which they are mainstreamed, the extent to which they receive special services in addition to the regular classroom activities, or the extent to which they are in segregated classrooms because of the nature of their disabilities. In my view, fewer weights are better, and the weights should be based on the way the child is served in the education program, not on the child’s disability per se.

One advantage of weighting pupils is that it allows the state, in its distribution of funds to local districts, to recognize that some districts are required to bear higher expenditures as a result of the type and concentration of children with disabilities within their service area. It also allows the money that is allocated to meet these needs to be distributed through the general state aid formula rather than as categorical aid. To the extent that the general state aid formula is equalizing, i.e., recognizes that districts with a low tax base need more assistance from the state, the distribution of money to support the education of children with disabilities is also equalized.

*Q&V:* At this point, let’s talk about the leadership role you assumed when you became the Director of the Wisconsin R & D Center in 1973. This was a difficult time for the regional labs and research and development centers across the country. What were the major activities that consumed your time during this period?

*RAR:* As a result of the work I did in connection with the NEFP—especially our visits to schools and classrooms—I became very interested in questions about how resources are used in schools and what effects the allocation and use of resources might have on the academic achievement of students. We saw great variations among schools and in classrooms during our collection of data for the study of special education costs. In 1972, I proposed to the Wisconsin R&D Center (now the Wisconsin Center for Education Research) a small pilot study on the cost-effectiveness of Individually Guided Education (IGE), the Center’s major program at that time.

That fall, Professor Herbert Klausmeier, the founding director of the Center, decided to leave that role and, in December 1972, Dean Donald McCarty asked me to serve as Director of the Center. I did not seek the job of director of the R&D Center, but when the Dean

asked me to take on that job, I accepted. I have always considered myself a team player, and the Dean was concerned about how the Center would fare in the transition to support by the newly created National Institute of Education (NIE). From the outset, I did not view this as a permanent change in jobs. I considered myself to be first and foremost a teacher and researcher and, as a tenured professor, I was not worried about losing my job if I were to take unpopular positions if that became necessary.

When I became Director of the Center in January 1973 I was also serving as department chairman at the time and quickly found that the jobs were too time-consuming to do both of them well. I resigned the department chairmanship to devote my full attention to the R&D Center since it had quickly become apparent that the relationship between the educational laboratories and research centers and NIE was going to be a rocky one.

The National Institute of Education (NIE) had been created in 1972 and designated as the funding agency for the network of regional laboratories and research and development centers that had been started in the mid-1960s as a result of the passage of ESEA. The R&D Center's sole source of funding at this time was NIE which was in the process of trying to "get its act together." Based on reviews of the Center's proposal submitted before NIE was created, it had been recommended for three years of funding to continue work on the development and dissemination of the IGE program. The details of the funding remained to be negotiated with NIE.

At that point, IGE consisted primarily of a reorganized organizational structure in schools and a focus on multi-age grouping and team teaching. We had reasonably well-developed reading and math programs that were complementary to IGE, but we did not have well-developed programs in other curricular areas. The Center had undertaken an extensive dissemination project and had commitments to work with twelve state education agencies to implement IGE. NIE, however, decided that it would not fund dissemination activities until it had developed a broad dissemination plan for the Institute. This left the Center in the awkward position of having commitments to work with 12 states to help them implement IGE, but with no funding to continue the work.

There were many tensions and problems during this period. I attended a meeting of the Council for Educational Development and Research (CEDaR), an organization representing all of the labs and centers, and shortly thereafter I was asked to become a member of the organization's board of directors. This led to an experience that was extraordinarily interesting, frustrating, and instructive in terms of the politics of funding educational research.

It quickly became evident that the existing network of regional educational laboratories and university-based research centers was not to play a significant role in the future envisioned by NIE. Most of the Institute's appropriation was committed to support the existing labs and centers, and this tended to stymie the plans of members of the NIE staff who were eager to launch their own research agendas. We were in the unenviable position where NIE, the agency responsible for our funding, preferred that we disappear. Consequently, I soon concluded that if the existing national network of labs and centers was to survive, we would have to hang together, or we would certainly all hang separately.

Our task was to maintain a reasonably cordial working relationship with the Institute while, at the same time, trying to convince Congress that we deserved continued funding. While I was not supportive of

all of the activities of the various labs and centers, at that time it was the only game in town. It became clear from my conversations with members of Congress that NIE was quite unpopular on the "Hill." The Institute was unlikely to survive if it failed to fund the labs and centers and, if NIE did not survive, most of the funding for education research would disappear. The education research community was likely to lose all of the money going to fund the labs and centers; this money would not be placed in another appropriation.

I spent a lot of time meeting with the members of the congressional delegation from Wisconsin and members of their staffs and testifying to congressional committees about the work we were doing in Wisconsin. Ultimately, we were successful in convincing Congress to provide a line-item appropriation for the labs and centers. Obviously, our success did not endear us to NIE, and it especially did not endear me to some members of the NIE staff since I was chairman of CEDaR at the time the line item was adopted and played a prominent role in securing the line item. I realized, however, that it would be impossible to sustain the Wisconsin R&D Center by relying on non-competitive, sole source funding. As a result, we started eliminating nonessential overhead activities to reduce our overhead costs so that we could compete effectively with other bidders for competitive funding opportunities.

When my term as chairperson of CeDaR ended, I was pretty well "burned out." It had been an arduous year. We had worked very hard to get the line item appropriation passed to assure continuance of labs and centers. I had testified several times in Congress and maintained a close working relationship with several members of the Wisconsin congressional delegation. In 1975, I had spent three weeks in Brasilia doing consulting with a unit of the Brazilian Ministry of Education and Culture. This unit (CAPES) dealt with the professionalization of faculty in institutions of higher learning in Brazil. As a result of that experience, I had an opportunity to spend a semester in Brazil in 1977 teaching at The Catholic University in Rio de Janeiro. I also lectured at several other Brazilian universities, including the Federal University in Rio de Janeiro and the Federal University in Rio Grande do Sul, as well as doing some traveling within Brazil. Fortunately, my family accompanied me and they had an enlightening exposure to life in a different culture—an experience that I believe greatly influenced the decisions my sons made concerning their education and their choice of professions. (They also learned to speak Portuguese much better than I did.)

On returning to Wisconsin in the August 1977, I resumed my position as director of the R&D Center. By 1979, I had decided to return full-time to my professorship in Educational Administration. I felt I had done as much as I could to configure the center in a way that would allow it to compete successfully for grants in the future and that it was an appropriate time for new leadership. I asked Dean Palmer to be relieved as director of the Center although I continued to serve until August 1980 when my successor, Mike Smith, was able to take up the job.

*Q&V:* Your work as a researcher in the R & D Center focused on the relationship between student achievement and how resources are used in schools. Have we made much progress toward improved school productivity over the last couple of decades?

*RAR:* While serving as Center director, I continued to be interested in how resources are used in schools and continued my research on resource utilization in schools and classrooms with the help of some very capable graduate students. I had developed a system model of

production in education, and the big black box in the model was what happened at the school and classroom level. We did some rather intensive work on the educational process as it was practiced in four elementary schools in Wisconsin. We observed students in their classrooms as they progressed through third, fourth, and fifth grades. Students were observed in their classes for a full day during three different intervals during the school year. We kept track of whether students were on- or off-task at two-minute intervals during the school day and administered achievement tests at the end of the year. We obtained data on expenditures at the school and classroom level as well as data on the professional background of the students' teachers. We also collected data on students' home backgrounds and out-of-school activities through interviews with their parents and teachers. Despite the wealth of data we obtained, we were not able to make a great deal of headway in unpacking the black box of the classroom.

We did find that time on task was much more important for those students who were less able than it was for very able students. The most able students tended to progress very well with minimal time on task—they needed far less time to acquire the content of lessons than students who were not as well-endowed intellectually.

One of the more interesting findings was that if you include in the data analysis “pull out students” who are getting special help from teachers or aides in a small group or one-on-one situation, you obtain a rather high negative correlation between the money spent per student on instruction in reading, math, science and social studies and the performance of students on conventional achievement tests. When we removed from the analysis the students who were receiving special treatment, we found virtually no relationship between the amount of money spent per pupil in the various subject areas and student performance on the achievement tests.

I continued to be involved in what is now the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research. For several years after I left the center directorship, I was a principal investigator in the Center for Effective Secondary Schools working with Mary Metz, Karen Seashore Lewis, and others on studies of teacher quality of work life in secondary schools and in exploring how principals of effective secondary schools (effective in terms of student performance) created high morale and high quality work life for teachers and other employees in their schools.

*GV:* You served as President of AEFA in 1980-81, and as President of UCEA in 1984-85. What prompted you to assume these leadership roles?

*RR:* I have always been interested and involved in educational finance and early in my career attended many of the national meetings sponsored by the NEA dealing with school finance. When the NEA discontinued those meetings in the mid-1970s, the National Educational Finance Project took up that task and held two national meetings on school finance that led directly to the establishment of the American Education Finance Association (AEFA). I was actively involved in establishing the association and served as its vice-president in 1979-1980 and president in 1980-1981. AEFA was experiencing some growing pains at that time, and I chaired a committee that revised the constitution of the association to ensure an appropriate representation of all interests. Fortunately, we were successful in this task, and AEFA remains today a vibrant organization that brings together many of the interest groups who are involved in educational finance—educators, economists, lawyers, researchers, legislators, and legislative

staff members. It was a real honor for me to receive the Association's Outstanding Service Award in 1993.

I enjoyed the 1980-1981 academic year because I had no administrative responsibilities for the first time since 1970. Since I had been away from the field for several years, I thought the quickest way to get back into the mainstream was to become active in the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) and was appointed as the UW-Madison representative. I soon discovered that UCEA had some serious problems—the founding director was retiring, the organization was nearly bankrupt, and it would need to find a new host institution. I chaired the search committee that found a new director and later was elected to the Board of Directors and eventually to a term as president of the organization in 1984-1985. During that time, we initiated what became the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, and I served on the commission during 1985 and 1986. The report of the National Commission led to the development of an umbrella organization of practitioner organizations and administrator preparation institutions that has defined and described the characteristics of adequate programs for preparing administrators for various leadership positions in schools and school systems.

*GV:* You served as department chair from 1981 to 1990. What would you consider as your most significant accomplishment in chairing the department during the 1980s?

*RR:* In 1981, my colleagues again elected me as chairperson of the Department of Educational Administration, a position I occupied until 1990. These were interesting and productive years. We were able to hire several staff members as replacements for retirees, and I take pride in the fact that they have continued to keep the department at UW-Madison in the forefront—typically it is either the first or second ranked department of Educational Administration in the United States. The faculty appointments we made were an important factor in maintaining the high quality of the department.

The task of obtaining and retaining high-quality faculty is most challenging. I noted, for example, that over my 32 years as a member of the department approximately one-third of the beginning assistant professors we hired during that time received tenure. Some left because they were not granted tenure; many left because they could see the handwriting on the wall, and others left because they realized that a professorial career was not what they wanted. We did manage, however, to hold on to most of the really good ones.

I spent the 1989-1990 school year on sabbatical leave—the first one I had taken in the 30 years I had been at Wisconsin. In 1991 when I returned to “active duty” as a member of the faculty, I was asked to serve as the director of the National Center for Research and Development on Effective Schools. Although I was contemplating retirement, I was persuaded to take on this task and continued as director until my retirement in 1993. It was an interesting but very frustrating job in that we did not have a complete reform package to offer, and nearly all schools were looking for a total package of curricular and administrative reforms. Unfortunately, the Center for Effective Schools never achieved the level of funding needed to fully develop the program. I have always been skeptical of the “in-and-out” reformers who can give spellbinding lectures, get school personnel excited about some current reform that allegedly will solve all their problems, and then move on leaving the local folks trying to figure out exactly how to do it.

After my retirement from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1993, I continued to be active in various ways. Lloyd Duvall and I worked with the American Association of School Administrators to develop what eventually became a definition of the characteristics that one would expect to find in high quality preparation programs for school superintendents and other educational leaders. In 1997, I visited the University of Kuwait to evaluate their proposal for a graduate program in educational administration. (In 1986, I had spent two weeks in Damascus, Syria, lecturing on the various topics in education at the University of Damascus.)

One of the activities in which I have been involved that continued from the early 1970s to the current time is my service as an expert witness in state school finance cases, employment discrimination cases, and financial aspects of school desegregation cases. I have served as an expert witness in cases in New Jersey, Colorado, New Mexico, Maryland, West Virginia, Missouri, Wisconsin, Montana, Texas, Arkansas, and Arizona. Although it is an experience I found to be challenging and enjoyable, I am not sure that expert witnesses in cases involving school finance are particularly helpful to the judge who must decide the case. For each expert who testifies for the defense, there will be at least one other expert who will testify for the plaintiffs in the case, and they will disagree as to whether the state's school finance program is equitable.

*Q&V:* Have there been any shifts in the direction or focus of school finance litigation over time?

*RAR:* Yes, there has been a major shift in the focus of that litigation over the past 30 years or so. The first cases (following the US Supreme Court decision in *Rodriguez*) were based primarily on the due process and equal protection guarantees that are found in most state constitutions and dealt with claims that either taxpayers or students or both were being denied their constitutional rights. More recently, the focus has shifted to the educational provisions of the individual state constitutions, which tend to be marvelously ambiguous— i.e., what does “thorough and efficient” or “as nearly equal as practicable” really mean in terms of the educational provision the state is required to provide?

In recent years, we have witnessed a number of attempts to define an “adequate” education in monetary terms, building on previous work such as the research on the cost of providing education for handicapped children. In my opinion, the courts have not been particularly helpful in this regard, since they have described in rather general terms what the outcomes of schooling should look like (responsible citizenship, ability to compete for jobs successfully, good family members, etc.) without paying much attention to how these worthy goals can be accomplished. In short, they have tossed the ball back into the educators’ court. It is virtually inevitable that any proposal for school finance reform will be criticized by the stakeholders who are being disadvantaged. My observation is that in order to enact serious school finance reform one must have more “winners” than “losers,” which almost inevitably requires more funds to distribute. In the past three years, the big issue in state finance has been looming budget deficits and large increases in state school funding have not been forthcoming. Rather, the question has been one of how much can we cut state funding for public schools?

*Q&V:* And, in conclusion, in your opinion, does money matter in education? Also, can you get us started with a definition of adequacy?

*RAR:* Yes, money CAN matter in education. However, it is how the money is spent, not how much is spent, that is important. Simply spending more money for the same things as in the past will not do much good. We need far more research on the results (in terms of student performance) obtained from specific expenditures. The results from spending to reduce class size in the earliest grades, for example, show promise, as does greater attention to expenditures for the continuing professional development of school staff.

Adequacy in education requires that every child have access to a sound basic education regardless of his/her individual circumstances. I cannot specify the exact components of such an education. In fact, the components may well vary from one community to another because all communities are not alike. It certainly does not require the same level of spending for every child in the state or nation! And, as long as every child has access to a sound basic education, I would not be too concerned if some communities choose to spend beyond that level.

*Q&V:* Thank you, Professor Rossmiller. Once again our conversation has been informative and most enjoyable.