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Connections and Tensions Between University and School Districts: Research Review Boards and School-Based Research

Currently researchers connected to university contexts who conduct research involving human participants must receive approval from a research ethics board, and in the case of school-based research, from school district authorities. This article focuses on the ethics review of school-based research. Applications submitted to a research ethics board and a district research review committee serve as primary data for the study. Information presented relates to research interests, researchers' background, methodologies proposed, and board decisions. Emergent themes discussed are limited to two: a focus on student researchers and research ethics review, and the connections between the research review boards and their influence on school-based research.

Les chercheurs qui travaillent dans des contextes universitaires et dont la recherche implique des sujets humains doivent obtenir l'approbation d'un comité d'éthique et, dans le cas de la recherche qui se déroule dans les écoles, des autorités du district scolaire. Cet article porte sur la révision déontologique de la recherche dans les écoles en s'appuyant principalement sur les documents constituant la demande soumise à un comité d'éthique en recherche et un comité local d'examen de la recherche. Nous présentons des données sur les intérêts de recherche, les antécédents des chercheurs, les méthodologies proposées et les décisions des comités. Des thèmes qui en découlent, nous nous limitons à deux : les chercheurs étudiants et la révision déontologique, et les liens entre les comités d'éthique et leur influence sur la recherche qui implique les écoles.

Historically, ethical responsibility for a study rested solely with the researcher; this is no longer the case. The onus has shifted from the individual to regulatory bodies who sanction submissions for research projects according to approved guidelines and regulations. (Anderson, 1998, p. 16)

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Introduction

A growing interest in school-based research identified in various ways including action research (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2000; Carson & Sumara, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2001) and/or teacher research (Cochran-Smith, 1994; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Freeman, 1998; Goswami, 1987; Hollingsworth & Sockett, 1994) is evident in the literature. Schools are standard contexts researchers access to conduct educational research in Canada and the United States. With the growth of formal bodies and policies governing research and increased interest in school-based research, a greater emphasis on, and concern for, the ethical dimensions of such research have developed. School district research review committees (RRCs) and university research ethics boards (REBs) are reviewing research applications to ensure among other things that proposed school-based research follows ethical procedures. Such review boards generally work in isolation from each other although in most cases they review applications representing the same researchers and research plans.

In 1998 a national ethics policy, the *Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, was implemented across universities in Canada. Three federal granting agencies (the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, formerly the Medical Research Council of Canada; the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council; and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council) developed and approved this unified policy applicable to all disciplines of research. In order to be eligible to receive funding from the three federal granting agencies, researchers in Canadian universities had to be in compliance with the TCPS. University research ethics boards guided by these policies “approve, reject, propose modifications to, or terminate any proposed or ongoing research involving human subjects which is conducted within, or by members of, the institution” (TCPS, 1998, with 2000, 2002 updates, p. 1.2). The requirements for adherence to this policy are clearly stated in the Memorandum of Understanding between the three federal granting agencies and all Canadian universities (Canada, 2002).

The membership of the REB involved in our study included 12 faculty members representing various disciplines across the university and two community members. The REB’s membership met the minimal requirements for an REB composition as detailed in the TCPS.

The board must consist of a minimum of five members including both men and women.

- a. at least two members have broad expertise in the methods or in the areas of research that are covered by the REB
- b. at least one member is knowledgeable in ethics
- c. for biomedical research, at least one member is knowledgeable in the relevant law; this is advisable but not mandatory for other areas of research; and
- d. at least one member has no affiliation with the institution, but is recruited from the community served by the institution. (TCPS, 1998, with 2000, 2002 updates, p. 1.3)

The REB meets monthly to consider applications in need of full review. However, the majority of REB applications are given expedited reviews, a process involving a minimum of two members and the Chair.

In addition to REB approval, researchers who recruit participants in an elementary or secondary school setting are required to obtain approval from a

school board review committee when one is in operation. This is a result of the formalization of review processes in school districts and the direction provided in the TCPS, which insists that research extending beyond university jurisdiction also be given approval by “the REB [RRC], where such exists, with the legal responsibility and equivalent ethical and procedural safeguards in the country or jurisdiction where the research is to be done” (TCPS, 1998, with 2000, 2002 updates, p. 1.14).

Until recently few established research review committees were in place in school districts. The district involved in this study has a formalized review process to approve or deny school-based research proposals. They have developed comprehensive policies and procedures and successfully established a process that provides district administration with greater control over research conducted in its jurisdiction (District School Board of Niagara, 2001, 2000-2001, revised 2002).

The RRC membership reflected the requirements for the composition of the RRC as outlined in Policy D-3 and detailed in Administrative Procedure 4-6. The committee shall consist of:

Two Trustees

One representative of the ... Elementary Principals' Association, Secondary Administrators' Council, Special Education Services, Curriculum Services Consultant responsible for Research, Assessment, and Evaluation

Board Lawyer

Appropriate Supervisory Officer (ex officio)

The Committee may invite a classroom teacher(s) to provide input on specific projects

The RRC is mandated to meet a maximum of four times over the course of a school year to review requests. All reviews are conducted in these meetings, and recommendations are made according to a set of guidelines found in the *Educational Research Committee Procedures 2000-2001* (revised 2002, District School Board of Niagara, 2000). Recommendations are forwarded to the Education Program and Planning (EPP) Committee, which comprises superintendents and principals and is chaired by a trustee. The EPP considers the recommendations received and makes further recommendations to the Board of Education for final approval.

The Research

The aim of our research was to develop an understanding of the school-based research proposed and/or conducted in a large school district that involved the university Research Ethics Board (REB), school board Research Review Committee (RRC) or both in a review process and to examine the linkages between the REB and RRC and issues related to their review procedures.

Research questions helpful to constructing the overview of the school-based research included: What school-based research has been proposed and/or conducted in the school district since consolidation and the formalization of the district's research review process and since the implementation of the national *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS)? Who were the researchers? and What were the methodologies proposed? Research questions related to the two research review boards in-

cluded: What is the relationship between the REB and RRC? and How do these boards influence what is researched?

Primary data for this phase of our qualitative study included 274 research applications dated between January 1999 and December 2002 (with three from early 2003) related to school-based research submitted to the university REB and district RRC. Although research proposals are not evidence that research has been conducted, they do provide documentation of researchers' intentions and a window into the review process. The content analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Conostas, 1992) was limited to the information available in the applications. Although most of the files were complete (application form, board decisions, researcher responses), in some instances files were lacking final documents (e.g., formal school board permissions, final revised materials). In spite of limitations, our analysis resulted in the collation of useful descriptive information and the identification of issues relevant to our research questions.

The research team connected through our work on the university REB. Although positioned differently in relation to research and the ethics board, we decided to conduct a collaborative research project to pursue our common interests in school-based research and the ethics review process. At the time of the research, Janet was a consultant in the school district and the community representative on the REB. Deborah was the university Research Ethics Officer and worked closely with the REB. Susan, in addition to sitting on the REB, was (and continues to be) a member of the Faculty of Education and has responsibility for supervising individuals, many of whom are graduate students and practicing teachers interested in conducting research in schools.

Research Process

Before initiating the research, we submitted formal ethics applications to the REB and RRC and received official approval from both institutional bodies. We consulted Section C, Secondary Use of Data of the TCPS (1998, with 2000, 2002 updates) for guidance on procedural issues. Conditions in which researchers may access identifiable data are detailed in Articles 3.3 and 3.4. In this case we first had to ascertain which applications fitted our criteria of school-based research (approximately 1,600 were included in the total five-year period of interest). Obtaining free and informed consent from each of these applicants or removing all identifying information from the files was logistically impossible. Contacting individuals who submitted the 274 applications addressed in this article was an unrealistic task considering that applicants' contact information, especially that of student researchers, would have changed over time. The TCPS recognizes that "It may be impossible, difficult or economically unfeasible to contact all subjects in a study group to obtain informed consent" (p. 3.6)

The TCPS (1998, with 2000, 2002 updates) requires that the REB apply a "proportionate approach" (p. 3.5) in considering requests to access identifiable secondary data. "Under it, the REB should focus on projects above minimal risk, or modulate requirements and protection proportionate to the magnitude and probability of harms, including the likelihood that published data can be linked to individuals" (p. 3.5). We take the position that our research is well below the threshold of minimal risk and that our responsibility is to ensure confidentiality in the use of the data and not to acquire individual consent.

Although the TCPS is a standard policy applied across all Canadian universities, the interpretation of the principles is in the hands of individual universities.

During our initial meetings, we developed a systematic process to follow as we conducted the research and analyzed data. As a group we discussed questions, problems, issues, and the procedures necessary to ensure that we were as much as possible interpreting and analyzing data consistently. We used the university ethics application headings to record data related to our “a priori codes” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). In an effort to keep close to the data and support later claims to credibility, we analyzed applications by hand, using software to manage the database as it enlarged. Over a number of months and numerous meetings, we worked individually and sometimes in pairs to analyze data and save results in common spreadsheet software, which we merged after each group meeting.

Multiple people analyzing data, although useful in terms of bringing various lenses to bear, complicates the process as they struggle individually and as a group with questions of language and interpretation. We regularly cleansed our master file as a strategy for managing our primary database and addressing such challenges. Anomalies and discrepancies as well as resolutions for both were identified as a result of this process. Members of the team collectively reviewed draft copies of the master file to ensure the accuracy of information recorded. As a result of our process, we moved ahead feeling confident about the data as represented and hopeful that readers would be convinced of the credibility of our findings.

In addition to a priori codes, we identified codes that emerged as we interacted with the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 2002). These codes frequently arose as a result of our discussions when we met as a group for analysis purposes. We were often surprised by how our differing perspectives provided multiple and rich readings of data. We used our research journals to document our process as well as our understandings of data, which contributed greatly to our overall analysis.

Descriptive Data

Research ethics applications chosen for analysis indicated that researchers were planning school-based research, which for our purposes meant research connected to schooling contexts and involving students, teachers, and/or administrators. Among other things, our interest was in collating information about researchers’ background, research focus, and methodologies to be employed, which is useful information when constructing an overview.

Up to the writing of this article, we have analyzed 274 applications connected to school-based research. It is interesting to note that of the 274 applications, 205 indicated women as the principal researchers and only 66 had men as lead researchers. In three cases the sex of the researcher was not identifiable. Women submitted more than three times the number of applications than did men, which is not surprising considering that these were school-based research applications that involved educational contexts where women play a prominent role and the research proposed was often qualitative.

Of the 274 school-based research applications, 217 were student submissions. Graduate students, mostly students in the Master of Education program,

submitted 150 applications. These students were expected to fulfill a research requirement as part of their program of studies. We draw heavily on these applications to inform our discussion.

Undergraduate students submitted 67 applications related to honors theses or course assignments, and Faculty members submitted 52 applications related to their research programs (see Table 1).

Faculties and School-Based Applications

The applications analyzed were representative of a number of faculties. As shown in Table 2, the largest number of applications was connected to the Faculty of Education, either faculty members or student researchers. The next largest number fell under the social sciences, specifically in the area of Child and Youth Studies, a department similar to Education that benefits from access to children and schooling contexts for research purposes. The departments of Physical Education and Kinesiology (29 applications) and Community Health Sciences (18 applications) contributed the submissions from the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences.

The REB received 134 applications from both students and faculty connected to education, and the RRC received 31. The REB applications included school-based research planned for other districts in addition to the district involved in this research. In the past, REB approval for school-based research has not always been considered necessary on the grounds that teachers inquiring into their own practice fell under the purview of normal practice and did not need REB approval (Zeni, 2001). The number recorded above might have been larger if this had not been the case.

The *Other* category in Table 2 includes RRC applications received from outside agencies such as Statistics Canada and applications in which connections to university faculties or departments were not explicitly indicated. The RRC application did not require specific details such as faculty-department affiliation, which was asked for on the REB form. As part of the continued RRC's formalization, a new form requesting more comprehensive information is planned for implementation in the 2005-2006 school year.

Table 1
Who Are the Researchers?

	<i>Research Ethics Board</i>	<i>Research Review Committee</i>	<i>Total</i>
Number of applications	211	63	274
Lead researcher	162 female 46 male 3 (unclear)	43 female 20 male	205 female 66 male 3 (unclear)
Graduate students	125	25	150
Undergraduate students	55	12	67
Faculty members	31	21	52
Other (e.g., Statistics Canada)	0	5	5

Table 2
Faculties and School-Based Applications

<i>Faculties</i>	<i>Research Ethics Board</i>	<i>Research Review Committee</i>	<i>Total</i>
Education	134	31	165
Social sciences	41	10	51
Applied health sciences	35	12	47
Humanities	1	0	1
Other	0	8	8
Unsure	0	2	2
Total	211	63	274

Focus of Research Proposed

We constructed seven broad categories to represent data related to the research focus described in the applications.

Not surprisingly the focus most frequently cited related to various aspects of curriculum content and involved students as participants. Graduate students in education, many of whom were past or practicing teachers or administrators, submitted most of these applications. Ninety-three applications described research interests related to subjects such as language, math, science, health, and physical education.

About one third of the REB and RRC applications were assigned to the *Research on Teachers and Administrators* category. Collaborative teaching, portfolio use, and school-based planning were some of the general purposes for these research requests. Mentoring for principals and new teachers and teachers' attitudes about computers and the use of various teaching methodologies were also topics described.

Special-needs students were the focus of 27 applications. These requests were intended to explore inclusion for special-needs students, as well as programming for deaf students, students with autism, and students deemed gifted. Thirty-five applications fell under the umbrella of school culture including studies that were planning to investigate aspects of diversity, safe schools,

Table 3
Focus of Proposed Research

<i>Research Topic/ Focus</i>	<i>Research Ethics Board</i>	<i>Research Review Committee</i>	<i>Total</i>
Curricular issues	69	24	93
Teachers and administrators	72	9	81
School culture	27	8	35
Students with special needs	23	4	27
Assessment and testing	3	7	10
Research that could have been conducted outside schools	13	8	21
Miscellaneous	4	3	7
Total	211	63	274

and secondary school reform. The label *miscellaneous* was applied to areas not considered a neat fit under the seven categories (e.g., home schooling, research ethics, and school-based research).

Twenty-one of the 274 applications did not relate directly to the school environment, but targeted students. Examples included applications related to childhood asthma, children and advertising, and childhood poverty. Such topics could have been researched outside the school context. In these instances the schools provided a controlled environment where students and their families were accessible to researchers who might otherwise have had difficulty finding participants for their research.

Methodology and Proposed Research

The methodology planned for use in the proposed research was not always easily determined. The RRC forms did not require an explicit labeling of the methodology, and although researchers were asked to indicate choice of methodology on the REB application, they did not always comply, and we were left to discern from the description of methods and research plan what methodology(ies) would be employed. We use the descriptors *Unstated Qualitative* and *Unstated Quantitative* to indicate when this was the case.

When concepts and language such as *pretest/posttest*, *control group*, *experimental* or *quasi-experimental*, or *quantitative* were used, we designated that research as quantitative. Fifty-five of the protocols appeared to be quantitative. When language such as *descriptive*, *narrative*, or *ethnographic* was used or methods such as interviews described or labels such as *grounded theory* or *action research* were applied, we designated that research as qualitative. One hundred and seventeen appeared to be qualitative. Twenty-three protocols indicated both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection.

A substantial number of applications (79) did not directly state the methodology(ies) to be used, or inconsistencies existed between the stated methodology, types of data to be collected, and collection procedures planned for use. When in doubt we designated these applications as unclear.

Although methodologies are not limited to qualitative and/or quantitative, those described in the applications did fall under the umbrella of one or both of these categories. Although identifying methodologies was challenging the cur-

Table 4
Methodologies of Proposed Research

<i>Research Methodology</i>	<i>Research Ethics Board</i>	<i>Research Review Committee</i>	<i>Total</i>
Qualitative	75	4	79
Unstated qualitative	34	4	38
Quantitative	4	3	7
Unstated quantitative	41	7	48
Qualitative and quantitative	8	5	13
Unstated qualitative and quantitative	8	2	10
Unclear	41	38	79
Total	211	63	274

Table 5
Review Board Decisions

<i>Decisions</i>	<i>Research Ethics Board</i>	<i>Research Review Committee</i>	<i>Total</i>
Approved as is	50	14	64
Clarifications required	150	30	180
Resubmission	10	0	10
Denied	0	6	6
No decision/Unknown	1	13	14
Total	211	63	274

rent trend in education toward qualitative research in educational contexts (Page, 2001) was reflected in the data.

Review Board Decisions

Table 5 shows the decisions recorded in the school-based applications submitted to the REB and RRC. In the case of the REB, three times as many of the applications—150—required some degree of clarification, and only 50 were *approved as is*, and in the case of the RRC more applications also required clarifications than were *approved as is*. The fact that we placed 13 of the RRC applications in the category *no decision/unknown* reflects the fact that the RRC was, and continues to be, formalizing its processes. In the earliest applications, incomplete files did not include information related to the final decisions. The only application for the REB placed in this category was one requiring resubmission, but no evidence of resubmission appeared in the file or final decision recorded. It may be that no submission was made or that the file was incomplete.

Discussion

Student Researchers and the Ethics Review Process

Graduate students in education submitted most of the applications proposing school-based research to the REB and RRC, and qualitative methods were those most often indicated (see Tables 1 and 4). In the past, the close tie between “normal” teaching practice and research has confused the question of what instances of school-based inquiry need formal university ethics approval. Currently, however, the TCPS requirement that all research involving humans have university ethics approval ensures that not much school-based research can forfeit the review process, including inquiry that can sometimes be construed as in the “zone of accepted practice” (Zeni, 2001, p. 158).

One of the issues emerging from our data analysis related to students and their level of knowledge and expertise in regard to the research planned. The most common decision recorded in REB and RRC files was a request for clarifications. In the case of surface-type clarifications, researchers received a list of “to dos” that if followed easily took care of reviewers’ concerns. Such clarifications included requests for additional information (e.g., supervisor contact information, specific details for consent forms), or consistency across sections of the application (e.g., description of methods not matching details in consent form). Inconsistencies recorded suggested that many student re-

searchers were treating applications as a list of random questions that needed to be answered rather than conceptualizing the sections as representative of the interrelated issues connected to ethical research practices. The review process seemed to be approached as an instrumental exercise. This may be partly due to the pressure applied to students (both internally and institutionally) to receive ethics approvals and to move forward with their research in a timely fashion.

More substantive clarification requests indicating the need for students to think more deeply about the ethical implications of their research plans and requiring knowledge not easily obtained on demand were more troubling. For example, students planning to conduct qualitative research focused on sensitive areas (e.g., self-esteem issues for First Nations adolescent girls, the school experiences of adolescent gay and lesbian students) left doubt in their responses to questions on applications as to whether they had particular kinds of knowledge related to the context, participants, and/or methodology necessary to ensure the protection of vulnerable participants.

Although the REB is not mandated to comment on research design or methodology unless clearly connected to ethical issues, the fact that we sometimes had difficulty in ascertaining the methodology (e.g., methodology designated as action research but not related to the researcher's examination of his or her own practices or that of the participants), that inconsistencies between methodology and methods were documented (e.g., grounded theory indicated but data collection and analysis not supporting theory construction in the context), and that so many applications at the conclusion of the analysis were placed in the *unclear* category reflects (at least minimally) the methodological expertise of applicants and is cause for concern.

Although applicants may have been aware of the possibilities of ethical complications arising in the research context, this was not always evident in the files. For example, in schooling contexts, power circulates (Foucault, 1979, 1980) and imbalances exist between teachers and students, and researchers must strategize to guard against exploiting their participants and must conduct their research respectfully. Clarifications in this area indicated that student researchers were either unaware of or did not acknowledge these power dynamics and thus did not take into account how they might influence the research process. In one case a student researcher responded by stating that he was offended by a request for clarification about potential power relationships (clarification response). Another student researcher who was asked to describe strategies in place to ensure that children and parents did not feel coerced into participating felt obliged to emphasize to the REB her commitment as a teacher to ethical conduct (clarification response). Owen (2004) suggests that a key problem is that

Teacher-researchers often do not distinguish between their complementary but sometimes conflicting roles—as teacher, administrator, and researcher in the context of their role as professionals within the school system and as student-researcher conducting research as a part of a degree program. (p. 22)

Similar frustrations are also documented in comments from experienced researchers responding to clarifications on their own or on their students' behalf

(e.g., form is far too bureaucratic, REB members lack the necessary methodological expertise), a trend also reflected in the report *Giving Voice to the Spectrum* (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Special Working Committee, 2004). We argue that from an ethical standpoint, children in schools are considered vulnerable populations, and special care must be taken when they are asked to participate in research.

Currently our individual responses as reviewers of REB applications is to request clarifications from student researchers that provide additional information about their knowledge and expertise in relation to the research planned. Although it may be argued that supervisors will have the necessary expertise to support student researchers, in many faculties of education members have large numbers of students to supervise and limited time and resources to dedicate to supervisory duties.

Whether or not substantive or surface-type clarifications were requested, the files were ultimately approved. No denials were recorded in the 274 REB applications. We argue that this reflects the intent of the REB to assist researchers in crafting applications that meet the requirements of the TCPS (albeit from the board and individual reviewers' perspectives) and not to prevent or obstruct research initiatives, an accusation made at times by researchers (Adler & Adler, 2002; Owen, 2004). In the case of the RRC, six decisions were made to deny research applications. These included an application that had a questionnaire assessed as inappropriate for children and others that raised concerns of possible legal implications. Regardless of reasons for denials, the review process did not include appeal procedures. The RRC is free to deny proposals that do not meet their criteria regardless of whether such research received REB approval. This is an important consideration given the number of REB applications for which access to contexts under school district jurisdiction was essential.

Tilley (1998) has argued that although the formal ethics review process is meant to protect participants, often this process as practiced provides more protection for the institution and the researchers than for the participants. Formal approval from the review boards when understood as the concerns for ethics taken care of can lead to a false sense of security on the part of student researchers. The REB and RRC maintain a degree of control (some would argue too much control) over research conducted by requiring the completion of research applications (Owen, 2004). However, this is in the initial stages and related to plans on paper. Institutional ethics boards have limited influence, as researchers make numerous in situ decisions informed mainly by the knowledge and experience they take into the research contexts.

Research Review Boards and Their Influence on School-Based Research

Although the REB and RRC are concerned with ethical issues and serve similar functions in their review of applications, they operate in separate contexts and have different purposes. The REB carefully scrutinizes particular aspects of proposed research to ensure that participants' rights are protected and that harm is not done. However, REB discussions about research quality are limited to cases where a lack of quality clearly influences the ethical dimensions of the research negatively or when projects pose more than minimal risk to participants. The latter direction is in accordance with the TCPS (1998, with 2000,

2002 updates), which directs REBs to “adopt a proportionate approach based on the general principle that the more invasive the research, the greater should be the care in assessing the research” (p. 1.6).

In contrast, the RRC reviewers, in addition to focusing on ethical concerns, are mandated to judge the quality and merit of the research and the value of the described outcomes for both the research context and the participants (District School Board of Niagara, 2000). The RRC also considers the degree of intrusiveness of the research into the regular workings of the research context, as well as the amount of research already in place or being requested in the district, specific school, or student body.

The experience and expertise of REB and RRC members vary. Faculty members on the REB are collectively experienced in a variety of research methodologies and have research experience. However, REBs have been criticized for their traditional positivist leanings and the limited expertise available on boards related to research situated in interpretive, qualitative paradigms (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Special Working Committee, 2004), which would include a large portion of school-based research. The RRC membership consists of individuals who may have some research experience, but have limited expertise in research methodologies. In spite of this, RRC clarifications were often related to methodological issues, especially when the research proposed was qualitative. For example, a common question was related to small sample size. The concern was whether there were enough participants to generalize results even though generalization was not the intent of the qualitative study. Reviewers questioned whether data were sufficient to draw conclusions, requested changes in interview schedules, and gave direction to researchers on the selection of participants.

The RRC application form, although not asking for a comprehensive discussion of methodology (as does the REB form), did have a section headed “Research Design” that asked about “sample procedures and how each hypothesis will be tested” (District School Board of Niagara, 2002). A quantitative lens was being applied to qualitative research as part of the clarification or modification request procedures, an indication of the influence of positivist perspectives on the everyday understandings of research. As members of an REB, we were not surprised to document such an emphasis considering that in the university context, where board members are also researchers, we still find ourselves in conversations that reflect the criticism of REBs documented in the literature regarding the biomedical, positivist influence embedded in the ethics review process (Pritchard, 2002; van den Hoonaard, 2002). Our analysis of requested clarifications indicates that the same influence is present in the RRC review process.

The formalization of the RRC evolved simultaneously with the School Board’s growing interest in monitoring and influencing research in its jurisdiction. Although the number of application rejections was small, proposals unrelated to the district’s educational concerns were more likely to be rejected than those that better reflected their interests. For example, in the past, the Board has had interest in literacy and gender issues, and applications reflecting these interests have been approved. The RRC has denied applications based on research related to areas such as gambling and smoking, concerned that similar

studies had already been conducted and that the results would be of little direct benefit to the board population.

When cross-referencing applications, we analyzed RRC files of researchers connected to the university who were planning to involve human participants in their research, but had not made an REB submission. Although the TCPS was introduced in 1998, its influence on faculty practice has taken time, especially in the case of school-based research. In REB applications instances occurred when schools in the RRC jurisdiction were identified as research contexts, but there was no evidence of an application submitted or permission sought from the RRC. In the past, researchers intending to conduct school-based research often acquired informal permission through principals and schools and not a formal decision from an REB or district RRC. Researchers have also needed time to adjust to the expectation of a formal review through a district review committee.

Although extensive communication lines may not currently be in place, the policies and practices of the review committees have the potential to affect each other. We illustrate this point in regard to reciprocity, an important concept in qualitative research tied to issues of ethical conduct. One of the criteria the RRC uses to decide on quality is related to possible benefits accrued. For the RRC, research that is seen to benefit participants and research contexts concretely has a greater possibility of receiving approval. The emphasis on reciprocity is embedded in their review process. A statement about research benefits to the community at large and to participants specifically is an REB requirement; however, in the applications we analyzed, these benefits were often related to the larger research community rather than the specific research context.

Feedback proposed by researchers was in many cases limited to obligatory letters of appreciation or promises of summary reports. On rare occasions a promise was made to provide participants with an inservice based on the researcher's findings or related to materials produced. For the most part, the usefulness of the feedback to the research context and participants was not obvious in the application. Although REB reviewers' requests for clarifications often addressed applicants' plans for feedback procedures, the critique reflected a concern for proper construction of feedback materials rather than a questioning of their value.

The current RRC emphasis on *giving back* to participants and research contexts will ultimately force researchers, university-based and otherwise, who propose school-based research to take up issues of reciprocity more than superficially, perhaps requiring researchers to share the knowledge constructed in useful ways. A thank-you letter and the promise of a report may have sufficed in the past, but we argue that with the current formalization of review processes in school districts this is unlikely to continue.

Faculties of education that work with graduate students who are practicing teachers and wish to conduct research in schooling contexts either in their own classrooms or in those of others need to take this growing formalization of RRC review procedures seriously. Already conducting school-based research is becoming more complicated because of the two review processes and in most cases the additional requirements of a clarification process. The RRC has only

four mandated meetings per year and multiple approval levels, which makes it difficult for students to meet tight deadlines.

School-based research is often the direct result of specific questions that teachers investigate related to their everyday practice that are not necessarily concerns of the district, but are of educational value. If the RRC begins to set criteria formally for areas to be researched, the researchers' choice of focus—what they see as worthwhile and have a keen interest in—is less likely to be approved. In the future, school boards may need to be convinced of the importance of teacher-focused research. We argue that both researchers and school boards experience loss when worthwhile research is dismissed because of a narrowing of research areas.

Conclusion

Although differences exist between the REB and RRC, both institutional bodies believe in supporting research and ensuring ethical practice in the conduct of school-based research. They are working toward developing systems that support rather than hinder research initiatives. However, care is needed to ensure that these boards are not working at cross purposes. Our research, although highlighting the lack of communication between the REB and RRC, points to the importance of the boards being proactive in finding ways to work together. Both review boards exert a great deal of energy and time on revising application forms and review procedures; however, more emphasis needs to be given to a consideration of ethical principles in the actual practice of research, an emphasis sometimes lost in the everyday business of ethics review.

The REB provides support to researchers who complete applications through the materials (e.g., Web site forms) and expertise made available. However, the board is limited in its ability and responsibility to the education of student researchers. Faculties of education need to pay particular attention to the education and training of students in research methodology and respectful research practices (Tilley, 1998) so that students can successfully fulfill the research review board requirements, but more important, address as much as possible ethical issues in situ. Currently research courses, research experience (e.g., research assistantships), and supervisory instruction are some of the avenues available for this preparation. For those who supervise students conducting qualitative school-based research, it might also be useful to consider the following questions in the initial stages of research design. What is appropriate research for students completing program requirements? Do they have the necessary background in relation to the research context and participants, the appropriate methodological knowledge? Will they have the necessary support to conduct the research they are planning? The student researcher's degree of knowledge and/or experience in relation to the research influences all aspects of the research process, beginning with the design and including the final representation of findings. A match between that knowledge and experience and the research planned is important to support ethical research practices.

School districts including the one in this study might wish to consider developing inservice sessions about school-based research and ethical conduct for the teacher researchers under their jurisdiction who are interested in conducting school-based research. This could be achieved through collaboration

with individuals in faculties of education that are also interested in developing initiatives with schools and school districts. The RRC may also accrue benefits through developed partnerships with individual faculty members who have expertise and interest in school-based research.

It is to the REB's advantage to develop and maintain lines of communication with the RRC to promote opportunities that encourage faculty and students to conduct school-based research as part of their research programs or as completion for degree requirements. As well, the REB and members of the Faculty of Education might consider collaborating to develop educational experiences and procedures that enhance the abilities of student researchers to meet the demands of ethics review and implementing ethical research practices.

Although acknowledging that this research is context-specific and limited in its focus on research applications, we argue that it contributes to a sparse but growing literature about school-based research and research review boards. Our collaborative research framework, which involved members of an REB, a district RRC, and a faculty of education, provides a framework for those beyond this specific context to begin working with others to build knowledge and procedures appropriate to school-based research and ethical research practices. Ultimately, we hope this article initiates a much-needed discussion in the field.

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