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Linking Faculties of Education with Classroom Teachers Through Collaborative Research

It almost goes without saying that a major reason for promoting closer relations between classroom teachers and faculties of education is to improve educational practice in the schools. Some educational observers, noting that the process of educational reform in developed societies has been extraordinarily difficult, might quip, "we've tried everything else, why not university/school collaboration." It is true that reform has been slow. Cuban, after a review of documentary sources spanning ninety years concluded that there is "a stubborn continuity in the nature of instruction."[1] And he cites only a few examples of close collaboration between practicing teachers and university faculty members in these nine decades.

Educational Reform in North America

In the recent past there has been increased public pressure for school reform, or at least for improved educational results. In the United States, the spring of 1983 could even be called the season of the critical reports. In April and May alone five major reports were issued concerning education.[2] They presented a generally gloomy view based on selections of testimony and reports prepared by individuals called in as consultants or witnesses by the commissions.[3] Although the reports were independent responses to perceived problems in education, the disturbing facts they contained received extensive media coverage within a short period and the somewhat alarmist tone of some of their rhetoric imparted a sense of crisis.

These reports viewed the school as the institution to be blamed for the problems of education, exhorting parents to "be vigilant in demanding the best our schools can provide" with little attention to ways in which parents might collaborate with schools to improve education. Although the poor quality of teachers was singled out for concern, there was little focus on specific ways to improve their preparation or performance. In fact, only one out of forty papers commissioned for the National Commission on Excellence focussed on teacher training.

The assumption underlying the majority of these reports is that competition should be relied upon as the motivation to promote reform. Students should become more competitive for grades; teachers should become more competitive for pay increases; parents should become more competitive to get their children into the best schools; universities and faculties should become more competitive with each other for qualified undergraduates. All of these educational reforms should result in the United States becoming more competitive economically with other countries. A similar set of assumptions about competition has recently received support in parts of Canada. Increased competition in education may result in increased productivity. One could conclude that there is no role for collaboration and cooperation. In fact, however, research on classroom processes suggests that cooperative effort is often more effective than is competition.[4] And where programs can bring together those who have basically common goals — such as teachers and members of education faculties — it deserves to be tried.

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Teachers and Educational Reform

To understand the problems and possibility for educational reform from the point of view of teachers, let us examine the roles they play in the classroom.[5] First, the teacher is an instructor — responsible for imparting information and teaching skills. Closely related to this function is the teacher's job as gatekeeper — deciding which students will experience success or failure, which will be admitted to university preparatory classes or sent to remedial programs. The teacher also plays a role as a citizen — socializing Canadian tradition and culture. Finally, there is the teacher's role as helper — developing positive personal relations with students.

Competitive motivation is likely to be important in the performance of each of these roles. In the instructor role, can the class test scores be improved so as to outperform other classes? In the role of gatekeeper, can one demonstrate that one's students are better prepared than others for external examinations? As a citizen, can one socialize national loyalty and wean immigrant children away from what is often a cooperative mode of interaction into an individually competitive mode? As a helper, can one avoid the charge that some pupils are being given more assistance than others? Although certain aspects of competitive motivation may have positive results, there are negative outcomes as well. There is considerable value in helping teachers to collaborate with each other and in fostering collaborative modes of interaction between them and other individuals, for example, members of university education faculties seeking to stimulate reform from outside the schools.

Collaboration as a mode of reform could address some problems identified in teaching as a profession. Lortie notes that teachers rarely have the opportunity to see themselves as "colleagues...sharing a viable, generalized body of knowledge and practice, and hence do not develop a common technical or professional culture."[6] Fullan, writing about educational reform in the U.S. and Canada, also notes the problem of teacher isolation, supported by a norm of privacy about what happens in each classroom. He concludes that teachers need the opportunity "more simply to converse about the meaning of change."[7]

It is not just a problem of isolation or loneliness, however. It is also the absence of interchange between teachers that limits their opportunity to reflect or be analytic about educational practice or problems. Lortie notes that "the preparation of teachers does not seem to result in the analytic turn of mind one finds in other occupations whose members are trained in colleges and universities...One hears little mention of the disciplines of observation, comparison, rules of inference, sampling, testing hypotheses."[8] A survey of faculty and students in eleven English speaking faculties of education in Canada asked for an assessment of the importance attached in their institutions to a set of goals and also how much importance should be attached to each of them. The goal "preparing teachers who can integrate theory and practice" was believed to be addressed by only about thirty percent of students and faculty; about ninety percent believed that this goal was very important. The discrepancy on this goal was greater than in any other of the nine goals included.[9]

The collaboration of university education faculties with teachers in designing and conducting classroom research has a unique potential for addressing the problems of isolation, lack of reflection, and the failure to integrate theory and practice. This article will focus on possibilities for such collaborative research. An Australian and a Canadian have described research by teachers as follows:

> Emphasis is placed on the nature of the research act, that is, on disciplined inquiry, rather than on specialized research design and methodology; the interrelationship between teaching and research is

> strengthened by enabling the teacher to see his or her normal teaching activity as one that includes research activity.[10]

Thus to the teacher roles described above we should add the cross-cutting role of "teacher as researcher."

Classroom Action Research: The Cambridge Institute of Education Network

One of the places where research by teachers has been ecouraged and documented most thoroughly is the Cambridge Institute of Education in England. Through the work of John Elliott a Classroom Action Research Network has been instituted with regular publications.

About ten years ago, in an attempt to move away from the process-product teaching model in which the teachers' behavior was seen as the cause of student learning, a new approach was tried with a group of forty teachers who were working on inquiry/discovery teaching. The classroom was assessed from several points of view in order to reflect reciprocal influences.[11] Teachers were encouraged to participate in the collection of data about their classrooms from at least three perspectives, namely, field notes kept by teachers with reflections on classroom events; classroom observations, either by other teachers or by project observers; teacher interviews, sometimes prompted by a video or audio recording of part of the observation; and student interviews or written surveys. Some teachers kept field notes in preference to being observed, while others participated in several kinds of data collection; some took part in identifying salient patterns in their teaching, sometimes with the observer alone and sometimes with other teachers; some developed teams to observe each others' classes. The project leaders noted that teachers adopted methods which provided illuminating but not overwhelming data. However, over the course of the project, the large majority of teachers seemed to become more responsive to feedback from students and to become more effective monitors of their own practice.

The classroom action research method seemed especially well suited to helping teachers understand how they led discussions. What did they do that might constrain students' expressions of opinion? Did they change topics abruptly, leading students to conclude that all possible opinions had been expressed? Did they call for premature consensus or react to some opinions as if they were correct and belittle others as uninformed?

Elliott and his co-workers do not see classroom action research as a way to provide generalizable empirical research findings but rather as a way to help teachers generate and examine explanations for their own teaching behavior. On the basis of this experience he draws the following conclusion about the problem of relating theory to practice:

> One does not first understand a theoretical principle about education and then apply it in an analysis of practice . . . Theoretical knowledge contributes to the learning of a practical skill only after a certain level of practical knowledge has first been acquired . . . Teachers learned new techniques on the basis of their perceived instrumentality, congruence with existing practice, and cost in time and effort, rather than on the basis of a knowledge of underlying theoretical principles."[12]

Thus, the introduction of classroom action research seems to have enormous potential as a source of training for teachers after they have spent several years in the classroom. It is also a useful way to reconnect them with members of the education faculty, especially those who are interested in educational innovation and renewal.

It is interesting to note that some individuals have written both practical guides to doing research in one's classroom and reflective essays about the conceptualization and value of such a process in teacher emancipation.[13]

> Research, enquiry, self-monitoring are all aspects of a similar activity, because they all require systematic, self-conscious and rigorous reflection to be of any value. The problem is that psychological research with its emphasis on statistical manipulation has captured the educational imagination so much that most people cannot think of research in any other terms . . . But such criteria as validity, reliability, and generalisability are necessary if we are to escape the sentimental anecdote that often replaces research designs in education and gives teacher research such a bad name . . . Teacher research(ers) need to establish standards and criteria that are applicable to their area of activity, rather than assume (and then reject) criteria designed for different procedures.[14]

Essential Features of Research in Classrooms

There are three essentials of research which should probably be preserved as criteria in classroom research.

First, one should seek objectivity. That does not necessarily mean a quantitative approach, but it does mean trying at some point in the process to identify assumptions and possible barriers to objectivity. Objectivity does not necessarily mean the use of a standardized or multiple choice test, but it does mean that the interpretation of an observation or scoring of an open-ended response is checked out with others to avoid an interpretation which is meaningful only to the individual who constructed it.

Second, one attempts to communicate to colleagues the major steps in the process of designing the research and analyzing its meaning. That process helps to fulfill the objectivity criterion detailed above. When one must take the perspective of someone else in communicating, a more reflective examination of the problem often results.

Third, one searches for alternatives. In measurement that means the kind of triangulation of methodology discussed by Elliott in his group — for example, giving surveys to students or scoring their open-ended responses to questions, having another teacher observe a lesson, and keeping field notes. Because it is impossible to control all the important factors in a study in a school setting, the generation of alternative explanations for findings is also important.

These three criteria of classroom research are more important in teacher research than strict rules about random assignment, attempts to fully assess internal or external validity, or access to large samples. Perhaps there will come a day when faculties of education devote equal time to instruction in teacher action research for the purposes of stimulating reflection and innovation *and* to more traditional research methodology for the purpose of generalization of findings.

Team Research Involving Teachers and University Faculty in the United States

Tikunoff and Mergendoller have described programs designed to develop research skills as a stimulus to professional growth in urban, rural and suburban settings.[15] Teams were constituted consisting of at least one teacher, one research specialist, and one specialist in staff development (in most cases several teachers were included). In this process:

> teachers are encouraged to acquire new ways of thinking about their own classroom problems. Through direct involvement with teachers, researchers can learn to identify new research procedures and methods and become aware of critical research issues they had not previously considered. Similarly, the trainer/developer may acquire new skill and insight into classroom functioning from extended work with teachers, and may be able to design more appropriate in-service education programs.[16]

Evaluations of the work of these teams suggested that teachers became able to think through problems and select strategies for inquiry into solutions; team members acquired skills in collabora-

tion and discussion; participants became more interested in the results of inquiry and more interested in trying out innovations in their classrooms.

> Participants began to rely less on conventional wisdom and more upon prior research and/or expert testimony . . . Team members (especially the teacher members) began to question one another regarding the empirical accuracy of statements, reports, and hypotheses.[17]

In general the working relationship between universities and schools benefitted from these experiences.

Characteristics of the Interaction of Faculty and Teachers

Collaborative research between university faculty members and teachers has been tried on both sides of the Atlantic and seems to have some similar characteristics. Day from the University of Nottingham[18] and Oja from the University of New Hampshire[19] have arrived at remarkably similar conclusions about the roles played by university faculty members who collaborate with classroom teachers. First, especially at the beginning of a project, the faculty member serves as a knowledge broker, filling in gaps of information often about research methodology. Second, the university collaborator throughout the project promotes group and interpersonal processes by helping to define goals, asking clarifying questions, raising issues about the context in which the research is conducted, reflecting and acknowledging uncertainty on the part of participants, and recognizing blocks to progress. This is an especially important role because teachers are not always experienced in the kind of planning involved in research. Third, university collaborators serve an important function as symbols of the importance of the research endeavor and as models of research objectivity and problem solving strategies; they provide reassurance that experimentation and reflection is valuable and that solutions can be found to perplexing problems. Finally, the university collaborator serves as a detective, helping to fit divergent pieces of information together from the perspective of an outsider. These roles are no easier for some educational research specialists to adopt than the role of researcher is for some teachers.

The benefits to teachers of doing research in their classrooms include increased colleagueship and enhanced opportunity for reflection about practice which can lead to a less passive role in educational improvement and an enhanced sense of professionalism. Field based research exposes university faculty members, even those who do not regularly supervise students, to classroom realities. Experience in collaborative research efforts make it more likely that teachers will feel comfortable seeking advice from education faculty because they feel that their own problems are better understood. Finally, collaborative research allows access to types of data which may be difficult or impossible to obtain under other circumstances.

Unique Advantages to Bi-national Collaborative Research

In addition to attempting to advance collaborative research between teachers and university faculty, there are unique advantages to expanding collaborative research on a bi-national basis. To focus this, let us return to one of the roles played by the classroom teacher (discussed earlier). The teacher-researcher in the role of citizen, or perhaps more accurately the role of socializer of citizenship, can best be understood in a bi-national context. National feeling in Canada is widely believed to be less chauvinistic than in the U.S., having even been called "hesitant nationalism."[20] Understanding national identity is a vital part of understanding social and political attitude development, and collaborative studies are needed to understand the differences which exist between Western democracies as well as their similarities. Another issue open to comparative investigation is understanding the influence of the British heritage of Canada, with its particular symbols and orientation. In particular, what role does the different conception of individual rights play, and

what impact does Canada's history as a member of the British Empire have on it? What are the unique aspects of Canadian society which the teacher as a socializer of citizenship should be aware of?

Approaches to values and moral education in the school seem to differ between the U.S. and Canada also. A recent survey found Canadian teachers to be more comfortable with directive approaches and less comfortable with techniques such as values clarification, when compared with teachers in the United States.[21] Should that be explained as a result of more familiarity with hierarchies of authority? Is the more explicitly recognized role of the church in education important to this difference? What are the implications for values education practice?

Bi-national research between Canada and the United States provides a unique opportunity to look at the influence of regionalism on social values. Some recent work suggests that this is much more important a factor for Canadian than for U.S. adults.[22] Is this also true for young people? If so, what are the implications for the teacher as a socializer of citizenship?

Conclusions

There is much to be said for collaboration as a motive for improving education. This cooperative effort has two specific manifestations for Canadians — research involving members of university faculties of education in a collaborative effort with teachers and research involving individuals from Canada and the U.S. The mechanisms for doing this can vary widely. The common product should be enhanced opportunities for reflective analysis of problems, improvements in educational practice, a better blend of the strengths of education faculties and teachers, and a stronger sense of professional self-worth among teachers.

Notes

1. Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Continuity and Change in American Classrooms 1890-1980.* (New York: Longman, 1984), p. 2.
2. These included *A Nation at Risk* from the Commission on Excellence appointed by Secretary of Education Bell; *America's Competitive Challenge* from the Business and Higher Education Forum; *Action for Excellence* from the Education Commission of the States; and *Academic Preparation for College* from the College Board.
3. These reports thus differed from *A Place Called School* by John Goodlad and *High School* by Ernest Boyer, which were written by teams of scholars who had themselves gathered and interpreted empirical data.
4. This is extensively documented in the work of David and Roger Johnson; Herbert Walberg's summary, "Synthesis of Research on Teaching," prepared for the *Third Handbook of Research on Teaching*, edited by Merlin Wittrock (Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 1983) indicates that the link between cooperative practices in classrooms and achievement is one of the most well documented findings in research on teaching.
5. This categorization of teacher roles is further expanded in my chapter in *Intercultural Counselling and Assessment*, edited by R. Samuda and A. Wolfgang (Toronto: C. V. Hogrefe, 1985).
6. Dan Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 79.
7. Michael Fullan, *The Meaning of Educational Change* (New York: Teachers College, 1982), p. 121.
8. Lortie, *op. cit.*

9. Cited in Fullan, *op. cit.*

10. Lois Foster and Mary Nixon, "Teacher as Researcher: The Problem Reconsidered," *Canadian Journal of Education*, 3:1, (1978), p. 79.

11. John Elliott, "Implications of Classroom Research for Professional Development." *World Yearbook of Education*, 1980, pp. 308-324; John Elliott, "Developing Hypotheses about Classrooms from Teachers' Practical Constructs: An Account of the Work of the Ford Teaching Project." *Interchange*, 7:2, (1976-77),pp. 2-22.

12. Quoted by Fullan (*op. cit.*), p. 269-270 from an unpublished paper by John Elliott.

13. David Hopkins, "Doing Research in Your Own Classroom," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 64:11, (1982), pp. 274-5 is the practical guide; David Hopkins, "Teacher Research: Back to Basics," in *Action Research in Schools: Getting it into Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Institute of Education, CARN Bulletin Number 6, 1984), pp. 94-99 is the more reflective discussion.

14. Hopkins, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

15. William Tikunoff and John Mergendoller, "Inquiry as a Means to Professional Growth: The Teacher as a Researcher," *Staff Development*, 82nd Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 210-227.

16. Tikunoff and Mergendoller, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

17. Tikunoff and Mergendoller, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

18. C. W. Day, "External Consultancy: Supporting School-based Curriculum Development," *Action Research in Schools: Getting it Into Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Institute of Education, CARN Bulletin Number 6, 1984).

19. Sharon Oja, "Role Issues in Practical Collaborative Research on Change in Schools." Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April 1984.

20. Comparison of American and Canadian nationalism made by David Statt, "The Influence of National Power in the Child's View of the World," *Journal of Peace Research*, 3, (1974), pp. 245-6. Discussion of role of Canadian studies in forming national identity to be found in A. B. Hodgetts, *What Culture? What Heritage?* (Toronto: OISIE, 1968) and in Paul Collins, "Canadian Studies: Something Old — Something New," in *Precepts, Policy and Process: Perspectives on Contemporary Canadian Education*, (London, Ontario: Alexander, Blake Associates, 1977), pp. 231-246.

21. R. Hersh & S. Pagliuso. "A Comparison of Two Moral Education Surveys." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 58, (1977), pp. 773-74.

22. Roger Gibbons, *Regionalism: Territorial Politics in Canada and the United States* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1982).