



Research in Schools of Education

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Shortly after I became Dean of the School of Education of the University of Wisconsin I had occasion to ask assistance from the Dean of the Graduate School. My mission was to obtain space and equipment for a research project on handwriting and the other basic skills of learning. The graduate dean, a distinguished research scientist himself, capsuled an historical image of educational research in schools of education with the needling remark: "I was under the impression that all that is required for research in education is a desk, a bookshelf, and some old, musty reference books from which to quote."

Until recent years, research in schools of education, such as there was, consisted all too often of the accumulation of authoritative statements to support espoused educational dogma. Occasionally a scholar would project a new theory. Considerable information was collected about the status of affairs in education. Little was done, however, either to test the theories or to change existing practice.

Perhaps the primary reason why schools of education have given so little attention to research is the original priorities they accepted. When such divisions were created in universities, they took as their foremost obligation the preparation of teachers. Thus, the time and energy of professors of education were consumed by planning, managing, and teaching in programs of teacher education. A second objective was service to schools and teachers in the field. Extension and summer session programs were organized to upgrade the professional competence of teachers and administrators. Such ventures represented added teaching burdens for faculties in education. In addition, consultative services were made available to school officials and boards of education to assist them with the problems of expansion that seem to have always been with the schools in the United States during this century.

Research has always been an admitted function of schools of education, not so much, perhaps, because

professors and deans of education were strongly committed to this objective but more because of the university traditions that made research an essential institutional obligation. Despite the lip service given to educational research, however, only in a few institutions was much done to fulfill this function. Schools of education did not attempt to give equal priority to research along with teaching and service. Rather they saw research as something to be taught in graduate courses and to be required for graduate degrees. Professors who taught the research courses and directed the graduate theses and dissertations typically did little research themselves. Such platonic involvement was due largely, no doubt, to lack of time and energy but also, one suspects, because of weak commitments to research as a way of life for scholars in the pedagogical fields.

A number of the older and larger schools of education did establish, relatively early, bureaus of educational research. These operations, however, tended to be service-minded

rather than research-oriented. Major activities of such administrative units centered in conducting surveys of school systems as guides to expansion. Few educational research bureaus developed programs of empirical research, although some sponsored testing programs that served analytical and evaluative purposes.

Laboratory schools, maintained as adjunct to schools of education, typically claimed as a type of "and also" objective: research to improve schools. Here too, however, the commitment was primarily to teacher preparation. The facilities of laboratory schools in most institutions have been completely committed to demonstrations and clinical practice for prospective teachers. Only a handful of such schools ever move strongly for any sustained period of time toward fulfilling their research commitments.

Developing a Research Component in Schools of Education

History may well record that the development of a research component in schools of education really started getting off the ground with the passage of federal legislation—P.L. 83-531—that established the cooperative research program in the United States Office of Education. In 1956 the first funds were appropriated to support contract research in institutions of higher learning and in state departments of public instruction. Over the first decade of its existence, this program has been the stimulus for increased interest in educational research. It has made possible research by faculty members in schools of education aimed at solving critical problems confronting schools.

The expansion of educational research in schools of education moved slowly at first. Of the estimated 150 qualified educational researchers in

the United States in 1960, only about half were on the faculties of schools of education; most of the others were employed by the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey. Many deans and professors of education were less than enthusiastic about entering into the research field. One inhibiting attitude was the concern that controls might come with federal support. Another was the unwillingness of administrative officials to shift faculty time from teaching courses to research. More of a brake than anyone likes to admit was the general lack of faith in scientific research as a means of solving problems in education. Most professors and deans of education, although they held doctor's degrees, and presumably were trained for research, had not really accepted the scientific method as appropriate in the field of education. Undoubtedly, some saw in the new move toward empirical testing of theory challenges to their own approaches to professional practice.

Whatever the reasons for the reluctance of schools of education to give higher priority to educational research, the reticence to move in this direction and the lack of imagination concerning the contributions of research to improving all aspects of education were strongly in evidence. Had it not been for the persistent faith and determined efforts of congressmen and certain lay leaders, aided by only a handful of professional educators in the beginning, the cooperative educational research program would surely have died in infancy. This small core succeeded, however, in generating sufficient grass roots support to obtain increases in budgetary support from the Congress. Federal funds for educational research have grown from just over two million dollars in 1962 to over one hundred million dollars this year. In addition, funds for re-

search on education and related problems are made available through a variety of other special programs that are categorically related to such areas as poverty, vocational training, and mental retardation.

As federal support for educational research has grown, schools of education have intensified their interest and commitments to programs of research. It is true, of course, that some had to be dragged screaming into the educational research venture. On any faculty of a school of education one still hears cynical remarks about educational research, its potential, its reason for being. Despite the increased support that has come for educational research from the federal government, from foundations, and from institutional budgets, it is still safe to say that only a few institutions devote as much as 50 per cent of their annual operating budgets to educational research. By and large, however, the interest in educational research is growing and the caliber of research underway is serving to build confidence in the research route to improving schools.

Types of Research in Schools of Education

Early research in schools of education supported by the cooperative research program was problem-oriented. The amendments incorporated in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, however, authorized the development of programmatic research that makes possible grant support for research in schools of education focussed on broad categories of educational problems. The research and development centers, already established in nine institutions, are an example of the type of programmatic support that is now available. The regional research centers in which schools of education will become cooperating

partners with other agencies represent an additional example of programmatic research support.

Another trend in evidence with respect to the development of research in schools of education is the use of interdisciplinary resources. The complexities of educational problems, as with problems in other fields, are such that the individual researcher likely will not possess the wide variety of scholarly background nor perception of research design that are required to create and carry out the kind of research that will be most beneficial. As public concern for quality in education has increased and as support for educational research has expanded, scholars in the various subject disciplines have exhibited a willingness to join with professors of education to engage in research on problems in this field. Motivation toward the interdisciplinary approach has come also from the encouragement of donors who seek maximum strength on research teams as guarantees for grants. An added and related significant development, however, has been the extent to which scholars in the academic fields have taken leadership to design and direct programs of research dealing with educational problems. Reports from the U.S. Office of Education indicate that specialists in the academic fields are becoming increasingly interested and involved in research in education. Such a trend toward tapping interdisciplinary sources must be viewed as healthful and desirable, despite the fact that a few professors and deans of education have seen in it a challenge to the vested interests of the professional field.

Administration of Research in Schools of Education

Schools of education have searched for administrative arrangements to facilitate educational research. Per-

haps the most prevalent type of organization has been the single bureau of educational research headed by a research specialist who is responsible for administering all research activities conducted by faculty members. The bureau itself takes responsibility for encouraging and developing research proposals and serves as a coordinating agency for interdisciplinary teams.

In contrast to the single bureau of educational research is a pattern of development that might be called the multiple research laboratory pattern. The University of Wisconsin is a good example of an institution that follows the policy of establishing research laboratories for individual professors or teams of professors. Such flexibility encourages the formulation of interdisciplinary coalitions that can cross departmental and school boundary lines to develop research and graduate training programs aimed at particular objectives. This year, for example, the School of Education of the University of Wisconsin helped to support fourteen research laboratories and centers.¹ Similar types of organization for research related to education are budgeted in other colleges. Smaller institutions have tended to follow the pattern of selecting a director of research whose responsibility it is to work with faculty members to help them generate and design research proposals and to give advice on research in progress.

The Laboratory School

The role of the campus laboratory school in educational research is as yet uncertain. A number of laboratory schools in universities, unable to make the transition from teacher training to research, have been discontinued or modified in organization and relationships. The laboratory school of the University of Illinois is an example of a research-

oriented operation that has won institution and public support.

The laboratory schools of the University of Hawaii recently adopted a policy of giving educational research and developmental efforts to improve the schools of the state a first priority. Teacher training functions have been substantially discontinued and the specialized research competencies of the staff of the institution's Education Research and Development Center have been enlisted to assist the faculty of the laboratory schools to design and carry out programs of research. Closer ties with the Hawaii Department of Education and the schools of the state are envisioned to provide a continuity between the pilot testing in the laboratory schools and the field testing that will be required to transplant the results of research from campus to schools. The possibility that the laboratory schools may be designated by the State Department of Education as a state service center under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 is under consideration. The establishment of research as the number one priority for the laboratory schools was recently supported by a study committee which was examining the programs of the College of Education of the University.

Future Prospects

What has been called a scientific movement in education has been under discussion throughout most of this century. The first significant development in educational research probably dates to the early part of this century when the measurement of intelligence was initiated. During the 1920's another thrust forward in educational research in schools of education took place that accompanied the refinement of statistics as a research tool. The present emphasis

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