# Research for Whom?

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WHEN the question, "Research for Whom?" is raised, a larger set of concerns is generally implied: the disassociation between educational research and practice; the *de facto* segregation of researcher and practitioner; and, consequently, the need to improve communication, identify mutual concerns, and increase productive interaction between researcher and practitioner.[1] Reflected in all these concerns is the pivotal question of clarifying the definitions and intended scope of educational research.

What I think we need is a consciousness-expanding review of the scope of educational research as traditionally defined. As a nudge in that direction, I am contrasting here two definitions of educational research, one that seems to me to be maximally exclusive, the other potentially inclusive of mutual concerns of researchers and practitioners.

I begin with definitions because I believe that redundance, confusion, and exclusiveness in definitions and implied scope of educational research are in themselves significant factors in segregating researcher and practitioner. Each definition delimits its unique set of acceptable problems, procedures, participants, and potential for making an impact on educational practice.

To illustrate: at the 1971 annual meeting of the Wisconsin Educational Research Association, a sizable group of concerned educators were told that most of the studies reported that day, ostensibly reflecting their genuine concerns, were probably not "research" at all.[2] This statement by a responsible and friendly professional researcher was possible because, in his definition, research is "an attempt to get at broad generalizable truths" in contrast to evaluation, "an attempt to get information to help make decisions in a specific situation."

If we start with his definition, there is no place to go, no way of increasing productive interaction between researcher and practitioner, and not much need to do so. Attempting to get at broad generalizable truths, a commendable scientific effort for some,[3] is simply not the major concern of most educational practitioners (nor, I suspect, of all professional researchers). Limiting the scope of educational research to the

[1] American Educational Research Association. *Educational Researcher* 22: 5-6; December 1971. (In statement of AERA aims for 1972.)

[2] William Gephart (Director of Research Services, Phi Delta Kappa). "Assorted Evaluation Models: Their Practical Significance." Address at the 11th annual meeting of the Wisconsin Educational Research Association, December 1971.

[3] For some negative comments on "basic research," see: Philip Reidford. "Educational Research." Chapter 9 in: Carl Weinberg, editor. *Humanistic Foundations of Education*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972. See also: Herbert C. Kelman. *On Human Values and Social Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1968; Chris Argyris. "Some Unintended Consequences of Rigorous Research." *Psychological Bulletin* 70 (3): 185-97; 1968; and Nevitt Sanford. "Whatever Happened to Action Research?" *Journal of Social Issues* 26 (4): 3-23; 1970.

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empirical testing of hypotheses initially creates the artificial distancing of researcher and practitioner (my concerns, your concerns, our concerns), then sets in motion the cry for improved communication, specialized techniques, and innovative methodology that can make research findings more readily available to the excluded practitioner. Despite the stated focus upon "mutual concerns," the research establishment continues to promote the elitism and exclusiveness of equating educational research with basic research.

If we are indeed attempting to move toward harmonious working relationships among researchers and practitioners, why not use a conception of educational research that is potentially more inclusive of mutual concerns and efforts? Defining research as "a systematic method of inquiry" serves two purposes. The definition discriminates the scientific method of validating knowledge from such nonscientific modes as revelation, leaps of faith, hunches, tacit knowing, insight, trial and error, logic, or just guessing. Yet the definition in itself does not delimit, nor does it predetermine *who* may be a researcher, *what* kinds of questions may be asked, or *how* research findings may be most effectively used. With this conception we can move out of the established framework of educational research to consider new approaches.

One such approach, cooperative research efforts of professionals and nonprofessionals, is evolving as an expression and implementation of the general thrust for self-determination and participation in all serious levels of educational decision making. This approach builds on the common purposes and diversified skills of professional researchers and the people who have the problems: administrators, supervisors, teachers, students, parents, and others (including researchers).

One example of the cooperative approach is described by Sanford [4] as research in which "the subject is the client, and reporting to him is an action." The "Model for Research-Action" that Sanford is proposing evolved in a study conceived with his students, demonstrating that "the way to study students was to help students study themselves"; when the barrier between researcher and subject is removed a situation is created in which all participants learn and develop.[5]

Note that emphases are: building on common purposes; removing barriers between researcher and participants; promoting learning for all (including the professional researcher). There is, of course, no intent that all should be learning the same things. The proposed model differs from action research, applied research, and evaluation studies in stressing the research process as valid action in itself, rather than as a means to solving practical and (sometimes) mutually identified concerns.

Cooperative participation opens up to the professional researcher experiences and insights about educational practice that are not readily available to outsiders. The professional researcher does, however, have to make some adjustments in his style of operating. As Sanford concluded:

> Research must . . . serve the purposes of its subjects. This does not mean that the researcher must sacrifice his own values. It does mean that he will probably have to say what they are and work out as much agreement with his subjects as possible.[6]

In Milwaukee, our own version of process oriented research is evolving in a cooperative evaluation project. This project was designed by and for seven co-learner research teams, one for each of seven elementary schools comprising the Federation of Independent Community Schools, Milwaukee.[7] Each school has selected its own team of nonprofessional and professional co-learners: two parents, two staff members, two students attending the school, a graduate student, and a faculty advisor from either Marquette University or the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. As the third phase of a larger effort, the project is in its beginning stages, to be reported in detail later. Yet even

[4] Nevitt Sanford, *ibid.*, p. 14.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[7] "Milwaukee Inner City Educational Development Project." Title I, Higher Education Act, USOE. Marquette University, 1969-72.

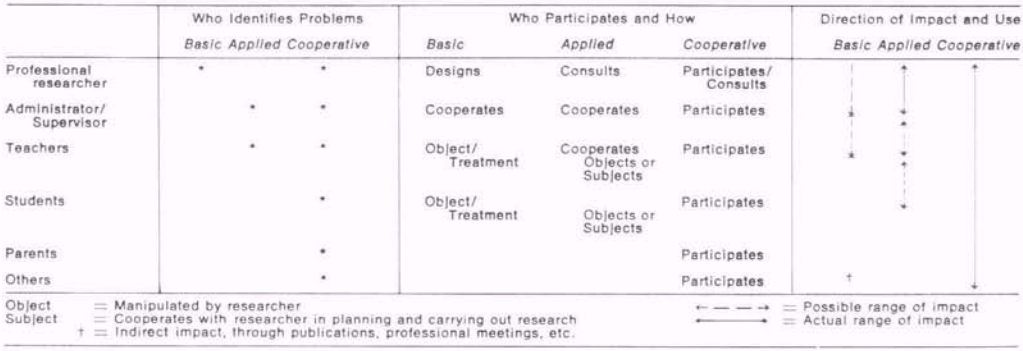


Figure 1. Research for Whom: Comparison of Three Methods of Inquiry

initially the cooperative effort, a "spontaneous" expression of three difficult years of struggle by professionals and nonprofessionals to develop productive ways of working together, is a beautiful exemplar of Sanford's proposed research-action model.

The cooperative effort in Milwaukee in common with Sanford's research-action illustrates three vital principles to be incorporated in expanding our conception of the scope of educational research:

1. Educational research defined as a systematic method of inquiry may be process-oriented, product-oriented, or both.

2. Cooperative participation in research is a value in itself.

3. Educational research has largely neglected the intervention resources of practitioners, students, and other available participants.

Defining research as a systematic method of inquiry and expanding the scope of educational research accommodates a range of models of inquiry. It also permits an examination of three representative models [8] each with a different answer to the original question, "Research for Whom?"

Figure 1 emphasizes three significant areas of difference among the models:

1. The point of origin of the inquiry: who identifies the problem; what kind of problem?

2. The extent and quality of participation in the research activity: who designs the project; what is the degree of involvement; did involved persons agree to participate? "Subjects" denotes agreement to participate with some understanding of the general purpose of the study; "Objects and treatments" denotes involvement without agreement, or with agreement based on misinformation.

3. The direction of potential impact, if any: to what extent will findings be made known and be of possible interest to others; how will findings affect or be communicated to various persons and groups?

The summary is not meant to imply that one approach is better than another or should be used to the exclusion of the others. It is meant to demonstrate that each model serves its own defined purposes within its own delimited parameters. And because each model has a different intent and different concerns, each has different potential for making an impact on educational theory and practice. Each model thus generates different answers to the question, "Research for Whom?"

I believe that research is for the researcher. If we want to broaden the impact of research, we have to broaden the base of participation and primary involvement in the effort. I believe also that the scope of educational research should be interpreted broadly enough to accommodate all persons in education (professional researchers, practitioners, students, and others) who have questions they want to study and who find the process and products of research satisfying, productive, exciting, and useful. □

[8] I am conferring temporary status as "model" to "Cooperative research" (Sanford's Research-Action) for comparison with Basic research and Applied/Evaluation research.

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