Intersection customary limits: How do specialists and college workforce depict their involvement in instructive research writing?

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Abstract

For many years, university based educational research has been blamed for being dominated by positivistic research tradition at the near exclusion of field based ethnographic work. Several findings have also portrayed this domination among the major explanations for practitioners' lack of interest in educational research literature. With the recent popularity of qualitative work in the educational research parlance, the question however remains whether a paradigm shift from positivistic research tradition to ethnographic and field based approach brings the interest among practitioners to turn to research literature. On the basis of data from both practitioners and researchers, this study argues that while most ethnographic studies "approximate" the "narrative" experiences of public school teachers much better than quantitative works, the available ethnographic studies either suffer from the same norm that distances the university based positivistic researchers from practitioners or fall in the traps of institutional and organizational factors that have remained so resilient in bridging the gap between the world of research and practice in education.

Keywords: Educational Research; Perceptions about Research; Research Utilization; Practitioner Knowledge; Narrative Experience

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Introduction

Mary: Let us talk while I am munching my sandwich, if you don't mind. This is the only time I have today.

Abe: Don't you have enough time even for lunch?

Mary: Well lunch is short. I mean, 20 minutes break is not a whole lot of time, you know. By the time you close up your classroom, wait until the students are out, go down to the faculty cafeteria, you have already used up five minutes. Then, you have about 10 minutes to eat, and then, you have to have another 5 to get up, have your class open and ready before the kids come back again. So relatively it is a short amount of time. Today, I have a little bit of a long period of time for prep period.

When Mary, the secondary school teacher made these remarks, I was really disillusioned. The source of my

disillusionment was my old mindset. As a university teacher and educator for about ten years, I always saw the educational system in the world's super power as flawless. My American educated professors, the books I read, the media—all taught me only the goodies (the success stories) of the system.

Then, as I started to conduct this study on the relationship between research and practice in education, I was keen to learn how the developed world creates the connection between the world of researchers and practitioners, a major challenge for most of the developing world. In other words, initially, I was not ready to learn about the problems as much as I was eager to learn the success stories, which I thought fit my mindset and would even serve as useful lessons to facilitate my career in academia. More specifically, according to my initial mindset, teachers in the USA had fewer respon-

sibilities, little time pressure, greater autonomy to plan their instruction, high support from parents and the community —then, coupled with adequate access to publications— I thought, they have all the motivation, the wisdom, as well as the stake to use research to advance their knowledge and improve the instruction. Mary, who is my first informant, however started to challenge my mindset, eroding all my expectations. The other teacher and faculty informants also have a lot of stories that are even more compelling to tell.

Background Literature

The gap between research and practice in education has been among the major concerns in the educational research literature. Several concerns are at the heart of this literature. First, findings (for example, Kennedy, 1997, Clifford, and Guthrie, 1998) testify to the lack of access to research publications of school-level practitioners. Researchers argue that, apart from inadequate supply of research articles to practitioners, the available literature itself is written in an academic language, becoming irrelevant to teachers for whom educational researchers claim to speak (Cliffiold and Guthrie, 1988).

Second, findings testify to an incentive problem within the university structure that influences faculty to pursue positivistic research tradition and, thus, to publish for non-practitioner audiences (Clifford and Guthrie, 1988; Constas, 1998). Here many writers (for example Hargreaves, 1996, Shkedi, 1998) underscore the fixation of educational researchers to pursue a "scientific" research path, partly as a reaction to maintain their lost status in the university structure (Clifford, Guthrie, 1998); and partly as a response to conform to the reward system in academia. In most universities, schools of education assume low status, and as a response to this, faculties gear their research to an academic audience to purchase "the peace and place of entrepreneurial career as scientists in the embrace of university" (Clifield and Gutherie, 1988). As a result, educational researchers put their focus on design and methodological issues to the near neglect of the classroom and the substance of teaching and learning.

Third, studies show the problem of relevance as well as persuasiveness in the existing research literature. This line of argument blames the researchers on the grounds that their work is not helpful to practitioners (Klemeperer, Theisens, Kaiser, 2001), or that it is too theoretical (Constas 1998; Shkedi, 1998) or unaligned to the specific classroom context of teachers and schools (Hargreaves 1996; Stevenson 1998). Put differently, in spite of choosing research topics that might help practitioners, "the particular child here and now" (Gomsburg and Gorostiaga, 2001), researchers opt for problems that get them precisions and generalizations.

Fourth, research shows the problem of the "two culture thesis", which divides the role of the researcher and the practitioner (Ginsdburg, and Gorsotiaga, 2001; Shkedi, 1998). According to this view, researchers design, conduct and interpret studies while practitioners entirely assume the role of implementation and dissemination of the results (Shkedi, 1998). The "two culture thesis" further assumes a practitioner to understand the importance of university based research, and then apply the findings the researchers "so meticulously generated". Subscribing practitioners' knowledge as partial, biased, incomplete, self serving, and politically compromised, this assumption purports that good science will trickle down to the level of practice and, thus, inform practitioners on what to do and what not to do (Ginsburg, and Gorsotiaga, 2001).

Fifth, studies underscore an incentive problem in the public school system discouraging the promotion of research-based practices. The argument goes that, improving several features of the research work — the methods, the research questions, the dissemination system, etc— important as they are, their contribution depends on whether the educational system provides the right environment to promote research-based practices at the school level. The educational system, the advocates of this position assert, is either too stable or too unstable to create the nexus between research and practice in education. For example, on the one hand, conflicting goals, lack of central authority, etc. characterize the system; paradoxically, on the other, the system provides little time to practitioners to assume their primary teaching responsibilities, let alone providing them with adequate time to attend to these conflicting interests. Such cross-purpose among the components of the educational system limit practitioners to think on the margins as opposed to facilitating their thinking for substantial change which the task of being a critical and reflective consumer of research requires (Kennedy, 1998).

In responding to the question why educational research has not had an adequate role in practice, researchers generally put the blame either on the researchers or on the incentive structures of schools and academic institutions. At a close look, these assumptions hold implied recommendations, which assume that if researchers improve the way they select topics or disseminate their findings or if teachers had enough time, and then, we could bridge the gap between research and practice in education. However, the feasibility of these recommendations depends on which perspective we frame our understanding about the role of research from, the researcher and the researched. Notwithstanding its contribution, much of the orientation in previous research comes from the "knowledge utilization" perspective, which assigns knowledge construction to the researcher, subscribing its implementation to practitioners. The assumptions embedded in this perspective also promote a positivistic research tradition and ignore context

dependent and reflective knowledge coming from practitioners.

The changing context of public schools is making the demands of teachers' work ever more challenging, complex, and particularistic. In the face of this complexity, context free application and generalization of knowledge on which university based educational research has largely been grounded cannot serve the purpose of public schools today. The changing context of public schools instead requires us to explore the narrative experiences of teachers and what counts as legitimate knowledge according to them to create the connection between the world of teachers and researchers. Epistemologically, the shift to this orientation promotes the presumptions of the qualitative research paradigm and challenges the empirical-analytic tradition entrenched in the positivistic research orientation (Shkedi, 1998). This new orientation expands the roles of the researcher and the researched in significant ways. The shift, for example sees researchers and practitioners both as agents and objects of inquiry, and expands their roles as co-learners, making their traditional division of labor more ambiguous. In this new paradigm, the researched are no more passive informants who depend for knowledge on the researcher. Instead, their wisdom, as opposed to research findings becomes the chief transforming agent for public schools (Ginsburg, and Gorostiaga, 2001).

Qualitative research that shows how faculty and teachers (in juxtaposition) articulate their encounter with educational research is generally scanty. This study, thus, explores the perceptions, orientations and experiences of researchers and practitioners regarding the purpose of educational research, its level of utilization, and reasons that might prevent practitioners from using it. In addition, on the bases of the orientations informants (teachers, faculty, and adjunct faculty) brought out in the course of the research, this study tried to capture what form of knowledge counts legitimate, to whom and the degree to which this legitimacy shapes the borders and boundaries between the world of researchers and practitioners in education. In short, the following overarching questions were addressed in the course of the study:

1. How do teachers describe their encounter with educational research literature?
2. Do teachers read and use educational research literature?
3. What are the reasons that might prevent them from using it?
4. What type of research literature do teachers tend to value (legitimize) and how does it reflect their orientation and perception towards research?
5. Whose orientation towards research (among the three groups of respondents: teachers, faculty, and clinical faculty), serves as a springboard to cross the traditional borders between the world of researchers and practitioners in education? Why?

Methodology

This study explored the relationship between research and practice in education on the basis of data from researchers and practitioners. The purpose of the study makes informant perspective indispensable input for extracting genuine data. In other words, "what respondents are experiencing, how they interpret their experiences, and how they themselves structure the social world in which they live" Bogdan and Biklen (1998: 7) becomes the sole agent for sound inquiry. The power of ethnographic research both to recognize and create a natural dialogue between informants and the researcher makes it a preferred approach for this study.

Setting and Participants

The informants of the study included eight public school teachers, four university faculty members, and one clinical faculty member.

I selected teacher informants from two primary and two secondary schools from two public school districts in Western New York on the basis of a random sampling procedure. There were few or no male teachers in all the four schools in which I conducted my study and the few teachers whom I met also could not afford fitting their schedule with mine. As a result, all my teacher respondents are females. Most teacher respondents have many years of experience ranging from 11 to 27 years in teaching. Regarding their educational level, two of them have B.A degrees; four MA degrees while the remaining two teachers are currently in graduate school.

The four faculty members, who participated in the study, are from Service University, a pseudonym I chose for this particular institution. With an enrollment of about 24,000 in 2001, Service University is the largest, the most comprehensive, and research-intensive university system in the state (Service University Website, 2002). The four faculty members were drawn from two departments: Educational Leadership and Policy and Learning and Instruction. The selection of these two faculty members is purposeful. Unlike the average faculty in the School of Education at Service University, these faculty members served several years in the public school system prior to their appointment in their current positions that makes them appropriate to provide useful information for the study.

In addition to the four faculty members, one clinical faculty member, who served 25 years in the public school system, but retired as of 2001, is part of the study. The desire to see how she relates the practical aspect of her work in juxtaposition with her current role as a clinical faculty member is the motivation for including her in the study. In other words, her inclusion is meant to capture the stories of both worlds —that of practitioners and researchers.

Data Collection

I have gathered data through individual interviews, and focus group discussions. In supporting the data obtained through the two principal methods, site inspection has also been used as supplementary method.

The Research Interview

One of the major advantages of the interview method in qualitative research is its strength to access social and educational issues that are abstracted out of the concrete experiences of people (Seidman, 1998) . The relevance of this approach to surface and unfold the experiences and the encounters of researchers and practitioners makes it a useful technique for the purpose of this study.

Interview as qualitative tool gains its strength through the flexibility it allows to informants in narrating their stories without being constrained by the investigator (Seidman, 1998, Bogdan, and Biklen, 1998). The level of flexibility in the interview approach, however, is subject to the purpose of the study, as well as the knowledge of the researcher about the context. As a researcher from a different culture and background, I had very little knowledge about the context of my informants and the types of experiences they were ready to unfold to me. As a result, I approached my informants with an unstructured and rather open interview schedule to learn from them and to generate as much useful data as possible. That said, given the breadth of the issues my research topic covers, and the variety and wealth of experiences teachers and faculty bring along with them, I partly included some semi-structured items to help guide the course of the interview.

Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion was mainly used to triangulate the issues and concerns that surfaced during the individual interview over which supplementary information was needed. In addition, the context created through group interview has served as a springboard, for recalling experiences among teachers. The relevance of focus group discussion for this study is also justifiable in light of what Bogdan and Biklen (1998) assert: people are often stimulated to talk more when others join them. In the course of the focus group discussion, my part as an investigator was one of playing a facilitative role, such as initiating participants to speak out their experiences, and keeping the discussion from being consumed by groupthink.

Site Inspection/Observation

In order to support the data generated through interview and focus group discussion, some site visits were carried out to school pedagogical centers, and school libraries to assess the type of publications available in school resources sites. Moreover, the level of research dissemination, and the degree to which the school administration is committed to provide the necessary resources for making publications available, and how frequently these publications are used, are some of the purposes behind this approach.

My Field Encounter

When I set out for data collection, I began with low expectations. I was less than sure that I would get genuine and cooperative respondents narrating their stories for someone who is not only from a different culture, but who speaks English with a visibly non-American accent. Contrary to my expectation, things worked out to my advantage. For most respondents, I became a genuine person to whom they disclosed their stories. Occasionally asking me how the same thing works out in my context, my informants confided their stories with trust and great enthusiasm.

All the data collected through interview and focus group discussions are taped, transcribed, and later coded, and sorted using *Nudist* computer software. In reporting the data, pseudonyms are assigned to all respondents and institutions to maintain their privacy.

Teachers' Utilization of Research Articles

Whether teachers read research publications is one rough barometer for knowing the level to which they are connected to the world of research. Both individual interview and focus group discussions generally show that most teachers seldom read research articles, or do not read any at all. For example, teachers make open remarks such as "I don't read research literature at all" or, "I don't see any one of us either doing or using research". Asked what type of literature they read if they don't read research articles, most teachers suggest -subject specific literature as their major sources of reference:

"The only thing I read now is something that is sent to me from my English Department. That is, some ideas that may be included in the standards. These are not research articles per se but practical ways of helping students. I don't really need research literature any more. I just read ideas of how to implement lessons (Judi)."

Elizabeth, the clinical faculty member further observes:

"Many teachers read journals related to their particular subject area. So, for example, my husband is a retiring English teacher. He always read the English journal because he would gather practical ideas."

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However, two teachers, who are currently in the graduate school (one in the private college and the other at Service University), suggest that they sometimes read research literature. These teachers say that they read research articles to remain up-to-date and to advance their knowledge in their particular fields. "I sometimes read journals and, I do that because I need to keep with what is current in the field"(Barbara, primary school teacher).

Asked how often and what type of journals they read, both teachers indicate that they read practitioner journals (both, for example, suggest Phi Delta Kappan), and they read these and similar journals once in a while. But, none of the teacher says they subscribe to journals except reading those sent to them from their professional associations.

The faculty members also believe that "the average teacher" seldom read research articles and those who have "the propensity to read", according to faculty members, are those who are in the graduate school. The faculty explained that these teachers read "partly because of the academic requirements", and partly because of the "motivation teachers have developed through their frequent contact with the academic community".

The finding from this study generally demonstrates that most teachers tend to ignore research literature or resort to subject matter readings with applicative dimension. Even for the few teachers who read research literature, their reading is rather random as, for example, none of them say they subscribe to journals or have sustainable source of readings. Then, what reasons do teachers provide for the distance created between their world and the world of educational research?

Teachers' Reasons for Not Reading Research Articles

Teachers have enumerated several reasons that prevent them from reading and using research articles. The following list includes a summary of their responses.

Irrelevance of Findings

Throughout the discussions, teachers have made expressions that indicate "irrelevance" as a major reason discouraging them not to turn to research articles. Teachers, for example, react:

I think people who are doing research are very far removed from the actual classroom and I really don't know how that correlates with what I am doing---not all research fits my little box (Mary, the secondary school teacher).

"I have little motivation to go through articles which I don't see their immediate relevance for what I am doing in the

classroom" (Barbara, the primary school teacher).

In some cases, teachers are even cynical:

I had a student teacher whose advisor tells him we had a block of 40 minutes lessons for Kindergarten. You know, you don't have a forty- minute lesson in Kindergarten. You don't do that in Kindergarten. You know, so they are not even giving the students a realistic idea about what the classroom is (Focus Group Discussion).

On the whole, teachers emphasize that much as they don't have the problem of access to research literature (thanks to the Internet, and interlibrary loan systems among other conventional media), the available literature, however, does not help them tackle the challenges they face in their schools.

I often go to the Internet when I feel like consulting sources and ideas; but there isn't enough of what I look for. Now, for example, we have to meet the new standard, there is no research available yet; because it is such a new thing which show you what is the best way of reaching the most needy students in meeting the standards. There is no up-to-date research on that (Judi, the secondary school teacher).

Lack of Understanding

The form that the research takes has great implication on whether teachers read research articles or not. Teachers complain that they neither have the preparation nor the time to read "too much of the numbers", "lengthy", and "wordy" research articles, let alone to use them to enrich their practices. Teachers further complain that "coming from the classroom where things are simpler", it is a big stretch for them to understand academic writings: "If two readings have the same information, where one is short and one is long, I would pick up the shorter one "(Katy, the primary school teacher) . She further adds, "Especially, at lower grades, we reduce everything to a very basic level that to sit down and read a very wordy research project is impossible".

Further, teachers comment, the fixation of researchers on methodological issues, to the near neglect of substantive issues, removes both their understanding of the material as well as their motivation to read it:

A lot of research gets into statistical mode: how they measure this and how they measure that. We want something bottom line; something that tells us the reasoning and something exactly most useful for me as a teacher. I don't want to read a 20-page article to find one useful thing. I don't want to do that. We would rather hire someone who could read all the articles for us [laughing] (Focus Group Discussion).

Interestingly, faculty members admit that the use of

academic language prevents teachers from reading research articles. Recalling his own experience in which he published on the same issue using two different approaches of writing, one for an academic journal and the other for practitioners, a faculty member explains the impact of his writing styles on practitioners' use of research:

So, the form your writing takes has a lot to do… I can give an example from the paper I wrote when I talked about attendance incentives. The place that the article first published was Journal of Human Resource Development; it was an unusual place to land on such a journal because that is an economic journal. And that article tightly focused on the model and the methodology. I don't think that many teachers would understand it. They would probably get within the second page and ask: What is this? Why should I read this crap? It speaks nothing at all to what goes on in schools. It speaks a lot about the model that is used in doing the research. I wrote, by taking the same study and issues in another place as a practitioner's model. This time, I got so many letters as a feedback from many places -it is ten years now. In terms of my promotion, the journal of Human Resources Development is very important. In terms of its effect on practitioners, probably five people read it (Martin).

Discontent in the Research Process

Part of teachers' dissatisfaction with the research work lies in the research process. Most teachers, for example, critique that faculties do research behind closed doors:

So you open the door, you know. I think they [teachers] know that research is being done but I think they don't think it going to have any relation to them. Maybe they will be more aware if they know the topics covered… and if it was presented in way teachers understand it… even having a day during one of our in-service programs where people would just come and talk about their topics for research is important. So you know, most of us don't have any idea what is being researched at UB or elsewhere. If you ask me, I don't have any idea, which is really kind of sad, you know (Focus Group Discussion).

Another teacher complains about lack of feedback in the research process:

"It is like they just come in and then go out. And, you know, they don't even share their names. As a matter of fact, this is what I taught. They come and say, "we would like to observe your class". Then, I would allow them to do so and when they are finished they will go, and that's it!" (Judi, the secondary school teacher).

There are also teachers who say they have never had an encounter with faculty coming to their schools either to

conduct their research or share their findings. These teachers implicate that faculty members do research at a distance:

"I think you are the first …I don't think I have seen any faculty member…at least; none of them have been to my classroom" (Barbara, the primary school teacher).

Batty adds, "I don't know where they go, and I don't see how useful such research is".

As part of their comments on the research process, teachers critique the use of a questionnaire to collect primary data from the classroom:

Whenever we have gotten questionnaire sent to us, we have the option to throw that questionnaire away. If you are really busy, the questionnaire is going in the garbage. Plus, you are not getting a lot of information through questionnaire. So, what you need to do is exactly what you are doing (referring me). You are sitting down and talking to people…unless, you will not have any idea whether you are getting honest responses or not. So it is very tricky. So it is not sending and turning on questionnaires. It is talking to people (Focus Group Discussion).

Taken together, the reasons teachers have forwarded for not reading research articles show a mismatch between teachers' values and the type of research coming from academic institutions. Equally, the reasons teachers have forwarded imply what type of research teachers tend to legitimatize and value before they make a decision to use them. This is the major theme worth discussing next.

Teachers' and Faculty Orientation towards Research: Explanations behind Teachers' Complaints

Studies generally show that teachers' knowledge is context -dependent, particularistic and tied to specific social, personal and educational values (Shkedi, 1998). Case studies, ethnographies, and narrative as forms of research approximate context -bound value and orientations of teachers, and view the classroom as teachers view it (Kennedy, 1998).

Going back to the data, we learn that teachers dismiss university-based research for several reasons, which include its "irrelevance," administration at a distance, difficulty to understand, or flaws in the way it has been carried out, among others. Implicitly, each of these reasons, exposes the bottom side of the positivistic research tradition, particularly its failure to address context-based values of teachers. Given the power of ethnographic research to address the weaknesses of the positivistic research approach, including the above ones, implicitly, then, these teachers are attempting to keep

solidarity with qualitative research and showing us that it represents their values. For example, teachers articulate that the existing research does not fit their "little box", expressing their desire for context-referenced knowledge. In addition, when they dismiss the use of the questionnaire, they are telling us about the importance of teachers' stories as sources of genuine data. Further, when they express their discontent with the research process, they are proposing the importance of reflective practice and open dialogue as an essential component in the research undertaking. Although these statements are not phrased in the way they might be in a scientific article, they definitely correspond with the presumptions of qualitative research.

What is even more compelling about teachers' orientation regarding qualitative research is data from a focus group discussion in which teachers describe one exemplary piece of research from their recent encounter: There were researchers who came to our kindergarten classroom two years ago. They videotaped the entire day for almost half a year and they couldn't believe what they found out in the classroom… because it was real… it was honest, they saw everything; that is, the social growth, the academic growth, the family component, the community component… it was all in there. But, you would not have seen that unless you had been in there… that is one of the few that I have seen done that way. So, research must move towards that direction. If you are going to help teachers, then, move to the setting, where the teachers are. We are not going to come to you.

The findings from this study are consistent with previous findings. Shkedi (1998:573) for example, underscores that "while there is a gap between the pragmatic character of the positivistic research approach and the narrative mode of thought of teachers, there can be a real bridge between the narrative modes of thought of teachers and between the narrative characters of qualitative research".

Paradoxically, however, teachers' perception of educational research (i.e. the way teachers define, and characterize educational research) does not agree with their narrative thought and experience about educational research and matches the definition the faculty members assign to the field, as we shall see next.

"A Cross-purpose" Between Teachers' Perception and Teachers' Experience with Educational Research

Abe: Let me take you to an essay type of question. In your view, what is the purpose of educational research?

Judi: I think I better answer this question from what I personally feel. I think it helps me to be able to read research reports to know what other people have researched, especially educational practices… I think research is an in-depth study that is done with scientific methodology.

Abe: Then, how do you describe scientific methodology?

Judi: In which, for example, you have wide sampling, which correlate and, thus, help you identify the problem.

Teachers' responses during focus group discussion add to this:

The purpose of educational research is to improve what we are doing, and teach us new techniques. I mean, the children are changing each year with the different economics, the different things going on the road, and how we better serve the type of children that are coming into our classrooms.

Certainly, teachers' perception of the purpose of educational research is very consistent with the characteristics that faculty members attach to the field, as we see in the following conversation:

Abe: Let me take you to an essay type of question: In your view, what is the major purpose of research in education?

Johnson: Let me take a crack and you will tell me if my answer is focused. As I said earlier, I believe that the purpose of educational research should be a service to educational practice. So, it is incumbent upon those of us who don't have to experience the day-to-day issues of schools to help those who don't better understand what is going on around them. Because it is very easy to lose sight of the other pressure that exists when you messed in this very close relationship with teachers, students, teachers with parents, students with parents, teachers with administrators. So, somebody has to observe and provide the information as objectively as possible. I think that purpose is absolutely essential.

Having been the products of university ---where the positivistic research tradition is deep entrenched ---the correlate between teachers' perception and positivistic research tradition is not surprising. Even then, we may ask: do teachers see faculty, and mainly faculty motivation for conducting research as a concern for informing practice? In other words, do faculty do research to inform and shape practice, as both teachers and faculty tend to perceive the purpose of education research? Faculty description of their motivation for conducting research, and the way teachers understand this faculty motivation, do not support the perception that both groups hold regarding the purpose of educational research, as the following conversation reveals.

Abe: Tell me your motivation for doing research

David: Just curiosity [laughing]. You know, initially, there is that motivation, where you have this intellectual curiosity. And some of the interest is because doing

research and having publication provides job security. So, if you do the work, and if it is well received in the career, it develops your reputation and that is gainful employment. And I like this kind of work because the work of a professor always comes to me as having tremendous autonomy. I have the luxury of exploring ideas and I am encouraged to do that.

To the same question another faculty adds:

It is to be able to spend your work environment. Wanting to come to work and to work with the brightest and the best in terms of your colleagues and students is a very tremendous privilege. So, there is a natural wish to contribute to a collective academy of learners. So that partly interests me (Maxim).

At the same time, faculty indicates that, in part, they do research because they want to contribute to educational practice:

I also enjoy the sense that the work I am doing makes a difference to schools. Your influence might not be always direct; my influence to local schools is indirect; it is the effect that I have had on the students that I have on the workplace, and that has effect on children (Martin).

By contrast, most teachers believe that faculties do research mainly to meet publication requirements. Interestingly, however, when asked whether the motive "to publish or perish" (to put it in their own terms), affects the type of research faculty produce, most teachers testify that faculty do good work, regardless. But, teachers further define, good work in terms of faculty creed to maintain their status:

I would think they would do a good job, regardless. Besides, you know, people are going to criticize after you finish, so you want your name on something that is well done, right? (Focus group discussion)

Another teacher complements: "True, they like their names, and, in fact, they do something that surprise, something that takes ones eyes when they read research" (Betty).

As both respondents attest, faculty motive for conducting research is largely driven by faculty creed for prestige, promotion, and academic excellence, as opposed to a belief to contribute to practice. Then, the question still remains why both teachers and faculty assign the role of influencing and shaping practice to educational research, despite these evidences suggesting the contrary.

One possible explanation (which I have already hypothesized above) is the positivistic research orientation teachers have lived with as products of academia. At the theoretical level, "the two-culture thesis"(Ginsburg and Gorsotiaga, 2001) in knowledge utilization helps us explain the case in point further. As per this paradigm, university based researchers design, conduct and interpret research studies, while teachers are entirely relegated to the function of implementation

and dissemination (Shkedi, 1998; Hargreaves, 1996; Stevenson, 1998).

From the faculty point of view, characterizing educational research in terms of "informing practice" as espoused in the positivistic research tradition is in part a response of conformity to the academic norm but, in part, it is also a matter of defending their borders and defining their traditional boundaries. As the researched, teachers conform to this norm for a different reason. The high status attached to generalizeable and propositional forms of university-based research, the argument for example goes —beyond perpetuating the excising cultural gap between researchers and practitioner—stifles practitioners' voices and degrades what counts as legitimate knowledge for them. From teachers' point of view, thus, their perception to define educational research in terms of positivistic research tradition, contrary to their ethnographic and narrative thought, is a matter of legitimizing university based research for its hitherto reputation as well as perceived scientific rigor. The findings of this study are very consistent with previous findings (Carter, 1991) and Shkedi (1998) in which the studies show that while teachers' knowledge is narrative, teachers perceive research as scientific and paradigmatic.

Interestingly, coming from a different orientation (presumably, representing both the world of teachers and researchers), the clinical faculty member tends to characterize educational research a little differently than the two. For example, she defines the function of educational research in the following way:

The role of research is not necessarily proving but it is learning. And so there is this general easy way to view research, as you know to prove something; now it is not. So, I think, people take it at a very primitive level, they don't dare ask the why especially when it involves numbers. They look at the numbers, which is easy to do, but not to understand for many, then, they implement the programs and, then, they apply them across the board without thinking of the context. And I think that is problematic; and we see that all the time in schools.

To a certain degree the perception of the clinical faculty member towards research helps us create the connection between the world of researchers and practitioners. When the clinical faculty member describes research as reflective experience as opposed to proving or disproving, or establishing facts, she is challenging the assumptions entrenched in positivistic research tradition and embracing qualities associated with qualitative research paradigm. In a more academic tone, the clinical faculty member further exposes why the world of research is fixated with paradigmatic taught, disregarding the potential for qualitative research. She has this to say: But I am afraid; we have not yet tapped the potential for qualitative research. Part of that is that it is not mathematical; it is not pure; it is not neat; it is not structured; it is messy-and that is the joy of it!

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On the one hand, the way the clinical faculty narrates and legitimizes research (ie her ethnographic mode of thought) matches those of the practicing teachers. On the other hand, however, unlike the teachers who have surrendered their perception about research to positivistic research tradition, the clinical faculty manages to create the connection between her narrative knowledge and her perception about research. It appears that unlike practicing teachers, whose perception about research is molded by the traditional norm of academia, both the practical and academic experiences of the clinical faculty enables her to break the norm---and to shape her perceptions consistent with her narrative knowledge.

The extent to which the clinical faculty member helps us create the connection between the world of researcher and practitioners, however, is up to a certain point, for one major reason, among others. The clinical faculty member has served more of her life as a practitioner and only joined the university two years ago upon her retirement from the public school system. Whether her current narrative mode of thought and ethnographic orientation towards research is sustained as she gets used to the academic norm remains a question to be addressed. Following her response regarding publications, she, for example, describes the norm, her current research, and her future plans in the following way, helping us capture her future intentions:

Abe: Do you see yourself a little differently than other faculty members when it comes to your role as a researcher?

Elizabeth: My research is generally informal. I don't publish many things. It is much different than Dr (names of faculty from the school of education at Service University), because that is their primary role. They have to do it. But I don't. Well, I might want to but I don't feel that push to-

Abe: What do you mean by the "push"?

Elizabeth: Well my job is not dependent upon my publishing. That is reality. I think that, as my former work life slows down, perhaps I may opt to do more traditional research so that I can actually publish. So I don't have publications in academic journals as yet. Anything I have ever published is typically been in a media that is geared for particular audience, such as educational technology, technology and learning, multimedia schools, mostly practitioner journals and newsletters. I wouldn't even call it publishing. It is really creating print material for any staff development opportunities that I am afforded. So generally it is creating course material. I wouldn't even call that publishing, it isn't. But in a way that is where I apply what I have done.

Partly, the experiences of the clinical faculty member further reinforce her narrative mode of thought and her research orientation. Unlike the full time faculty, who for example, say they mostly publish their work in "prestigious national and international journals", the clinical faculty member tells us that she makes her work available in a media that is appropriate to practitioners. But, what seems to stand in sharp contrast to her thoughts are her future research plans. Even though she believes that the type of research she does and the media in which her work currently appears is useful, she has the intention to move into the world of "traditional" research, just like other faculty. In this case, like teachers who perceive research from a positivistic point of view, despite their narrative mode of thought, the clinical faculty tends to surrender to the same norm. However, unlike the teachers who have unknowingly conformed to positivistic tradition, the clinical faculty member has made a learned decision, as demonstrated through the connection she creates between her narrative mode of thought and her perception about research. For her, this conformity is simply a coping strategy ---the only way she thinks she asserts her career success in an academic institution.

Institutional Barriers

In one context or in another, both, teachers and faculty have brought out the reward structure in academic institution and the incentive system in public schools as major hindrances that prevent the promotion of educational research. Explaining the impact of the reward system in the university, a faculty member recalls:

I am a professor and I began to calculate my professional rewards in larger altruistic rewards of my service to the field. I began to recognize that if I want to get tenure, I am better off doing a series of studies that last a year, cross sectional studies of a year or two so that I can get published as opposed to what probably would make more sense to schools.

Worse still, the low status the school education historically assumes in the university structure makes the link between faculty research and its relevance to school practice even murkier. Martin, further laments:

So many people, you know, who serve in education typically are hyphenated, not just as educationalists. You are an educational philosopher, you are an educational economist, you are an educational psychologist, and you are an educational sociologist and so on. Well, what I have seen in many institutions is that people who have the title of an educational psychologist are working very hard to impress their colleagues in psychology because that is the discipline status. The same way, the educational economist works hard to get recognition by the economist. When, in fact, the work we really ought to be focusing on the education part.

It is interesting to note that even when schools of education have maintained their professional status for so long, at least in the sense of getting "official"

recognition as a field, faculty still avoids the classroom as a projection to maintain their lost status in the university structure. Describing the situation, which was common during the formative years of the school, Clifford and Guthrie (1988:35) have this to say:

"Victimized by the American disease of "status anxiety", schools of education have been tracking in circles. One presumed route to higher regard was to encourage abandonment of the classroom. Rather than bend their talents to helping teachers gain skills and build structures that would professionalize teaching, the most nationally visible professors of education constructed their own careers without much reference to that most important and challenging task of professional education: creating the effective and influential teacher."

In their attempt to emulate colleagues in disciplinary departments, faculty members ignore not only the practitioners, but also their own colleagues in the same school. As a result, educational research becomes a mere academic exercise among "presumed" colleagues, disregarding the very purpose for which it is created. To the extent that educational research avoids the classroom, and becomes an instrument to reproduce one's types, then, practitioners might ask whether it is worth spending the sparse public money on it ---a necessary question an educational researcher should also ask.

Similarly, the organization of the school system has its own adverse effect, which discourages the promotion of research- based practices in schools. Most teachers comment that the school system "does not see research as an important part of the school work", in the face of other commitments at their disposal. Faculty members also share the same view with teachers. Given the circumstances, then, reading research articles for teachers becomes a matter of prioritizing their essential functions against those that are subsidiary in light of time constraints to do both. Unfortunately, research falls to the latter group of the two functions. Describing the immensity of the time pressure, teachers in focus group discussion, for example, recall:

Many obligations to get done: paper work, recordings of grades, preparation for what is gonna happen for the day, minutes to share…keeping in close contacts with kids, making telephone call to parents, and preparing for the classroom, and much, much more (Barbara).

For most teachers, administrators have the luxury of time to read (or even to conduct) research. But, when asked if administrators share what they read with teachers, teachers respond almost in the negative, complementing the fact that research is subsidiary to their functions:

Yes, they send us (what they read) if they feel it is valuable. We do get them through memos, recommending that we read an article and something like that. But, we are not required to read anything or we are not given the entire article to read (Focus Group Discussion).

The very organization of the teaching career conspires against the marginal status research assumes in public school system, further frustrating the attempt to close the gap between research and practice in education. The organization of teaching in public schools is preoccupied with standards, targets, checklists, form filling, leaving teachers balkanized among department structures, and inhibiting their collaboration to work as teams (Hargreaves, 1994, Sergiovanni, 2000). Such a result-oriented mentality, it is argued, creates a sense of disconnection among teachers, reduces their professional autonomy, and erodes the level of flexibility in which they plan their instructional goals, changing teachers into one of "hired hands" rather than professionals. In this regard, teachers have surfaced the requirements for state mandated testing as major erosion to their professional autonomy, inhibiting their free will as to what to teach and how to teach. To this, Mary, the secondary school teacher, unfolds the tension she has encountered in the following conversation:

Abe: Going back to the subject you teach, does it require you to consult sources other than the ones specified in the curriculum?

Mary: Yes, a lot, but it is not actually a syllabus that we are getting anymore ---because New York State, probably you know, is unique. They are not in a syllabus business any more. What they give you is called core document. It just has some general concepts that the students are expected to know. And, then, from there they expect teachers or the district to put together the courses they are going to teach.

Abe: So it's up to the teacher to flexibly incorporate and feel the gap?

Mary: Well, that is an interesting question because that is also what I ask myself a lot. You know, they give you very vague guideline; yet, I don't make the final exam. They make the final exam. So, another way of saying this is that you would decide what you want to teach, or how you want to teach, but we are not the ones who set the final exam. So, on the one hand, you have a lot of freedom to choose but by the same token, you better expose the kids what is on the exam. So, it is kind of interesting.

The implication is clear. In the face of these state-mandated tests, teachers teach the students for the test, limiting both their readings and their instructional approaches to fit the requirements of the test. Using research or introducing research-based ideas under these circumstances is too much taxing for teachers. Simply stated, it means working against the system,

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which has purposefully restricted itself from substantial change, changing things at the margin.

Conclusions

The data from the three informants (university faculty members, teachers, and a clinical faculty member) provide useful insights regarding the borders between the world of research and practice in education and, presage possible tips that might help us cross these traditional borders and boundaries. In this light, the responses of the two faculty members are both productive and frustrating. On the productive side, faculty join hands with teachers when they realize the problem of the language of research, expose the impact of the reward structure, voice the pressure of time and identify absence of incentive for teachers to use research. Compared to an average faculty member in the school of education, these faculty members have more experience as teachers and administrators prior to their appointment in their current positions. At present too, these faculty members are working with practitioners, thanks to the various programs geared for the training of practicing teachers and administrators. It is, thus, not accidental that these faculty members have part of the awareness needed to connect the world of researchers and practitioners.

On the frustrating side, these faculty members succumb to the same problem they voiced to solve. To our chagrin, but consistent to the norm, these faculty members tell us they do research for the "luxury of exploring ideas", to quench their "intellectual curiosity", to meet "publication requirements", etc. Further, when asked where they publish their work, they tell us "in the most prestigious national and international journals" though they say they sometimes publish in practitioner journals, too. Then, much as these faculties are closer than their average colleagues to practitioners both in terms of their frequent contact and their background, to show us how to close the gap between the world of researchers and the world of practitioners —they still give into the same academic norm and tradition—creed for prestige, excellence and promotion ---much the same way as their allegedly distant colleagues do.

Largely to our expectation, the clinical faculty member has set an example that might help bridge the gap between the world of researchers and practitioners. By creating the connection between her narrative thought and her perception about research, the clinical faculty member has not only challenged the paradigmatic research tradition which contributes to the observed gap between research and practice, but she also complements what teachers lack in their attempt to create the nexus between their narrative thoughts and their perception about research.

At this point, however, we may still inquire whether the nexus between teachers' narrative thoughts and their perceptions about research or, more importantly, changing the way we do research automatically results in bridging the gap between the world of research and practice in education. In other words, for example, do researchers promote teachers' utilization of educational research and, thus, bridge the gap between research and practice, via ethnographic work, the preferred research strategy from teachers' point of view? Does that make teachers turn to research publications?

The observation I have made in the sample school libraries and resource centers, added with the responses of teachers on the interview show that access to research publications is no more a problem among most teachers. Thanks to the inter library loan systems, as well as the Internet, teachers today have ample access to research publications, including to qualitative and ethnographic work from all over the world. Then, if we take teachers' solidarity with qualitative work at the face value and believe that qualitative research would reverse the current dismal connection between research and practice, then, we are involving the risk of glossing over the fact that such literature is out there and that teachers have not turned to it despite its accessibility at their close quarters. If we push this argument further, and inquire why teachers have not used the existing ethnographic work — the work, which they tend to legitimize—we might find the following explanations, among others.

Primarily, not all-ethnographic work is relevant to teachers' classroom experiences and their narrative thoughts. It is worth recalling that most university based ethnographic researchers are defenders of the same academic norms—prestige, recognition and creed for excellence—and victims of the same reward structure—desire for tenure or grants —as their colleagues in quantitative research areas. As such, to expect university based ethnographic researchers to behave any differently from their quantitative researchers is ignoring the reality of academia, its norm and tradition, which, by and large, dictates the type of research university faculty do. If we count on ethnographic research more than we do on quantitative work in terms of its contribution to close the gap between research and practice in education, then, at best, the difference lies in the potential of ethnographic research in approximating teachers' experiences and narrative thoughts, however unexploited this potential might be.

At the same time, however, we cannot say that the type of educational research which teachers appreciate and value is unavailable altogether, however scanty this work might be. For example, during the interview, few as they are, some teachers have cited the importance and the relevance of articles that come out on practitioner journals (such as Phi Delta Kappan, America Education, among others). True, the supply of such literature is not as sizeable as the work that comes out in academic journals. However, there is still some "relevant" literature, at least, enough to satisfy teachers who are most ambi-

tious, and in dire need to read.

Admittedly, then, while ethnographic and qualitative research help us to approximate the lived lives of teachers and schools, and without forgetting the validity of this work to guide future research direction, we cannot, however, concur that qualitative research per se, or the nexus between teachers' perception about research and their narrative experience allow us to close the gap between research and practice in education. In order to encourage teachers' use of educational research we need to concurrently improve institutional factors that have remained so resilient against the promotion of research in public schools. In the situation where teachers have time pressure and less autonomy over their work, and are subject to conflicting goals and requirements, and are Balkanized among departments and units (Hargreaves, 1994, Sergiovanni, 2001), then, asking them to become reflective consumers of research seems less practical. Simply stated, the average teacher is too incapacitated to make as much of a sacrifice as that.

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