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ABSTRACT
              Research in education has not been relevant because:
1) Decision makers have been making decisions without research
findings and see no need for this kind of information now; 2)
Research findings in the local schools are usually made available to
the decision-maker or administrator after the decisions have been
implemented; 3) Researchers feel the need to replicate findings
before making them known. Several suggestions are made for making
research findings available in a form and at times when they can be
used by the local decision-maker. Dissemination of information which
requires change in curriculum, administration, or methods will be
resisted by those in power. Models which will provide information of
process as well as product evaluation data are suggested as
alternatives which will provide data more quickly, and provide
partial replication before decisions are made. (Author/AG)

Abstract

Let's Make Research More Relevant

Some of the reasons that research in education has not
been relevant are: 1. Decision makers have been making
decisions without research findings and see no need for this
kind of information now; 2. Research findings in the local
schools are usually made available to the decision-maker
or administrator after the decisions have been implemented;
3. Researchers feel the need to replicate findings before
making them known.

Several suggestions are made for making research findings
available in a form and at times when they can be used by
the local decision-maker. First, the technical reports must
be translated into simpler language which can be easily and
quickly read by busy decision-makers. Second, testing dates
may have to be changed so that test results will be available
for analysis before the decisions are made; Third, the re-
searcher will have to become more knowledgeable about the
politics of new knowledge.

Dissemination of information which requires change in cur-
riculum, administration, or methods will be resisted by those
in power. Models which will provide information of process as
well as product evaluation data are suggested as alternatives
which will provide data more quickly, and provide partial
replication before decisions are made.

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Let's Make Research More Relevant

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The discrepancy between research findings and decisions
made by local school boards and school administrators makes
most of the educational research being done meaningless in
terms of implementation by local school districts. That
this problem is true at other levels of government is indi-
cated by the report made by Dr. Dershimer in the April 1971
Educational Researcher. He refers to "practitioners at
the federal, state, and local levels who are key in shaping
or reshaping major educational policies", and says:

> At present these policy influencers seldom
> consult researchers to determine how the
> findings of key studies could influence
> policies. In turn, it has also become evi-
> dent that researchers much listen more close-
> ly to the problems and concerns of the
> practitioners in order to better under-
> stand what needs to be studied to improve
> the system.

In this paper, I will concentrate on the latter issue;
that is, as researchers, we must learn to listen and be
responsive to the concerns and problems of the decision-
makers, and use our understanding of the decision-making
process better in order to really influence the decisions
made in educational circles today. I would like to pose
three factors which contribute to the problem:

1. Decision makers have been making decisions without
   research findings for so long that they see no
   need for using this kind of information now. After
   all, the schools have been opening each fall and
   operating each year without such information, and
   everyone knows that he is an "expert" when it comes
   to educational matters anyway.

2. Research findings are generally made available to
   the decision-maker or administrator long after
   the decisions which required this information have
   been implemented.

3. Researchers are prone to want to corroborate their
   findings thoroughly before they publish them or
   make them known to decision makers, a most desireable
   attribute but one which needs to be explored.

It has been a practice of researchers in the past to

blame the decision maker for not using the "good" results

of evaluation in making decisions. As Dershimer indicated,

this blaming the administrator indiscriminately may be

more of a problem which the researcher should address than

the administrator. This poses some problems in terms of

the kind of training which has been provided most researchers

in education. First, the researcher has been trained in

a highly technical area in most instances (Yamamoto, 1968).

The Title IV trainees, for example, have been given ex-

tensive training in the use of computers, advanced statis-

tical techniques, and experimental design, but very little

training in the politics of disseminating the information

they obtain. Another problem involved in the Title IV

training program is that most of these graduates are found

in teaching positions rather than working in research offices

so that the pattern of their training will be repeated in

the students whom they teach.

Second, while it is true that research in education

has been shorted in terms of money allocated for it (Wynne,

1970), it is also true that researchers have done little to

provide answers to questions asked by the administrators

at decision making time. One reason for this is that the

testing programs upon which most of the summative evaluation
of new programs in the schools is based are given in May of
each year, and by the time the results have been compiled,
reports written, and the information disseminated, the decisions
have long since been made regarding the planning for the new
school year. This planning for a new school year is usually
scheduled for February or March in order that the necessary
materials, personnel, and other administrative details for
beginning a new school year can be obtained and distributed.
This timing is essential for the local school district to
operate, and only if research results are available at
decision making time will they be utilized.

Third, many researchers see the production of summative
data by March as an impossibility since the test data upon
which much research information depends is not collected
until May. This time schedule in most school districts
throughout the nation is almost inflexible. But must we
always test in May? Why not change the testing dates to
January? Granted, the first year or so that the new testing
program was installed, some extrapolation or interpretation
of test data would have to be made. After a year, however,
this could be used as a baseline, and there would be no
reason for waiting until the end of the year to do the
comprehensive testing. In addition if the testing were done
at mid-year, the results could be made available to the
teacher so that she could alter her teaching program if
certain areas of weakness were shown to exist where he had
assumed her children were proficient. This procedure would

also permit the data for analyzing the research programs in

the district, which might bring about change in curriculum

or program, to be available at the time when decisions regard-

ing funding of such programs were being considered.

Cohen (1970) has indicated that recent commentators,

including Stufflebeam and Guba, have pointed out that

evaluation of projects in the schools is potentially rele-

vant to decision-making. The researcher should be aware of

the political implications of his findings, and the fact

that the politics of a situation may make his findings of

lesser importance than some other factors in implementing

programs. Those trained to work in local school districts

or state or federal agencies must be aware that many of

the decisions which are made, not only in regard to program

implementation and resource allocation, but also in the

evaluation itself, are judgmental in nature (Stake, 1970).

In this sense the discrepancy model for evaluating

on-going programs has much merit (Provus, 1970). The re-

searcher or evaluator recognizes that he provides information

which may or may not be influential in making the final

decision. Since it is a vital part of the discrepancy

model of evaluation, the use of process data to both

evaluate programs and corroborate previous findings should

be emphasized. That is, a program may be instituted in a

school system, carried out for a year and a report based on

summative data presented to the Board of Education or

Administration in August or September. By this time, the

report will have little or no effect on the program for that

school year, but a careful monitoring of the program during
the fall of that year, using process data which can be
compared to that collected the previous year could be used
as corraborating evidence that the program should be con-
tinued or discontinued. If the evidence is substantial
that the program is progressing as well as it had the pre-
vious year, and if the previous year's results indicated
that the program was effective, then the recommendation
would be made to continue the program. If the data had
shown the program to be largely ineffective in accomplishing
its goals the previous year, and the process data indicated
that the same kinds of results could be expected during
the coming year, this data could be used to recommend that
the program be dropped or at least modified in a significant
way the following year. There are, of course, many other
possibilities for recommendations, but these should suffice
for our purposes.

Once the decision makers become habituated to receiving
this kind of data, they will request that new programs
have evaluation designs built into them, and pilot studies
can be conducted which will provide information based on
small samples and short periods of time to give some indi-
cation of the usefulness of the projects. Here, less
rigorous probability levels would probably be used, and much
more judgmental kinds of inferences made, subject to more
rigorous follow-up studies.

It is surprising to many people to learn that the

voluminous reports which they write are actually read by people at the state and national levels. As I was reviewing one report submitted to the Bureau of Professional Development this past year, I noted a discrepancy and called the local researcher. His surprised response was, "I never thought that anyone ever read them so I didn't check them carefully". This kind of attitude has developed in many evaluators since much of the information required by state and federal agencies in particular has not provided feedback to them in terms of their programs' effectiveness. In many cases the kind of evaluation requested has been purely of a descriptive nature, and could not be used to determine program effectiveness in any case. As we hear more and more about accountability, the research reports generated by local, state, and federal agencies charged with evaluative responsibilities will be in greater and greater demand, however, and the purely descriptive kinds of reports will be replaced by more thorough reporting using the best kinds of evaluative techniques possible.

A factor which will affect the degree of sophistication and care with which projects are carried out and evaluated is the monitoring function. By a carefully scheduled monitoring of projects, administrators and project directors will be made more and more aware of the importance of performing the kinds of duties which have been prescribed in the proposals which they have submitted, or performing the duties required of a particular kind of curricular innovation.

This monitoring process until recent years has not been
an integral part of most locally conducted evaluation processes,
and much of the data collected has not reflected truly the
kinds of programs for which data was collected. In other
words, the program which was described initially was never
really implemented, but data were collected after a prescribed
period of time which purportedly measured that program. Such
loose evaluations have created many of the discrepancies in
findings which are reported in educational research literature.

Another facet of this problem is that frequently the
research office is called in to evaluate a program after it
has been completed (Theimer, 1970). To stop this kind of
request from coming from administrators who are frequently
trying to simply get data to support their own position
or current practice, researchers will have to build the habit
of thinking in terms of research in the minds of the decision
makers at all levels (Powers, 1970). In order to accomplish
this goal, researchers will have to learn the skills needed
to communicate with those for whom they are gathering their
information. At present, this poses no small problems
(Robertson, 1970, Cohen, 1971). The fact that most of
us feel that we must write very technical reports in order
to impress our peers works to our discredit when we try to
relay our findings to laymen, school boards or other
educators. Our expertness has set us apart, and made us
less able to communicate in simple language with this group
of people.

The problems which beset us as educational researchers
are those which must be addressed by us. Ed Wynne (1971) feels
very pessimistic about ever effecting change through school
administrators, and suggests that we need to be addressing
a new constituency. Provus (1970) has devised a model
which does work in a local school district. I think we must
continue to work with both groups based on my experiences in
Denver and Philadelphia.

The research department of the Philadelphia Public
Schools, largely ignored in any decision making process for
years, has become an increasingly important group involved
in the planning for change in the schools. This change
came about because (1) the department originally undertook
to do post hoc studies, although they realized the limitations
of them. Each time they were asked to perform one of these
activities, however, they carefully explained that they
should be involved in the planning process from the beginning,
and that their findings were not as good as they could be
if they were involved at the beginning of a project. The
message finally got through, and within three years after
the reorganization of the Office of Research and Evaluation,
superintendents were asking for reports on special projects
as they planned their budgets for the succeeding year; (2)
the reports were presented in simple language, with back-up
reports of a technical nature available to support any state-
ment made in the simplified reports; and (3) careful attention
was paid to both the monitoring of the projects and the
reporting of data which was as valid and reliable as it was

possible to obtain in an applied situation. This change did
not occur because the Research Department waited for the
administration to ask them for information. It came about
when we said that the data we had collected should be at
least presented before decisions were made regarding re-
allocation of funds.

As Wynne (1970) and Cohen (1971) so eloquently point
out, however, good information poses a real threat to
those who are and have been working in a totally political
realm. In that area knowledge is dangerous, and great
skill must be employed in presenting data in such a way that
implementation of results can be accomplished with the
least threat to those in power. Where the information de-
mands that major changes in the power structure be made,
such changes will have to be made only after concerted effort
of a political nature. Even the changing of the time of
testing in a school system arouses the suspicions of many
people; to suggest major changes in organization or cur-
riculum will certainly bring out many defensive mechanisms.

I have suggested some of the problems which have
made educational research irrelevant as far as implementation
of new findings in the schools are concerned. I have also
suggested some changes which might help to break through
the bottleneck which keeps the schools operating several
years behind the knowledge we now have regarding good educa-
tional practices. To the extent that we can begin to com-
municate our results in understandable language and at
appropriate times, our work will be effectively incorporated
in the schools systems of our nation.

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