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ABSTRACT

The art of relating educational research to public policy is still primitive. Educational policy is formed mainly by tradition and the political pressure of interest groups, while educational researchers study questions determined by the scientific community. Educational research has not noticeably influenced policy because trained researchers have been too few, resources too limited, and efforts too fragmented. The need for illuminating educational policy by research is great, and the situation is becoming serious. The California Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study, which illustrates cooperation between educational policy makers and researchers includes these aspects: (1) the study is a genuine cooperative venture between the policy makers and researchers; (2) it has had sufficient funding from the several million dollars available to develop new programs; (3) the research and its eventual application requires time, which is available; (4) the study has been flexible in its planning and implementation stages; (5) the policy makers and the researchers meet together continuously, and each teaches the other; (6) the project has had continued advice, to which it has listened, from a broad spectrum of persons on a research advisory board; (7) the research and policy effort has been continuous; and (8) the project is taking advantage of spinoffs. If this study is a good example of research relevant to public policy, then educators are moving from a primitive state of organizing research and policy.

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EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND PUBLIC POLICY:
PROBLEMS AND PROMISE

Robert N. Bush

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Introductory Statement

The mission of the Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching is to improve teaching in American schools. Current major operations include three research and development programs--Teaching Effectiveness, The Environment for Teaching, and Teaching and Linguistic Pluralism--and two programs combining research and technical assistance, the Stanford Urban/Rural Leadership Training Institute and the Hoover/Stanford Teacher Corps Project. The ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources is also a part of the Center. A program of exploratory and related studies provides for smaller studies not part of the major programs.

This paper sets forth certain characteristics of California's Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study which may point the way to a more fruitful interaction between educational research and public policy.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND PUBLIC POLICY:

PROBLEMS AND PROMISE

Robert N. Bush

Let me begin by observing that the state of the art in relating educational research to public policy is extremely primitive. It is much easier to begin with the problems than the promise side, since there is so much more to talk about.

Problems

In the words of C. P. Snow, there are indeed two worlds, and in this case, as with oil and water, they seem almost impossible to mix. They are like theory and practice.

The researcher and the policy maker ask different questions. As Fred McDonald stated in the provocative and illuminating paper he delivered at the University of Texas meeting in October 1975, entitled "Research on Teaching and Its Emphasis for Policy Making": "The researcher may contemplate jumping the brook; the policy maker must jump it." The researcher and the policy maker are bothered by different problems. They march to different drummers. They speak different languages. Each is shaped by his own set of priorities. The policy maker must find an acceptable answer to a pressing problem. The researcher is answerable to his colleagues about the reliability and validity of his instruments, the adequacy of his sample, the generalizability of his findings, the elegance of his design--not about the nature and importance of his problem.

Educational policy is formed mainly by tradition and the political pressure of interest groups, not very much illuminated or influenced by solid information about the potential efficacy of a particular policy.

These remarks were presented at a symposium on Educational Research and Public Policy at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 20, 1976.

It is more difficult to tell from whence research in education takes its cues as to the problems it selects for study. But the cues do not usually come from the policy makers. How researchers phrase their questions is determined mainly by the scientific community, and as a result, their findings usually have little to say to the real world of the policy maker. It is in education generally true, as McDonald stated in the paper just referred to about teaching, that "It should be obvious that research on teaching has not reached the point that it can be used to inform policy decisions in any substantial way."

Seldom are the policy questions that need illumination formulated clearly enough to guide research efforts. Seldom is there enough time, money, and favorable environment for the policy maker and the researcher to work together. Some of these serious problems may be in the process of solution in the California Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study, and I will comment on them later under the heading of "promise."

Educational research has not noticeably influenced policy or practice for a variety of reasons. Trained researchers have been too few, the resources too limited, efforts too fragmented. Research has been directed to small, isolated parts of the total system. The methodologies and samples have been so diverse as to preclude cumulative effect; the methods have unduly copied designs from the natural sciences and have often been inappropriate for the problems under consideration. Until quite recently, much educational research has been carried on by individual professors and a few graduate students working on doctoral dissertations, whose results were filed only to gather dust on library shelves.

Even though the problems are great, the need for illuminating educational policy by research is even greater. We repeatedly embark upon large spending that stems from assumptions and educational policies that have little or no foundation in fact. Both the press and professional literature abound with new examples. Stephen Bailey, for example, pointed to one such situation while discussing the efficiency of spending billions of dollars to help millions of underachievers in our schools, with the comment that "the evidence is increasingly clear that our educational

system is woefully unprepared to use marginal additional money effectively for the redress of educational disadvantage" (Bailey, 1970). Currently, there is great emphasis upon "mainstreaming." In a recent issue of Education Daily, the testimony of Yale psychologist Edward Zigler to Congress concerning support for research on the mentally retarded is headlined as "skeptical on mainstreaming." Zigler pointed out that several years ago experts convinced decision makers that special education was the solution to the problem of training the mentally retarded. Now that special education is looked upon as an undesirable form of grouping or segregation, the pendulum begins to swing in the opposite direction. Decision makers are now committing themselves to such concepts as "normalization" and "de-institutionalization" under the heading of "mainstreaming." Zigler states: "I join with my senior workers in the field who view these concepts as little more than slogans that are badly in need of a data base." Yet we already find states passing laws mandating mainstreaming before there are any basic data to support it. As Zigler says, "It makes little sense to appropriate hundreds of millions of dollars on questionable social practices and fail to find a few million for researchers committed to discovering the actual effects of such practices" (quoted in Education Daily, March 22, 1976).

The situation is serious and time may be running out. While I am not one of the prophets of the impending doom of the school system, I confess to an increasing disquietude that we may be losing ground and that we in education may not be moving forward fast enough to keep pace with the surrounding forces. Fred Hechinger, writing in a recent issue of Saturday Review under an alarming headline entitled "Murder in Academe: The Demise of Education," suggests that as a result of assaults both from the left and the right, education is literally hanging on the ropes. He claims that we have lost our faith in the efficacy of education in schools to keep our social system open and to keep the streams of upward mobility unclogged.

Promise

There are, as I indicate, problems. I could enumerate others, but perhaps I should leave a few for my colleagues on the panel. What of

the promise side of the ledger? First, we are beginning to recognize the problem. This meeting is an example. If one studies the AERA agenda, one sees the word "policy" used more frequently in the last few years. Several educational policy centers have been established in the last decade. More promising even than such centers, which in some cases are perhaps too future oriented, are the instances of policy makers spending more time and resources to hire researchers to help them answer their policy questions--and, furthermore, keeping the researchers to the task. My chief experience in such a large-scale effort has been with the California Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study. It is a promising venture indeed. What in that experience has led me to suggest that there is promise ahead? Let me list eight aspects that come quickly to mind. No doubt there are others that my colleagues on the panel can suggest.

1. The Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study is a genuine cooperative venture between the policy makers and the researchers. It is a venture between a federal funding agency (the National Institute of Education), a state policy-making group (the California Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing), and a large, diverse advisory committee, all working closely together.

2. There is money available--several million dollars. We are breaking new territory. Such an effort always costs more the first time around, until a prototype has been developed. Later it may be possible to have the kind of research that illuminates policy without such substantial expenditures as this one.

3. The research and its eventual application requires time. The process cannot be hurried, even though policy needs are pressing. In most instances, research that will illuminate policy is not a short-term affair.

4. The Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study has been flexible; it has modified its attack and its plan as it has gone along. It has not attempted to stay wedded to its original design. This has caused some travail, but on balance it has been wise to be open, flexible, and developmental in approach.

5. The policy maker and the researchers meet together continuously, and each teaches the other. In my judgment, there has not been a sufficiently balanced exchange. Thus far the policy makers have done more listening than talking. The researchers have been more successful at influencing the policy makers to change their questions than the policy makers have been in getting the researchers to modify their efforts to answer the questions that are important to the policy makers. Nonetheless, there has been a genuine exchange, much more than is typically the case, and it is increasing as the program goes forward.

6. The project has had continued advice, to which it has listened, from a broad spectrum of persons on a research advisory board. The advice has not been narrow and doctrinaire. The panel includes a wide range of researchers, a wide range of practitioners, and a wide range of administrators and policy makers. The research advisory board has stayed together for a period of several years. They are all fully acquainted with the project over its long and complicated history. The advice has not been hit-and-run.

7. The research and policy effort has been continuous. We have stuck to the problem persistently. Now, after several years, the project has reached Phase III, which is the end of current funding, but already there is talk about a needed Phase IV.

8. The project is taking advantage of certain spin-offs. Both the researchers and the policy makers are asking better kinds of questions than ever before, questions that encompass a broader range of problems than in the beginning. The original policy question was quite specific: "What can we learn about teacher behavior that will enable us to formulate new teacher licensing requirements?" Now a multiple series of questions are being asked, not just about licensing but also about preservice training, in-service training, and the teacher's role in the improvement of instruction. This means a recognition on the part of both the policy maker and the researcher of the interdependency of the different parts of the total teaching system. We are beginning to get away from our naive belief that great improvements in education will spring from piecemeal reforms such as introducing a new method, a

new license, a new method of instruction, an in-service education program, the regrouping of learners, organizing teachers into teams, or adopting a particular program of instruction. We are beginning to recognize the importance of compatible systems in which behavior of persons, the media and context of communications, scheduling of activities, the reward system, and many other factors operate to produce effects. This recognition of the need to give attention to all elements, so crucial to system performance, is something new and promising in education.

Just as one picture is worth a thousand words, so too is one good example worth a myriad theoretical statements. A good example of research relevant to public policy may be in the making in the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study of the California Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing. If this turns out to be the case, we shall have moved forward from the primitive state of the art referred to at the beginning of these remarks.

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