The Meaning of Scholarly Activity and the Building of Community

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Over 30 years ago, I was a sixth-grade teacher in a fast-growing suburb of Los Angeles. The school was new; the district was building a new school every year. (It was a time when people could buy new houses for $100 down.) Some students in my class had been to as many as 12 schools. Many came from poor families; some were students of the military; others had moved to California from the Midwest for the promise of a new life. Educational change was in the air; it was the era of “individualizing instruction” and “modern math.” But there were 45 students in my class, and I was responsible for teaching more than 10 subject areas.

I had a teaching credential from UCLA where I had participated in what was to be the last year of a teacher-preparation program based on the teachings of John Dewey. I had learned to teach by participating in the creation of all the materials and activities that I was to use as a teacher: for example, original songs and rhythms, books and artwork for a social-studies unit on Brazil. I felt well prepared and well qualified. I saw social studies as the core of the curriculum, and knowledge as more than the rote learning of discrete subjects, but rather as flowing from and integrated with the core. The role of the teacher was to create the conditions for students to engage actively in learning.

I found out, when I began to teach, that creating these conditions was much more difficult than I had ever imagined. So I did what many other teachers before me had done: I tried to keep the students busy, tried to follow the curriculum, and most of all, tried to survive the isolation and loneliness and the fear of losing control. I stopped thinking about the ideas I had learned at UCLA. The questions that mattered most were: Were they learning anything? When would I stop having a stomachache? Should I become a social worker?

One day the principal called us to a meeting at 3 o’clock. We dragged ourselves to the teachers’ room to be met by a woman there who gave us a form to fill out concerning our principal and our school. I zipped through the questionnaire, finishing first, which allowed me time to talk to her. She told me that she was doing research, and that the questionnaire was attempting to get at the type of organization of this school, the style of the principal, and the influence that all this had on the teacher. I remember being fascinated by the idea that someone was studying us. After all I was just a teacher. But could she possibly understand? Where in the questionnaire was the terror of losing control of 45 students? Or that what we had learned in preparing to teach had little to do with what we were actually doing? Or that we had no time to really reflect on our practice, and that we teachers rarely talked to each other about teaching? Did she know that the district curriculum people who were supposed to help were too distant from our problems to understand them and never asked us our opinion? Did she have any idea how wonderful and exhilarating it was to talk about intellectual ideas with another adult? It never occurred to me that before too long, I would be standing where she was.

Indeed a few years later I went to graduate school and became involved in a research project that connected 18 schools in 18 different districts to UCLA—the League of Cooperating Schools. My job as research assistant (there were 12 of us: 11 men and 1 woman) was to go to assigned schools to encourage discussion and action to improve schools, while documenting the process (Goodlad, 1975). The idea of a partnership between university people and public schools to implement and study the change process was a bold idea for its time. (Studying the change process in schools requires a long-term relationship, and there were few models.) We were exposing the schools to new ideas in curriculum, instruction, and school organization, observing the impact they had on the functioning of the principals and teachers. In my new role I found myself thinking: Why weren’t these teachers more willing to be open with each other? How come they don’t read more? Was my principal so paternalistic? Was I this docile when I was a teacher?

It is not surprising, then, that trying to understand and resolve the contradictions in my own professional life, and in the professional lives of educators as a group, has become one of the main thrusts of my work. It has taken a long time even to figure out the right questions to ask, let alone provide the answers. Can we connect schools and universities, building community that provides for growth and change, and sharing responsibility for and involvement in practice and research? Can we develop frames of understanding that consider and give voice to the inner and observed lives of teachers and schools as partners, rather than solely as objects of study? Is it possible to study schools, programs, and practices to enhance knowledge as well as aid in the improvement of practice?

Unraveling and Understanding the Ties That Bind

As a graduate student, becoming socialized into the world of research, I often felt as if I were living a double life. At the...
university I was exploring theories of social change, conceptions of curriculum, and the sociology of organizations. While the subjects were stimulating and provocative, it was difficult to make the link between the theories and the particular schools we were working to change. Looking back, it is not hard to see that a gap existed between the university and the schools—and we were trying to bridge it.

In the two schools I was most involved with, I met with teachers and their principals every other week. Although both schools were totally different in fact and feel, I tried to reconcile them with my university learnings about generalizability. But the lived lives of the teachers in the schools I went to, their world and their work, were not represented in our class discussions. And words like norms, values, leadership, and bureaucracy, while helpful, did not explain enough about the practices and relationships that I observed.

The teachers, although excited about their connection to the university, seemed unable or unwilling to talk openly about their students, themselves, their school, or their relationships with us. (Some did voice their concerns about being treated as “second-class citizens.”) The administrators, predominantly male, went to meetings with university people to learn about new ideas to improve their schools; the teachers, predominantly female, were to receive what knowledge was thought appropriate. While we initially bought into this “trickle-down” theory of change, we soon realized that, if we wanted real reform, teachers would have to be directly involved. Willard Waller, in 1932, had put it this way:

It is not possible to develop the personalities of students favorably without giving like opportunities to teachers, and it is not possible to liberate students without liberating teachers. (1932/1967, p. 445)

A “Translator” Between Practice and Theory

It seemed to some of us, then, that there was a role here for a “translator”: someone who although excited about concepts, big explanatory ideas, and small mini-theories, also had the “head” of a teacher or principal and was comfortable with the ambiguity and messiness of schools. I began to see myself as progressing from being “just a teacher” to being “just a translator.” We were so involved in the building of this network of university and school people, some of us were now uncomfortable in both worlds. Calling us “boundary spanners,” “linkers,” “marginal,” or “translators”—depending on one’s orientation—helped, but just a little. Because although we were making things happen in the schools and trying to write it all down, we didn’t yet have a way of explaining it to others. The old methods and theories weren’t sufficient, yet we were not clear on what could or should replace them. We were discovering what John Dewey meant when he wrote:

Experience and experiment are not self-explanatory ideas. Rather, their meaning is part of the problem to be explored. To know the meaning of empiricism we need to understand what experience is. (1938, p. 25)

A critical incident I experienced as a research assistant dramatizes the problem. We had collected interview and questionnaire data and had worked for 3 months organizing it to feed it back to the schools. The researchers (who went to the schools only to collect data) wanted to get a group response to how the schools reacted to the data. They wanted me to pause at several places in the feedback for as long as it took so that they could check off group responses on their carefully constructed data sheet. A tremendous argument ensued and lasted a week. They were trying to get “good data,” and I was trying to say that I had a relationship with these people and it was unnatural to talk and pause as was suggested. We were fighting about the meaning of research, the nature of our collaboration, the appropriateness of the search for “objectivity” in what was already a “subjective” set of relationships. But our experience and what was then the acceptable canon were in conflict. In the end, we compromised, but the meaning of “data” and the appropriateness of the existing research methods were being challenged, as were the purposes of our work.

I thought at the time that these issues were new. As I subsequently discovered, they were not only years and decades old, but had been around for centuries. In the early 18th century an obscure professor of rhetoric at the University of Naples, Giambattista Vico, proposed a conception of acquiring knowledge of human society separate and distinct from other forms and methods:

This is a sort of knowing which participates in an activity claim ... the knowledge of the actors as against the audience, the “inside story” as opposed to the “outside” vantage point; knowledge by “direct acquaintance”... or by sympathetic insight into those of others. (Berlin, 1978, p. 117)

But this approach did not meet with approval in the Age of Enlightenment, where the dominant drive was to make laws for the social sciences as rigorous and universal as those for the physical sciences. And that dichotomy continues to bedevil us today.

The League Project exposed issues that raised pivotal questions: What is knowledge? And whose knowledge counts as legitimate? What do we really mean by collaboration and colleagueship? Who should drive the agenda for change? Us? Them? How can we talk about universal truths when there are such enormous differences in schools? What do we do with schools that for complex reasons of history, culture, and context, don’t or can’t change? Do we tell them what to do? And does that do any good? How do we explain and listen to the competing voices of teachers, principals, and community? Whose reality do we act upon? Can we explain what we are seeing or doing without embedding it in its own specific context? (Mishler, 1979).

We were stumbling upon and struggling toward understandings that enabled us to see that the discrete areas of research about teaching, schools, and change needed conceptual refinement or modification, and that the methods that were acceptable at the time didn’t and indeed couldn’t allow us to tell the whole story as we saw it. We were becoming, in C. Wright Mills’s words, “self-conscious thinkers,” not to be “mastered by method or theory,” recognizing that the formulations of the problems we were studying had to include “values and feelings, arguments and fears” (Mills, 1959, pp. 130–131).

Deepening Conceptual Knowledge About Teachers, School Cultures, and the Process of Change

We—and others known and unknown to us—were on the verge of some breakthroughs in the building of some of this
knowledge: about teachers, about schools, and about change in and improvement of practice (Bentzen, 1974; Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Goodlad, 1975; Lortie, 1975; Sarason, 1971; Smith & Keith, 1971). Initially researchers were interested in the individual characteristics of teachers. For example, teaching had often been described as being for people not as “bright” as other professionals, or for women who were just interested in a job subordinate to marriage, or for “unmarriageable women and unsaleable men” (Waller, 1967). But it was not until Lortie’s classic study in 1975 that the contexts of teaching, the tenuous connection between teaching and learning, and the isolation of teachers from other adults were so clearly and poignantly explained. By analyzing the rewards of teaching (the excitement when students “get it”), how teachers spoke about their own learning and their students’ learning (its “endemic uncertainties”) as well as their lack of connection to other adults, he began to unlock and give conceptual richness to the social realities of teaching and the problems of change. And he made us aware that the very thing teachers were supposed to do for their students—create the conditions for their growth and learning—was being denied to them in their own schools.

The Social System of Schools
The social system of schools and communities had been studied earlier (Coleman, 1962; Gordon, 1957; Hollingshead, 1949; Lynd & Lynd, 1937), and those studying the school as an organization continued to document problems of goal ambiguity, the vulnerability of schools to the external society, and the varied nature of schools’ adaptations to these characteristics (Bidwell, 1965; Miles, 1967). But Seymour Sarason’s book The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change (1971) moved beyond these earlier studies to link the continuous press for reform in the society with the powerful norms that tied a school together, its “behavioral and programmatic regularities”: the patterned ways of behavior during lunch hours and faculty meetings, how school programs were organized into grade levels and discrete subject areas dictating particular sequences at particular times. Schools are cultures, and cultural change is a far more complicated affair than the simplistic assumption that new curricula or pedagogical techniques—even though they might be better—could be simply delivered to schools and included in teachers’ practices. Rethinking these regularities was at the heart of what authentic change was all about, and also realizing that it involved not only new subject matter and pedagogical techniques and new technologies but people, their values and aspirations, their understandings and their commitments.

The Problem of Change and Utilizing New Knowledge
Studying how people and groups change as a result of understanding and acting upon new knowledge has a long history (Lewin, 1947). One line of inquiry was concerned with how innovative ideas—knowledge produced in the university, or elsewhere—actually got used and spread to others (Havelock, 1971). Kurt Lewin’s insistence upon cooperative work among scientists was responsible for designing specific research to find solutions to specific social problems: ranging from resolving organizational conflict to studying whether solitary or group involvement encouraged women to use self-examination for the detection of breast cancer. In his view, researchers were also educators, not only inquiring into particular practices, but using what they learned from their inquiry to educate others (Lewin, 1947; Schon, 1991).

Action Research
Still another approach to change occurred as early as 1953 when Stephen Corey and his colleagues at Teachers College used a method of action research to help school faculties work better by using a cooperative problem-solving approach. School teams identified the problem, while the university researchers helped them go through a research process (Corey, 1953). Other researchers at Teachers College, working through the Horace Mann–Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation, cooperated with schools on problems of practice and theory such as learning to work in groups (Miles, 1959), writing new curricula, creating new forms of administration. This work continued during the forties, fifties, and sixties at Teachers College, but this kind of sustained connection to schools lost favor and funding during the seventies (Passow, 1991). It was not until the Rand Change Agent Study of federally funded school improvement projects in 1978 (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978) that conceptions of school change and improvement linked process issues—such as teacher commitment, rewards for staff involvement, and opportunities and support for teacher learning and leadership—with outcomes: outcomes that showed changed teacher practices, student growth, and project continuance. Recently McLaughlin defined a perspective on school improvement that showed that while policies could enable outcomes, such characteristics as will, motivation, and commitment were locally defined and largely beyond the reach of policy (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 124).

The increased understanding in these three areas—the context and content of the social realities of teaching, the complexities of the culture of the school, and the problematic nature of the school-change process—became the basis for a burgeoning literature in the past 2 decades that has sought to describe and conceptualize the practices and problems of school improvement (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Goodlad, 1990; Hargreaves, 1991; Little, 1981; Louis & Miles, 1991; McLaughlin, 1987; Sizer, 1992).

The Fragmentation of School-Reform Efforts
Yet despite this growing knowledge, school-reform movements have continued to stress one reform at a time—either curriculum, or equity, or alternatives, or high schools, or “excellence.” Restrictive and prescriptive policies, unrelated to the specifics of culture and context, have only abetted the fragmentation of curriculum and the erosion of many of the rewards of teaching, attempting to achieve quick fixes rather than comprehensive change (Cohn & Kottcamp, 1992; Passow, 1986). The transformation of society, producing vast changes in social, political, economic, and educational realities, has increased the pressure to radically transform schools and to effect comprehensive change in educational institutions. The impact of a growing number of new voices with expanded views dealing with how knowledge is created, understood, and transmitted, and the need for systemic thinking and action to make real change possible, are creating an environment and an opportunity for schools of education to rethink many of their purposes and practices, enabling them to encourage an expanded view of the nature of scholarly activity (Clifford & Guthrie, 1988;
An Expanded View of Scholarly Activity

I use the phrase “scholarly activity,” despite its seeming to be a marriage of contraries or contradictions (Elbow, 1986; Lampert, 1985), an embrace of what appear to be two ideas that do not fit comfortably together: scholarship, defined as “a quality of knowledge and learning... which is systematic, attempting accuracy, critical ability and thoroughness,” and activity, “requiring action, producing real effects as opposed to theoretical, ideal or speculative” (Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary, 1983). The development of a synthesis from these seeming contradictions has important implications for scholarly work: the kinds of relationships we develop, how we frame and carry out our work, and how we give voice to both activism and knowledge building. As I have suggested, this approach to scholarship has a rich tradition (Lewin, 1947; Miles, 1959; Mills, 1959; Passow, 1991; Sarason, 1974; Stinchcombe, 1965) and a strong and growing presence (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Fine, 1992; Hopfenberg, Levin, Meister, & Rogers, 1990; Lampert, 1985; Lieberman, 1988; Sarason, 1972; Schon, 1991; Shulman, 1987; Wasley, 1991). There are, of course, many differences in focus, purpose, and scope of work, and it is to these differences, and how people make meaning from them, that we now turn. The work I cite here is necessarily limited by time and provides examples of only a small number of those involved in this growing work.

Three categories encompass this expanded view of scholarly activity. While they may overlap to a certain degree, they help us to see the differences in the ways people are thinking and working. They include (a) studying school programs, events, practices, people, organizations, and particular cultures to better understand and describe the improvement of practice; (b) creating new frames and strategies for thinking about, understanding, and acting upon this new knowledge; and (c) building new collaborative structures and relationships between schools and universities that deal with specific or general areas of content and pedagogy, aimed at the transformation of research and practice.

Studying Programs of School Improvement: Describers and Improvers

In the first category—studying programs and school cultures to better understand and describe the improvement of practice—again there is a history to draw upon. For decades researchers have been studying schools and trying to understand them, as well as improve them, using different methods and foci. ¹ Harry Passow’s Washington study, in 1967, organized 80 faculty, 136 graduate students, and 36 task forces at Teachers College to study and redesign the schools of the District of Columbia, an 18-month project. This was clearly a fine example of mobilizing the faculty, but we were to learn that this kind of mobilization was needed at the school and district level as well. Lou Smith and Pat Keith’s Anatomy of an Educational Innovation (Smith & Keith, 1971) documented the first year in the creation of one new school attempting to rethink structure, curriculum, and teacher, student, and administrative roles. John Goodlad’s A Place Called School (1984) was an attempt to study schooling as it existed in the United States in the 1980s. Within this varied change literature, researchers have seen themselves, and been seen, as both “describers” and “improvers”; those who describe what schools are like, and those who actively engage in creating programs for change. Some, to be sure, have been both.

Describers have come from many disciplines such as political science, educational history, and policy analysis. They have researched and written about the politics of restructuring schools; the policies, paradoxes and practices of school reform; the historical trends as well as the tensions, contexts and meanings of school improvement and restructuring (Cohn & Kottcamp, 1992; Cuban, 1984; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Glickman, 1990; Hargreaves, 1991; House, 1974; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Little, 1988; Louis & Miles, 1990; Timar & Kirp, 1989; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). The growth of this change literature over the last 30 years has enriched both the research and the practice communities and has encouraged, if not a blend, certainly a variety of hybrid research purposes and stances toward schools, particularly in this period. Some describers, crossing over into new territory, have used conventional research methodology, adding a new dimension to their work—that of immediate utility. The Chicago survey Charting Reform: The Teachers’ Turn (Teachers’ Survey Work Group, n.d.) is an example of a conventional form adapted for purposes of reform. This is a survey where there was much guidance and collaboration from school people, but where the intent was to collect not only good data, but data that would be useful during the change process as it was happening. (It includes quantitative data on teachers’ views on collegiality, influence, voice, parent involvement, instructional change, etc.)

Other studies have developed methodology to include voices that have been missing from our work. For example, in a study where Matthew Miles, Ellen Saxl, and I were trying to understand the role of assistance personnel in bringing about school improvement, the “assisters” we were studying were still frustrated by our (we thought) very thorough case studies. They felt that we still didn’t get at the intensity and complexities of their work. So we invented—with them—a way of framing their dailiness with questions that described the many interventions they made, attempting to be more sensitive to the rhythms and many relationships that made up their daily work. These vignettes, instead of being written by us, were written by the assistants themselves and edited by us. In this way, we were getting closer to both the insiders’ and the outsiders’ view of their work (Miles, Saxl, & Lieberman, 1988). The reach of this kind of work continues to broaden and deepen and change.

In a recent study done at our Center, we were asked to document the effects of a student-centered restructuring effort organized by the New York City Teachers Center Consortium of the United Federation of Teachers during its second year. In this instance, our funder, Myrna Cooper, told us what she wanted to know about the 12 schools involved in the effort. Her questions—straightforward, practical, common-sense questions—served as the basis for our interviews and made it possible for us to ask practical questions that touched upon how the teachers thought about their work. Our interpretation of the data—conceptualizing it through our understanding of what we knew about teachers, the culture of the school, and the process of change—enriched the study and formed the basis for insights into the restructuring process, which we called “Early Lessons in

¹ This study was conducted by the New York City Teachers Center Consortium of the United Federation of Teachers during its second year. The data was analyzed by Myrna Cooper, and the results were presented at a conference sponsored by the Consortium. The study involved interviewing teachers at 12 different schools in New York City. The data was used to provide insights into the process of school improvement and to identify strategies for future improvement efforts. The study was funded by the New York City Teachers Center Consortium of the United Federation of Teachers.

These studies make manifest the range of purposes and methods used to study and improve schools; they also reveal the changing relationships of some researchers to the researched. Researchers must decide how close or how distant they will be, whose purposes they want to serve, how much use they will make of participants’ views of their own reality, and how much they care about the utility of their findings to those who do the work that is being researched (Roman & Apple, 1990). Karl Weick reminded us some years ago that it was not possible to be “general and accurate and simple” all at the same time and that perhaps we ought to have a portfolio of research positions, making an analogy to a clockface with 12 positions ranging from aphorisms to journalism (Weick, 1979, p. 41).

New Frames and Strategies for Taking Action

The second category—creating new frames and strategies for thinking about and taking action on these new learnings—further expands the idea of “scholarly activity.” Some scholars, going beyond thinking or studying about improving schools, are taking action based on broad, comprehensive conceptions for change, conceptions that, in many cases, include new voices and new ways of organizing work and understanding practice. Sometimes moving from theory and conception to action, sometimes from practice to conception or theory, sometimes creating strategies or documenting the conceptualization of strategies, they push the field forward, illuminating the possibilities and limitations for changing schools.

Researchers such as Comer, Gardner, and Goodlad, to name a few, are working in schools, testing their conceptual and theoretical ideas in real contexts. For example, the high schools that belong to the Coalition of Essential Schools subscribe to Ted Sizer’s proposed set of principles that encourage a rethinking of the purposes and practices of high schools. The Coalition principles are not prescriptive, but give the schools broad goals to strive for, goals of value and worth. For example, the aphorism “less is more” involves teachers in departments working together to think through how they will organize the curriculum, taking a stand and planning together how to deepen and broaden student experience. Working on ideas of this scope make public the tensions in teachers’ lives that have long been private and make school change a major school effort. Hank Levin at Stanford developed the idea of “Accelerated Schools” for students who, historically, have been slated for remediation. His three overarching principles include “unity of purpose,” that is, agreement by all in the school community on school goals, school-based decision making and responsibility, and building on the resources of all members of the community—from parental involvement to understanding the strengths of diverse cultural and learning styles (Hopfenberg et al., 1990). Conceptions such as these energize and inspire school people who, by committing themselves to new visions and values, become an integral part of the process of finding out how to enact them in practice. Because they provide a language and generic ideas rather than prescriptions, school people can share in developing these ideas, in making them practical and meaningful in their own particular context. Researchers, resisting prescriptive shortcuts, share their conceptual frameworks and learn about and become more sensitive to real school contexts; practitioners theorize, analyze their own work, and take charge of their own professional lives. Scholarly activity then becomes a shared enterprise.

Some researchers are revitalizing teacher research—a form of collaborative research that had its historical roots in the forties and fifties. They argue that teacher research is a form of “insider knowledge” in the way that Vico defined it. This research involves teachers in a process of systematically inquiring and reflecting upon their own work, thinking through and giving voice to knowledge that was heretofore unspoken and unacknowledged (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Griffin, Lieberman, & Jacullo-Noto, 1982; Miller, 1990). The concept of teacher knowledge defined as subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and craft knowledge has broadened and deepened this whole field of inquiry (Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1991; Grossman, 1990; Shulman, 1987).

As concepts such as “collegiality” and “professional community” are explored, researchers, seeking to understand the ways in which teachers come to share meaning and purpose about their work and their students (Grumet, 1988; Hargreaves, 1991; Little, 1981; McLaughlin, 1990), are focusing on the context of school change, some on the content, and some on the comprehensiveness of the change process itself (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; McLaughlin, 1990).

Methods and purposes range from “collaborative conversations” held over a long period of time (Hollingsworth, 1992) to narrative stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986) to giving advice, “disciplined by research,” to school people (Schlechty, 1990), to organizing teacher groups for discussion of existing research on particular topics of teacher interest (Casanova, 1991).

Researchers and school people, in these examples, open themselves to learning from one another, building more long-lasting and trusting relationships, and challenging, refining, or even changing their own frameworks. These are important efforts by the research community and school communities to combine their abilities and skills to understand problems of practice and theory, long resistant to other approaches. How we as academics engage in this research is conditioned in part by the respect with which we approach schools struggling, within new social contexts, to deal with the challenges of rapid change. It has much to do with the frameworks within which we place teachers, the school culture, and the process of change.

Our Center at Teachers College is collaborating with a group of schools in New York—the Center for Collaborative Education—that have worked for many years to create learner-centered schools. For the past 2 years, Linda Darling-Hammond and her colleagues have been documenting the development of an alternate assessment system. In the process of analysis of the data, Darling-Hammond began to see that the process of assessment of student learning was better understood as part of an overall accountability system for the entire school: including the school’s policies, practices, structures, and processes, as well as its safeguards and incentives. Feeding back this model of accountability to the school enabled the school people to understand in conceptual and practical terms what they were attempting to do.
They now had a language and a frame for understanding and analyzing the relationship of assessment to accountability.

Transformation of Research and Practice

The third and last category concerns the building of collaborative structures and relationships between schools and universities, dealing with specific or general areas of content and pedagogy, and directed at the transformation of research and practice. This category often has the other two nestled within it, because academics involved in building new collaborative arrangements—with schools, teachers, parents, or other agencies—confront the necessity to change, in substantial ways, how students are valued and challenged, how schools are organized and run, and how policies can support and enable such changes to take place (Fine, 1992). (New methods of work and strategies for change are developed, while the process, with the inevitable problems that come with radical transformation, are documented.)

These collaborative arrangements include school-based charters, which are semi-autonomous schools within schools that have their own governance councils made up of parents, teachers, and students—as in some Philadelphia high schools; school-university partnerships, attempting to restructure schools and create professional development schools, as in Maine, New York, Georgia, Washington, and other states; and subject matter collaboratives or networks that focus on math, writing, teacher research, or student-oriented pedagogy (Little & McLaughlin with Knudsen, Lichtenstein & Sharken, 1991; Lord, 1991) and that are directed at supporting and transforming curriculum and practice in schools and universities (Heath & Magnolia, 1991). Creating these collaboratives becomes the means to build will, commitment, and motivation, while sustaining them often brings both communities—school and university—into conflict with the bureaucracies and cultures of which they are a part (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992).

Those university researchers—whose goals are the transforming of schools and universities—find that their goals change the nature of their relationship with schools, challenging them to reevaluate the role of research and the responsibilities of researchers who participate in authentic collaboration with school-based educators. The role of the academic is no longer that of the dispassionate observer, but rather that of an insider and an outsider at the same time: one who dares to “speak the unspeakable,” because she must document what she sees, but also one who cares deeply and passionately, and empathizes with the problems of practice. She must hold on to a larger vision of what is possible, while not avoiding or being unaware of the inevitable conflicts that come from being a part of both worlds. Two examples give the flavor of this work—one in an urban and one in a rural environment.

The Philadelphia Schools Collaborative is attempting to transform comprehensive high schools through the creation of small communities, called “Charters,” that work with educators and parents (Fine, 1992). Academics involved in doing “collaborative and critical ethnography” find themselves working as organizers of teacher and parent groups, collaborators in helping to develop classroom-based performance assessments, co-constructors of written work documenting the process of change, advocates for decentralized professional development, learners attuned to teacher and parent questions, and teachers raising questions that aim at fundamental reform. Academic work is being involved in schools, at the district office, in Charter meetings, and at teacher seminars, but it is also being involved in collecting data, writing about it, feeding back information—making sure that what is made public has the consent of and input from fellow collaborators. This cannot be categorized as basic or applied research; it is knowledge that is co-constructed and owned by practitioner and researcher alike. Those who do this work find themselves involved in creating, documenting, and encouraging “community, relationality and autonomy...in the face of traditions of bureaucracy” (Fine, 1992, p. 32). They are scholars and they are advocates for transforming schools. They are creators of knowledge and critical analysts of the change process.

A school-university partnership, attempting to restructure schools and create professional development schools, is our second example. The growing literature on school-university partnerships documents “scholars of practice”: academics who work with people in schools, building trust through continuous interaction, creating dialogue on topics of substance, and organizing shared work. An emerging culture that values personal caring and professional advocacy provides increased support for improved school practice (Glickman, 1990; Lieberman, 1992; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Miller & Silvernail, 1992; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988). Miller and Silvernail, working in a school-university partnership in Maine, describe the struggles for power and control between school-based and university-based faculty as they work together to create a professional development school.

With the accepted professional roles of both teacher and university faculty being challenged, key questions are being raised: What is the role of university and school faculty in the production and use of professional knowledge? Where unequal power relationships are the rule, how is equality achieved and what does that mean? Whose knowledge is of most worth or value—and to whom? Initially both school and university justify what they know as most important, blaming each other for the problems. Subsequently they may work together—side by side but separately—presenting their own world view. The achievement of a new synthesis involving the transformation of beliefs and the creation of new knowledge in both cultures is a goal that has yet to be accomplished. Those involved in the inevitable conflicts that arise in the course of these collaborations might draw some comfort from the fact that the difficulty of building community and creating knowledge is in direct relation to the magnitude of the effects on organizations and individuals.

Of course, not everyone in academic institutions can or should be doing this particular kind of work, but it should most definitely be encouraged for a portion of the faculty of schools of education.

Colleagueship, Collaboration, and Changing Conditions in the University

The scholarly work that I have described here is coming up against old structures, values, and prejudices in universities and schools that need to be reconsidered. Donald Schon and others have argued that the university has been dominated by a model of “technical rationality,” particularly in the teaching profession. The assumption has been—and the reward structure has reflected it—that the highest form of inquiry, the best research, is the product of those in the university removed from the contexts of practice. In turn, school...
people have been seen as "technicians" who must somehow absorb the results of this research and introduce it into the very same contexts of practice that have been derogated and ignored. This view has led to serious omissions and distortions in academic work, which have had dire effects on policies influencing school change and reform. The necessary and important contributions of school people themselves in the construction of knowledge have been largely ignored, and the influence of and respect for the university diminished.

The organizational structure of the university, reflecting the values underlying it, has limited our ability to do interdisciplinary work, team research, and team writing and, in so doing, has inhibited the building of a professional community of our own, as well as one with schools. To build such community will require changes in the kind of research that is supported. Students will need support for being members of research teams that work in schools, as well as for taking classes in the university. Criteria for tenure and promotion of professors who do this kind of work must be developed, through discussions of time frames and time limits, standards for written work that must face critical scrutiny, and public discussion with peers and expanding audiences that go beyond our own community (Sarason, 1974, p. 265). We should question accepted norms that encourage junior professors to write many articles on short-term, manageable problems, sometimes of questionable worth, while work with senior colleagues grappling with complex problems of longer duration is discouraged. Far from lowering standards, support for collaborative inquiry would enhance the work of students and professors alike (Lynn Miller, letter to the author, January 10, 1992, and Rodman Webb, letter to the author, February 10, 1992).

The practice-theory connection is no better served than when it is lived. We can learn from as well as about practice. Our challenge is to create a community that educates all of us, those in the university and those in the schools, a community that expands our relationships with one another and, in so doing, our knowledge and our effectiveness.

There is a great deal to be learned from our own research: educational sociologists describing the necessity to change from teacher isolation to professional communities working together to improve practice; cognitive psychologists making us aware of the relational nature of human cognition and the importance of context; change theorists teaching us that the conditions and practices of teachers' work must be redefined so they can work at meeting the twin goals of equity (providing for all students) and excellence (their own and their students'); organizational theorists and policy analysts providing evidence that people change systems and that the old notions of top-down and bottom-up oversimplify what it means to both engage people beyond their immediate self-interest and rethink power relations and policies that enable such change; scholars of practice helping us realize that research, policy making, and advocacy for schools demand intellectual diversity, methodological pluralism, and context specificity as well as new roles and relationships with schools; and feminist researchers and theorists making us aware that nonhierarchical relationships, caring, compassion, and concern for people are not antithetical to competence, but rather a necessity for full understanding of what it means to be human.

I began this speech with a personal struggle that has sustained my professional life. Over the years I have learned what C. Wright Mills was talking about when he said that "personal troubles" are connected to "public issues," and the solutions to those issues require that individuals work in collective ways (Mills, 1959, p. 226). Perhaps I learned my earlier lessons from Dewey better than I thought. In Democracy and Education (1916/1966) he wrote, "Any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative to those who participated in it" (p. 6). And so it is with education and schools in our time. We have much to offer and much to learn.

Notes

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The Horace Mann–Lincoln Institute at Teachers College in the forties, fifties, and sixties did field-based research, focused on curriculum, underachievers, and ability groups, and assisted school districts (Passow, 1991).

2This poignantly expressed by Geertz. "Finding somewhere to stand in a text that is supposed to be at one and the same time an intimate view and a cool assessment is almost as much of a challenge as gaining the view and making the assessment in the first place" (Geertz, 1988, p. 10).

3See Schön, 1991, particularly pp. 9-11. See also Wood for her discussion of the "technical" and "constructed" view of research.

References


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