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# Schism: When Research and Practice Fail to Meet

## **Abstract**

The authors explore the hypothesis generation, intervention formation and operationalization of PL 107-110, as a cautionary example of the social cost of failure to effectively integrate empirical research to professional practice. They suggest a reexamination of traditional dichotomous University identification as "Research versus Practitioner" and present a case for a stronger emphasis upon the integration of research and practice through applied experiential activity during the period of University education.

## **Keywords**

research methods, reflective practice

## **Author Statement**

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## **Schism: When Research and Practice Fail to Meet**

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### **Abstract**

The authors explore the hypothesis generation, intervention formation and operationalization of PL 107-110, as a cautionary example of the social cost of failure to effectively integrate empirical research to professional practice. They suggest a reexamination of traditional dichotomous University identification as "Research versus Practitioner" and present a case for a stronger emphasis upon the integration of research and practice through applied experiential activity during the period of University education.

### **Schism: When Research and Practitioner Fail to Meet**

While the concept of teacher reflective practice is certainly not new (Hatton & Smith, 1995) the merging of teacher research for practitioners as a form of reflective practice is gaining momentum (Dawson, K. 2006). Typically the practice of research is associated with doctoral students aspiring to be professors, scientists, historians, anthropologists, etc., embarking upon some new discovery that will uncover buried truths. Oftentimes the science and art of research is misconceived in that it is separated from its relevance to actual practice. In fact it is not uncommon for Universities to be described or labeled as either "practitioner-based" or "research-based", as though these two competencies are somehow isolated and dichotomous. It is rare that one hears of the notion that the competencies and dispositions of research and practice are essential for positive impact upon our society, and more specifically, our educational system.

Many theories could be posed to offer explanation as to why these two entities (that should be connected) are most often disparate in both higher education and our public school systems. It is not difficult to trace our historical roots back to a time when formal and informal education was only available to the privileged, and disallowed to those who did not fit within the social infrastructure of the elite, whether based on race, gender, ethnicity and/or social class (Woodson, 1998). Relegating formal and informal education to the exclusive domain of the social elite (largely White, property-owning males) was a remarkably effective form of social engineering that allowed resources to be contained within the hands of a small, select community and their progeny. One has only to look at the Income Earnings and Poverty American Community Survey, United States Census (2004) to see the lasting effects of this practice. Examine the variable "Gender" which includes the full range of race and class. Earning in 2004 for American women was 76% of their male counterparts. Even with the addition of a professional degree and the exponentiation effect that education has upon income, in 2004, women with professional degrees earned a mere 67.4% of what their similarly educated male counterparts brought home. In fact, children under the age of 6 are

approximately 10 times more likely to be living in extreme poverty, in the absence of a male head of household. Power and privilege is passed on intergenerationally and not easily accessed by the marginalized. Similarly, if the process of research can be understood as the type of educational knowledge and attainment that brings power, status and a voice to the work that has been done on any particular subject, then it would follow that this type of "elite" knowledge would be held back from the "common class" or, in this case, the practitioner.

In the United States, the movement and philosophy that all children have the right to a public education is relatively new. We see the nascence of this philosophy reflected in the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Title VI) which was quickly followed by the 1968 Bilingual and Education Act (BEA). The BEA came about through the passage of the Title VII Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The BEA and ESEA were designed to provide funding to the poor and individuals with limited English proficiency who lived on the margins of American society (Kloss, 1998). Subsequent to the passage of the original 1968 ESEA, there were six transformations (1974, 1978, 1984, 1988, 1994, and 2001) of this legislation.

American mythology surrounding democratic principles *manifestly* guided the discourse and behavior of the legislature with respect to the crafting and passage of this legislation, but as the demographics of the nation changed, a shift in the disposition held toward these marginalized groups occurred and persists today. This shift is reflected in the language used to craft these acts. For example, it is the 1968 BEA that, for the first time, officially identified students who speak a language other than English in their home as "deficient" (Lyons, 1995).

This perception moved forward in the process of California voters who passed the 1998 Proposition 227 "English for the Children Initiative" by a sweeping 61:39 % margin (Unz & Tuchman, 1998).

Students identified and labeled as having "Limited English Proficiency" (LEP) would now be required to be educated in an English immersion model. Massachusetts and Arizona quickly followed suit. This brings us to the 2001 passage of PL 107-110 which is otherwise known as the "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) act. In response to an increasingly strident dominant discourse surrounding the state of the nation's schools and the need for a hot button campaign issue, this legislation was crafted. The identified problem was "bad teaching" which was to be punished out of existence through the implementation of comprehensive high stakes testing in all of the nation's public schools. Federal funding was tied to the achievement of a predetermined increment of change in the performance of students on the exams. Should a school or district fail to achieve the identified increment of change on the Academic Performance Index, consequences are incurred which could include loss of funding, school closure, loss of employment or school takeover. The schools that tend to achieve the identified increment of change on the API tend to be populated with a student body that is largely English as a first and/or only language and middle to upper class. The schools most negatively impacted by NCLB are populated with the very people that PL107-110 was designed to serve: The poor; Individuals with limited English proficiency who, in this country, are more likely than not to be marginalized minorities.

*Where are we and how did we get here?*

If the fundamental belief that "the competencies and dispositions of research and practice are essential for positive impact upon our society, and more specifically, our educational system" had driven the process of the legislature as they moved forward to improve the quality of education in the nation's schools, would a more auspicious path have been selected? Would we have arrived at our identified destination? In the late 1990's the Federal Department of Education built a sample of over 20,000 K-5 students which was derived from 1000 schools, selected from every state in the union. The purpose of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) was the identification of variables that impact academic performance. Regression analysis identified 8 variables that correlate most strongly (positively or negatively) with an individual's performance on standardized tests. The identified variables were:

- Many books in the home
  
- Adopted Child
  
- Parents speak English in the home
  
- Mother is 30+ at child's birth
  
- Highly educated parents
  
- High Socio-economic class
  
- Parental PTA involvement
  
- Low Birth Weight.

Perusal of this list makes two factors readily available to the discerning reader. These are *sociological* scope conditions for academic success. "Bad teaching" does not appear upon this list. "Bad teaching" was the thing that "No Child Left Behind" was designed to remedy—the identified problem that this grand experiment is supposed to fix.

Tremendous human and fiduciary capital have been applied to this process in the absence of the exercise of due diligence. The Federal Department of Education could have allowed their *own* research to impact the process of problem identification and remediation.

The conceptualization and implementation of NCLB is offered as one example of the tremendous impact that society absorbs as a result of the schism between research and practice. If empirically research based hypothesis generation, intervention formation and outcomes assessment were the default mode in our professional communities, their process and outcomes would be greatly improved. The fact is that the marriage between research and practice is not the default mode. The trend toward suppressing the knowledge and strategies toward making this a reality is still prevalent today (Mayers, C. M., 2006).

One of the factors that contribute to the gulf between research and applied practice is the dispositions that are passed from University, to professor, and from professor to student. A University may cultivate the image and values of the "Research Based" institution or the "Practitioner or Teaching" institution. Right from the start, as a student selects their future seat of learning; the process of self identification begins. These same students carry this acquired disposition of dichotomy into their professional life. It is, consequently, no surprise that even in the highest levels of government; we fail to see the effective integration of research and practice. It is time for Universities and training programs to move away from a strictly dichotomous approach. The creation of student research symposiums that partner with individuals in their aspirational professions, outcomes assessment training, and guided research based hypothesis generation and subsequent community intervention formation and implementation are just a few of the competencies that contemporary professional practice demand, and Universities fall short of cultivating in their students. The impact of this shortcoming is widespread and clear.

Most practitioners (e.g. teachers, counselors, administrators, etc.) are engaged in the process of supporting the socio-emotional development, academic ability and sense of efficacy of all learners. They hold the key toward equal access and opportunity for all children but the infrastructure that surrounds these practitioners changes the locks without consultation. Whether ill informed or well informed, major educational reform and monetary rewards come about through governmental and state legislative decisions. Oftentimes theoretical research, without application to relevant practice, is utilized as the basis for such decisions. But the applications of such research might not connect to nor have a positive effect on populations effected by such decisions. Therefore it is imperative that practitioners be given a voice through research. The reflective knowledge that comes from such practitioner-oriented research competencies and dispositions unlocks the potential and opportunities for all children and families in our public educational institutions.

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