

Educational Research: A Look Back

In September, 1958, The Canadian Education Association (CEA) hosted a panel discussion on the current status and emerging requirements of educational research in Canada. The panelists' comments are firmly rooted in the context of the 1950s. Half a century later, Penny Milton, CEO of CEA, takes a look at their comments and suggestions. How far have we come? What research issues continue to challenge us? What problems have we solved? What new problems have emerged?

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Needs in Educational Research

Panel Discussion, September 18, 1958

The following are summaries of the addresses presented by the individual members of the panel at this discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. H. P. Moffatt, Chairman

Since the last war there has been a tremendous growth in public interest in education, promoted in part by the stresses and strains put on the school systems by the increase in school population, in part by increased demands for more and better education, and in part by increasing costs. People and educators, in order to make effective use of both material and intellectual resources, want answers to such questions as: Are schools giving the best type of instruction to the intellectually gifted? Should there be different types of schools or programs for pupils of different levels of ability? How should these students be selected? How can funds for education be secured from federal, provincial, and local sources, and how distributed? What are the best methods for teaching the skill subjects such as reading, arithmetic, and language? What factors are to be considered in improving the training and education of teachers? How can the abilities of the best teachers be utilized efficiently? These and many other questions demand answers which only research can give.

In almost all countries, including Canada, increasing interest in research has expressed itself in the establishment of educational research centres and bureaus. In Canada, three of the national educational organizations, the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Canadian Education Association, and the National Conference of Canadian Universities, now have research divisions. Two provinces, British Columbia and Alberta, have provincial research councils and a few of the provinces and several urban school districts have research bureaus or divisions. Many others are interested in similar facilities for research.

Penny Milton responds:

Some fifty years on, the importance of research to inform public policy choices and practices in education remains strong and research capacity in universities, governments, and non-government and private sector organizations has grown. Dr. Moffatt spoke at a time of rising enrolments and economic growth resulting in the post-war expansion of secondary education and the emergence of technical and vocational education to serve the growing labour market. Today new questions confront us. How can we achieve high levels of educational outcomes for all students, especially for Aboriginal peoples? What mix of services support the early development of young children and family needs for child care? What strategies best support access to post secondary education for groups under-represented in enrolments?

Various mechanisms to overcome limitations arising from our constitutional allocation of powers for education wax and sometimes wane because the relationships between federal and provincial governments are never static. The Canadian Council for Research in Education (CCRE) established in 1961 was disbanded in 1973; The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), created with federal money in 2004, awaits decisions about further funding; and the Canadian Policy Research Network founded in 1994 has announced that it will close its doors at the end of the year.

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THE NEED FOR OBTAINING GREATER UNIFORMITY IN BASIC DATA

Dr. F. E. Whitworth

Research may be considered as an attitude of mind. It is a persistent, penetrating attempt to arrive at valid conclusions. The steps are those of reflective thinking and experiment; the logic is usually the logic of knowledge; and the tools are those suited to the problem at hand. These may be survey or sampling, statistical devices from the simplest measures to electronic computation, suitable experimental design, or the use of questionnaires, control groups, and so on. Research may be directed towards basic problems with the hope of obtaining solutions which are true for all situations, or towards practical problems where solutions are relevant to limited situations. I shall deal with the latter and limit my remarks mainly to a discussion of the collection of relatively simple data, which is often the first step towards reaching a solution.

In Canada, some attempts have been made to ensure that when data are reported, the categories used have the same meaning from province to province. However, there are 10 provincial systems and additional schools, hence such simple terms as 'school', 'teacher', 'class', and 'public school' have different meanings in different parts of this country. While it is recognized that the school systems are not operated to make it easy for the statistician, the benefits to be derived from the use of a common terminology are obvious. Time and effort should be given to effecting greater uniformity in reporting data which will be used to present a picture of education in Canada or for comparative studies.

On the international front, UNESCO has recognized this problem and has been conducting meetings and carrying on correspondence in an attempt to get agreement on the use of simple working definitions in compiling data for international publication. In June 1958, UNESCO held in Paris a special intergovernmental committee meeting on the international standardization of educational statistics. The report prepared at the two-week conference of UNESCO was approved by the representatives of more than 40 nations without opposition, and should result in greater uniformity in reporting.

It is also of interest that the Inter-American Statistical Institute is working toward comparability of census data on level of education for the census years 1960 or 1961.

In Canada, there is still need for co-operation between the federal and provincial governments, the CEA, and other interested bodies to effect greater comparability, probably through conferences and committees. The greater the measure of comparability achieved, the greater the possibility of making useful comparative studies and producing reliable statistics on education for Canada.

Penny Milton responds:

In the last fifty years, comparative studies within Canada and internationally have taken on even greater significance, especially since the establishment of the Centre for Education Statistics under a 1989 protocol between Statistics Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education.¹ The latest in a series of reports on pan-Canadian as well as provincial and territorial education indicators includes international comparisons made possible by the harmonization of measures with those used by OECD.² Two federal longitudinal studies provide support to public policy and to education decision-makers: the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth and the Youth in Transition Survey. Measurement of educational progress through achievement testing assumed prominence in the 1900s and added real impetus to assessment at provincial, territorial, national, and international levels. Canada participates in a number of international assessments including the Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) and the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). CCL has published its concerns that national level data on the performance of the post-secondary sector is inadequate for public policy purposes. The Millennium Scholarship Foundation that is to cease operations in 2010 contributed important research on post-secondary access and the costs to students of financing their post-secondary education.

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THE NEED FOR TEACHERS TO USE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Dr. J. D. Ayers

The three characteristics required for the full recognition of teaching as a unique profession are: (1) its practitioners must possess a specialized body of knowledge and skills acquired in professional training institutions; (2) they must continue to develop professionally after graduation through post-graduate studies, seminars, workshops, and other in-service training programs; and (3) they must conduct research studies, or be intelligent consumers of research. The first requirement is emphasized, but not sufficiently; the second receives only limited attention at the present time; and the third crucial element, 'research,' receives recognition only by way of an occasional master's or doctoral thesis.

We need theories of teaching to give direction to our professional training programs and to our research. We need more emphasis on theories of learning, motivation, and group dynamics. But above all we need a theory of teacher competence that will provide trainees with a concept of what a teacher should be even if that theory is modified or revised later by research findings. The lack of an adequate background in theory shows up in most research that has been conducted in education.

A theory of teacher competence would also go a long way toward preparing trainees for change. The tricks of the trade may be taught in six weeks, but adequate theory, which can direct the trainee's attention to the processes of learning and pupil-teacher relationships rather than to the techniques of teaching, requires more time. Adequate theory in professional courses should provide our teachers with a framework into which they could fit both the results of their own experiences in teaching and the future research findings of education and the social sciences. All teachers could thus become consumers of research.

The implications of this paper, then, are that the teacher-training institution has a responsibility to provide some courses beyond giving trainees the basic mechanics of teaching. These would bring to teachers the point of view that sound instruction should be based on continued experimentation. It is only through adequate testing and other evaluative procedures that teachers can measure the effectiveness of their work. Courses of this nature could be provided in a two-year training program beyond senior matriculation, but they would be much more thoroughly and adequately covered in a four- or five year program.

Penny Milton responds:

Teacher education has replaced 'training'; significant differences in the duration and therefore the content and coverage in pre-service teacher education programs occur across the country. Evaluation of teaching effectiveness remains somewhat perfunctory in many places and teaching may not yet be a profession grounded in research. The Accord on Initial Teacher Education³ includes the development of 'an introduction to research and scholarship' in initial teacher education. Practicing educators are most likely to encounter research information through intermediaries including websites and professional journals and books. This magazine, *Education Canada*, is a prime example of making research accessible and meaningful to the field.

In research writing there is a marked tendency to obscure the results in unintelligible and unnecessary statistical jargon.

EN BREF En septembre 1958, l'Association canadienne d'éducation (ACE) a organisé une séance de discussion d'experts sur la situation d'alors et les nouvelles exigences de la recherche en éducation au Canada. Les commentaires des experts sont bien ancrés dans le contexte des années 1950. Un demi-siècle plus tard, Penny Milton, chef de la direction de l'ACE, examine leurs commentaires et suggestions. À quel point avons-nous progressé? Quelles sont encore les questions de recherche qui nous intriguent? Quels problèmes avons-nous résolus? Quels nouveaux problèmes se sont présentés?

THE NEED FOR DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ON RESEARCH Dr. G. M. Dunlop

One of the problems relating to the dissemination of research findings lies in the inability of research workers to report their findings intelligibly. In research writing there is a marked tendency to obscure the results in unintelligible and unnecessary statistical jargon.

A second difficulty in the dissemination of research lies in the absence of regularly published Canadian journals devoted exclusively to educational research. In all Canada, at the moment, there is only one journal which satisfies these requirements: The *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, which has been published continuously for three and three-quarter years. It is a hopeful sign that the publication of similar journals is projected at the Ontario College of Education, and, perhaps less immediately, in British Columbia and the Maritimes.

Still more discouraging is the fact that there is no national organization in educational research, no national journal of educational research, nor an education index.

It is to be hoped that a national organization, journal, and index will be developed in the near future. While it is possible that either the existing CEA Research Council or the Canadian Teachers' Federation Research Division might assume leadership in the national field, this is unlikely. It might be preferable to have a national organization with

membership from all existing national organizations concerned with education. If this plan were followed, the CEA Research Council, the CTF Research Division, the Canadian School Trustees' Association, the Canadian Association of School Superintendents and Inspectors, and related organizations representing elementary education, secondary education, and university-centred teacher training institutions might join in the sponsorship of a national organization. As a matter of fact, the National Advisory Committee on Educational Research might be the point of departure of a national organization. With an enlarged membership and an executive, performing more than simply an advisory role, it might become the long-sought national committee on educational research.

Penny Milton responds:

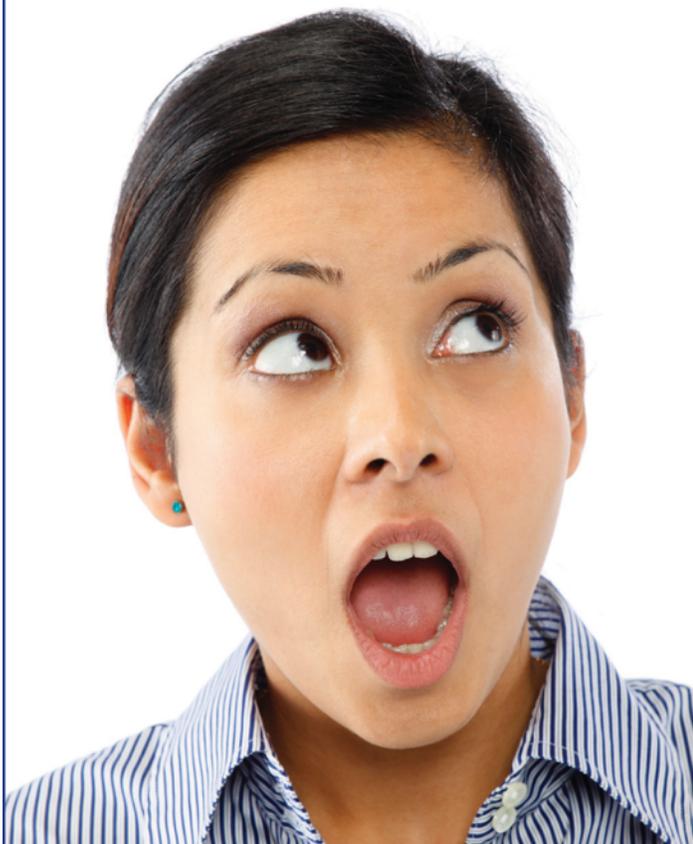
Although still in its infancy in practice, 'knowledge mobilization' has replaced earlier ideas about research dissemination. Clearly academic publishing, important as it is to scholarly progress, does not satisfy the needs of the practice community. A CEA/OISE study⁴ will shed further light on how educators currently find and use research relevant to the issues they face. |

Notes

- 1 Canadian Education Statistics Council www.cesc-csce.ca/aboutE.html
- 2 Education Indicators in Canada: An International perspective. 2009. Statistics Canada; Council of Ministers of Education Canada. www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/212/education-indicators-canada-international-perspective-2009.pdf
- 3 Accord on Initial Teacher Education. Association of Canadian Deans of Education. www.csse.ca/CADE/TeacherAccord.pdf
- 4 Research Use and its Impact in Secondary Schools – Executive Summary www.cea-ace.ca/media/en/ExecSummaryFinal_ResearchUse_CEAoise.pdf



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