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JOHN E. READENCE
Louisiana State University

R. SCOTT BALDWIN
University of Miami

With the editorial assistance of

JOHN P. KONOPAK
Louisiana State University

PATRICIA R. O'KEEFE
NRC Headquarters

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TOMORROW'S READERS TODAY: BECOMING A PROFESSION OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNERS*

Jerome C. Harste
Indiana University

It is time for teacher educators to acknowledge who they are. I hypothesize that most members of the National Reading Conference are involved in one way or another in the preparation of teachers. Although we are researchers, we are teacher educators first and foremost. One reason for concern about teacher education is that many professors of psychology and other foundational areas do not acknowledge their role and responsibility in teacher education even though their classes largely are populated by future teachers. About 68% of a teacher's preparation takes place outside of departments of education.

This paper constitutes a collaborative call to action. It represents my current concerns and hopes as a researcher and teacher. Specifically I wish to speak against the separation of research and teaching on logical, philosophical, and sociological grounds as well as to explore an alternative that I believe better serves research, literacy, and the profession as a whole.

READING, READING INSTRUCTION AND READING RESEARCH: FOUR POSSIBILITIES

It is often suggested that the profession could easily solve the problems in teaching reading if teachers applied what is known from research. Many of us have implicitly, if not explicitly, endorsed this statement. But before advocating the use of research as a basis for improving instruction, it is important to think about the relationship between reading, research on reading, and reading instruction (de Beaugrande, 1985). As it stands right now, there are four possible logical relationships which might exist.

Same

The first possibility is that reading, what we learn about reading from reading research, and classroom instruction are one and the same (see Figure 1). This possibil-

*Presidential Address

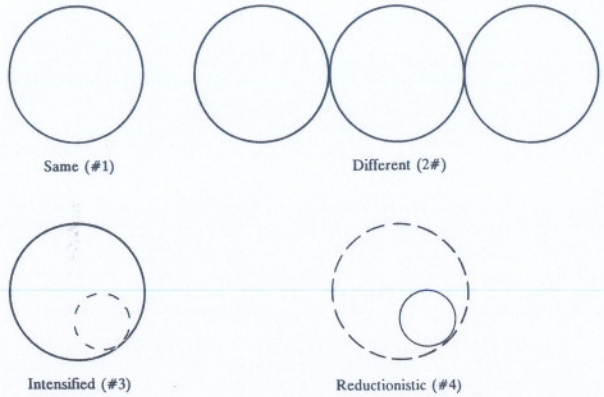

Figure 1. Four possible relationships among reading, reading instruction, and the study of reading.

ity seems unlikely in light of what we know about the three. Reading activities in school often look quite different from what real readers do outside of school. And, despite the trend toward field-based research in reading which many of us have begun, a review of the literature shows that most researchers still use psychology majors as the subjects of their research on reading, rather than children or adults in functional contexts (Crismore, 1985; Harste & Stephens, 1985). As a result, the research community tends to know more about reading under laboratory conditions than under more realistic ones.

Given the gap between laboratory-based reading research and reading in normal social settings, and the artificiality of many classroom activities in reading, it seems safe to conclude that whatever the relationship is among reading, reading instruction, and research in reading, the three are not the same.

This conclusion is important. It helps teachers and researchers clarify for themselves and others what they are (or ought to be) about. Many problems arise when we assume that reading instruction *is* reading, or when we infer that what children do when faced with nonsense words is what they do when faced with print situated in a meaningful context.

Different

A second possibility is that the reading instruction, reading, and research on reading are completely different. If reading instruction, reading, and the study of reading were each represented by a circle, diagrammatically, this possibility would be represented by three non-overlapping circles (see Figure 1). In contrast to Possibility 1 where the three are posited as the same, Possibility 2 suggests that the three do not touch, that each constitutes a separate world.

There is some evidence for this possibility, particularly given the aforementioned lack of intersection between reading research and real reading. However, in the case of *reading* and *reading instruction,* the likelihood of no overlap is remote. Despite the

ditto sheets that dominate reading instruction, to the extent that children are given the opportunity to select things to read, or have opportunities to write on topics of their own choice, some overlap exists. Of course, the overlap between reading and reading instruction is greater in some classrooms than in others.

The same can be said about the intersection between research in reading and real-world reading. Although readers are rarely given much choice in reading under research conditions, for some studies this is not true. In fact, the current trend is toward more ethnographic or field-based studies (for a review, see Harste, 1985) and many ethnographic researchers have purposefully selected classrooms which simulate natural learning environments. These researchers assume that we might learn more by studying classrooms which are rich reading environments than by studying classrooms in which reading is narrowly defined.

Intensified

The third possibility for the relationship among reading, the study of reading, and reading instruction is that research *intensifies* certain processes without necessarily distorting them. To envision this possibility, one must conceive of reading as a larger circle with a smaller circle representing either reading instruction or the study of reading within it (see Figure 1). This possibility is optimistic. It suggests that the relationship between reading and either reading instruction or the study of reading is indeed continuous, differing only in that the one studies or highlights key processes (but not all processes) within the general area of reading. It also suggests that research and instruction differ from real-world reading only in that the first two intensify or focus closely on key cognitive operations in reading.

If the intensification possibility is true it would mean, given my review of reading comprehension research over the past 10 years, that such strategies as inferencing, generalizing, monitoring, and summarizing are key operations in successful reading (Crismore, 1985; Harste & Stephens, 1985). Researchers, of course, would love to believe that this is the case.

Yet we must be careful. Many key reading strategies—such as applying what one knows about letter/sound relationships, about the flow of language, about how language varies across the circumstances of use—have not been the focus of research by most researchers during the past 10 years. This is not because these topics are considered unimportant, but because their centrality in the process has been confirmed and because researchers today think their potential for expanding our horizons of knowledge about reading is limited in comparison to exploring other aspects of the process.

Having said all this, I still find the intensification perspective useful. Clearly, researchers now know more about the process of reading than ever before. New stances, because they have focused on strategies, process, and comprehension, have advanced our understanding more than past perspectives. There is no doubt in my mind that reading instruction would be greatly improved if we were to apply what researchers have learned about key processes in reading comprehension over the past 10 years. This does not, however, mean that this is *all* we should teach. Children will still need to go to the library, read widely, and be given daily opportunities to use reading as a tool for exploring and expanding their worlds. And research is continually providing new insights that prompt critical reordering of priorities in instructional practices.

Reductionistic

The fourth possibility is that the relationship among reading, reading instruction, and reading research is one of *reductionism*. This is much like the intensification possibility, with the noticeable difference that it is less optimistic. This possibility posits that, rather than intensifying key strategies, reading research and instruction lead to distortions. This is, I believe, a real possibility. Often our attempts at simplifying reading instruction and shaping researchable hypotheses impose a tidiness that is quite unnatural, given how reading works outside the classroom. Carolyn Burke (1980) reminds us that although we can talk about a complex process simply, doing so does not alter the complexity of the true process underlying it. Her reminder is useful for researchers and teachers as they go about translating recent research to practice.

The reductionistic possibility is what I think is the most typical relationship between research and practice. There is much evidence for this in recent policy reports on the status of reading. Research topics come and go (as demonstrated by the "hot topics" on the annual programs at professional meetings), and a bandwagon effect clearly operates in research as well as in education more generally. Researchers, teachers, and educators would be deluding themselves if they failed to take the reductionistic possibility seriously. The reductionistic possibility is also why, I think, the current bifurcation between research and practice is not healthy nor, over the long run, beneficial to the profession.

THEORY AND PRACTICE: PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

In my estimation, a theory-to-practice stance leads to four relationships which as currently practiced are logically unacceptable. Research and practice are seen as separate entities which interact. Under current conditions, research is rooted in discrete disciplines, and although several disciplines impinge on practice, each is believed to ". . . offer a different and of necessity partial picture of the educational process" (Applebee, 1984, p. 5). Practice is broad, an imprecise science, and involves things researchers supposedly are not interested in (Stansell & Patterson, 1987).

Although this argument may appear logical, one must ask: In what other discipline is theory not an attempt to explain practice? Reading theory isn't something one applies to the practice of reading; it is the result of an attempt to explain reading.

Theory and practice in reading stand in transaction (Lee & Patterson, 1987). If the theory of reading does not explain the practice of reading, the theory ought to change. The theory ought not govern the practice; the practice of reading ought to govern the theory.

Theories of reading instruction ought to follow the same pattern. Instructional theory ought to be grounded in experience. It ought to be practicable theory rather than theoretical practice. Most of us would agree that a subskills approach to the teaching of reading is a theory of how to *make* expert readers, not a theory of what expert readers do when they read.

Underlying a theory-to-practice stance, then, is a set of philosophical assumptions which need to be addressed. The point is that a theory-to-practice stance is neither scientifically nor politically neutral.

BEYOND NEUTRALITY

In my fieldwork I repeatedly encounter school districts which have either severed relationships with local colleges or universities or never really developed substantive relationships in the first place. In part this pattern exists because school people also have bought into the notion that research is something colleges do, whereas teaching is something schools do. College professors are involved in knowledge production but school teachers are involved in knowledge utilization. The current relationship between research and practice is one of hierarchy: Researchers produce knowledge; teachers consume knowledge.

Sociologically this stance puts researchers above teachers. In many recent publications not only is the implication made that reading instruction would be greatly improved if teachers but applied what researchers know, but also teachers are posed as the weak link in an otherwise perfectly conceived delivery system. That is why so much time and effort goes into developing teacher-proof materials. That's why basals are so popular despite criticism on linguistic, psychological, and sociological grounds. The assumption is made that if we are not careful, teachers will mess up our research findings.

Sociologically, a theory-to-practice stance puts a couple of thousand of us in charge and consigns the bulk of the profession to the status of second class citizens. To maintain a theory-to-practice stand is to keep a certain set of social relationships in place. Researchers may like this. It lets them be leaders. It separates what they do in the name of education from what teachers do. In short, it empowers.

Empowerment, however, is a transaction. Teachers are disempowered and likely to remain so as long as a theory-to-research stance is maintained. Given my reading of the research in reading, most researchers theoretically advocate a subskill approach to reading by dint of the kind of research they do on reading, not the kind of research they do on teaching and learning. When asked to take what they know to practice, they adopt this stance largely because their research methodology has not allowed them collaboratively to gain an alternative perspective.

This is not a poor boy speech. Although I have not been involved in producing teacher-proof materials or tests, I clearly have had my hand in the cookie jar. A theory-to-practice stance has served me well. Not only did it get me tenure, but it got me a position in a major university in the first place. I have been given an Alumni Award for contributions to reading research from my alma mater, as well as having received, with Carolyn Burke and Virginia Woodward, the David H. Russell Award for distinguished research contributions to the improvement of teaching English. My presidency in NRC and whatever the stature I enjoy in the profession are largely a function of this stance. Any person having earned the title of Professor at an institution of higher education is at least as guilty as I am.

Young researchers may rightfully ask, "Well, isn't that special. He wants us to take all the risks, after he has made it by playing the game."

But things are rarely this simple. We are products of our socio-historical context. To play the game we played is more risky than to play a different game. You are not entering the world we entered partly because of the progress we have made. Besides, institutions of higher education reward innovation and professors who take intellectu-

ally challenging stances. Persons who have made a difference in reading rarely have been neutral. When science was reduced to technological problem-solving, a theory-to-practice stance was seen as an educational innovation. That wasn't that long ago.

I think it behooves us—the more seasoned researchers—to rethink the status quo, and at a minimum to create a supportive environment for those younger than we to explore alternative, more productive research stances. What our stance has changed, as well as who it has benefited, says a lot about what the stance has been.

It may be asking too much to expect active researchers to abandon their lines of research in favor of other, possibly even more promising avenues. Yet many of our teacher education colleagues are less than active scholars. I could call them dinosaurs. They populate lots of institutions. They are easily recognized by their small brains and their big asses. They not only do nothing, but they also block any attempts at progress. A good many dinosaurs inhabit public schools, too.

The least we can expect is that all educators be scholars pursuing some line of inquiry. This is true in institutions of higher learning as well as in the schools. I see being a learner as prerequisite to being a teacher. To learn nothing is to change nothing; but to change nothing is still to *do* something. "To do nothing" is to perpetuate an existing set of class and social relationships. To do nothing is to perpetuate current formulations of who is empowered, who is disempowered, and who will be empowered in the future.

This is what I meant when I said before that our field is political. Most research groups hate to take political stands. To take a stand strikes them as somehow anti-intellectual. Most research journal editors pride themselves on running their journals under a free-marketplace-of-ideas philosophy. Rather than take a leadership role by actively adopting a position and soliciting articles, they believe neutrality is best. That's why some issues of *The Journal of Reading Behavior* can look like they ought to have been released in 1940 rather than in 1980. That is also why some issues of *JRB* only contain articles by professors in psychology departments. Text is not only embedded in context; context also establishes which texts are empowered.

Ideas are not equal or neutral, when viewed in a socio-historical context. Some researchers may wish to think they are personally neutral, but this is an illusion, too. Knowledge is not innocent. A theory-to-practice stance is not only illogical, it also constitutes a particular set of social relationships. I wish to argue that to perpetuate the social arrangements inherent in a theory-to-practice view of the world is not in the best interests of either the NRC, the research community, or the profession.

BECOMING A PROFESSION OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNERS

As an alternative, I recommend collaboratively taking as our goal the development of a theory of literacy instruction. Rather than see the relationship between theory and practice as hierarchical, this alternative poses the relationship as transactional.

Work in classrooms is but one dimension of this agenda. In one sense, to continue to maintain the current level of debate is to fiddle while Rome burns. Urban education, for example, is an atrocity. The *Chicago Tribune* reported a 43% dropout rate in the Chicago schools. I was in the Adlai Stevenson High School in the Bronx last month.

No white families send their children to this school. The school is 50% black and 50% Puerto Rican. There is a 50% dropout rate. The average class size is 44. This is a school of 5,000. On any given day only 2,500 students show up.

Special Education is equally dismal. In the State of Indiana, one-half of 1% of the school age population gets labeled special education each year. This is not only a problem for special education, it is a clear indication that regular education is failing.

While we debate methods of teaching reading, research methodology, and whether or not it would do any good to adopt an anti-policy on English as the language of instruction, education as a social institution fails. In order for research to be useful, it must address not only language policy, but also teacher working conditions and the context of schooling in society. To be a true force, research in reading needs to be mediated by a wider context.

This does not mean that I think earlier disputes were petty, but rather that they were focused inappropriately. What I wish to do is to raise the level of the debate and in the process to make the political agenda and what researchers might do more explicit. I wish to argue that a practical theory stance popularizes research, clarifies what it truly means to be literate, and potentially can unify the profession.

The Research Process as a Learning Process

As a learning process, nothing beats research. That is why we are all here. It is at this level that we can all agree. I know I have theoretical differences from many of you, but it is our common attitude about the role of research in learning that makes us colleagues. The function of both reading and research is learning. Interestingly, learning is also the goal of teaching. Given these parallels, it seems only fitting that the NRC should promulgate guidelines for the future in terms of how it is that language educators can collaboratively become a community of learners.

Tolerance in and of itself is not science. All ideas are neither theoretically nor politically equal. Science proceeds on the basis of belief, not fact. It is by putting our best and most current beliefs to test that we grow. Research is a product, a process, and an attitude. Operationally these come together in the hypothesis, "I can find out."

Reflexivity, not advocacy, is the hallmark of the true researcher. Reflexivity, not advocacy, is the hallmark of the true teacher. Nothing frightens me more than a mad-dog advocate of phonics, direct skill instruction, or for that matter whole language. There are now, you know, whole-language basals. To the extent that whole language is permitted to become a kit to be taught, rather than a reflective stance for teaching and learning given the child as informant, any contributions the movement can make is lost.

For me, whole language embodies a reflexive stance. One must always keep an eye on oneself as well as one's findings. Knowledge is not innocent. As a teacher one must always keep an eye on one's teaching as well as what is being learned. Schooling is not innocent.

True researchers understand that they are their best research instrument—not some new test, new set of materials, or new consultant. We often attribute progress to a new research technique or to a particular individual, but this is an illusion. We cannot think certain thoughts until certain others are on the floor of history. There can be no prophet

without persons willing to act on the ideas proffered. Intellectually we are all very much tied. As a collective, we represent a similarity of perspectives characterized by diversity. What we need to do is acknowledge this fact and learn to more productively use ourselves and others as potentially new research instruments. The stance we take on theory and practice makes a difference.

Given this faith in the research process as a learning process, I think we have everything to gain by making it more widespread. To continue to have our hands in the production of teacher-proof materials is to say to teachers: "Just use it, don't think about it!" By sending these messages, we deny them their rightful role as learners and fail to help them value research as a tool for continued professional development.

We want teachers to engage children in learning, yet what models do they have from the research community? The problem is not only the way we do educational research, but also its lack of connectivity with practice. In operation, a theory-to-practice stance violates the very notion of the research process as a learning process. Even further, it violates the active roles that reading and writing should play in a system of knowing for all learners.

A New Goal, Not Just More Effective Ways to Reach Old Goals

To be literate is to use reading and writing as tools for learning in order to reposition yourself in the world. Rather than being a victim of circumstances, the literate can reflexively decide which stance will or will not be taken. In this way literacy empowers. Because we understand the roles that reading and reflexivity play in learning, researchers are in a position to offer leadership in popularizing their value. I suggest we seize the opportunity history has provided. To change, I believe researchers need to establish a new goal; namely, the collaborative development of a theory of literacy instruction.

I wish to argue, in this regard, that we do not need a new theory of reading, a new theory of writing, or a new theory of literature. What we need is a new theory of literacy instruction. There is, it seems, a single and general model of literacy slowly evolving in the research community. Even though we and others still talk about different theoretical models of reading and writing, an examination of the more viable ones shows that they share more in common than is typically assumed. I predict that, to the extent this phenomenon continues, we will end up with a single theoretical model of literacy and no one in the end will be given credit for having developed it. What is needed is basic educational research grounded in our current knowledge base but focused toward the development of a practical theory of literacy instruction.

Basic research in education is different from basic research in psychology, sociology, or linguistics. Basic researchers in these disciplines can decide to study reading and nothing more. Some even may decide to limit their investigations to only aspects of the process, such as how the grapho-phonemic system works, or what happens during the period the eyes are on the page.

Educators do not have this luxury. Educators must act come Monday morning. They must know reading theory and also writing theory, learning theory, child growth and development, curriculum theory, and more. The business of education is synthesis. The role of the educator is to be a synthesizer, whether that educator be in the university or in the public school. Because the business of education is synthesis and use, basic educational research is more complex.

This does not mean that I do not support funding for basic psychological, sociological, and linguistic research. Educators benefit greatly from more adequate explanations of the basic operations in language and learning. Nonetheless, I will maintain that findings in these disciplines must still be interpreted and tested by basic educational research if they are to result in an improved theory of literacy instruction and improved educational practice. This is why funding psychologists to solve the instructional problems in reading is misguided. What one finds is that they do well at basic psychological research, but then either (a) leap to practice, (b) assume practice will take care of itself, or (c) turn this aspect over to persons who they would never consider qualified to do basic research in their mother discipline. In the final analysis, it is basic research in education—not basic research in psychology, sociology, or linguistics—that has direct and immediate focus on improved instruction.

Many educational researchers, including those in the federal government, do not seem to understand this. Instead of doing educational research, my assessment, after reviewing the literature (Harste, 1985), is that the reading and writing educators who do research try to act like cognitive psychologists, sociologists, or quasi-linguists. The number of instructional studies—studies that synthesize basic research findings across a variety of disciplines for purposes of building and testing a theory of reading instruction in classrooms—is extremely small.

Part of the reason for this is the fact that educational researchers adopt research methodologies from what they see as the basic sciences—psychology, sociology, linguistics—rather than attempting to build a basic methodology of their own which accents synthesis, reflects their goals, and acknowledges the action-and-change orientation of their discipline. In my estimation, neither quantitative nor qualitative methods of research serve us. Because I am interested in more than just description, I am not an ethnographer—though I do believe there are aspects of an ethnographic stance that can serve us well as we move to a more proactive stance.

Good instructional research synthesizes and explicates the curricular premises upon which it is conducted, tracks the collaborative learning that participants engage in as a function of the curriculum, and documents its value by demonstrating reflexivity in terms of original premises and curricular growth on the part of all participants. This is but a start. The agenda ahead for educators of all kinds is to develop a research methodology for their discipline. They must begin by not being afraid to acknowledge who they are, and by conducting and reporting real educational inquiries in real instructional settings.

To further accomplish this new agenda, teachers must become researchers, and researchers teachers. I believe reading researchers can begin by developing new research procedures on what is known about the twin processes of comprehension and learning. We can begin by inviting teachers to write a narrative of what they make of a videotape of their own teaching. We also can write a narrative describing what we see as the most salient feature of the teaching. These narratives then would be compared and contrasted and lead to an exploration of differences in assumptions and beliefs.

Our stance is not privileged, but rather interrogated, just as are the teachers'. Such work leads to changes in classrooms as well as to potentially new insights into the process of teaching and learning.

I am convinced that we know nothing by ourselves. It is only in juxtaposition with others that we know what we know, and know how what we know differs from others' knowledge. Just as various disciplines offer us a new perspective on literacy, so collaboration both gives us a perspective on our knowing and opens up the possibility for interrogation, reflexivity, and growth.

Although thought collectives at researcher centers tend to be generative and influential—but also tend to replicate their findings across time—intellectual leadership for the study of literacy will benefit from school/university collaborations, and by a wider participation and involvement of all educators in the process of basic educational research.

NRC as a Unification Potential

My stance has many implications for research communities such as the National Reading Conference. It is not intended to tear us apart, but rather get us to proceed with humility and reflexivity—the hallmarks of what I think it means to be a researcher, teacher, and learner.

I do believe that it is important for researchers to get together to share their findings, interrogate their assumptions, and reflect on the relationship of their findings and the research methodology that they have used. In short, I think the NRC serves a useful function as it is currently constituted.

However, through a facade of innocence, the NRC also does its part to maintain the profession as it is. The result is that certain types of social arrangements and certain assumptions about the relationship between theory and practice are maintained and not interrogated. The question each NRC member has to ask is, "Is what the NRC currently supports what we want?"

For my part, the NRC is in a unique position to play a new role in revitalizing the profession via research. We have begun by encouraging interdisciplinary research. You can see the effects of this stance in the program today. I still think it is largely parallel play in parallel sandboxes, but this is because we report our findings as truth rather than as forum of potentially new collaborative and exploratory action.

The NRC has also begun to encourage researchers from a wide variety of methodologies to dialogue together. To date this has been more good humored tolerance than an understanding of how we might use our own perspectives and those of others to grow reflexively as a profession.

But I do not wish to give the impression that I know with certainty what needs to be done. I simply believe that collectively we should take action. The NRC is a potential that is largely untapped. I think there are many alternatives and some ways to begin.

Although the effort might be tokenistic, we could begin a research grant program and award monies for collaborative research efforts. We could begin an Urban Education Committee and collaboratively attempt to use research to solve this or any number

of other educational issues. In short, we could begin to think about organizing ourselves differently.

We could rethink our conference and institute a series of seminars across the United States that would have as their purpose the widespread advocacy of the attitude of research in education. We could begin by inviting someone to guest edit an issue of *JRB* on some topic of practical interest. Even though articles in the invited issue might not explore all sides of a topic, this format might invite more active reading and further the goals of research more than does the format we now use.

CONCLUSION

By creating an environment which supports the use of reading as a tool for learning, by inviting collaboration, and by joining hands, we take a political stance. This stance challenges existing assumptions and social relationships, but it sets up the conditions for new learning. Rather than a specific change in knowledge, literacy learning and research can then be seen as a range of potential new behaviors, actions, and stances.

We *cannot* do nothing. The least we should be willing to do is set up a supportive environment where young researchers are encouraged to explore and try options we may never have dared to envision. What we have failed to change tells us much about what our position has been and where it has and has not gotten us. My only hope is that, whatever the decision, it is not allowed to just evolve, but rather it is made collaboratively and consciously, via humility and reflexivity, in terms not only of where we are, but also where we wish to go.

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