

## CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARISONS, DOCUMENTATION, AND KNOWLEDGE BUILDING IN IEQ: EXAMINING POLICY-PRACTICE-RESEARCH CYCLES<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

This paper focuses on three strands of work within IEQ: cross-country comparisons, documentation, and knowledge building. Are these strands related and is it possible -- and advantageous -- to combine (or at least more carefully integrate) these strands? I believe that these questions can be answered in the affirmative. In order to undertake cross-country comparisons we will need to engage in documentation of the IEQ project, and by carrying out these activities we will be building knowledge.

But the question remains as to what kind of knowledge we desire and have the resources to build. In this paper I suggest a framework and set of research questions as a starting point to guide our collective activity as we approach the end of the third year in the project. In a sense, there is nothing new in this paper, but hopefully looking anew at the various discussions we have had since the project began may prove helpful.

I approached writing this paper with a nagging concern: Who would be interested in the results of comparing the classroom resources, instructional activities, student behavior and achievement/development across three (non-randomly selected) countries? That is, why should we seek to compare the data being collected (and analyzed) in conjunction with the important investigations being conducted by HCRTs in Ghana, Guatemala, and Mali?

Questions such as this led me initially to focus attention instead on the possibilities and value of comparing the links between research and policy/practice in the three country settings. Such comparisons seemed promising, in that (local, regional, national, and international) policy makers and researchers would likely be interested in similarities and differences in approaches and accomplishments in efforts to link research and policy/practice.

The perceived value of such comparisons would seemingly be enhanced if we also were able to a) illuminate the links between educational policy and practice and b) draw on details of HCRT-collected classroom level data to examine the links between research and practice and between policy and practice. In this way we can focus on IEQ's important contribution -- classroom-anchored research -- as a key component of our

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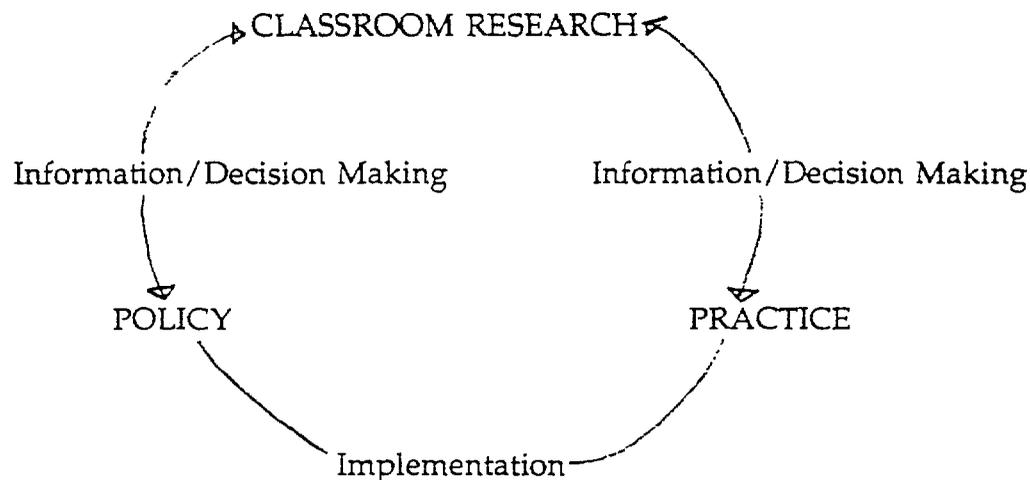
<sup>1</sup> This paper was prepared for the IEQ meeting of 5-7 July in Washington, D.C. It draws on a number of other texts previously produced in the IEQ project and has been informed by a range of conversations with participants in IEQ. Particular acknowledgment is due to Don Adams, Thomas Clayton, Richard Donato, Martha Mantilla, Michel Rakotamanana, Judy Sylvester, and Yidan Wang at the University of Pittsburgh.

comparisons without seeming to try to replicate IEA-type studies with a smaller sample of countries.

### The Policy-Practice-Research Cycle

Thus, I propose that the unit of analysis for our cross-country comparisons be the policy-practice-research cycle. A rough graphic representation of the policy-practice-research cycle is presented in Figure 1:

**Figure 1: Diagram of Policy-Practice-Research Cycle**



Since each IEQ country site will have at least two such cycles, we can compare cycles over time within a given country as well as compare cycles across countries. This would entail describing and analyzing each "step" in the cycle (policy, practice, and research) as well as the links between each pair of "steps." Note, that as illustrated in Figure 1, we will want to examine the bi-directional links between research and policy and between research and practice.

### Research Questions and Data Needs

In general the cross-country comparative research will address the question: What are the similarities and differences in policy-practice-research cycles across countries (and across time or settings within countries)? We need to decide, however, what aspects of such cycles we want to study. And once we make this decision, we need to determine what kinds of data need to be collected, which subset of this data is already being collected by various IEQ project members, which members would be responsible for collecting the other needed data, and who will take leadership in compiling and analyzing these data for purposes of cross-country comparisons, documentation, and knowledge building.

The more specific within cycle and within country research questions presented below are meant as stimuli for discussion about *what kind of data need to be collected*.<sup>2</sup> Note that the questions are organized under three headings -- policies, practices, and research, which are the key steps in the policy-practice-research cycle. Many of the questions subsumed under each heading link issues about the respective step to another step in the cycle.

Research Questions About Policies  
(During Each Cycle in Each Country)

1. What are the goals and proposed strategies of the national level "reform," "innovation," or intervention planned in each country at different points in time? How is the IEQ project perceived to be related to the national reform, innovation, or intervention by individuals, groups, and organizations in the country?
2. What individuals, groups, and organizations have been involved in shaping or defining the policy for the "innovation," "reform," or intervention (international organizations, U.S.-based bilateral agencies and their hired consultants, national government officials with education or other portfolios, regional or district level administrators, local or school level administrators, national teacher organizations, local groups of school teachers, parents or other community members, students)?
3. What information influences (manifestly and latently) the policy and planning decisions (economic situation, political situation, informal views of what takes place in schools and classrooms, findings from classroom-anchored research)?
4. What classroom-based interventions are associated with the planned "reform" or "innovation." What specific instructional resources, pedagogical approaches, curriculum content, and student behavior and achievement/development are suggested by the plans?
5. How is educational quality conceived and/or operationalized (in policy documents or otherwise) by policy makers?

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to identifying research questions, we also need to concern ourselves with issues of collecting or compiling data as well as analyzing these data to answer these questions. Here I only outline some of the possible research questions we may wish to ask; I leave for later discussions issues of data collection and data analysis. In our decision making about which research questions to include in our cross-national study(ies) we will obviously need to consider the feasibility (including time and other cost factors) of collecting and analyzing the requisite data.

Research Questions about Classroom Practice  
(During Each Cycle in Each Country)

1. What instructional (or other material) resources are available in different classrooms? How, if at all, are these used by teachers and/or students?
2. How many teachers or other adults are involved in a given classroom, and what is their background and training?
3. What is the nature of the adult's (or adults') activity (lecturing, managing behavior, asking content questions, discussion, giving tests, giving feedback)? How regularly are teachers in attendance and how much of their time in classrooms is invested in various activities in various subject areas?
4. How many students are involved in a given classroom, and what is their backgrounds and socio-economic circumstances?
5. What is the nature of students' activities (individual, small group, or large group; competitive or cooperative; speaking, writing or nonverbal in what languages; sitting, standing, or moving around)? How regularly are students in attendance and how much of their time in classrooms is invested in various activities in various subject areas? Are there gender differences in students' attendance and involvement in certain types of classroom activities in given subject areas?
6. What roles (training, supervising, evaluating, rewarding, punishing, constraining, enabling) do school, district, or national level administrators play in relation to what teachers and students do in classrooms?
7. What roles to parents play in relation to what teachers and students do in classrooms?
8. What roles do IEQ researchers play in relation to what teachers and students do in classrooms? Does the process of research influence the classroom environment and/or do the findings from research shape classroom practice?
9. What is the curriculum (goals, content, and organization) and how are students' achievement and development evaluated in relation to this curriculum?
10. What levels of achievement or development do students evidence at different points in time? What is the average level of achievement/development, how much variation is there among students, and to what extent is that variation associated with students' social background, gender, teacher characteristics, teacher behavior, etc.?

11. How do various people (school administrators, teachers, parents, students) conceive of and/or recognize educational quality?

Research Questions About Research  
(During Each Cycle in Each Country)

1. How are planning decisions made about each of the following aspects of classroom-anchored research in IEQ:
  - a. identifying research questions?
  - b. adopting theoretical perspectives?
  - c. using methodological approaches or paradigms?
  - d. sampling districts, schools, classrooms?
  - e. measurement and data collection procedures?
  - f. analyzing data?
  - g. interpreting findings?
  - h. determining implications of findings for policy and practice?
  - i. disseminating findings to policy makers and practioners involved at various levels of the educational system?
2. Which policy makers, practitioners, researchers and other people (at school, local district, national, and international levels) are involved in what ways in shaping or making the above noted decision about research in IEQ? What information (policies, informal ideas about practice, previous IEQ or other research studies) do they draw on in making such decisions?
3. How is the research conducted with respect to the above-noted aspects (1a-1i) and what does this imply about the nature of educational quality?
4. Which policy makers, practitioners, researchers and other people (at school, local district, national, and international levels) are involved in what ways in conducting research in IEQ?
5. How do the various participants and non-participants evaluate the processes of deciding about and conducting research in IEQ?
6. How do the various participants and non-participants evaluate the quality and relevance of the research conducted in IEQ?
7. What constrains or facilitates the participation of various groups in planning and conducting the research in IEQ?

8. What strategies (written documents, audiovisuals, meetings) are employed to disseminate research findings or to involve policy makers and practitioners in a dialogue about the interpretation(s) and implications of the research findings? Who is involved in planning and participating in the dissemination or dialogue? What information is exchanged via dissemination or dialogue? How often? How do participants and non-participants evaluate the process?
9. Which of the following facilitates or inhibits policy makers, practitioners, and researchers in making use of the information obtained from the dissemination or dialogue:
  - a. quality of the information?
  - b. clarity of the information?
  - c. relevance of information to policy and practice arenas?
  - d. timeliness of the dissemination or dialogue?
  - e. support or nonsupport of colleagues, superordinates, subordinates in seeking to make changes envisioned or desired?
  - f. financial or material resources needed for implementing such changes?
  - g. skill, knowledge, values and customs of those whose behavior may need to change?
  - h. laws or policy regulations?