

LINKING RESEARCH TO EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE: WHAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIPS IN HOW (DE)CENTRALIZED A CONTEXT?¹

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Abstract

This paper outlines a set of debates concerning a) alternative models for the relationship between researchers and policy makers/practitioners in efforts to link research and policy/practice and b) centralized, linear versus decentralized, iterative strategies for reforming education. The issues raised in these debates are then explored using illustrations drawn from documentation research of a USAID-funded project, Improving Educational Quality (IEQ), which operated in Ghana, Guatemala, and Mali during 1992-96.

Introduction

The 1980s and 1990s have witnessed heightened international concern about enhancing educational quality (Chapman and Carrier, 1990; Fuller, 1987; Hallak, 1990; Heyneman and Loxley, 1983). While the concern is almost universally shared, different conceptions of what constitutes educational quality have been adopted (Adams, 1993). Moreover, there have been

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debates on two issues related to the process of improving educational quality. The first concerns the alternative models for the relationship between researchers and policy makers/practitioners in efforts to link research and policy/practice, and the second involves arguments about the merits of centralized, linear versus decentralized, iterative strategies for reforming education. In this chapter we will summarize the issues raised in these debates and then explore them using illustrations drawn from documentation research of a USAID-funded project, Improving Educational Quality (IEQ), which operated in Ghana, Guatemala, and Mali during 1992-96.

Models of Researcher-Policy Maker/Practitioner Relationships

Much of the research on educational quality may be categorized roughly into two methodologically and conceptually distinct approaches: school effects (e.g., Hanushek, 1994) and effective schools (e.g., Lezotte, 1989). These approaches, however, have been criticized on a number of counts (e.g., Hargreaves et al., 1998; Riddell, 1989), including the fact that neither school effects nor effective schools research have much to say directly about the process of improving education, that is, implementing and sustaining the policies and practices derived from such research activities. Too often research conceived of in relation to efforts to improve educational policy and practice is done by researchers in isolation from policy makers and practitioners, and the findings from such research are disseminated through conference presentations, research reports, articles, or books (targeted primarily to an audience of other researchers). The assumption seems to be that “good science” (Whyte, 1991, p. 8) will “trickle down to the level of practice and inform practitioners [and policy makers] on what to do and what not to do” (Gitlin et al., 1992, p. 25).

However, in recent years educational researchers in conjunction with policy makers, administrators, and teachers have sought to employ (and write about) strategies for strengthening the links between research and educational policy and practice. Here we describe three models for linking research to policy and practice: decision-oriented research, collaborative action research, and research as collective praxis. These models differ with respect to the nature of the roles played by researchers and policy makers/practitioners.³ Thus, the models are built on different notions of what constitutes collaboration and empowerment (see Kreisberg, 1992) of researchers and policy makers/practitioners.

In their book on the subject, Cooley and Bickel (1986, p. 3) describe *decision-oriented educational research* (DOER) as "research designed to help educators as they consider issues surrounding educational policy, as they establish priorities for improving educational systems, or as they engage in the day-to-day management of educational systems." A key element in this model from the researchers' standpoint is a "client orientation," operationalized through an "on-going educational dialogue" (p. 27) in which researchers "work hard at trying to understand the information needs of the client and to meet those needs" (p. 36). Within the DOER model, researchers interact with clients (usually defined as policy makers or administrators, though logically they could be teachers, students, parents, etc.) to provide "facts" about education and society, whether based on quantitative or qualitative data, which are needed by the clients to make certain decisions. The researchers are in dialogue with the (policy-maker or practitioner) clients,

³ Arguably, these three models of linking research to educational policy and practice have close affinities with three scientific paradigms (see Ginsburg et al., 1996). Thus, although proponents of each model subscribe to some form of methodological eclecticism – usually framed as using quantitative and qualitative data, it seems like the decision-oriented research model fits best with positivist science, collaborative action research with interpretivist science, and research as critical practice with critical science (for descriptions of these scientific paradigms, see Popkewitz, 1981).

but each group has its own specified and fairly distinct role. The researchers are not involved directly in policy making or practice, and the policy makers and practitioners do not participate intimately in the research process.

Similar to the DOER model, *collaborative action research* (e.g., Stenhouse, 1975)⁴ is concerned with enhancing the use of research by educational policy makers and practitioners. However, in contrast to the DOER model, the collaborative action research model entails not only dialogue about, but also joint participation in, research by "researchers" and "educators" (usually defined as teachers, though logically they could be educational administrators, policy makers, etc.). This model builds on the notion that educational practitioners normally engage in inquiry and that their practice can be enhanced if they devote more time and energy to a more systematically planned and implemented process of research (Brause and Mayher, 1991; Kincheloe, 1991; Wagner, 1990). Nonetheless, a division of labor still seems to exist. Even though the "practitioner" assumes rights and responsibilities in the research process, the "researcher" is involved primarily as a collaborator in research design, data collection, and data analysis, remaining somewhat detached from the "professional" and "political" activity of educational policy making and practice (see Whyte, 1991).

The third model, *research as collective praxis*, shares some of the elements with, but is also framed in contrast to, the other two models. In her chapter on "Research as Praxis" Lather (1991, p. 56) comments that: "I am arguing for an approach that goes well beyond the action research concept. ... The vast majority of this work operates from an ahistorical, apolitical value system" (see

⁴ Although Stenhouse (1975) and his colleagues at the University of East Anglia in England popularized and legitimized collaborative action research in education, Corey (1953), drawing on ideas of Lewin (1946) – who coined

also Bodemann, 1978; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Gitlin et al., 1992). Similarly, McTaggart (1991, p. 176) describes a "process of using critical intelligence to inform action, and developing it so that social action becomes praxis through which people may consistently live their social values." Core assumptions of the "research as collective praxis" model are that a) researchers acknowledge and act upon their political commitments and b) they do so in the context of theorizing and practice (i.e., praxis) with both professionals and non-professionals, such as students and community members (Fine, 1989; Gitlin, et al., 1992; Reinharz, 1984; Vio Brossi and de Wit, 1981). In this way, the line between "researcher" and "policy maker" or "practitioner" becomes blurred as those who identify (or are typified) primarily as playing one of these roles, in fact, play both. Not only do policy makers, administrators, teachers, students, and community members participate in research, but "researchers" become active participants in various settings, working with others to understand and change schools and society.

(De)Centralized Contexts for Research-Based Educational Change

Paralleling and reinforced by the frequently unsuccessful attempts to translate studies of educational quality and effectiveness into policies and programs have been moves to reconceptualize the process of initiating and sustaining educational change. Traditionally in most countries and particularly in developing countries, there is a clear division of roles and responsibilities, wherein the central educational authorities are expected to initiate reforms and innovations and local schools are expected to participate, largely as implementers.

the term, action research – may have been the first to promote this approach in education through his book, *Action Research to Improve School Practices*.

Although such top-down, centralized, linear approaches to reform have continued to be promoted, in recent years there has been increased rhetoric in favor of and experimentation with various forms and meanings of educational decentralization and center-local partnerships (Adams, 1994; Bray and Lillis, 1988; McGinn, 1992; Moyle and Pongturlan, 1992; Special Issue on Education, 1992; Tyack, 1993). This trend away from an exclusive reliance on detailed educational plans and mandates from the center is partly in response to the perceived weaknesses of top-down policies and attempts at expert-driven, programmatic development of educational reform. It is argued that although inputs of technology, equipment, curricular materials, and staff development designed and implemented in the center have in some cases improved school quality, often such center-orchestrated efforts have only marginal impact on the way teachers and students operate in classrooms and schools. It is also claimed that while reform defined exclusively at the national level may successfully obtain compliance, it often fails to gain commitment from administrators and teachers, let alone from students and parents.

Traditional planning of educational change has tended to ignore uncertainties and complexities and to focus instead on simplifying and standardizing innovations for universal dissemination. The newer approach draws from the extensive local and regional experiences of many countries in initiating and implementing school- and classroom-level innovations (see Buckley and Schubert, 1983). To be successful in educational change efforts, one must recognize the complexity of developing viable change and give less attention to rigid plans or outcomes. Such planned change is assumed to begin with a few readiness principles (e.g., adequate resources, acceptance of validity of the new practice), require pressure (from below), support (from above), and continuous negotiation (between system levels). Specific, detailed, centralized plans are

devalued as initial guides to new practice because plans follow culture and mission follows (rather than precedes) enactment of principles.

It should be noted, though, that during the same period that decentralization has been increasingly stressed in the rhetoric and activity of educational reform, we have witnessed an intense process of globalization in the economy but also in the discourse and action in the field of education (Ginsburg, 1991). Thus, as we examine the (de)centralized contexts in which researchers establish relationships with policy makers/practitioners and pursue educational reform initiatives, we need to consider the degree to which international as well as national or local actors are involved in planning and implementing educational research, policy, and practice. For example, if much of the reform activity is shaped at the school- and local system-levels, but with significant input from bilateral agency officials, international organization representatives, or foreign consultants, should we label this as decentralization and/or super-centralization?

Illustrations from Documentation Research on IEQ Project

To explore further the issues identified above – concerning the relationships between researchers and policy makers/practitioners and the (de)centralized contexts for implementing educational reform, we draw on documentation research we conducted focused on the USAID-funded “Improving Educational Quality” (IEQ) project.

IEQ was initiated in 1991 as a five-year, USAID-funded project. IEQ’s main objective was to design practical ways to improve learning in classrooms and schools within the context of national educational reforms in selected developing countries. In the three countries supported from 1992-96 under the core contract – Ghana, Guatemala, and Mali – IEQ formed partnerships

with one or more host-country institutions to: a) assist in the enhancement of country research capacity and application; b) collaboratively design and implement classroom research at the primary school level; and c) link findings to practice and policy at various levels, from classrooms to national ministries, of the educational systems.

Following the ideal described by Clark (1988), but working within time and financial constraints, the documentation research we conducted provides a window for viewing the relationships established, the classroom research and other work undertaken, and the contexts in which such activity took place. Our documentation research involved analyzing a variety of documents and interviewing key participants in the IEQ project in Ghana, Guatemala, and Mali. The following types of documents and other artifacts were examined: technical proposals; weekly, monthly, semi-annual, and annual reports prepared by the Institute for International Research (IIR) with input from other (U.S. and non-U.S.) members of the project team; IEQ project newsletters; trip reports prepared by U.S. consultants upon their return from one or more of the core countries; research reports, other documents, and videos of schools and classrooms produced by members of the Host Country Research Team in each core country. In addition, beginning in March 1994 and continuing beyond the project's official ending in October 1996, a series of interviews were conducted with the Project Director and the majority of U.S. consultants involved in IEQ and a sample of the key members of the Host Country Research Teams from the three host countries. These interviews were conducted face-to-face or by telephone, fax, regular mail, or e-mail. Through these mechanisms, information was gathered to clarify and augment what was included in the documents, to focus informants' feedback on drafts

of the “stories” of IEQ in each country (see Clayton and Wang, 1996; Mantilla, 1996; Sylvester, 1996), and to identify new activities or themes to explore.

Prior to discussing what our documentation research says about a) the relationships (i.e., division of labor) between researchers and policy makers/practitioners and (b) the (de)centralized nature of the institutional contexts within which efforts were undertaken to link research to educational policy and practice, however, it may be helpful to describe briefly the societal context of and IEQ activity in each country (for further details, see Ginsburg and Adams, 1996; Ginsburg et al., 1999).

IEQ in Ghana, Guatemala, and Mali

Ghana, a West African country with a population of 17 million, achieved its political independence from Britain in 1957. Ghanaians speak 44 indigenous languages, though English is the official language and the sole medium of instruction (beginning with the fourth year of primary school). Ghana is rich in natural resources – cocoa, gold, diamonds, and timber (Agbodeka, 1992), but following years of expansion, Ghana experienced a severe economic decline beginning in 1975. This led the government to negotiate loans from the IMF and World Bank as part of a structural adjustment program, including the reduction in public expenditures on education and other social services (Rothchild, 1991).

Up until the mid-1970s, Ghana had one of the most advanced educational systems in West Africa, but in the context of economic downturn, investment in education dropped drastically, plunging the system into a crisis (Yeboah, 1992). Because of this educational crisis, the government began pursuing a number of educational reforms. For instance, in 1991 the

Primary Education Program (PREP) was initiated with funding from USAID. PREP focused on: a) distributing instructional materials; b) developing criterion-based tests for primary school leavers in grade 6; c) organizing a comprehensive inservice education program for primary school teachers; and d) preparing and implementing an Equity Improvement Plan in the Central Region. When in April 1992 representatives of USAID/Accra, the Government of Ghana, and IIR, the prime contractor for the IEQ project, met to discuss where to focus IEQ resources, PREP was the consensus choice.

IEQ activity in Ghana centered on the efforts of a Host Country Research Team (HCRT), which was created and staffed by members of the Faculty of Education at the University of Cape Coast. In the first phase of the project, the Team collected data – via observation and interviewing – in primary level (P1-P6) classrooms in six schools, focusing on the availability and use of instructional materials for teaching and learning of English, math, and science. In the second phase the Team collected data in 14 (seven experimental and seven control) schools, studying the implementation of interventions (i.e., emphasizing teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil oral conversation in English, exposing pupils to English via print sources, and adopting a mastery learning approach) and their effect on English language proficiency of 1,032 P2-P5 pupils (using curriculum-based assessments developed by the HCRT and U. S. consultants). And in the third phase, P3-P6 classrooms in the 14 schools were studied to gauge implementation of the interventions (those introduced in the second phase as well as additional classroom management, remediation, and enrichment strategies) and their effects on pupils' English language proficiency and classroom behavior.

Key findings from the three phases of the research (1-3) include: 1) pupils were not

interacting with the teachers, classmates, or written materials in ways that would promote English language literacy; 2) pupils in the interventions schools were more likely to be exposed to oral and written English (via textbooks and other instructional resources) and they evidenced higher levels of oral and written communication skills; and 3) teachers in the intervention schools more often used textbooks and other print materials (rather than the chalk board) and reinforced pupils' use of English in class and outside of class, while pupils evidenced significantly greater improvement in their reading, writing and speaking skills in English.

Between 1992 and 1996 various forums for dialogue about the research were organized from that national to the local level. A "Conference on Improving the Educational Quality of Primary Schools" was held annually in 1992, 1993, and 1994 and the "IEQ National Advisory Board" was convened in April and December, 1995 and March, June, and September, 1996. These national-level gatherings were attended by representatives of the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, the Overseas Development Association, UNICEF, USAID/Ghana, the teacher's union, the University of Cape Coast, and a teacher's training college, as well as by circuit supervisors, school administrators, teachers, and parents. IEQ research findings were also discussed at the local level during monthly school visits by researchers (and head teachers and circuit supervisors) for purposes of training teachers in instructional and classroom management strategies as well as data collection.

Guatemala, a Spanish colony until 1821, is a Central American country with over 9.5 million inhabitants. Approximately 60 percent of the population are Indian, who speak 22 Mayan languages (Jones, 1991); the rest of the population are *ladinos*, descendants of white and

Indian racial intermixing, who speak Spanish the official language.⁵ With coffee, bananas, cotton, and sugar supplying 62 percent of the export earnings, Guatemala is characterized as having a dependent economic status. Extreme poverty and malnutrition (Jones, 1991) juxtaposed with concentrations of wealth have led to long-term social and political unrest, including a civil war Guatemala experienced during three decades (1960s-1990s).⁶

In this political economic context it is not surprising that Guatemala has one of the lowest literacy rates in Central America and the world (Hayes, 1993). In an attempt to alleviate this problem, the Guatemalan government developed the Basic Education Strengthening (BEST) program, a seven-year (1989-1996) project supported by a grant from USAID. The *Nueva Escuela Unitaria* (NEU) component of the BEST program became the focus of IEQ activities in Guatemala. The NEU model was based on an approach developed in Colombia and involved flexible promotion; active, collaborative learning; peer teaching; use of self-instructional guides; and participatory student government.

A Host Country Research Team (HCRT) was assembled, including a research coordinator, two regional field coordinators, and 10 field researchers. The original plan in 1992 was for the HCRT to become part of the Ministry of Education, but instead it functioned as a stand-alone organization until February 1996, when it was incorporated into the Universidad del Valle. Designed as a longitudinal evaluation study of the NEU component of BEST, the IEQ research involved (cognitive and socio-emotional development, health status, and language

⁵ The main language of instruction in Guatemala is Spanish, although beginning in the 1980s there has been increasing efforts to include the four main maternal languages for bilingual instruction in the indigenous regions.

⁶Until the 1996 peace accord, Guatemala had the longest-running guerrilla movement of Latin America, starting in 1961. It is estimated that since 1954, following a *coup d'etat* and an invasion backed up by the United States, 100,000 people have died, 40,000 have disappeared, and 150,000 have been made widows and orphans.

proficiency) testing, classroom observations, and interviewing in five NEU or experimental and five control schools. The sample in first phase included first and second grade pupils, a cohort who were studied as they moved up the grades during the second and third phases. Additionally, in the third phase the research agenda was expanded to collect data on the retention of students, and 20 NEU and 10 control schools were added to the sample.

Highlights of the findings by research phase (1-3) include: 1) children in NEU schools evidenced significantly greater gains on several test measures, including reading comprehension in Spanish; 2) no significant differences were observed between children in the NEU and control schools in terms of gains in achievement; and 3) NEU schools had significantly lower dropout rates.

Dialogue activity occurred in conjunction with local or regional workshops organized by NEU program officials for supervisors, administrators, teachers, parents, and pupils. While discussion and reflection were emphasized, these periodic workshops functioned more to motivate and train educators to implement the NEU approach than to evaluate and refine the NEU program. The former type of interaction also characterized the workshops organized by some of the NEU teachers (termed *multiplicadores* or multipliers) to orient teachers in other schools, where the nationally planned NEU program was to be expanded. At the national level, IEQ findings were discussed during a (February 1995) research methodology workshop conducted for Ministry of Education personnel and UNICEF staff; the long-delayed (September 1995) meeting of the IEQ National Advisory Committee, which was attended by representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Universidad de Valle, Rafael Landivar University, USAID/Guatemala, and UNICEF; and an (April 1996) IEQ sponsored "Latin American

Conference on Educational Quality,” which was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Education, the two above-mentioned universities, USAID, UNICEF, and World Bank.

Mali, which gained its political independence from France in 1960, is a West African country of approximately 8.5 million people, comprising 15 major ethnic groups (Ouane, 1994) who speak 11 different languages (World Bank, 1988). Only about 10 percent of the population speak French, the official language (Bokamba, 1991). About 45 percent of the GNP in Mali comes from agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, and forestry (Ouane, 1994), and its economic position is one of dependency with extensive poverty, particularly in the rural areas.

School enrollment rates in Mali are among the lowest in the world, and there are significant rates of repetition and dropout (e.g., UNESCO, 1991). To address this situation, the Malian government launched in 1989 its Basic Education Expansion Program (BEEP), a major national reform of primary schooling supported financially by USAID and the World Bank. This reform program became the focus of IEQ activities in Mali.

The Host Country Research Team (HCRT) in Mali was composed of eight members, four members each from: a) the *Institute Pédagogique Nationale* (IPN), the technical research branch of the Ministry of Basic Education, and b) the *Institute Supérieure de Formation et de Recherche Appliquée* (ISFRA), a research unit of the Ministry of Secondary and Higher Education. IEQ research in the first phase examined factors that affect French language learning⁷ in first and second grade classrooms in 11 school communities, with ISFRA researchers highlighting health,

⁷ The focus on French language learning was shaped by an official in USAID/Mali, who discouraged a focus on bilingual (French and a maternal language) approaches. He asserted that U.S.-funded projects should avoid actions that might be interpreted by the French government as interfering with French-Malian relations, particularly in the area of language policy. This is despite the facts that approximately 100 schools were implementing bilingual programs and that some Malian educators' views were in line with the favorable evaluation (conducted in the

nutrition, sanitary environment, socio-cultural, and other characteristics of children and IPN researchers illuminating instructional practices during reading and language arts lessons. The findings from the first phase of the research combined with professional judgments by host-country researchers and U. S. consultants shaped the decision to implement two interventions: a) using didactic materials, folk tales, and small group instruction in large classes and b) establishing community centers to provide supervised settings with good conditions for studying. Following training workshops that were organized by the researchers and local/regional administrators, a second phase of the research was conducted. This initially involved follow-up visits – including classroom observations and interviews – to 21 of an expanded sample of 42 “intervention” schools, of which 22 were employing a transitional, bilingual approach and 20 were using a “classical” French immersion approach.⁸ During subsequent activity of the second phase of the research, the HCRT conducted a more in-depth investigation, involving observations, language testing, and interviews in 12 of the 42 “intervention” schools.

The research findings were discussed at a national *Colloque* (April 1994), which was attended by both ministers of education; inspectors; regional educational directors; principals; teachers; parents; and representatives of bilateral agencies (including USAID) and international organizations. Regional workshops (one in August and three in November 1994) were also organized by researchers and attended by teachers, principals, inspectors, pedagogic advisors, community development technicians, regional education directors, and parents. And during the

context of the USAID-funded Advancing Basic Education and Literacy [ABEL] project in the late 1980s – see Hutchinson, 1990) of a national experiment in the use of maternal languages.

⁸ Despite discouragement at the beginning of the project from a USAID/Mali official, IEQ research ended up focusing on bilingual instruction because a new Minister of Basic Education, who took office in January 1994, specified that all education projects in Mali must be cohesive with his new educational reform initiative, *Nouvelle Ecole Fondamentale* (NEF), which was designed to promote the teaching of maternal languages.

second phase of the research school visits not only provided opportunities for researchers to gather information from the field, but also offered a chance for dialogue about the data gathered previously.

Relationships Between Researchers and Policy Makers/Practitioners⁹

The relationships between researchers, on the one hand, and policy makers, administrators, supervisors, teachers, and parents, on the other hand, varied across the three countries in the IEQ project as well as across time and system levels in each country. The Guatemalan case seems to best fit the more positivist, “decision-oriented research” model. Researchers consulted with policy-makers and practitioners – including those working at international, national, regional, and local levels; collected and analyzed data viewed to be relevant to key decisions; and then reported on the findings. Particularly during the first phase of the project in Guatemala, it was the government authorities and educators who took charge of training for and implementing changes designed to improve educational quality (viz., the NEU component of BEST). Although the IEQ research coordinator increasingly played a role in training activities, this primarily consisted of reporting on the research findings and illustrating the differences between NEU and non-NEU classroom activities using transcribed excerpts of videos filmed during the research. In two cases, however, the relationships differed from that associated with the DOER model. The first was that the Colombian consultant, who was heading up the NEU project – having been hired for the job by a U. S. consulting firm, was an active

⁹ It is important to note that in the three IEQ core countries the role played by the Host Country Research Teams is complicated because of their collaboration with US-based consultants, who helped to design the research, collect

participant in designing the research and interpreting the findings. Through the role he played in the research activities, he stretched beyond what might be seen as the typical role for a policy maker or practitioner. The second case involved the teachers/*multiplicadores*, who became involved in disseminating the IEQ research findings in their efforts to promote the expansion of the NEU approach to instruction. While not involved in data collection and analysis, these teachers took on interpretation and dissemination roles traditionally associated primarily with researchers.

In Mali, the relationships between researchers and educational policy-makers and practitioners were also in many ways similar to those associated the DOER model. The HCRT, representing research units in the two ministries of education, consulted primarily with national- and international-level educational policy makers and practitioners prior to conducting research that they (and U.S. consultants) perceived to be relevant to improving educational quality. The research team then reported their findings to local as well as national and international audiences of policy makers and practitioners. However, the Malian researchers took a more active role than associated with the DOER model in training and supervising teachers to implement the instructional strategies and other interventions developed within the IEQ project.¹⁰ Thus, in Mali the researchers' role was more in line with that implied by the "research as collective practice" model, in that they became more directly and actively involved in the process of (educational) change. However, the complementary stretching of policy-maker and practitioner roles was not

and analyze data, interpret the results, and (in the cases of Ghana and Mali) develop and train educators to implement reformed educational practices.

¹⁰ In Guatemala, the HCRT coordinator and others made presentations at training workshops, and IEQ and NEU staff jointly organized such workshops late in the project, but in Mali (and particularly in Ghana), the HCRT played a relatively active role in training activities from the beginning of the project.

as apparent. Policy-makers and practitioners at various levels of the system mainly related to the project as sources of data or audiences for reports of research findings. The interesting exceptions to this conclusion, though, involved the significant involvement in designing the research – albeit in contradictory ways – by two policy makers: a) the USAID/Mali official at the beginning of the project and b) the Minister of Education who was appointed just before the start of Phase II of the project. As noted above, the former discouraged any research focus on schools using the transitional bilingual program, and the latter mandated such a focus.¹¹

In Ghana, particularly at the beginning of the project, researchers' relationships with national ministry officials (and USAID and international organization representatives) generally resembled those that are associated with the DOER model. Researchers conducted research while ministry officials and agency personnel determined policies. Two notable exceptions to this characterization, however, were observed hinting toward collaborative action research or research as collective praxis models. The first involved a USAID/Ghana official, who had a major influence on the research design in the second phase of data collection in urging that the HCRT: a) expand the sample of schools to 14 schools (seven experimental and seven control schools) and include schools from more than one region of the country; b) focus on identifying “new instructional strategies which might be used nationwide;” and c) limit the study to the investigation of teaching and learning of English (and not on math and science) in the upper primary grades (only). The second exception was the fact that during the final year of the IEQ

¹¹ In another sense, though, the Minister's *Nouvelle Ecole Fondamentale* reform could be seen (and perhaps was in fact) in line with the results of USAID-funded research conducted in Mali in the late 1980s (Hutchinson, 1990) that concluded that language proficiency in French (and indigenous language) was better achieved through a transitional bilingual education approach. Thus, at the same time he was stretching his role toward active involvement in research planning, he was also operating as a policy maker consuming the research findings of decision-oriented educational researchers.

project the coordinator of the research team was appointed to be a member of the Ministry of Education's Executive Committee for Teacher Training, thus incorporating her more formally into a national policy-making role.

At the local and regional levels in Ghana the relationships between researchers and educational practitioners (especially head teachers and circuit supervisors) developed in ways to make them even more in line with a "collaborative action research" model or a "research as collective praxis" model. For example, the HCRT assumed a fairly active role in promoting educational change, not only through participating in the organization and implementation of training workshops but also in assuming quasi-supervisory roles in relation to teachers and, thus, quasi-collegial roles in relation to head teachers and circuit supervisors. This occurred as the HCRT members engaged in on-going conversations about educational research, policy, and practice with teachers during training, monitoring, and data-gathering visits to schools. Additionally, over the course of the project, head teachers and circuit supervisors increasingly participated in the research efforts to document the activities of teachers and students, and they assumed full responsibility for conducting the research in the third phase after fiscal and time constraints prevented HCRT members from participating.

Centralized Versus Decentralized Context

In each country the IEQ project operated in a relatively highly nationally centralized context, though aspects of the project's functioning suggested – and to some extent moved the dynamics to – a more regionally or locally decentralized model. To begin with, in each of three countries IEQ research was focused generally on a major *national* educational reform initiative,

which both predated IEQ and was (at least in part) funded – and, therefore, shaped – by an extra-national organization (USAID).¹² And in the case of Mali, the NEF reform introduced by a new Minister of Education just prior to the beginning of the second phase of the IEQ research was also a centrally – in this case, nationally – determined policy, on which IEQ researchers were required to focus. Moreover, in all three countries, many of the initial research design decisions were made based on the advice of – or at least with the approval of – officials at the “center,” whether nationally (i.e., representatives of ministries) or internationally (i.e., representatives of USAID missions and international organizations). Additionally, prominent dialogue efforts were undertaken in a centralized context in which many participants were representatives of national and international agencies.

A somewhat decentralized structure for IEQ efforts to link research to educational policy and practice in each country, however, is indicated by the fact that these national events – the conferences, colloques, seminars, and advisory committee meetings – often included administrators, supervisors, teachers, and parents from the local areas in which the IEQ research and other activities were being conducted. Furthermore, many dialogue activities were organized on a regional or local school level, thus creating opportunities for a more decentralized approach to developing and refining classroom teaching practices stemming from ideas generated by IEQ research or based on professional insights of HCRT or U.S. support team researchers. During the period of the IEQ project in the three countries (1992-1996) there was certainly an increase in the level of local participation in discussing and shaping educational practice.

¹² While the influence of USAID officials – both in Washington and in the mission of each core country – cannot be discounted, it should be noted that ministry of education officials and IEQ personnel helped shape the decisions to focus on USAID-funded projects: PREP in Ghana, BEST in Guatemala, and BEEP in Mali.

With respect to educational policy, though, the IEQ project inserted itself into, and functioned for the most part as a part of, a centralized process of planning and implementation. In a sense the IEQ activity at the regional and local level served to disseminate and promote the policy (and practice) reforms that had been determined centrally – whether at the national or international level. Generally, local input was sought mainly for identifying problems with and solutions for implementation of the nationally and internationally determined reforms in educational policy and practice.

One notable exception to this conclusion is worth mentioning, in that while it provides an example of “bottom-up” policy change, it clarifies how those at the top or center of the system retains considerable control over at least the timing of policy reforms. The case in point occurred in Ghana. In 1993, the HCRT reported at the “Conference on Improving the Educational Quality of Primary Schools” on the finding from the first phase of their research that Ghanaian pupils’ English language learning was hampered because textbooks were not available in some schools and, when available, the texts were not being used by pupils. Moreover, the researchers found that: a) textbook availability was limited because head teachers did not have funds to travel to district distribution centers to obtain the PREP-sponsored books for their schools and b) even when the books were available, teachers did not distribute the texts to pupils to avoid having to pay for any damage the books might suffer in the hands of pupils. The dialogue stimulated by these findings eventuated in two changes in national-level policy, although not until 1995 – approximately one and one-half years later and after the findings had been replicated in the second phase of the research. First, a new policy was adopted authorizing payment to head

teachers' for the cost of traveling to district offices to collect textbooks for their schools. Second, the policy, which held teachers fiscally responsible for textbooks that were soiled or damaged by student use in class or at home, was rescinded.

The fact that teachers' and head teachers' views about the negative effects that national policies had on educational quality led to changes in these policies suggests that the IEQ project facilitated more local participation in policy making and, in this case, a bottom-up reform. We should note, however, that it took a centrally organized team of university-based researchers, who were collaborating with U. S. consultants in the context of a USAID-funded project, to communicate the message to national policy makers. And, indeed, even their message did not result in policy changes until after they reported the same conclusions based on findings from a second phase of the research.

Conclusion

What longer-term lessons were learned from such experiences by researchers as well as local, national, and international policy makers and practitioners will have to await future research as will the examination of the level of local participation in decision making about educational policy and practice that occurred after the first five years of the IEQ project – and the funding for the research teams – ended. Whatever the longer-term impact, the experiences of the IEQ project in Ghana, Guatemala, and Mali illustrate some of the opportunities and challenges in developing different kinds of relationships between researchers and policy makers/practitioners and in pursuing educational reform efforts in contexts that vary – across countries and over time – in their degree of national-local as well as international-national-local (de)centralization.

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