Why Research in Education?

LEANDER BOYKIN*

R ECENT national and world-wide developments in such areas as space exploration, military preparedness, environmental pollution, poverty, and disease prevention and control have caused the term "research" to become one of the most commonly used words in the English language. Utilized in many different ways by different people, the term "research" has come to be applied to such a wide range of activities that it has ceased to have a single identifiable meaning or method.

Because the term "research" is difficult to discuss in the abstract, it appears that some authors prefer not to approach outright the problem of definition. Attempts are made to define research through discussion of the specific kind of activity engaged in; by explanation of the stages in the research process; by describing its characteristics; or by treating synonymously the terms "research" and "scientific method."

Yet whether we define it as a method, an activity, a process, or simply as structured problem solving; whether we label it experimental or nonexperimental; whether we designate it as basic, applied, or evaluative; whether we refer to it as descriptive, historical, or philosophical, research in education has as its objectives the development of theory, critical analysis of hypothetical propositions, the search for truth, the discovery of new knowledge, and the solving of theoretical and practical problems. Research in education makes wide use of the deductive-inductive reasoning process—problem identification, hypothesis formulation, data collection, organization and analyses, formulation of conclusions, and verification, rejection, or modification of the hypothesis.

What Is Educational Research?

Educational research is the more formal, systematic, and intensive process of carrying on a scientific method of analysis (Best) 1; "When we use the term educational research, we mean the scientific investigation and solution of education's problems" (Hillway) 2; "Educational research ... represents an activity directed toward the development of an


* Leander Boykin, Professor of Education, Florida A & M University, Tallahassee
organized body of scientific knowledge about the events with which educators are concerned" (Travers) 3; “Educational research is a part of the behavioral sciences, in which the purpose is to understand, explain, predict, and to some degree control human behavior” (Hayman). 4

Research in education is “disciplined inquiry.” It is use of the methods of scientific analysis to produce information needed to make improvement in educational planning, decision making, teaching and learning, curriculum development, understanding of children and youth, use of instructional media, school organization, and educational management, and in public acceptance of the school as society’s agent for change.

Contributions of Research

Research in education has enabled significant progress to be made in curriculum development and reform, educating slow learners, understanding the mentally retarded, and in adapting methods of instruction to the needs of individual learners.

Research has contributed immeasurably to our understanding of different cultures and the impact of culture on values, attitudes, ideals, personality development, and human behavior.

Education is indebted to research for its theories and research methods and techniques; also for what we know already about educational achievement, learning theory and motivation, intelligence testing, growth and development, measurement and evaluation.

Important contributions have been made through research to our knowledge and understanding of administrative leadership and behavior, group procedures, classroom atmosphere, interaction analysis, the self-concept, levels of aspiration; deprivation and racism; and educational inequality and the disadvantaged.

Need for Continued Research

Despite a half-century of prodigious research effort, we have no final solutions to such perennial educational problems as class size, grouping for instructional purposes, selection and organization of curriculum content, interpersonal relations, how to train teachers, children’s cognitive development, teaching effectiveness, the nature and measurement of teacher personality, how best to organize schools and classrooms, and how to plan for and bring about educational change. In education, as in all fields, continued progress and finding solutions to such problems depend on research.

At the present time, few needs are more important than for carefully designed studies and investigations which will enable education now and in the future to cope with various complex societal problems. Some of these problems are poverty, alienation, delinquency, drug addiction, pollution, student unrest, teacher mobility, economic competition for teachers, the allocation of needed resources, anti-education attitudes, and educational inequality.

Research activities are needed which will help education enhance the goals of our culture, rebuild confidence in the public schools, adapt to cultural diversity, educate for self-identity and individual fulfillment, reestablish faith in human, moral, and democratic values, change racial attitudes, achieve the goals of quality and relevance, and meet the challenges of the future world of accelerating scientific and technological change.

Research for the Future

In reviewing the research for this brief discussion of “Why Research in Education?” this writer identified more than 25 areas as needing more vigorous research in the future. However, it is possible here to list only a few of these areas for the purpose of stimulating reflection and thought, not to provide answers.

1. Even though there have been several significant statements of goals for American education, research on purposes and objec-
tives is not plentiful. Research is needed that will aid education in the rediscovery of educational purposes. The search must continue for an optimal balance between the purposes of the individual and the purposes of society.

2. We are in a primitive stage in creating a body of knowledge and developing effective basic strategies and procedures for effecting educational change. Research must attempt not only to identify the probable major changes in society, but also to develop basic strategies, procedures, and support systems for effecting change.

3. We clearly need more sophisticated techniques for assessing the will of the people and means for accounting to the public for the stewardship of schools. There is need to determine if "accountability" will stifle rather than promote progress and whether "cooperation" performance contracting will become the measure of "accountability" and lead eventually to "accreditation" by contract.

4. Research is needed to help the education community explore further the potential effects of "decentralization" and consumer control of schools on the quality of education, and whether voucher schools, learning incentive bonuses, and the involvement of parents in curriculum decision making will improve educational performance.

5. In our search for better schools and alternatives to age-graded, self-contained education, we now have the "multi-unit school," "schools without walls," "storefront schools," "the Harlem Prep School," and British primary schools. But we have not yet determined how relevant and effective such experimental schools are.

6. The plight of urban schools, both educationally and financially, may well be the most serious problem facing education in the seventies. But we have not yet developed the know-how of meeting the attitudinal challenges and resolving in realistic ways the problems of resistance-politics, racial-ethnic conflicts, student unrest, parent and civic involvement, teacher militancy, and opposition to bussing.

7. In our technological society where each sex is expected to fulfill multiple roles, we must have more research studies to assist education in overcoming sex role stereotyping and in developing an environment that will nurture the ideal of female equality, and promote the goal of equal rights for the development of strong concepts of self for both women and girls.

8. We do not possess the "know-how" to correct conditions in depressed areas which make school a punitive, unmotivating, and failing experience for many children; nor do we have the expertise to intervene in the

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life of a “culturally deprived” child so that unrelieved poverty will not pass from generation to generation. We cannot yet account for the failure of intervention programs in early childhood education to produce more lasting and permanent results.

9. Needed badly are more scientific studies that will help us understand better the effects of family life variables, child-rearing patterns, and the biological and behavioral factors that go into growth and development. We need a better understanding of how human potential may be modifiable through the interacting influences of the home, school, and community environment.

10. More intensive experimental evidence is needed and further investigation should be made of the impact of all mass media, especially television, on learning and behavior. We do not yet know what the time- and money-saving possibilities are of computer-assisted instruction, programmed learning, and other forms of educational technology.

11. Our current knowledge is inadequate about curriculum decision making, learning and instructional program designs, and curriculum development. There must be continuing research to generate knowledge concerning how to improve curriculum materials, instructional procedures, and the use of curriculum guides. The conceptual tools available to curriculum planners who are caught up in the demand for reform and change are quite inadequate. We have not yet devised models of truly imaginative curriculum alternatives.

We do not yet know how to develop curricula that will produce an educated high school graduate who possesses the basic communications and occupational skills and personal competencies needed to adapt to future unknown changes in society. School curriculum will have to be restructured to be responsive to the affective as well as the cognitive needs of disadvantaged pupils.

12. Research for planning and decision making in education is crucial in education. More refined forecasting techniques are needed. Longtime investigations of prospective changes in society of manpower requirements, occupational changes, population shifts, and economic trends and developments and their implications are imperative for planning, designing, and effecting needed changes in education. Especially significant is the need for research to eliminate policy decisions relating to educational practices and programs, funding, and control. Research is needed to help shift decision making about educational goals from classical philosophy to analysis of societal and individual needs. Further delineation is needed of the decision-making roles of the teacher, administrators, local boards of education, and state departments of education.

Other areas in need of further investigation are significant concepts in educational administration, supervision, and instruction; improvement in measurement, research design, research methodology, and evaluative research; the effectiveness as change agents of workshops, institutes, sensitivity training, and encounter groups; psychological theory to explain and predict teacher behavior, expectancy, and images in relation to student achievement; different styles of teacher interaction for optimal student results; psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic studies of language development and functioning.

Further investigations should be made of PPBS as an effective educational planning program, budgeting, accounting system. Also, for what kinds of schools, children, and teachers are the following innovations appropriate and valuable: “team teaching,” “nongrading,” “differentiated staffing,” “flexible scheduling,” “microteaching,” “minicourses,” “performance contracting,” computer-assisted instruction, and programmed learning?

Without continued attention to society's needs and education’s problems and unanswered questions, the crisis of the classroom, the criticisms, the search for alternatives, and the demands for reformation of education will continue.