

INTRODUCTION

Good morning it is wonderful to be back in Edinburgh after many years.

I want to start by saying a little bit about myself in relation to the topic of my talk today which is concerned with finding new ways to value and take advantage of the contributions of college and university faculty (academics) and teachers and administrators in primary and secondary schools (practitioners) in educational research, teacher education including continuing professional development and educational policy making.

Using the terms academic and practitioner, is not without problems because according to the way that I see the world, academics have practices (and not just theories) and practitioners have and produce new theories. This limitation aside, I will use the shorthand terms of academics and practitioners to represent those who inhabit the very different worlds of primary and secondary schooling and colleges and universities.

I have been involved for about the last 35 years as either a primary school teacher or a university teacher educator in either conducting research about my own teaching practice and the programs for which I am responsible OR in supporting the action research of others- (much of my own research and support of research involves some aspect of self-study)

- Student teachers in the university teacher education program in which I teach.

- Cooperating teachers and university graduate students who teach and supervise the school-based teaching experiences of our student teachers- supporting self-study by teacher educators..
- Teachers in the local public schools who have built over the last 20 years a very strong action research network in which they conduct research and share their research widely throughout the local schools and beyond.
- I have also spent some time supporting the action research of teachers and teacher educators elsewhere including working for over 10 years in the southern African country of Namibia in supporting what they call critical practitioner inquiry by student teachers, teachers, and teacher educators.

All of this work has reflected my strong belief that action research is potentially both a powerful vehicle for professional development and growth for both individual educators, and their institutions, and is also an important source of knowledge about practice from those who actually are engaged in a daily basis in the work of teaching students.

Although there has been much progress during my career in recognizing the potential contributions of practitioner generated knowledge to educational research (e.g., our understanding about how to teach reading, maths and so on), to educating teachers at different stages of their careers, and to educational policy making, practitioner generated knowledge is still marginalized from the mainstream, and if acknowledged at all as a source of knowledge, is awarded a second class status.

For example, Although I understand the reasons for a separate practitioner research day at conferences like this one and the annual Ethnography Forum in the US- in my ideal world there would not be a separate day for practitioner research, Instead, both academic research and practitioner research would be presented and discussed together in one coherent conference. The focus would be on the topics of the research rather than on who has conducted it. Programs of research on particular issues and questions would gain insights from both the findings of academic led studies and practitioner studies and the dialogue among academic and practitioners would be freer of the status hierarchies that often exist and both practitioner and academic research would become better because of this interaction.

Today I am going to talk about border crossings and of ways in which academic research and knowledge and practitioner research and knowledge can come together to enhance the quality of research, teacher education, and educational policymaking. I began my career as a teacher educator as what today is called in the US a “boundary spanner.” During the 1970s the US government paid for someone to teach my urban primary school classroom where I had taught mostly African-American students who lived in extreme poverty. After the government supplied a teacher to take my place in my classroom, I worked in the same school in which I had taught supervising and mentoring teams of Teacher Corps interns who were enrolled in a national program designed to prepare teachers in new ways to teach in high poverty schools. I was employed simultaneously by the school district and the local university and went back and forth regularly between the

two worlds in my work teaching both primary school students and post-graduate student teachers.

For the last 32 years, I have been on the faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison which is a large research university near Chicago. When I came to WI in 1976, I came into a position not as a professor, but as a staff person with a contract that had to be renewed each year, who “handled” our largest teacher education programs and many of the relations with the local schools (clinical faculty). Several people before me who had tried to do this work and who were regular tenure track assistant professors were not able to be promoted because of the reward structures of research universities which devalues work in schools. It was felt that if someone could be hired to do the work on pre-service teacher education who did not have to worry about publishing and the other things that are required to gain tenure in a major research university in the US there would be more stability in our teacher education programs.

Even though I was classified as a practitioner of teacher education and not as a scholar, I was a boarder crosser and to the surprise of my colleagues, I conducted research and published it (much of it about my own practice). At some point I was persuaded to switch over to become a regular professor with tenure. Although I did this, I have never stopped traveling back and forth between the worlds of schools and the university on a regular basis. I have been involved in the worlds of practitioner and academic research throughout my whole career.

In my talk today, I am going to use the idea of third space to frame the issues of finding ways to break out of the patterns of relationship between academics and practitioners that have prevented us from taking full advantage of what practitioner and academic research have to offer us in educational research, teacher education, and educational policy making. I am only going to spend a brief time introducing the idea of third space and will concentrate on discussing how I have applied it to the issue of utilizing both academic and practitioner knowledge.

My comments will address issues of power, privilege and status in educational research and are aimed at contributing to rethinking the dominant social relations and political economy that characterize educational research in many western advanced capitalist societies like the UK and the US, the enduring divide between practitioner and academic research.