Ethical Issues in Teacher Research

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This article identifies and examines the ethical issues surrounding teacher research, especially when the participants of the research are the teachers' own students. I first explore the movement to increase the relevance and applicability of research on and for teachers, and then address ethical issues in teaching and in research, especially as they stem from federal regulation requiring the protection of human subjects. The article then turns to the specific issues that arise in teacher research. Dual-role conflicts are described, as are the difficulties of assuring unfettered informed consent. The article relates these problems to the difficulties of deciding what is research and what is normal educational practice in the classroom setting, especially when qualitative research methodologies are used. Suggestions as to how the potential conflicts and ethical problems can be addressed are provided, but teacher researchers are cautioned that work with their own students raises particularly thorny issues.

Current efforts aimed at improving education are increasingly emphasizing the need to further develop and codify the knowledge base of teaching. Additionally, reformers focusing on teachers have emphasized the relative isolation of teachers from each other and the need to develop new venues for teachers to interact around the problems of practice they face (Shulman, 1990). Such interaction is seen as essential for another goal of reform: professionalization of teaching (Holmes Group, 1990). One element of a profession frequently identified in this literature is the possession of a body of knowledge unique to the profession, and based on both basic and clinical research specific to the tasks of the profession. Thus, a movement to identify forms of teacher scholarship and writing (and talking) as research and to encourage teachers to see research as a part of their roles as teachers has gained momentum (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992, 1993; Curriculum Committee of the Holmes Group, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Duckworth, 1986; Evans, 1991; McElroy, 1990; Patterson, Santa, Short, & Smith, 1993).

The link between the professionalization of teaching and increased research on the problems of practice is clear. Professionalized occupations claim to be experts in their practice, holding knowledge and practice skills beyond the capacity of laypersons. Thus research or scholarship of some kind is necessary to demarcate their expertise from that of the general
population. The scientific base of medicine or the esoteric knowledge of a lawyer or of a priest, rabbi, or minister (although these are not science-based) is beyond that of most patients, clients, or believers, and supports the special, professional status of these occupations in the community. The need for involvement by teachers in research is not immediately self-evident from the uses other professions have made of research. Certainly not all doctors, rabbis, or engineers engage in research or otherwise make contributions to the knowledge base of their professions. Someone needs to do that work, but the general practitioners of the professions usually are not the ones.

The movement toward involving teachers in research derives from a critique of university-based research and researchers who have often defined educational problems in isolation from real classrooms and real students and teachers (Cole & Knowles, 1993). In the field of educational sociology, for example, the relations between educators and sociologists have been referred to as "uncomfortable" (Hansen, 1967). Research contributing to the discipline of educational psychology has sometimes been seen as more important than contributions to the classroom work of teachers (Saphier, 1982). Thus, the critique of teacher education and of schools of education has led to proposals for closer collaboration between schools of education and schools and between university faculty and classroom teachers. Such collaboration, it is argued, will produce knowledge more sensitive to the realities of teachers' tasks and the learning environment of classrooms. "Teachers have begun to assume their rightful position at the head and heart of inquiry into classroom practice" (Cole & Knowles, 1993, p. 477).

The thrust of this line of argument is different from the one emerging from a motivation to professionalize teaching. In some ways, this line of argument is almost antiprofessional and almost always antihierarchical, calling for closer relations between researcher and participant: "The university researcher may not always shape the nature and direction of the work. Instead, choices, change, and understandings are shared and shaped by everyone involved in the inquiry process" (Clark & Moss, 1996, p. 521).

Engagement in research, however, may place classroom teachers in roles they had not anticipated, and that may conflict with their roles as teachers (Baumann, 1966; Wilson, 1995; Wong, 1995a, 1995b). In particular, the potential for ethical problems for teachers resulting from dual relationships with their own students—as teachers of students and as researchers with subjects—is particularly severe.¹

E. David Wong (1995a) describes a situation where the conflicts of interest are readily evident. A researcher concerned with how students develop understanding of natural phenomena, Wong taught a high school science class to better experience learning in a natural setting. While he was dis-
cussing an experiment with the class, one student's answers became the focus of his attention. He seized on what seemed to him a particularly illuminating moment for his research, and his concern as a researcher was to allow the student the time to develop her thoughts while holding the rest of the class at bay, preventing them from jumping in with their own ideas. As he pursued the data the one student was providing him, the rest of the class became increasingly distracted, frustrated in their inability to participate and not knowing or understanding why the teacher was stopping their involvement. Reflecting on the experience, Wong writes, "My actions as a researcher compromised my role as a teacher" (Wong, 1995a, p. 26). The conflict Wong describes here is a practical one, between the demands of teaching and those of his research, with ethical implications. Baumann (1996), too, lists a number of occasions when time constraints limited his ability to satisfy his roles as teacher and as researcher, and how these conflicts affected his performance in both roles.

Dual-role conflicts do not arise when research participants are not otherwise related to the researcher, but are present when a teacher uses his or her own students in research. Research, as opposed to practice, is undertaken primarily for the purpose of discovery. Thus, when one does research, one takes on a role that is different from that when one practices. For research to generate knowledge not otherwise known, new variables, behaviors, activities, and so forth, are introduced and examined; new questions lead to new ways of approaching or defining data. Something other than normal practice happens when research takes place; otherwise, it would not be called research. Certainly, in the case of schools, the normal activity is not research, but teaching and learning. The difficulty of determining what distinguishes practice from research will be raised below. For now, it is important to acknowledge that teacher research implies activities other than normal practice and that the dual roles of teacher of students and researcher with research participants may lead to conflicts (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979; Code of Federal Regulations, 45 CFR 46, 1983).

Dual-role conflicts will become more common, I anticipate, as the rewards of doing research increase and become more prevalent in the professional lives of teachers. It must be recognized that there are rewards for doing research. The visibility and opportunities for further professional growth and development that often flow from research and publication offer real incentives, especially in teaching, where few alternatives to classroom work are available for most teachers. Those who become involved with research may develop an "interestedness" in research that can compete with the obligation to keep the "interests" of their students paramount.
ETHICS OF TEACHING AND OF RESEARCH

Teachers' primary obligations are to their students, while researchers have obligations to the field to which they seek to make a contribution. As researchers, teachers expand the audiences for their work to include not only students, but peers, administrators, and colleagues outside their immediate place of employment. The preparation of papers, books, workshops, and so forth, is an essential part of the researcher's task. Employing research techniques acceptable to the field is necessary, and requires a commitment to norms and canons of research in the field to which one hopes to contribute. The incentives to do research and to disseminate one's findings are significant, especially for teachers seeking professional involvement outside the classroom.

Virtually all professional occupations have formalized statements of ethics that are applied to the conduct of members of the profession. These codes serve two purposes. First, they help mark off the "profession" from other occupations. Thus, they place the profession in a category of work with special obligations and special status, stemming from their powers (the knowledge and practices only they can exercise: e.g., writing prescriptions) and deserving of higher status than other occupations. Second, codes of ethics are attempts to make explicit that the practitioner of the profession is committed to the welfare of the profession and of the client over all other considerations. Professional actions are to be taken not for the self-interest of the practitioner, but for the benefit of the client. This commitment, not found in such occupations as used-car sales, is intended to provide a foundation of trust between the practitioner and the client. Such trust is seen as essential for the professional's work to be successful (Abbott, 1983).

At the same time, codes of ethics also specify in general terms the obligations of practitioners to clients. The rationale for general specification—as opposed to specific—is the allowance for professional discretion: professional authority and autonomy exist because of the superior knowledge of member professionals about how to address problematic circumstances facing their clients. While standards of "best-practice" may exist, professions are loath to codify these prescriptions as ethical obligations of practitioners toward their clients. Core values sustaining individual "professional judgment" are at stake, and have been strongly defended. Clear abuse of clients or patients, however, is always prohibited and subject to the harshest discipline (Abbott, 1983).

For teachers, especially teachers in elementary and secondary schools, where children are compelled by law to attend, the moral dimension, however codified, is an essential aspect of the work. Soder (1990) concludes that "it is precisely because children are compelled and children are defenseless and have low status that teaching has moral obligations and
thus moral praiseworthiness" (p. 74). Children are deserving of special protection because of their age and because they do not have free choice to attend school.

Teacher codes of ethics as developed by various teacher organizations are generally consistent with the patterns Abbott (1983) described and share Soder's (1990) views. While concern for the ethical dimensions of education and of teaching is on the rise (Cuban, 1992; Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990; Journal of Teacher Education, 1991; Strike & Soltis, 1985), thus far this focus has not included the realms of research. The National Education Association's (1989-1990) Code of Ethics contains two principles: Commitment to the Student and Commitment to the Profession, each with eight provisions. Involvement in research is not mentioned, but teachers are admonished not to "use professional relationships with students for private advantage" (p. 317). Also, they "shall not disclose information about students in the course of professional service" (p. 318). These two provisions clearly relate to the potential for dual-role conflicts if research is undertaken by a teacher.

The recently issued "Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment" of the National Association for the Education of Young Children asserts, among other principles, the association's commitment "to appreciate the special vulnerability of children . . . to create and maintain safe and healthy settings that foster children's social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development and that respect their dignity and their contributions" (in Feeney & Kipnis, 1989, p. 26). The code also contains statements of principles regarding research and confidentiality of student records. About research, the principle is stated thus:

We shall not permit or participate in research that could in any way hinder the education or development of the children in our programs. Families shall be fully informed of any proposed research and shall have the opportunity to give or withhold consent. (p. 27)

This provision requires that parents be notified before any research takes place, that they be informed about the purposes of the research and what it will entail for their children, and that they be offered the opportunity to opt in or out of the research.

The recently issued "Ethical Standards of the American Educational Research Association" (1992) has six "guiding standards," each followed by a "Preamble" and specific "Standards." The second guiding standard includes standards concerning research populations. The preamble includes the following language:

It is of paramount importance that educational researchers respect the rights, privacy, dignity, and sensitivities of their research popula-
Educational researchers should be especially careful in working with children and other vulnerable populations. These standards are intended to reinforce and strengthen already existing standards enforced by institutional review boards and other professional associations. (p. 23)

Of particular interest for the concerns of this article, standard 5 asserts that “educational researchers should exercise caution to ensure that there is no exploitation for personal gain of research populations or of institutional settings of research. Educational researchers should not use their influence over subordinates, students, or others to compel them to participate in research” (p. 23). How teachers can create such conditions in their classrooms and conduct research with their own students is a crucial question to which we shall return.

Developed formally during the 1970s, the regulations of the Department of Health and Human Services for the protection of human subjects now specify the requirements researchers using human subjects must comply with in carrying out federally funded research. These rules and the procedures they specify were enacted to prevent abuse of subjects by medical and psychological researchers who had often put their research objectives before concerns for their subjects. Dangerous procedures with high risk or deception, especially when carried out with dependent or vulnerable groups as research subjects (e.g., prisoners, children, the seriously ill), has caused the greatest concern, the rules cover all types of research with human subjects. Because these rules specify the way research funded with federal funds may be conducted, they have come to be applied to all research with human subjects at many institutions, such as colleges and universities, and by professional associations such as the American Psychological Association. The Code of Ethics of the American Educational Research Association (1992) makes explicit reference to institutional review boards (IRBs), entities created at institutions where research takes place in compliance with the relevant federal regulations.

In essence, these rules begin by requiring an assessment of all risks the research may generate, and an assessment of any risks against benefits that may be produced. Who and or what will benefit from the research should be explicit. The researcher must obtain the informed consent of research subjects to be participants in a way that is without coercion and that treats the information they provide confidentially.

for the establishment of committees, often referred to as institutional review boards, composed of researchers and public representatives, to review research proposals and to certify that each proposal conforms to the regulations (Sherman & Van Vleet, 1991).
There has been some controversy over specific aspects of the regulations and the review process (Fluehr-Lobban, 1994; Thompson et al., 1981; Wax & Cassell, 1979). Social science researchers and associations have been the most concerned, and have identified several ways in which these regulations seem to pose a threat to their conduct of research. For example, researchers studying illegal behavior have found gaining prior, informed consent difficult at best (Punch, 1986). Others think the rules are overly bureaucratic and, for fieldwork, are held to be inappropriate regulations that may do more harm than good (Cassell, 1979). More recently, Clark and Moss (1996) appear to reject the rules regarding informed consent, arguing that they were formulated for "fixed procedures," while fieldwork methods in collaborative research must be flexible, and, quoting Wax (1980), "sequential and conditional so that consent is a continual process, dependent upon mutual learning and development" (p. 275).

It is worth noting that this view is not universal among anthropologists and other fieldworkers. Fluehr-Lobban (1994) titled her lead article in the journal *Human Organization* (the journal of the Society of Applied Anthropology) "Informed Consent in Anthropological Research: We Are Not Exempt." Addressing concerns such as those expressed by Clark and Moss (1996) and Wax (1980), she concludes that in anthropology there are no important limitations imposed by informed-consent regulations. She argues that another source of resistance to the regulations stems from paternalism. "In social-cultural anthropology or applied research, under conditions of colonialism or other forms of subjugation, paternalism had an historical context, which was always an unequal power encounter between the anthropologist and the subject. Colonialism has ended and the formal rationale for paternalism has disappeared" (Fluehr-Lobban, 1994, p. 8). Yet other forms of unequal power remain, such as those between teachers and their students.

Interestingly, the ethical code of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (in Feeney & Kipnis, 1989) virtually endorses paternalism as a professional obligation, given the "special vulnerability of children" (p. 26). This stance is rejected in anthropology by Fluehr-Lobban (1994) as a holdover from the "My Tribe" syndrome. Nothing in her article, however, related to children, nor to situations where the researcher has other obligations to the participants, as in the dual-role conflicts of teacher-researchers. The issue here centers on the dual roles of teacher-researchers. The exercise of the teacher role may require protecting children from some knowledge or information that could interfere with their judgment, were they fully competent adults. Such protection is defensible given the teacher's ethical obligations to children. For a researcher, keeping such information from a participant violates the ability to make an informed choice, and has lost its justification, according to Fluehr-Lobban.
The federal regulations have their origin in a statement of research ethics called *The Belmont Report* (National Commission, 1979). Appointed to study the increasing ethical complexities of research, the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research sets out in its report the basic ethical premises the current regulations embody. Essentially these premises follow three ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Each of these principles will be elaborated on and applied to the research setting.

Respect for persons asserts that individuals should be treated as autonomous persons, and that persons with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection. In the context of research, this principle alerts researchers to the need to inform potential participants of what the research will entail so that they can make an unfettered decision to participate. Moreover, any constraints surrounding the decision to participate, such as fear of the consequences of not participating, must to be removed so that the decision is, in fact, a freely made one. Again, the problem of classroom teachers' using their own students as research participants is evident.

Some people have limited autonomy, however, and special considerations are necessary under the principle of respect for persons. Children, sick people, those dependent on institutional services, and those otherwise incompetent are entitled to greater levels of protection from the consequences of decisions that may not be made freely.

The principle of beneficence directs researchers to do no harm and to maximize benefit for participants and for society at large. Any risks posed by the research must be carefully identified by the researcher and lessened as much as possible. These risks, and any benefits that may follow, must be clearly communicated to potential participants before they agree to participate.

The principal of justice requires that one think through the burdens and benefits of the research and assure that there is fairness in the distribution of each. Is the research using only participants who are easily available to the researcher because of their compromised position or docility, rather than for reasons directly related to the problem being studied? Is research that will benefit all being carried out only on the poor or on the homeless? Justice requires that the benefits and burdens of research be shared.

For classroom teachers doing research with their own students, these principles raise several thorny problems.
PROBLEMS WITH TEACHER RESEARCH

The potential for ethical problems is exacerbated as a result of the development of nontraditional research methodologies that seek to break down the distinction between researcher and practitioner and subject (such as described by Bogdan & Biklin, 1982; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1989; Yin, 1989). These new styles of research, which challenge traditional conceptions of research, are gaining in popularity—case studies of teaching and the analysis of a researcher's own teaching among them (Brandt, 1992). Instead of the probabilistic results of process-product research, Shulman (1990), for example, argues for research designs that yield "stories" that detail the "wisdom of practice" (p. 15).

Researchers utilizing any research methodology need to be able to describe their research in terms that are accessible to potential subjects and their parents, in order to obtain informed consent. These newer designs, and the collaborative and joint teacher-researcher programs intent on producing open-ended participation of both researcher and subject, however, are frequently hard to define for laypersons, who are likely to have experimental or survey models of research in mind. Thus, being clear about the purposes and procedures of the research to subjects may not be particularly easy, and especially so for children.

The primary issue to be explored here, however, is the nature of the teacher-researcher's commitment when in a dual-role situation. A teacher normally charged with the education of a class is, or should be, committed to educational practices that serve the best interests of those students. Although teachers are employees of school districts, and thus must relate to administrators, the board of education, and parents, their professional clients are their students. Decisions about what happens in the classroom, influenced by state law and district and school policy and objectives, should be, nevertheless, determined by what is best for the student. Cuban (1992) describes this aspect of teaching as one that requires "making concrete choices among competing values for vulnerable others who lack the teacher's knowledge and skills, who are dependent upon the teacher for access to both, and who will be changed by what the teacher teaches, how it is taught, and who the teacher is" (p. 9). The teacher's own span of autonomous decision making may be relatively limited, but the exercise of what autonomy exists is justified by the criterion of ethical service to the student specified in the codes of conduct under which teachers practice.

The problem raised by doing research with one's own students is that the criterion of service to the student is potentially jeopardized by needs determined by the research, as Wong (1995a) and Baumann (1996) have
illustrated. When one anticipates that the outcomes of research will include preparing papers for professional meetings and publishing the findings, the research must meet the substantive and technical canons accepted by the discipline, or the paper will not be accepted for presentation or for publication. The teacher-researcher, then, may face a situation where a classroom action has two potential rationales: what is best for the student or the class or what is needed for the research. While one hopes that each of these criteria will result in the same decision, Wong and Baumann describe how hard this may be in real classroom settings. When the decisions are not the same, the teacher-researcher is in a dual-role conflict situation.

As teachers begin to take on research roles in their classrooms, moreover, another complexity may evolve. The focus of much teacher research has been on teaching itself and the line between the two roles is often blurred, both in fact and in the teacher-researcher’s own perception. Thus, where the roles of teacher and of researcher may be quite distinct in other settings, and the obligations of each role to the student-participant clear, when teachers conduct research in their own classrooms, the lived experience is a blending of the two. This ambiguity may confound teachers’ efforts to enact both roles responsibly, as Wong’s (1995a) example illustrates. It can even make the potential for conflict more difficult to perceive.

One aspect of the federal regulations (Code of Federal Regulations, 45 CFR 46, 1983) can illustrate another difficulty involved in teacher research in the classroom—whether the teacher is at a school or a college. A central tenet of the regulations for the protection of human subjects, and one that follows from the principle of respect for persons, is that subjects must have the opportunity, free of coercion, to decide whether to participate in the research. This decision is to be “informed,” made on the basis of information about the research, its purposes, and its risks and potential benefits. The usual way of affording potential participants this opportunity to choose is by providing a written description of the research objectives and what the research will entail to the prospective participant and asking the participant to sign a consent form. In the case of minors, a form also must be signed by a parent or guardian.

In usual practice, where participants are drawn from the ranks of those served by an organization or agency (such as schools, hospitals, clinics, or social service agencies), the decision to participate or not must not alter the right to or quality of service the client would otherwise receive. In conformity with the principle of respect for persons, the decision to participate in the research must be made in a noncoercive atmosphere. In classrooms and in other places where researchers have other relationships (such as between teacher and student with those they are studying), however, such circumstances are difficult to arrange (Marshall, 1992; Thorne, 1980; Wax, 1980).
For students in a class in which the teacher-researcher intends to carry out a research project, the freedom to decide whether to participate is severely compromised. Clearly, if the teacher is doing the research, then he or she is very much involved with it. A student who says no or who seeks to drop out once the research has commenced risks the disappointment, or even the wrath, of the teacher. If the teacher wants all the students in the class to be involved, the pressures to participate may be very great. These may come not only from the teacher, principal, or superintendent, but also from fellow students.

If students or their parents choose to opt out of the research being undertaken, the ethics of teaching assert that this decision must not have negative consequences for the children. Moreover, provisions should be made so that the children who do not participate are not left out of important classroom activities or subject to detrimental treatment by the teacher-researcher or other students.

One would hope that the decision to participate or not could itself be confidential, and not a matter of public knowledge among other members of the staff or fellow students. It is in just such considerations that dual-role conflicts lurk. Researchers generally seek to maximize participation in their research, whereas teachers are likely to maximize learning opportunities. The natural inclinations of the two roles are not the same.

If the only relationship the teacher has with his or her students is as teacher, and an outside researcher requests access to recruit and research students, the teacher's attitude toward the research would be likely to err on the side of protecting students from research participation, unless a clear benefit would be forthcoming to the students, to the school, or to instruction. When dual relationships are involved, teacher/student and researcher/subject, the potential for conflict between priorities is very real.

In addition, the relationship between a teacher in a school (which most students attend under penalty of law, as well as, perhaps, out of choice) and students is not symmetrical. As Cuban (1992) stressed, the teacher grades students, and the school influences the students' educational and occupational futures, not the other way around. Therefore, to envision a situation in which the student's consent could be obtained without the perception by the student of constraint, if not coercion, is at best difficult.

The ethical obligations teachers have as teachers in serving the needs of their students seem paramount. Thus, the potentially coercive nature of teachers as researchers when they request student participation in their own research creates problems that must be confronted.

Because of the conflict when the participants are in a relationship of dependency with the researcher, the Committee for the Protection of Human Participants in Research (1982) of the American Psychological
Association recommends to its members “turning over the recruitment of participants and the conduct of the research to a third party not involved in the relationship” (p. 51). In other words, this professional body recommends that research not be done with clients who are dependent on other services of the researcher or his or her employer.

**WHAT IS NORMAL EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE AND WHAT IS RESEARCH?**

Another way to conceive of the problem identified here is to address the question of what constitutes “research.” For many teacher-researchers, the line between normal practice and research is a fine one (Wilson, 1995). Good teaching practice has always required close observation and experimentation. Moreover, many of the current efforts to encourage teachers to engage in research fall into the category of systematic professional introspection and reflection—of research about one’s own teaching. The increased use of the term “inquiry” where research might have otherwise been used seems to reflect this view. Clark and Moss (1996) treat ethical and epistemological issues together, asserting that to do otherwise would “mark a shift away from research done ‘with’ teachers and students back toward a method of treating these groups as the objects of study” (p. 522). Baumann (1996) even goes so far as to say that teacher research should be considered a new genre of research. Yet the difficulties of drawing lines between the activities of teaching and of doing research remain, as Baumann also notes.

The dividing line that is suggested here is provided by the answer to the following question: Would the activities undertaken for the research have been carried out anyway, even if no research outcomes (e.g., professional presentation or written research paper) were sought? Researching what one does anyway emphasizes the anyway—that is, the teaching, not the research. In this way, potential conflicts between teaching and research will be reduced. They probably cannot be eliminated.

The authors of *The Belmont Report* (National Commission, 1979) raised the issue of what constitutes practice and what constitutes research at the beginning of their text. Noting that the distinction between these two functions is blurred, they suggest that the general rule to be applied should be as follows: “If there is any element of research in an activity, that activity should undergo review for the protection of human subjects” (1979, p. 3).

In the regulations, research is defined as “a systematic investigation to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge” (Code of Federal Regulations, 45 CFR 46, 1983, p. 5). Whether the newer forms of teacher research and of action research by teachers would belong in this category
is a question that should be addressed. However, the dual-role conflict would remain in either case.

As noted earlier, many of the models of research now guiding teacher-researchers and their university collaborators are based on assumptions regarding the conduct of research that are different from traditional, and most medical, research—the model of research assumed by the authors of *The Belmont Report* (National Commission, 1979). Whether one refers to participant observation research, action research, feminist research, or post-positivist research, the paradigm of scientific hypothesis testing and experimental or quasi-experimental design is not universally assumed. Cole and Knowles (1993), for example, assert that “hypothesis testing and theory generation by rating, classifying, and correlating observational and verbal report data gathered under contrived (or at least controlled) conditions are no longer readily accepted ways of apprehending and representing teaching and classroom life” (p. 475). They go on to state:

> Through the transition in the way educational research activities are viewed, research into teaching has become more “subjective,” more intensive, more demanding of the participants and less controlled by researchers affiliated with academic and research institutions. In some cases, research has become more personally and professionally intrusive. . . . New forms of partnership research are based on fundamental assumptions about the importance of mutuality in purpose, interpretation, and reporting, and about the potency of multiple perspectives. (pp. 477-478)

To their credit, these authors note that this new research style needs to address several ethical issues, including assuring confidentiality of informants. Although they do not describe what the dilemmas were, Clark and Moss (1996) also say: “We have encountered dilemmas that have forced us to make ethical choices” (p. 525). How consent will be given by research participants is another issue.

These are, indeed, important questions if one is going to do research, no matter which style or paradigm one adopts. To them we need to add the question of how vulnerable, dependent populations, often unable to negotiate with school authorities and with little capacity to collaborate as equals, are going to be protected. How can we assume that mutuality of interest really exists when power differentials between students and their teachers are great and usually irreducible? Simply defining “subjects” as “participants,” or calling what one does inquiry instead of research, does not change the fundamental differences in status. As Baumann (1996) puts it, “My point is that I do not believe that conflict in teacher research is methodologically dependent” (p. 32).
Moreover, if the new research styles are more intrusive, by definition the risks of participating increase; otherwise, "intrusive" has no meaning. The principle of beneficence requires researchers to make explicit the risks to potential participants and to assure as much as possible that no harm be done. Whatever the risks of harm might be from more intrusive research, they must be balanced against the benefits the research offers, either directly to the participants or to future teachers or students.

What remains important, in my mind, is that students come to school expecting to learn, to be taught, not to be subjects—or participants—of research. We compel them to attend and tax their parents and other citizens to support our educational activities on the assumption that we have some idea of what we are doing. Increasing that knowledge is essential, but that is not the primary reason schools exist. Increasing knowledge about health is not why hospitals exist. Rather they exist and are supported to provide the relevant professions a place to practice. In fact, the analogy between hospitals and schools is a flawed one. Learning in school is a normal part of one’s life; being ill or otherwise needing the services of a hospital is not normal (except, perhaps at birth or death).

Returning to the question of what is practice and what is research helps to clarify some of the issues raised here. It points out the limits of the knowledge we use to practice and alerts us to be mindful when we engage in activities that are not "normal educational practice." Perhaps most importantly, we are alerted to the world as perceived by our students; do they know the difference between practice and research? When are they free to choose which to experience? Their very lives may not be at stake as if they were choosing to treat a cancer with experimental radiation treatment over surgery, but it is simply incorrect to assume that there are no consequences to their less-threatening choices, or that those choices are made freely.

Nothing said here is intended to deprecate the value of more research undertaken in real schools and in real classrooms. But we cannot have it both ways. With our own students, we must remain teachers—teachers who are alert and professional, who are constantly trying to perfect their practice and who experiment and reflect. Certainly all of that falls within "normal educational activities," especially when done within the context of the school's normal processes of decision making. In fact, it can be argued that much of what is referred to as teacher research is normal educational practice, or should be. At the same time, we need to be aware of limits to such practice, and to when and where lines between normal practice and research should be drawn.
WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

Teachers who also wish to be researchers must think about the rights of their students and other participants of their research activities and become familiar with the rules and procedures for the protection of human subjects. Where research evolves as a frequent activity of teachers and other school-based professionals, those involved in the research should be members of institutional review boards. Currently, many schools refer requests to conduct research from outside researchers to their central board, where a procedure for clearance is often already established. However, while the central office is where researchers have been located, as teachers themselves become more involved in research, this centralized procedure should include representatives from the research site at the school level. This notion is in concert with increased teacher professionalism and site/school-based management systems. Moreover, examination of ethical issues surrounding classroom research is best done when those who know the context well—teachers interested in research—are involved. It should also be done in a public way (Bok, 1978).

These review boards may benefit from coordination with university IRBs linked with the school, such as in professional development schools. Shared responsibility for protection of human subjects is common between hospitals and clinics and universities now, and relations among schools and universities should be established.

Finally, we need more thought about "normal practice" and establishing canons of "clinical research." Reflective practice does necessitate record keeping and analysis, but schools do that anyway. Curricula must be evaluated, and innovative teaching practices assessed. Student records must be shared and maintained in a methodical way. All these activities are a part of normal educational practice. It is when teacher-researcher activities are not a part of the school's normal educational processes that the dual-role conflicts arise. And it is then that conflicts of interest between teacher and researcher roles may jeopardize the professional obligations of teachers to their students. The blending and blurring of teacher and researcher roles referred to above make the need to think through our research and its consequences critical. That teacher research may be based on new paradigms and utilize more informal methods does not reduce or eliminate the problems and conflicts that may arise. The "intrusive" nature of some of this research (Cole & Knowles, 1993) alerts us to the potential problems. Only teacher-researcher awareness of the possibility of dual-role conflict and of issues concerning the protection of human subjects in research can safeguard our students from the bind we may set for them as we conduct research in our own classrooms.
Much is to be gained from greater involvement of classroom teachers in research. Their continuing professional development can be enhanced; their enthusiasm and commitment to teaching can be stimulated by adding a new dimension to their work; their ability to participate in school-level decision making can be improved. All of these rewards should benefit their students as well. As teacher research expands, however, teachers need to keep alert to the ethical issues that may arise and in particular those surrounding dual-role conflicts.

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Notes
1 Other forms of research involvement, with other colleagues, with university faculty, at other schools, and so forth, are fine, but with one's own students, the situation is more complicated, as I argue below.
2 Public school teachers also have obligations to their employers (school boards), and through them to the broader society. The potential for conflict between the obligations to students and others is recognized, but not directly relevant to the issues of concern for this article.
3 The regulations were established after a number of very harmful and exploitative studies came to light, such as the racist Tuskegee syphilis study (Brandt, 1978; Jones, 1981). In the social sciences, "Project Camelot" (Horowitz, 1970) and Milgram's (1963) studies on authority are often cited examples of where subjects' rights and privacy were not sufficiently protected.
4 There are also rules and procedures for protecting animals used in research.
5 These rules, from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), known as 45 CFR 46, Protection of Human Subjects, are available from the Office for Protection from Research Risks, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD 20892. Many college and universities have an office charged with the maintenance of the "assurance" agreement (outlining the university's steps to protect human subjects) between the school and DHHS; others have an office whose responsibility it is to check research protocols for the protection of subjects, and there may be places where review does not take place.
6 There are categories of "exempt" research, as when the surveys of public officials or candidates are undertaken, when the research involves observations of public behavior or analysis of existing files if the information is public or the identifiers are not recorded by the researcher. The study of normal educational practices in commonly accepted educational settings or the results of educational tests, if identifiers are not recorded, are also exempt. This category will be more fully discussed below.
7 In the work they report, Clark and Moss obtained the written consent of the parents of the student participants, and were not using their own students. They seem to have followed the regulations in their own work.
8 The recent account of the relationship between a researcher and a research participant described by Bloom (1997), and reflected on by Hauser (1997), provides added insight into the ways differential power may affect research relationships.
9 Marshall (1992) offers insight into the complexities of conducting ethical research in applied anthropology, a field that has parallels with teaching. With particular reference to issues of informed consent, Fluehr-Lobban (1994) reviews the social science literature, especially as it relates to anthropology, the source discipline of much of what is now included under the term "qualitative research."

10 See Fenstermacher, 1990, and Sockett, 1990, for more on this topic.

11 Forms must be sent home to parents or guardians, signed, and returned to the researcher. Passive consent, where parents or participants do not say no or do not return the form, is not sufficient. Affirmative consent is required.

12 In assessing the potential risk to participants of a research design, investigators must consider not only what the research will require of the participant, but also how the research will affect and be affected by the context in which it takes place. This consideration is especially important when research takes place in naturalistic settings, such as classrooms. Psychological and sociological risks should also be assessed.

13 Research that is part of official and regular educational practice (such as curriculum evaluation) is not subject to the considerations above. Exempt from the regulations, though not, of course, from ethical considerations, is research normally part of the educational enterprise and the use of educational tests where the data are anonymous. I will return to this topic below.

14 Moreover, "practice" in schools varies widely. In some schools, for example, paddling is "normal educational practice," while in others this practice would be abhorrent. Relying on what particular schools or districts define as "normal" to guide our deliberations about whether a research project needs scrutiny is an unreliable way to proceed.

15 The problems identified here are not unique to teachers; as research in nursing has expanded, for example, it has faced similar issues. A recent editorial in Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship (Diers, 1990), asks the question, "When is it research and when is it medical practice?" Also, for medicine, where this problem has received some attention, see Grinnell, 1990.

References


