The Research Relationship in Community Research: An Inside View from Public School Principals[1]

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When social scientists pursue their research in community settings, research relationships are created which may lead to problems and conflict between the outside researcher and those inside the community. A better understanding of the inside view of the community research relationship was sought from 24 public elementary, middle, and high school principals who were interviewed about their previous experiences with research, their attitudes toward research and researchers in their schools, and their thoughts on the usefulness of research in the future. Responses to the interview revealed important points of convergence and divergence among principals' views, and called some commonsense notions about community research into question. The past problems and present concerns principals expressed about entering into research relationships are discussed in terms of three concepts: conflicting institutional missions and roles of school principals and university researchers; issues of power and control in the structure of the research relationship; and the quid pro quo *in the research contract.*

The relationship of university-based social scientists to community groups or institutions where they conduct research has been a source of strain as well as promise for both parties. Beginning with World War II and reaching a peak in the 1960s, communities and public institutions were flooded with research projects which appeared to offer benefits to scholar and citizen alike. For the public citizen or the service institution professional, the attention of social scientists promised new resources for neighborhoods or service programs, and stirred hopes that participation in the research process would result in some palpable good. Some social scientists, in turn, hoped that research activity could have clear and direct social utility, that the concepts and hypotheses of the laboratory would receive an informative reality test, and that the ensuing knowledge would lead to the intellectual and professional development of both the individual researcher and the discipline of social science.

But the promise of community research was not always fulfilled. Social science literature reports a wide range of circumstances where research relationships went awry. For example, 6,000 test protocols were burned because of parent protest over the content of some of the test items (Nettler, 1959). In another incident, community protest brought a temporary halt to an adolescent health survey containing questions about sex, drugs, and aggressive behavior (Josephson, 1970). Political sensitivities about the image of a public school system played a part in shutting down a project designed to explore the relationship between an individual's school experience and subsequent dropping out or delinquency (Voss, 1966). Conflict over decision-making power between indigenous community mental health workers and professionals led to the cancellation of a planned conference on the use of nonprofessionals in mental health roles (Roman, 1973). Eron and Walder (1961) report similarly dramatic experiences.

When such incidents were publicized, they undoubtedly contributed to public suspicion about the nature of social science research. One concern mentioned repeatedly by "subjects" of research has been that they feel "exploited" by researchers who seem more intent on developing their own careers than contributing tangible benefits to the communities in which they work. For example, one neighborhood effectively stopped a Model Cities agency from completing the research called for in its comprehensive plan because "representatives said that they were tired of being used as something for professors to experiment with so they can write about poor folks" (Vargus, 1971). When another group of community residents and researchers were brought together to share views about three research projects which had been done in their area, community representatives expressed concern about such issues as community participation in the research process, return benefits for cooperating with projects, and ownership of the data gathered in studies (New & Hassler, 1973).

Strong feelings about being "recipients" of community research have not been reserved only for the poor. Proshansky (1972) has paraphrased the complaints of "two very high level community administrators of public agencies" as follows: "Too often you people come in not as problem-oriented researchers but academic purists more interested in searching and testing what is important for your theory than for the problem itself. But what really gripes me is that there is no long-term commitment. You can't come in, have your fun, and then leave—and expect us to welcome you back, particularly after you have left a mess" (p. 212).

The above comments and reports of community research suggest the importance of examining the nature of the research relationship in community projects. A number of social scientists have written about the social context of research in community or organizational settings, but their discussions rely mainly on personal observations from the researcher's outside perspective, or on their impressions or recollections of how the inside-community participants must have felt (e.g., Argyris, 1958; Mann & Likert, 1952; Rodman & Kolodny, 1964; Wax, 1952; Weiss, 1971). We have found no systematic research presenting the participants' view of their role in the research relationship. Are social scientists generally seen as exploiting the community institutions where their research takes place? Do they usually appear insensitive to the hopes and cares of the people who participate in community research? Do accounts of test-burning and intrusive, offending inquiries characterize the research process, or do they represent only unfortunate circumstances in isolated projects?

The present study explicates the nature of the community research relationship by presenting interview data on how social science research conducted by "outsiders" has been perceived, processed, and reflected on by "insiders." In this study, outsiders are defined as any person or group who requested permission to conduct systematic inquiry in a public school and who were not affiliated with the institution where the research took place. These included psychologists, sociologists, educators, political scientists, and medical researchers. The insiders are a group of inner-city public school principals, selected for two reasons. First, principals share with the administrative heads of many public institutions the dual responsibility of implementing policy and acting as a gatekeeper between the institution and the larger community (see Bidwell, 1965; Trickett, Kelly, & Todd, 1972). Because researchers usually need clearance, if not active cooperation, from the principal in order to proceed, the principal's role can be crucial to the research relationship. Second, in recent years public schools have hosted an unusually large amount of social science research conducted by outsiders, providing principals with considerable experience with requests for research. By interviewing them about their experience with social science and social scientists, we hope to provide a broader set of data

about the research relationship than is currently available. Our assertion is that knowledge about the process by which such research is conducted is itself an important research agenda for community psychology.

METHOD

Interview

A semistructured interview was used to allow respondents to develop their own ideas about the topics and, at the same time, to gather comparable information across respondents within general categories. Because we wanted to learn what issues were uppermost in principals' minds, questions were initially worded in a general way (e.g., what should the purpose of research be?) allowing latitude in initial response. Questions designed to elicit more specific details followed.

The interview began with a few casual questions about the history of the school and the principal's career, a review of the purpose of the interview and the research, and a general inquiry about opinions or comments the principals might have about research in schools.

The interview was organized into the following five categories reflecting different aspects of the principal's relationship to the research process. Specific questions reflected assumptions about what was important within each of these categories.

1. History of the principal's prior experience with research, including description of some prior research projects in their school—their frequency and nature—and what had contributed to their success or failure in the school.

2. Factors considered in deciding whether or not to approve a project, including what questions came to principals' minds when they received research requests, and how such groups as teachers and parents affected the decision.

3. The relationship of the principal to an ongoing project, including how information about the project is conveyed to faculty and how personally involved principals wished to be.

4. Principals' experience with projects after the research has been completed, including the nature of feedback and whether or not the research yielded any information the principal perceived as useful.

5. Principals' beliefs about the usefulness of research and topics which they believed deserved research attention.

The interviews typically took about 90 minutes and were jointly conducted at the principal's school by two graduate students—one black

female and one white male. Following the interviews, letters of appreciation were sent, promising to share a report of the findings, and offering to discuss them personally with principals who were interested.

Sample

Interviews were conducted in an urban school district serving over 21,000 ethnically diverse students: 65% black, 25% white, and 10% Hispanic. The schools were located near several colleges and universities, and had been the sites for many pure, applied, and evaluative research projects.

Initially, letters were sent to all 48 principals in the district asking if they were willing to be interviewed about their experience with research and researchers in their schools. Letters stated that the project had received the clearance required by the district office, and the President of the School Administrators Association had given the project a "vote of confidence." Follow-up phone calls were made to ask if principals wished to participate or had any questions. To minimize self-selection, special efforts were successfully made to include principals who were initially reluctant to participate. In some particularly delicate situations a fellow principal who was sympathetic to the project called on our behalf. With the exception of three elementary school principals, all other 45 principals agreed to participate. From this sample we interviewed 24 principals (50% of all those in the district), including the principals of all the high schools and junior high schools and 33% of the elementary schools.[3] The sample of elementary school principals was selected to represent variations in leadership style and experience, and to represent the range of sizes, locations, and socio-economic and ethnic compositions of the elementary schools in the district.

RESULTS

The results are presented according to the five areas of inquiry on the interview.[4]

[3]Due to the unusually large rate of agreement to participate, a representative sample of elementary school principals was selected to make more feasible the task of data collection. Those principals who did not participate were sent letters informing them of the reason for using a limited sample and offering feedback on the completed study.
[4]No clear differences were found among principals of elementary, middle, and high schools. Thus, the results refer to the aggregate group of principals. In addition, to provide partial protection against the possibility of interviewer bias in either the conduct of the interviews or the interpretation of the transcripts, respondents were asked to read this report for "plausibility" of the findings. All agreed that the views of principals in general seemed to be accurately represented.

Principals' History of Contact with Researchers

An open-ended question about principals' feelings regarding prior research in their schools evoked many responses, suggesting that the topic was important and relevant. More than half reported that in a typical year five or more different and often unfamiliar outside sources asked permission to conduct studies in their schools, and that the number of requests was even greater a few years before. Further, 75% of the principals indicated that they typically accepted at least half of these solicitations. Thus, while very few principals report having conducted research themselves, they have nonetheless had considerable contact with it in their role as principal. Principals' rather loose conceptions of "research" included not only university-based projects but mailed questionnaires and a variety of service or demonstration programs such as a federally funded reading program and Big Brother programs.

Issues of Concern Prior to Accepting a Project

Issues that concern principals in deciding whether or not to accept a particular research request can be divided into two categories (a) concerns regarding factors outside the school, and (b) concerns regarding the internal operation of the school.

Outside Actors. Two specific groups outside the school itself—the school district administration and the parents—were most often mentioned by principals as influencing their decisions concerning the acceptability of research projects. First, a rather irregular picture emerged of the principals' attitudes toward district administration policy regulating research in the school system. Official district policy at the time of this study was that every project emanating from outside the school system had to be approved by "downtown" before any individual principal could accept or reject the project; but in actual practice, only about half the principals acknowledged the policy, while the rest were either unaware of it or paid it little heed in their decisions about research projects. Among those who did mention the policy, two perspectives emerged. Some principals insisted that the researcher obtain district permission before even contacting the school ("it's a screening device. . . I want permission from downtown before speaking to anyone"), while others preferred to discuss a project with a researcher while it was in a more flexible planning stage.

Parents constituted the other outside group mentioned by a clear majority of principals. "Parents have given me a mandate to protect their children from being ripped off by researchers," said one. Of greatest concern to principals were parents' potential reactions to research which

touched on such sensitive content areas as social differences, personal family interaction, or "personality tests" with "prying" items. No consensual strategy was apparent for principals to assess parent reaction, though a sizable minority of the principals mentioned that they would discuss projects or questionnaires with parents, teachers, or representatives of community groups before committing themselves to a project.

Principals were asked how they would react to projects when the results might make the school "look bad" to the outside community. While most principals were wary of researchers using their data as a platform from which to criticize the school publicly, a majority also welcomed information about school problems when the information was presented discreetly, and especially when the researcher was willing to collaborate with them in improving the situation. When handled properly, research on school problems was generally not seen as a threat to the principals' job but as an aid in doing that job more effectively. "It's when the *process* of research in the school goes badly," said one principal, "that I'm in trouble."

Internal Functioning of the School. A major concern of principals was that the presence of the researcher not unduly disrupt the normal functioning of the school. When asked to describe the factors which make one project go better or worse than another, they made frequent reference to both the professional conduct and the personal qualities of the researcher. Issues such as dress and grooming and affiliation with a respected and familiar institution were occasionally mentioned, but the predominant expectation of a professional among principals appeared to be that, from the initial meeting and throughout the research, the researcher show a sincere interest in and thorough knowledge of the subject of the study, a willingness to discuss the project fully with the principal, and skill in the process of conducting the research. An initial meeting to discuss the research was expected by almost all principals, and they expected this meeting to be preceded by a letter or phone call. Most principals found it helpful for the researcher to provide a written summary of the research design, samples of any material to be used, and a description of how much time the project would require of different participants.

Principals repeatedly mentioned the personal qualities of honesty, open-mindedness, and commitment, as characteristics of the researcher which go beyond professional demeanor in making a project successful. From previous experiences with "dishonest" researchers, several principals thought it necessary to advise the researcher to "tell me what you're really studying and what you really want from me and my school," since they felt that their jobs required them to have full knowledge of the intent, procedures, and conduct of the research. Principals also appreciated an open-minded researcher who did not assume an air of superior knowledge and did not offer quick judgments about how the school was—or should

be—run. Further, a researcher's commitment, principals said, was revealed not only in the way the research was conducted, but also in such things as keeping appointments, being on time, keeping the principal informed of any delays or new developments in the research, and keeping promises to provide feedback to the school.

Beyond concern with immediate personal and professional qualities of the researcher, principals also had a "message" for social scientists about the importance of understanding and respecting the culture of the school. A majority of the principals mentioned areas where the researchers' needs might conflict with the organizational constraints of the school, including the conflicting responsibilities of school personnel, the limited facilities a school can offer, and the problems involved in taking students out of class. Principals did differ in how accommodating they were inclined to be—indeed, a small minority stated that they would place virtually no constraints on how a project was run. In contrast to such leniency was the frequent and popular suggestion that the researcher take time before beginning the research to learn the "feel" of the school—to become familiar with the students and their abilities as well as with the staff and their ways of carrying out their responsibilities. "Don't come in and begin right away," said a principal. "Spend a few days roaming around and talking. Neglect of proper preparation leads to friction."

The Project in Operation

Once a project has been approved, the official entry of the researcher into the school is the first step towards getting it underway. Our interviews showed no consistent trend in how the researcher's entry was managed. Some principals had a planned agenda which may include discussion with department heads, faculty, students, parents, and district officials, if these groups have not been consulted *before* the project is accepted. Others improvised according to the nature of the particular project and the group involved. Once the project was running, most principals were inclined to assume a passive administrative role, limiting their involvement to having the researcher keep them "regularly informed about the progress of the research." Only one-fourth of the principals responded with interest to the idea of departing from the strict administrative role and actively participating in the planning and conduct of the research.

The Completed Project

When asked what the purpose of research should ideally be, over 90% of the principals stated that research should provide useful informa-

tion and have practical value for the schools. There was less agreement, however, on whether it was reasonable to expect such returns from any single research project. About half the principals were willing to consider participating in research which was basically theoretical, where the results would not immediately benefit their own schools. But some of these same individuals were among another half of the principals who insisted that their school should be compensated for participating in research in one way or another, and if compensation could not be expected from the immediate application of the research findings, then it should come through other direct forms of service or remuneration. *All* principals wanted, at the very least, some kind of feedback about the results of a study *and* how it might benefit education in the short or long run.

Principals' hopes of receiving information or service of immediate benefit to their schools from research were seldom realized. When asked if their school had been change in any way by research, less than one-fourth mentioned any positive influence. Half the principals reported that they did not usually receive feedback from researchers. Further, when feedback was received, it was often a technical paper written for other audiences and was incomprehensible to the principal. Many principals expressed a wish to discuss a study with the researcher *after* having received a written report, though reports of such occasions were rare.

The Future of Research

With few exceptions, principals felt that future research would be more valuable to them if it were conducted in the context of an established and enduring relationship with a researcher, in contrast to more typical short-term, single-study arrangements. One perceived advantage of the longer relationship was that principals could grow familiar with the researcher and the research operation, and arrange for it to disrupt only minimally the regular functioning of the school. An even more prevalent hope among principals was that a longer relationship would allow the researcher to become more familiar with the school, more sensitive to its problems, and in the end become a more helpful resource. Principals spoke of having a researcher "on call" just as one might have a consultant to provide objective feedback, point out strong and weak points of specific programs or policies, and provide information for decision-making and program development.

When asked what were the issues and questions on which they would welcome research, principals gave diverse and voluminous responses ranging from some of the classic problems of teaching the three "R's" to some more unexpected areas, including: Why do tardiness and absence influence some children's academic performance but not others? How

aware are school administrators of new developments in educational administration? What are students' food preferences in the cafeteria? What influences does the custodian have on the atmosphere of the school? In spite of principals' misgivings about their past experience with research, clearly they are confronted daily with questions *they* believe research could clarify.

DISCUSSION

This research began with the general question "What experiences have principals had with researchers and how do they view the research relationship?" The variability of responses in some areas—for example, in principals' understanding of the concept of research, in their initial "orienting reflex" of whether or not to accept research projects, and in their relationship to formal district policy—suggests that they do not share a single, generalizable approach to research and researchers. While it may seem obvious that such differences should exist, discovering them in fact provides more than another glimpse of the obvious; it challenges some ideas about principals and commonsense notions of how community research should be conducted. For example, the relatively high "acceptance rate" of projects and the low number of "horror stories" reported indicates that, despite published narrative accounts of abortive research efforts, these principals showed no monolithic rejection of research. The sizable number of principals who report not usually receiving feedback of any kind from researchers casts suspicion on the avowed good intentions of researchers to "send them a copy of our report." And the variability in how principals prefer to be approached by researchers, coupled with their differing levels of interest in providing input into the project, suggests that there may be no single "method of choice" for approaching these principals, and that learning about particular schools or school systems is an important prelude to particular research projects.

The rich detail which made each principal's interview unique should not, however, obscure the fact that they all fulfill similar roles, have similar general goals for their schools, and in trying to achieve these goals, face many similar problems. Attempts to understand these interview data, then, must be responsive both to the individual differences in principals' ideas and coping styles *and* to the more normative aspects of their role. Hence, our discussion is not based on the assumption that "every school is unique" or the notion that "all principals are alike"; rather, it emphasizes that the community research relationship involves a recurring set of general issues which are idiosyncratically manifested in each particular setting.

When discussing principals' comments on the community research relationship there is a temptation to dismiss certain points (e.g., the absence of useful feedback) as too obvious to be newsworthy. Two rejoinders are appropriate. First, if principals feel compelled to remind researchers of things which seem obvious, one must ask why researchers appear to principals to have lost sight of the obvious. Second, it is important to state that the practical implications of obvious statements are not always obvious themselves. In fact, we suggest that three aspects of the research relationship, which may appear obvious, have subtle implications which frequently elude both researcher and principal. These three organizing concepts which have proved particularly helpful in understanding and interpreting the interview data are (a) role requirements and institutional mission; (b) structure of the research relationship—highlighting specific ways that differences in institutional mission are reflected in the conduct of research; and (c) *quid pro quo*—that aspect of the research relationship involving the exchange of resources.

Role Requirements and Institutional Missions

Every principal's first allegiance is to the school and the goal of imparting knowledge and social skills to children amid scarce resources and, often, the distractions of inner-city life. The principal's primary accountability is local and immediate—to parents, students, and colleagues—and to the present rather than the future. The principal's boundary role as a gatekeeper requires a mediation between the internal workings of the school and numerous external influences, including research requests. This view of the principal's role gives order to our findings that every principal wanted to meet personally with the researcher before the project began, and that every principal's greatest concern with an ongoing project was to be kept informed of its progress. It makes understandable the principals' cautious attitude and their shared concern that the researcher be organized, committed, and reliable. In short, it explains their predominant concern with protecting the school's internal operations, even at the expense of the researcher's convenience.

The researcher, too, is enacting a role arising from participation in an institution, typically the university. While it is perhaps an article of faith in the mission of the university that the theoretical constructions of research are ultimately pragmatically exploited, the acquisition of knowledge usually supersedes concern with its utility.

The concept of role requirements and institutional missions, as applied to the research relationship, is not meant to explain away or gloss

over matters of individual responsibility or irresponsibility. It is meant to imply that honestly-come-by differences in perspective are a source of strain in the research relationship. Further, it suggests that many concerns principals expressed about their relationship with researchers are both understandable and predictable in terms of the potentially conflicting role requirements and institutional missions involved.

Structure of the Research Relationship

One "implicit" manifestation of the institutional mission of the university-based researcher involves the way in which the research relationship is structured. Historically, this relationship derives from the canons of classic experimental design and is often exemplified by laboratory research where the setting is designed to maximize control over the relationship with the subject and to minimize external influences which may impinge on the experiment and threaten its internal validity. In this research relationship, the subject is typically not allowed to influence the topic of our research, its method, or the treatment of the results.

Our interviews indicate that the "laboratory" research model described above has been applied not only to individual subjects participating in the research, but also to the administrator of the community research setting. Like the subject, our interviews suggest that principals seldom influence the topics, methods, or use of the data generated in their schools. The nature of this research relationship is not typically discussed between researchers and principals, but the way this unspoken relationship is enacted seems to have unintended consequences, both for (a) the clarification of ethical issues in the research relationship and (b) for the validity of information generated by community research.

Clarification of Ethical Issues. Our interviews suggest that the structure of the research relationship in community research highlights different and additional ethical issues to those governing laboratory research. Perhaps the case of those few principals who stated that they would place virtually no restrictions on research in their schools raises most starkly the question of the researcher's ethical responsibilities. For example, if it does not occur to a principal that parental consent for children's participation in a project is wise or necessary, or if the principal does not raise the question of who in the school should get feedback on a project, then does the researcher have any responsibilities in such cases to address these issues? If yes, then to whom, and within what permissible range of action should these responsibilities be exercised? These are the kinds of issues which,

when ignored, may cause conflict or anger about community research, but when adequately handled, may increase belief and trust in the research process among parents, faculty, and students. To clarify these ethical issues, various models of the research relationship in community research need to be specified and their ethical implications discussed.

Validity of Information. Principals made it clear in a variety of ways that their willingness to participate in research was influenced by the structure of the research relationship and that personal qualities of the researcher affected how the research proceeded. Such concerns raise a particularly crucial issue: the ways in which the nature of the research relationship can affect the validity of data. There are at least three ways in which this may happen. The first involves the issue of entry and the subsequent problem of institutional self-selection bias. To quote Campbell and Stanley (1972): "Consider the implications of an experiment on teaching in which the researcher has been turned down by nine school systems and is finally accepted by a tenth. This tenth almost certainly differs from the other nine, and from the universe of schools to which we would like to generalize, in many specific ways. It is, thus, nonrepresentative and the effects we find, while internally valid, may be specific to such schools" (p. 19). While a more complete reporting of the process of school selection and the general characteristics of places where research occurs would allow the power of Campbell and Stanley's argument to be evaluated, such considerations are not readily visible at present in published research. However, the general issue highlights the importance of principals' statements about how they decide to accept or reject a proposed research request.

A second way in which the structure of the research relationship may influence validity is suggested by Argyris (1970). The model of classic laboratory research, he argues, strongly resembles the organizational structure of authoritarian, bureaucratic organizations and produces research results tainted by various reactive artifacts. Principals' interviews describing school staff who refused to cooperate with a researcher because they were not properly consulted beforehand support Argyris's proposition. Research on the process of community research—analogous to laboratory-derived research on experimental artifacts (see Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969)—is needed to clarify the nature of such threats to the validity of community research.

A third threat to validity—perhaps the one most familiar to those who conduct research in community institutions—involves the potential impact of various "intrusions" into ongoing research projects and their effects on internal validity. When a teacher is not alerted that many children in the class will be "tested" on a certain day, or when children have just engaged in some particularly arousing event before they participate in a study, the

validity of the data may be affected by such situational influences. Stories from researchers about such happenings are legion, but their possible effect on research data is generally unknown and reports of such events are usually omitted from published articles. While we currently have little empirical information on these different possible threats to validity, the interviewers suggest that they are often operative in community research.

Quid Pro Quo

One aspect of the structure of the research relationship which is particularly useful in understanding our data is the *quid pro quo,* the "contract" about what various parties hope to gain from participating in the research.

Insofar as principals accurately recall their experiences in research, our interviews suggest that the *quid pro quo* is seriously neglected by both principals and researchers. Only one-half the principals report "usually" getting feedback from researchers, although it is always promised, and most say that the feedback they do receive is often difficult to interpret. Occasionally a principal would describe an arrangement whereby the school had received something besides "feedback" in return for participating—something like direct payments of money to the school or provision of special services by the researchers—but such "barter" exchanges appeared to result from serendipitous circumstances more often than from serious discussion of what schools could gain from participating in research. While we would hesitate to recommend to principals what they ought to expect in order to make the trade-off fair, our interviews do suggest that principals have neglected to think much about negotiating with researchers over the *quid pro quo* of their research relationships. This is particularly apparent in the frequent but ironic case where principals insist on feedback as their receipt in the trade-off with the researcher, even though they have not found past feedback particularly useful.

The inevitable question is: why do principals cooperate so often in research relationships that do not appear *to them* to provide an equitable exchange of resources? Several possible speculative answers are presented below.

First is the possibility that, apart from the prospect of tangible returns, principals believe that participation in research enhances the prestige of their school and themselves. This would be consistent with the proposition that the American university "has become upgraded in prestige and influence within the society to the point that some commentators describe it as the central institution in society" (Parsons & Platt, 1973, p. 103). Though principals stated in general that the particular prestige

of the institution making a research request was relatively unimportant compared to other factors in influencing their decision, it is possible that a generally positive orientation to universities per se increases principal willingness to entertain research requests.

It is also possible that such factors as respect for the researcher's quest for knowledge and a belief in the eventual payoff of research for education and society have made principals want to—or feel they should— cooperate in the mission of research. Some evidence for this conclusion exists in the slight majority of principals who, in discussing their ideas about research, made spontaneous comments sympathetic to the mission of the university. Further, their expressed interest in learning about the results of studies as an element in the *quid pro quo,* and their concern that researchers know their subject matter and demonstrate commitment to doing a thorough job supports the idea that principals share a concern with researchers about generating knowledge.

A few principals retained hope that the researcher could be of use to the school, either by addressing immediate research questions of practical importance, or by establishing a long-term research relationship in which these problems would eventually receive attention. The idea of a long-term relationship included both the notion that, over time, an external researcher could serve a constructive role as critic, and the assertion that it would take time for such a person to become familiar with the unique character of the school. Such a role was implicit in the principals' statement that although researchers who were quick to criticize aspects of the school were perceived as "intrusions," those who developed a trusting relationship and who presented their ideas in constructive fashion could become potentially valued resources. In this latter vein, while principals complained about the usefulness of much of the feedback they received, some did suggest that more complete discussions with researchers, even involving projects with no immediate practical outcome, might provide them with new perspectives or aspects of the school or focus their attention on previously overlooked issues.

Perhaps most understandable was the stance of those few principals who insisted that the resources offered by the researcher need not be defined only in terms of the research topic. Other forms of material benefit or service may suitably balance the *quid pro quo.*

\While it is especially understandable that principals would be dissatisfied with the short end of the *quid pro quo,* this imbalance should also be of concern to researchers; not only because it is an important reminder of lapses in their promises to principals, and not only because it threatens the possibility of gaining cooperation from community research participants in the future, but because it betrays the narrow conceptualization of the resources community research and researchers can offer. It also

challenges the imagination for future researchers to consider how resources can be exchanged with community research participants.

Implications for the Conduct of Community Research for Researchers: Two Examples

The primary purpose of the study was to explore the process of research in a particular type of community setting through the eyes of people whose institutions were the recipients of research requests. However, their descriptions of the research process suggest prescriptive and substantive issues for researchers involved in such community institutions as schools. Two issues are selected as examples: (a) the importance of understanding that because research in community settings represents an intervention into an ongoing social environment, understanding that environment becomes critical; and (b) the importance of developing varied conceptions of community research and alternative models of the research relationship.

Community Research as an Intervention Demanding Social Context Assessment. Both the variety of responses given by principals to their preferences about research entry and the conduct of research, and their frequent concerns about researchers not being sensitive to the realities of daily school life highlight this first general issue. Research in community settings may be viewed in scholarly terms by the researcher, but the act of carrying it out is as much an intervention in a social system as a service-based program of psychological consultation. Explicit efforts to understand the culture of the institution thus become central in anticipating potential problems the research may pose for a particular setting as well as alerting the investigator to be sensitive to local issues even when the administrator of the setting is not. Such assessment may be useful at a prior level also, namely, in deciding what institutions to approach and how to approach them. The variability in our data suggests that schools differ considerably from one another in receptivity to research, kinds of student populations served, and sensitivity to local issues. Finding a good "fit" between research problem and host environment necessitates an active effort on the part of the researcher to investigate various possible contexts for the execution of research. Finally, the variability in our data suggests that the kind of knowledge needed to explicate these assessment issues is ecological; that is, its concepts must be sensitive to the diversity of local conditions which influence the process of carrying out community research.

Developing Varied Conceptions of Community Research and Alternative Models of the Research Relationship. By regarding research in community settings as an intervention, one is forced to broaden the conception of what the research relationship may involve. As previously men-

tioned, the predominant impression from our data is that the modal research relationship experienced by principals derives from the classical psychological experiment, where control over the definition and conduct of research lies with the experimenter. Data from citizens whose communities have been sites for research (e.g., New & Hassler, 1973) suggest that issues of control may interfere with the conduct of research in community settings and, further, that there is a need to develop conceptions of the community research process which account for the potential differences between community-based research and the execution of research in the laboratory. We believe such a conception of community research includes, but is not limited to (a) the process through which the research problems are defined, (b) the nature of the accountability toward "subjects," (c) the processes for defining decision-making power at various states of the research, and (d) a discussion of the potential gains to be received by community institutions and personnel as well as by universities and researchers. The underlying assertion is that community-based research involves a series of negotiated roles and relationships more complex than those in the classical psychological experiment.

Our data also suggest that opportunities exist for creating different models of the research relationship itself, based on alternative conceptions of community research. Thus, some of the principals were interested in developing a collaborative role in the definition of the research problem and in pursuing a cumulative, long-term relationship. Although the costs and benefits of such alternative models await empirical investigation, some descriptive data are available. The University of Illinois, for example, has developed an interdisciplinary program in human development (Note 1) which includes as a core component a series of School-University Research Seminars "designed to involve students in problem-oriented research programs initiated by school personnel but closely tied to the basic principles involved and carried out jointly by school and university personnel." In another vein, Berndt (Note 2) is developing an undergraduate course in research methodology in which students are placed in schools to conduct research on a particular problem defined by the school.

Community Research and the Mission of Research Reconsidered: A Concluding Statement

Our belief is that an appreciation of institutional missions, and an examination of the structure of the research relationship and the *quid pro quo,* can stimulate more comprehensive and imaginative approaches to the community research. Indeed, the views of the principals expressed in this paper should stimulate thinking about the possible roles and contributions

of social scientists in community research settings. Yet, while one antici-
pated goal of such activity might be to increase the likelihood that com-
munity research may become increasingly pragmatic *and* valid, it would be
mistaken to conclude that documenting either the utility or the validity of
social science research is simple or uncontroversial. Social science research
results, unlike much technologically oriented research, cannot be useful to
administrators unless they understand research findings and know how
to translate findings into practice. The translation of knowledge into policy
or practice is itself a largely unsolved intellectual puzzle (Mann & Likert,
1952, Nelson, 1977). Claims have been made that social science knowledge
gained at any one point in time in a rapidly changing world is likely to
quickly become historically dated and obsolete (Gergen, 1976), and that
social problems are ever-recurring affairs which cannot be solved once
and for all, but continually need re-solving (Sarason, 1971). When one
couples the seriousness of these concerns with the difficulty of conducting
methodologically rigorous research in community settings at all, the
enormity of the task of community research becomes apparent.

However, there is value in an intellectual consideration of how the
payoff for community research can be increased by relating research styles
and options to the immediate environment of community settings (Kelly,
Note 3). Our belief is that there are substantial returns in exploring the
costs and benefits of ecological variations in the research relationship in
community settings.

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