ISA ARON

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN JEWISH EDUCATION: CAN WE (AND SHOULD WE) CLOSE THE GAP?

What is the responsibility of the education department of an academic institution, or the research department of a central agency, to the schools which surround it? What significance do the books and journals in the education section of a university's library have for the front-line workers in the field? What, to frame the question most broadly, is the relationship between research and practice in the field of Jewish education?

It seems that whenever researchers in Jewish education gather, these questions crop up, often to the frustration of the participants; for discussions of this issue very quickly become repetitive and circular. But the issue is unavoidable, especially in a field as small and undeveloped as ours. All of us play so many overlapping roles (as teachers, parents, administrators, consultants, and board members) that it is sometimes hard to differentiate between our activities as researchers and our activities as practitioners. Funding for research in Jewish education is so minimal and so irregular that those seeking funds are constantly called upon to demonstrate the utility of their proposed studies. At the same time, there is an opposing pressure to prove that the field of Jewish education is as academically respectable as any other.

This paper represents my attempt to move the discussion of research and practice out of the circle and into a coherent framework, wherein different positions are exemplified and compared. The framework I use is borrowed from an article by the philosopher Richard McKeon (1952), entitled "Philosophy and Action," which outlines four distinct philosophical views of the relationship between theory and practice. In this paper I apply McKeon's typology to research in both secular and Jewish education. I contend that most of our common-sense assumptions about research and practice fall into one particular conception out of the four, and that this conception is too flawed to be relied upon exclusively. Though the other views have their limitations as well, each is built on a kernel of truth, and each highlights a particular facet of the complex relationship between knowledge and action. Following McKeon, I assume that there is no one proper way to link research and practice. A comparison of the four views, and a deliberate scanning of the alternative research strategies suggested by each can help researchers in Jewish education become more reflective and, perhaps, more resourceful.

Throughout this paper I use the term research to refer to the full range of scholarly inquiry in the field of education, from philosophy and history to sociology, psychology, economics and anthropology. That inquiries in these diverse fields can be discussed together under the same heading is an arguable point,[1] as is my use of the term research to denote this amalgam.[2] A third point open to debate is my inclusion, under the same rubric, of a wide spectrum of research activities, from the isolated work of individuals to large-scale cooperative efforts. I ask that the reader grant these points at the outset, in the hope that the analysis which follows will serve as a useful heuristic.

The Logistic Conception of the Relationship Between Research and Practice

The commonsense view of the relationship between research and practice is that the purpose of research in education is to identify regularities in human behavior that pertain to education, and to derive from these regularities some practical prescriptions for teachers, administrators, and/or policy makers. Much as the engineer applies the laws of physics to the building of bridges and machines, the ed-

DR. ARON *is Associate Professor of Jewish Education, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles, Ca.*

ucational practitioner should be able to take "laws" related to learning, teaching, social interaction, and so forth, and create successful and efficient learning environments. If there is a controversy over what counts as successful or efficient, the philosophical researcher can be called in to clarify these concepts. The notion that sound educational practice can be "derived," almost logically, from research, fits into the category which McKeon terms "logistic."

In secular education the logistic view underlies a number of research paradigms, including "process-product" research on teaching and "school effectiveness" research (Brophy 1979; Griffin and Barnes 1984; Zumwalt 1982). Another type of research rooted in the logistic conception is policy research, which:

> provides the state with authoritative and objective evidence concerning the costs and consequences of social policies: Research is expected to improve the effectiveness of social service. [Cohen and Garet 1975, p. 20]

In Jewish education the logistic view prevails among those who commission, engage in, and read research. For example, the American Jewish Committee has, over the years, commissioned a number of studies aimed at improving one or another aspect of Jewish education. The assumption has been that each of these studies would yield certain policy recommendations, which would serve as "a catalyst and directive for educational change" (AJC 1976, p. 22). Though the studies under consideration have been quite modest and exploratory in nature, each has ended with explicit proposals for action. Even Samuel Heilman's ethnographic study, "Inside the Jewish School" (1984), had certain policy recommendations appended to it, though it was not at all clear that the recommendations derived from the data at hand.

The classic example of how the logistic conception dominates research in Jewish education is the fanfare that accompanied the Bock (1976) and Himmelfarb (1974) studies. These studies indicated that a threshold of a certain number of hours of instruction was required before Jewish education made any difference in a person's identification as a Jew. In their rush to derive practical prescriptions from these studies, the AJC and other leaders of the Jewish community paid scant attention to the fact that the thresholds "established" by the two studies were vastly different (3,000 hours in the case of Himmelfarb; 1,000 or 500 hours in the case of Bock).

A single study, however, or even two can hardly be taken as the final word. When the Bock and Himmelfarb data were reanalyzed by Cohen and Ritterband (1984), it was found that controlling for gender made the threshold disappear. Unfortunately, the reanalysis came too late to repair the damaged reputation of supplementary schools among some communal leaders. In contrast, secular education reseachers in the "process-product" tradition, for example, base their practical prescriptions on dozens of inter-locking studies. The paucity of research in Jewish education, and the lack of a critical attitude by consumers, makes the logistic mentality particularly simplistic and misleading.

Even were we to have traditions, schools, or paradigms of research, as is the case in the field of secular education, the notion that practice might be derived from research in a straightforward manner would still be open to question. As Schwab (1957) and others have pointed out, theories and research in the social sciences are only partial representations of a very complex reality, and may offer contradictory explanations of social phenomena. Moreover, the rate of change in our society is such that even generalizations which are currently valid may have a very short half-life (Cronbach 1975). The analogy between the educational practitioner and the engineer is faulty, because not all educational research generates laws, and because those "laws" that are generated are not as reliable as those of physics.

Finally, even if a certain body of educational research were to repeatedly confirm certain generalizations which remained stable over a period of time, its acceptance by practitioners and policy makers as a basis for changing their practices and policies would hardly be guaranteed. In the field of secular education there

has been considerable hand-wringing about the lack of awareness and adoption of research findings (Lindblom and Cohen 1979; Cohen and Garet 1975). Some blame practitioners for being parochial and resistant to change; others blame researchers for employing the wrong methodologies (Eisner 1984; Bolster 1983; Greer 1983). Still others attribute the problem to the fact that educational research is, as yet, undeveloped (Jackson and Kiesler 1977). All acknowledge that, at least for the foreseeable future, practitioners and policy makers will not utilize the findings of research in as simple and direct a fashion as the logistic conception implies.

The Operational Conception

Given the problems with the logistic perspective, it was natural that some researchers would begin to advocate an entirely opposite view — that research and practice must be viewed as separate and distinct endeavors. This conception, termed by McKeon the "operational," is rooted in Aristotle's delineation of three fundamental types of activities: the theoretical, the practical, and the productive.

What are the implications of this difference? Proponents of the operational offer at least four different answers:

1. That researchers should be given the latitude to work on their own, without the expectation that their efforts will yield something of use to practitioners (Kerlinger 1981; Phillips 1980).

2. That researchers accept the fact that the knowledge and insights they generate can do no more than influence the social climate in which practical decisions are made (Weiss 1977); consequently, that they deliberately orient their research toward issues of personal and political concern, so that their research becomes a conscious political tool (Lindblom and Cohen 1979).

3. That neither researchers nor practitioners be asked to bear the burden for forging the connection between their activities, but that agencies and mechanisms be created for effecting such a linkage in a careful, thorough and politically sensitive way (Keppel 1966; Louis 1981).

4. That a new kind of research is needed, research which focuses on the "practial wisdom" of the successful practitioner (Schwab 1978, p. 331; Argyris and Schon 1975; Schon 1983).

Each of these suggestions has much to recommend itself to the field of Jewish education. The first and the third are more appropriately addressed to central agencies and organizations: Clearly, there must be greater acceptance, on the part of funding agencies of all sorts, of the legitimacy of research in education as a valued activity in its own right. In addition, a crucial role could be played by centrally located linking agents, who translate the findings of research to practitioners, and the reactions of practitioners back to researchers.

For those researchers concerned with having their research "make a difference" in some undefined way, the operational views expressed in points two and four can help them begin to clarify what they mean by "making a difference." Rather than living in the fantasy world of the logistic, they must begin to think, in more political terms, about the kind of difference they want to make. Do they want to critique certain existing arrangements or spotlight exemplary ones? Who are the practitioners whose skill merits inquiry? Once exemplary practitioners are identified, how do we get others to emulate them?

All of the operational views other than the first require the kind of support and infrastructure which is still quite rare in the field of Jewish education. Not surprisingly, the only two examples which come to mind of research informed by the operational conception have been conducted under the auspices of two large bureaus of Jewish education, in New York City and in Los Angeles.

The 1988 New York BJE study of 40 supplementary schools included classroom observations, interviews with students, teachers, parents, administrators, rabbis, and lay leaders, as well as pencil-and-paper assessments of student knowledge, involvement, and attitudes.[3] The most notable aspect of the study, aside from its scope, was the careful groundwork laid by the study team, which served to maintain interest in the study, and to facilitate the implementation of its recommendations. It was no accident that the publication of the

findings coincided with the development of an action plan designed to test some of the recommendations.

In Los Angeles, the Bureau of Jewish Education, and the education schools of the Hebrew Union College and the University of Judaism have joined together to study, through both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, teachers of Hebrew and Judaica in the Los Angeles area. In undertaking these studies, the researchers hope to identify and assess the size of a number of different teacher populations, and to determine both the motivations and perceived needs of each group. The Bureau plans to use this information to create experimental projects aimed at improving the situation of one or another of the subpopulations.

The Problematic Conception

The examples cited above highlight two factors which may be prerequisites of the successful utilization of research: (1) the coordinated use of a number of different methodologies and approaches; and (2) the close connection between researcher and both practitioners and policy makers. But what of the individual researcher operating from a single methodological perspective? Can he or she hope to influence either practitioners or policy makers? In the past few years two different approaches to educational research have emerged, which answer this question in two different ways. The first, which would fit into McKeon's category of the "problematic," begins with a critique of the faulty notion of "derivation" of practice from research. The reason, in this view, that practitioners do not use the findings of educational research is that this research is generated in splendid isolation, with the assumption that practitioners will be its passive recipients. On the contrary, however, practitioners are (or should be) reflective and inquisitive individuals who have research questions and concerns of their own, and who possess at least some of the resources necessary to conduct such research. Problems of "linkage" would largely disappear (and the professional development of teachers and administrators facilitated) if research were viewed as a joint endeavor.

McKeon calls this approach the "problematic" because its philosophical roots may be traced to Dewey, who conceived of all scholarly inquiry as following the same basic pattern: a felt problem, the generation of alternative solutions, and the testing of these solutions through thought and empirical study (1938/1966). But the idea of practitioners engaging in research probably owes as much or more to Kurt Lewin, who coined the term "action research." Action research in education enjoyed a brief popularity in the 1950's (Corey 1953), but fell into disrepute because it was poorly conducted, and because it was often too narrowly conceived (Hodgkinson 1957).

Contemporary practitioners of action or problematic research are, in contrast, quite broad in their perspective and sophisticated in their methodology. Recent examples of this kind of research in the field of secular education include teachers recording and analyzing events in their classrooms on their own (Lampert 1985; Paley 1986), in groups (McDonald 1986), or with the assistance of outside researchers (Florio and Walsh 1978). Other examples fit more closely into the Deweyan model, with teams of teachers, working together with outside researchers, to research the causes and potential solutions of problems they have identified (Klausmeier 1982; Jacullo-Noto 1984).

Advocates of the problematic approach offer several different kinds of arguments in its favor:

1. That research can empower teachers and make them more reflective (Paley 1986; Jacullo-Noto 1984; Florio and Walsh 1978).

2. That teachers invested and involved in research are more likely to take its findings to heart and change their behavior when a change is indicated (Klausmeier 1982; Tuthill and Ashton 1983).

3. A more radical claim: That the knowledge generated by teachers is knowledge of a different sort; and that this type of knowledge is a requisite for both academicians and policy makers in their attempts to fully understand the process of education (Lampert 1985; McDonald 1986).

I have not found any studies which have en-

gaged policy makers in a comparable school-based research, but I do know of at least one such study in museum education. Robert Wolfe undertook a naturalistic observation study of visitors in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Members of the research team included docents, curators and board members. Actual on-site observation of visitor behavior and preferences challenged many of the assumptions held by the curators and board members, and resulted in changing the museum's exhibition policy in several respects.[4]

In the field of Jewish education, we have at least one example of research undertaken from a problematic framework, Judith Press' (1987) phenomenological analysis of student perceptions of the Hebrew school she directs. When she presented her paper at the 1987 Conference on Research in Jewish Education, Press noted that her research gave her a fresh perspective on the school, and highlighted the need for certain structural changes. Similarly, Susan Wall's (1986) study of parents in a supplementary school suggests another useful form of problematic research. Though Wall herself did not work in the school she studied, she believes that "the focus group approach has tremendous potential for launching a much-needed dialogue between educator and parents" (p. 31).

The notion of bridging the gap between research and practice by having practitioners engage in research has some limitations, both practical and principled. The motivations, concerns, skills, timetable, and rhythm of the researcher are different from, and may even be antithetical to, those of the practitioner. Even if time could be found for practitioners to conceive of and engage in research, the resulting studies would be likely to be more episodic than ongoing. A good deal of coordination would be required to make such studies cumulative; this coordination would probably have to be provided by an outsider, or at least by a staff member assigned to this task. Despite these limitations, research of this sort has a certain appeal, and I hope we will see more of it in the field of Jewish education.

The Dialectical Conception

A final response to the failures of the logistic approach has been that of researchers in secular education who are sharply critical of fundamental aspects of both schools and society, and who see their research efforts as an integral part of the process of emancipating and empowering both staff and students. Referring to themselves as the "critical school," these researchers see research and social change as closely connected, in that only a proper understanding of social conditions will bring about fundamental, rather than superficial, change. These researchers trace their intellectual lineage to Marx, particularly as his writings have been interpreted by such members of the Frankfurt School as Habermas, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse (Giroux 1983b). Their perception of research and practice as inextricably bound in a dynamic of change places them in McKeon's fourth category, the "dialectical."

Researchers guided by these ideological premises have tried to demonstrate that public schools, rather than being vehicles for social mobility, reinforce and maintain economic and social inequalities (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Apple 1982). Although they differ in their analysis of the ways in which schools reproduce social inequalities (Giroux 1983a), they are united in a vision of research as "praxis" (Lather 1986). By exposing the underlying conflicts and contradictions of current institutional arrangements, research can hasten their downfall (Shapiro 1982).

It is not clear to me whether or not the dialectical approach to research and practice, at least in its current incarnation, has any relevance to the field of Jewish education, where cultural, rather than socio-economic cleavages seem to be at issue. The notion that research can expose the conflicts and contraindications which inhere in certain educational settings, and that such exposure can raise the consciousness of various stakeholders has an intuitive appeal. The example which springs to mind is David Schoem's (1979) ethnography of a supplementary school, which has assumed the status of a classic in the field. Readers of the study who are familiar with supplementary settings are probably very much aware of the problems Schoem found in the "Shalom" School. Nonetheless, Schoem's

setting of these problems in the context of two overarching myths (the myth of the Jewish Way of Life, and the myth of the synagogue as a Jewish Community), and his marshaling of anecdotes and quotations to exemplify how false these myths actually are, make reading the entire work a very powerful experience. Could a reading of this piece of research by a synagogue's lay board and professional staff be a transforming experience? It certainly has been for some of the students I teach.

Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, one might ask: what of this paper? Can McKeon's typology, and my own application of it to research in Jewish education, be helpful to practitioners, policy makers, and researchers in the field? By way of summary, I would like to offer the following comments:

1. It is imperative that potential funders, policy makers and practitioners be disabused of the notion that research can affect practice in the simple logistic sense. We must begin to promote the view that research is important in its own right, though its contribution to our understanding of educational settings may, over time, create a climate for their improvement.

2. To avoid any misinterpretation of their work by logistic-minded consumers, researchers must be particularly careful to point out the limitations of their methodology and sample; the alternate interpretations that emerge from their data; and the additional research which might serve to corroborate or discredit their findings. A model for such fairness and caution is the study conducted by Cohen and Wall (1987) on the recruitment and retention of senior personnel in Jewish education.

3. Institutions and organizations interested in conducting policy research which will serve as a catalyst for change in current educational practices might consciously model their studies on others conducted in the operational mode. Such studies would approach a problem or an institution from several different perspectives and would employ a number of methodologies. They would give careful attention to the processes of investing influential stakeholders in their research at the outset, and establishing linking mechanisms at its conclusion. This sort of research is likely to be quite expensive, labor-intensive, and time-consuming.

4. Individual researchers interested in having their work affect the "real world" might think carefully about the operational, problematic, and dialectical approaches, and decide which fits best with their own interests, inclinations, settings, and resources. Those who are practitioners themselves might decide to study their own setting in a problematic mode; others might want to work with one or more practitioners in the same mode. Some may want to look more closely at the work of exemplary practitioners of one sort or another; others may choose to focus on the pervasive problems common to a number of institutions.

5. Finally, there is no one right way to think about the link between research and practice. Nor is there an infallible guide to choosing the sort of research most appropriate to a particular researcher and a particular setting. Both researchers and policy makers would do well to adopt an attitude of informed pluralism. By keeping their minds open to the various possibilities, while minding the limitations of each, those who seek to close the gap may meet with partial success.

NOTES

This paper was presented at the opening session of the 2nd annual Conference on Research in Jewish Education, held in Philadelphia in June, 1988. I would like to thank Hanan Alexander, Adrianne Bank, Adam Gamoran and Michael Zeldin for their helpful comments on earlier drafts.

1. Several individuals, commenting on earlier drafts of this paper, have argued that different disciplines and methodologies naturally fit one or the other of McKeon's categories, and that referring to all of these endeavors together may, therefore, be misleading. I remain unconvinced, but open to further discussion.
2. Terms which have been offered as alternatives include "professional social inquiry (PSI)" (Lindblom and Cohen 1979) and "disciplined inquiry" (Cronbach and Suppes 1969). In using the term "research" I am following Kenneth Strike (1979).
3. Limitations of space preclude a more detailed analysis

of this important study. Of particular interest in this context is the way in which the study, though operational in design, employs the rhetoric of the logistic. The study concludes with a series of recommendations regarding family education; worthy as these recommendations might be, they cannot be said to "derive" from the data, as claimed in the report.

4. Unpublished paper presented at a meeting of the American Association of Museums, Indianapolis, 1981.

REFERENCES

American Jewish Committee, *Jewish Education and Jewish Identity: Summary Report and Recommendations*, New York: AJC, 1976.

Apple, Michael. *Education and Power.* Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.

Argyris, Chris and Donald Schon. *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975.

Bock, Geoffrey. *The Jewish Schooling of American Jews: A Study of Non-cognitive Educational Effects.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1976.

Bolster, Arthur. "Toward a More Effective Model of Research on Teaching." *Harvard Educational Review* 53 (1983): 294-308.

Bowles, Samuel and Herbert Gintis. *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life.* New York: Basic Books, 1976.

Brophy, Here. "Using Observation to Improve Your Teaching." Occasional Paper No. 21, Institute for Research on Teaching. East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1979.

Cohen, David and Michael Garet. "Reforming Educational Policy with Applied Social Science Research." *Harvard Educational Review* 45 (1975): 17-43.

Cohen, Steven and Paul Ritterband. "The Impact of Jewish Education and Jewish Identification: Positive Effects of Part-Time Schools." Paper presented at the International Research Conference on Jewish Education, Jerusalem, 1984.

Cohen, Steven and Susan Wall. "Recruiting and Retaining Senior Personnel in Jewish Education: A Focus Group Study in North America." Draft of an unpublished report, commissioned by the Jewish Education Committee of the Jewish Agency, 1987.

Corey, Stephen. *Action Research to Improve School Practice.* New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1953.

Cronbach, Lee. "Beyond the Two Disciplines of Scientific Psychology." *American Psychologist* 12 (1975): 116-127.

Cronbach, Lee and Patrick Suppes, ed. *Research for Tomorrow's Schools: Disciplined Inquiry for Education.* New York: Macmillan, 1969.

Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966 (originally published in 1938).

Eisner, Elliot. "Can Educational Research Inform Educational Practice?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, March, 1984: 447-452.

Florio, Susan and Martha Walsh. "The Teacher as Colleague in Classroom Research." Occasional Paper No. 4, Institute for Research on Teaching. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1978.

Giroux, Henry. "Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education: A Critical Analysis." *Harvard Educational Review* 53 (1983): 257-193. *(a)*

Giroux, Henry. *Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition.* South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1983. *(b)*

Greer, R. Douglas. "Contingencies of the Science and Technology of Teaching and Pre-behavioristic Research Practices in Education." *Educational Researcher* 12 (January, 1983): 3-9.

Griffin, Gary and Susan Barnes. "School Change: A Craft-Derived and Research-Based Strategy." *Teachers College Record* 86 (1984): 103-123.

Heilman, Samuel. *Inside the Jewish School: A Study of the Cultural Setting for Jewish Education.* New York: American Jewish Committee, 1984.

Himmelfarb, Harold. *The Impact of Religious Schooling: The Effects of Jewish Education upon Adult Religious Involvement.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1974.

Hodgkinson, Harold. "Action Research — A Critique." *Journal of Educational Sociology* 31 (1957): 137-153.

Jackson, Philip and Sara Kieslar. "Fundamental Research and Education." *Educational Researcher* 6 (September, 1977): 13-18.

Jacullo-Noto, Joanne. "Interactive Research and Development — Partners in Craft." *Teachers College Record* 86 (1984): 208-222.

Keppel, Francis. *The Necessary Revolution in American Education.* New York: Harper and Row, 1966.

Kellinger, Fred. "The Influence of Research on Education Practice." *Educational Researcher* 6 (September, 1981): 5-12.

Klausmeier, Herbert. "A Research Strategy for Educational Improvement." *Educational Researcher* 11 (February, 1982): 8-13.

Lampert, Magdalene. "How Do Teachers Manage to Teach? Perspectives on Problems in Practice." *Harvard Educational Review* 55 (1985): 178-194.

Lindblom, Charles and David Cohen. *Usable Knowledge: Social Science and Social Problem Solving.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

Louis, Karen S. "External Agents and Knowledge Utilization: Dimensions for Analysis and Action." In *Improving Schools*, edited by R. Lehming and M. Kane. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981.

McDonald, Joseph. "Raising the Teacher's Voice and the Ironic Role of Theory." *Harvard Educational Review* 56 (1986) 355-378.

McKeon, Richard. "Philosophy and Action." *Ethics* 62 (1952): 79-100.

Paley, Vivian. "On Listening to What Children Say." *Harvard Educational Review* 56 (1986) 122-131.

(Continued on page 53)