

Service-Bonded Inquiry: The Road Less Traveled

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In this essay, a new approach to doing research in schools and other community settings is described: service-bonded inquiry. This approach allows researchers to expand the boundaries of scholarly inquiry through the integration of service and scholarship. It is not an attempt to replace traditional forms of research; rather, it serves to complement the way researchers have historically conducted research. Service-bonded inquiry is the proverbial bridge between what Hal Lawson (1990) calls *information gathering* and *useful information*. The discussion here focuses on describing important assumptions underlying service-bonded inquiry and arguing that personal values and commitment must be assessed before engaging in this type of research. In addition, guideposts for evaluating and doing service-bonded inquiry are provided.

*Two roads diverged in the wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

—Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken"

In L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, the scarecrow tries relentlessly to get Dorothy to the Emerald City where hope for a return to Kansas awaits. There are two yellow brick roads, one leading to the Emerald City and hope, and the other to an uncertain future. Deciding which road to take is not easy. Like Dorothy, sport pedagogy research stands at a crossroads. There is the road to traditional forms of research. Those who travel it are researchers who produce information about practice with little connection to those who use it. Completing this path leads to clear, identifiable rewards for researchers, such as publication in journals and recognition by the professional academies.

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The other road has few travelers other than practitioners. One reason for this is that the less traveled road has been obscured by the prominence of the more traditional paradigms of research. With few travelers, the road is rough, undefined, and often void of tangible rewards. It is a road, however, that holds promise for impassioned and visionary travelers who attempt to make a difference in the lives of kids. We believe that more sport pedagogy researchers should be encouraged to take this road. Like Dorothy, we are faced with a difficult decision. Do we continue to journey down the path producing knowledge for only a select enclave of scholars, or can we also venture down the path that brings relevance to real life conditions? Reason (1981) warns us that "A crisis in scientific belief" exists among researchers' most important constituents: the practitioner. The gap continues to widen between producers and users of knowledge. Continuing to travel the road away from the Emerald City alone makes the narrowing of this gap improbable.

The purpose of this article is to describe an alternative way of viewing research in sport pedagogy. Specifically, we will suggest a way that differs from the technical or product-oriented perceptions of scholarly inquiry. We call our approach *service-bonded inquiry* to suggest the integration of service and scholarship. We also provide guideposts for evaluating the knowledge generated by service-bonded inquiry. We want to reclaim the original ideals of research proclaimed by William Brown, former president of Princeton University:

Scholarly research reflects our irrepressible need as humans to confront the unknown and to seek understanding for its own sake. It is tied inextricably to the freedom to think freshly, to see propositions of every kind in ever-changing light. And it celebrates the special exhilaration that comes from a new idea. (quoted in Boyer, 1990, p. 17)

Our motives for writing this article spring from three main concerns. The first relates to the long-held belief that all research is driven by the assumption that all researchers have similar ways of viewing research. We contend that there are various *cognitive styles* that individuals possess and that influence how they formulate and answer questions. The second concern comes from recent pressures exerted from inside and outside the walls of the university to expand the definition of scholarship. The third concern relates to the irrelevance of research for changing practice in our schools and youth programs. If research is to change our world for the better, we must come face to face with the question, Is what I am doing worthwhile? These three concerns are not mutually exclusive; they are intertwined. Contending with the issue of relevance in research depends on how willing we are to acknowledge differences in the way we seek knowledge and truth.

Exploring Styles of Inquiry

For years research by professors has been guided or influenced by a narrow set of assumptions. These assumptions, for the most part, have defined whether one's work is scholarly and credible. Although there is some latitude in these assumptions, their boundaries have been anchored in what Metzler (1994) calls a "monolithic system." This system includes journal review boards with specific guidelines for adjudication, hyper-specialization in writing and readership, domination of the parent

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disciplines, and institutional reward systems that give professors an incentive to "pump out" articles. This has created a myopic view of "what research should be," not only in sport pedagogy but also in other subdisciplines.

This narrow view of research has accommodated individuals who have what Mitroff and Kilmann (1981) call a "technical psychological" style. This style embraces the use of impersonal systems where content is evaluated according to its "logical character" or "truth." Personal considerations do not play a role in the evaluation or interpretation of the research. Mitroff and Kilmann argue that an array of cognitive styles of inquiry are possible. They range from styles that are technical to those that are humanistic. Mitroff and Kilmann believe that technical models of inquiry have focused exclusively on quantitative growth and control. Technical models have a set of assumptions that influence the author to write a "certain way." For those who have this style, the technical model has served them well in doing and publishing research. The gatekeepers of our most prestigious journals (i.e., *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, and *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*) have used the templates of quantitative and qualitative inquiry based on technical style to judge and showcase good research. Although many qualitative researchers would bristle at the thought of being thrown together with their positivistic counterparts, their research is also restricted by its own set of methodological boundaries. Interpretative inquiry in and of itself has a certain set of assumptions and specific formats for writing the meanings of so-called soft data.

But what about those whose psychological style pushes them to look much differently at the role of scholarship? Such differences, according to Mitroff and Kilmann, have created open hostility and conflict in social science research. We also believe that other styles for doing research do exist. These are called *humanistic* styles, which seek to understand and contribute to human growth and well-being. Humanistic styles drive the investigator to use a vast array of strategies to describe innovative concepts, relationships between the researcher and researched, and in-depth characterizations of people and conditions (Reason, 1981).

It is important to note that this approach to inquiry, as suggested by its focus on contributing to human well-being, encompasses teaching and service as well as research. This approach also forces us to expand work beyond in-school physical education, as advocated by Lawson (1996) and Siedentop (1992). Integrating this tripartite mission and expanding the settings will help connect us to what are the central issues of our time.

Broadening the Concept of Scholarship

It has been several years since the publication of Ernest Boyer's provocative treatise, *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990). A major plea made by Boyer was for universities to "enlarge the perspective" of scholarship. That is, scholarship must be viewed as something more than doing research and publishing it; it should include the integration of facts, the application of findings, and the teaching to and enticement of future scholars. Today, his call for broadening the boundaries of scholarship still resonate within the community of researchers and those who judge the merit of research (Lawson, 1990; Metzler, 1994). Trying out ideas, reexamining personal value systems, and solving "real world" problems constitute possibilities for discovery.

By enlarging the scope of scholarly inquiry, we can begin to infuse personal and professional meaning into the practice of teachers, youth workers, and professional educators. Traditional forms of research will no doubt continue to flourish. They will also continue to produce information about professional practice and training. However, science is just one of the many ideologies that propel society, and it should be treated as such (Fenstermacher, 1986). We need to expand our current research practices so that they become more relevant to the problems facing society and, in doing so, have some impact on the solutions of these problems.

This broader view of scholarship has gained great intuitive appeal within the past 5 years. Calls for help from community agencies and schools to universities have significantly escalated (Clinchy, 1994; Harkavy & Puckett, 1994). Meeting the challenges brought on by rapid changes in urban economics, youth lifestyles, environmental conditions of schools, tax-supported revenue for education, and the service roles of schools (e.g., full-service schools) have put teachers in a difficult and vulnerable position. As a result, universities, especially those in urban settings, have been forced to respond. For example, community service centers have been established at several research campuses (e.g., University of California at Berkeley, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Stanford, and University of Pennsylvania) in an effort to tackle community problems. Requests for evaluating program outcomes, working with at-risk students, helping teachers deal with oppositional behavior, providing staff development, or providing one-on-one mentoring are some of these calls for help. Harkavy and Puckett (1994) argue that addressing these calls will require the university to engage academic resources in ways that integrate teaching, service, and research. This helps to solidify the foundation of "social settlements" composed of agencies, schools, and universities.

For the most part, politics has influenced the university's response. Alumni groups, local businesses, and personal donors have pressured administrators to take stock of the returns on their investment in quality education at their respective universities. To some degree, such "button pushing" has made institutions of higher learning reconsider their reward systems so that service to others and basic research are on equal footing. While the groundswell of support for such change is unclear, a new vision of scholarship may be on the horizon. According to Eugene Rice, the Director of the American Association of Higher Education Forum on Faculty Roles and Reward Systems, building new and innovative tenure and promotion assessment protocols for teaching, service, and research is just beginning. He urges institutions to recast reward systems so that a "new American scholar" can emerge. Rice (1996) warns that if this is not done, our colleges and universities will fall prey to the financial restructuring that has hit industry, medicine, and government.

Faculty also are driven by a sincere desire to help others. Consulting, creating ways for affecting practice, teaching classes, providing staff development programs, and just helping others have become newly acquired tasks for many faculty. These types of activities have expanded the storehouse of knowledge by testing new ideas, facts, and theories.

Making Research Relevant

Few would argue with the fact that both qualitative and quantitative forms of inquiry have produced a storehouse of information in sport pedagogy. This storehouse

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continues to grow considerably. Unfortunately, the inability to make research relevant has become the "albatross around the necks" of those who are students, teachers, youth workers, coaches, and administrators. Practitioners continue to be disenfranchised from the research community, mainly because research questions and their answers have not proven to be useful for solving real world problems. As Oskar Handlung points out, "Our troubled planet can no longer afford the luxury of pursuits confined to the ivory tower" (quoted in Boyer, 1990, p. 23).

Emerging from the disconnection of research and practice are educational ghettos or secluded enclosures, one inhabited by professors of knowledge and the other by those who work with kids (Clinchy, 1994). A consequence of this "disconnectedness" is that little is learned from either party. University professors have been very influential in dictating to schools and other social agencies what standards of excellence should be. They have done little in terms of learning what really works from those who engage in what Joe McDonald (1992) calls the "uncertain craft of teaching." Likewise, schools and agencies have allowed themselves to be governed by research findings without questioning and placing them in a proper context of practice. Our point is that both parties can learn from each other if we expand our views of research. Service-bonded inquiry, therefore, provides a means for the collective inventiveness needed to improve the educational environment. This will transform ideas into better experiences for our nation's youth and for society as a whole (Clinchy, 1994).

Service-Bonded Inquiry

In order to clarify the concept and use of service-bonded inquiry, there are three issues to consider. The first is defining service-bonded inquiry and the personal qualities needed to do this type of work. Important personal assumptions underlie the implementation of service-bonded inquiry. The second issue asks the question, "How worthwhile is the knowledge produced by service-bonded inquiry?" The impact and the range of application are some of the key factors in determining the worth of knowledge. The third issue involves specific guidelines for doing service-bonded inquiry.

Characteristics of Service-Bonded Inquiry

Service-bonded inquiry is partly the result of outside pressures on the university, coupled with dissatisfaction with campus priorities and dominant research paradigms from within the university. While these forces set the stage for change, they are insufficient to promote the development of a specific approach that honors and integrates research, service, and teaching. Fortunately, a number of alternative research methodologies offering the possibility of achieving such an integration have recently surfaced, most notably practical inquiry (Schubert, 1986), reflective scholarship (Schon, 1987), teacher as researcher (Duckworth, 1987), curriculum as craft (Kirk, 1991), action research (Martinek & Schempp, 1988), and researcher as teacher (Housner, 1996). Although these methodologies have different histories and proponents, we have taken the liberty of suggesting their coalescence into a generic kind of inquiry that we call service-bonded inquiry.

The Values and Beliefs of the Investigator. Service-bonded inquiry begins in the head and heart of the investigator. Service-bonded inquiry investigators must

