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A myriad of forces influence faculty and the production of research, including tenure and promotion policies and practices, institutional socialization, disciplinary culture, and journal editors and senior scholars. These powerful forces must be rethought and reshaped if we are to bridge the research-practice gap.

Reshaping the Forces That Perpetuate the Research-Practice Gap: Focus on New Faculty

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Rhetoric about higher education crises, agendas, solutions, and problems reverberates in state legislatures, faculty senate meetings, and administrative edicts. Debate about higher education issues also consumes ink in the popular press, policy reports, scholarly journals, and managerial magazines, and now it also occupies cyberspace on the Internet. Despite all the verbiage, higher education administrators, policymakers, students, their parents, faculty, and the public apparently do not listen much to higher education scholars, and higher education scholars do not listen much to their stakeholders (Conrad, 1989; Keller, 1985; Terenzini, 1996). Kezar's research (see Chapter One) indicates that higher education scholars do not even listen much to one another. The communication gap between higher education scholars and stakeholders is particularly frustrating for new faculty who entered an applied field with hopes higher than attaining tenure—hopes that their scholarly efforts might somehow make a positive impact on the people, policies, and practice of higher education.

As a graduate student and assistant professor of higher education at two research universities, I have seen university administrators implement major teaching and curriculum reform initiatives without so much as brief phone consultations with experts on their own campuses who are renowned for their research in those areas. I have also heard education professors hesitate to offer their expertise to administrators, either doubting that their counsel would be heeded or fearful that administrative requests for institutional research would become yet another unrecognized requirement of higher

education faculty members' demanding jobs. But I have also learned much from opportunities to work closely with senior scholars who consistently and creatively integrate educational research and practice.

With those lessons in mind, I argue in this chapter that there are ways that tenure-seeking faculty in higher education can bridge the research-practice gap. Well-directed efforts to improve communication among higher education scholars, practitioners, and policymakers might improve junior faculty chances for attaining tenure. Such efforts, which include active listening and reciprocal relationship, may also be the catalysts required to revitalize a relatively young field of study that has already been labeled lifeless and pedestrian (Conrad, 1989), picayune (Keller, 1985), and narrow (Terenzini, 1996) by some of its leading scholars.

First, I explore the professionalization and socialization forces that encourage new faculty to perpetuate the research-practice gap in higher education. Next, I suggest alternative ways to view the relationship among higher education scholars, practitioners, and policymakers, drawing on communication theory, feminist philosophy, and organizational theory. Finally, I offer recommendations for ways that junior faculty can bridge the gap and ways that senior faculty and administrators can support their efforts, to the collective benefit of all.

Forces That Encourage New Faculty to Perpetuate the Gap

New higher education faculty are caught between experiences that are likely to help them bridge the research-practice gap and socializing forces that encourage them to reinforce the gap. It is likely that a majority of higher education faculty were practitioners before they were scholars, as more than three-fourths of the graduates of higher education doctoral programs worked at colleges, universities, or related agencies before starting doctoral study (Townsend and Weise, 1991). It is also likely that many assistant professors have graduate school colleagues who have become practitioners, as a majority of those who hold doctorates in higher education work as middle-level or senior-level college or university administrators in agencies focusing on higher education (Townsend and Weise, 1991). Furthermore, as the number of faculty who staff a higher education program on any campus is comparatively few, most of any new faculty member's campus colleagues are administrators and faculty in other fields or disciplines—in other words, practitioners.

Although assistant professors of higher education may have had practical experience and do have friends and colleagues who are higher education practitioners, new faculty quickly learn that their new profession requires that they establish separate identities as scholars. When they were still graduate students, they began learning the values of the education pro-

fessoriate from their teachers and mentors. Little of that learning was likely to have involved lessons in the worth of reciprocal communication with practitioners and policymakers (Peterson, 1998; Miller, 1999; Terenzini, 1996) or acknowledgement that by nature of their positions as faculty members, higher education scholars are also practitioners. Although some senior scholars assert that the research-practice gap should be bridged (Conrad, 1989; Keller, 1985; Terenzini, 1996; Hearn, 1998), others emphasize the differences rather than the similarities between scholars and practitioners or policymakers (Birnbaum, 2000).

Research on the process of professionalization in other fields helps explain why some higher education scholars distance themselves from practitioners. One of the hallmarks of achieving professional status is the general perception that certified members of the profession have developed expertise in a body of knowledge and a set of skills obtained only through long and intensive education (Friedson, 1986). The perception of having expertise is facilitated by the development of professional jargon. There is “a social pressure on would-be professionals to create a closed and esoteric vocabulary” so they may claim a monopoly on their particular skills (Brown, 1992, p. 21). Higher education is certainly not the first young social science field to adopt scientific formats and “obfuscatory verbiage” (Conrad, 1989) to gain legitimacy among the community of scholars. In 1959, C. Wright Mills asserted that the unintelligibility of sociological writing “has little or nothing to do with the profundity of the subject matter, and has nothing at all to do with profundity of thought” (p. 218). He further described the origins of sociological jargon, “In large part sociological habits of style stem from the time when sociologists had little status even with other academic men. Desire for status is one reason why academic men slip so easily into unintelligibility” (p. 218). Unintelligibility is perpetuated as succeeding generations of scholars emulate the obtuse style of articles written by renowned scholars. Editors publish jargon-filled articles by new authors because nothing better is available and because copyediting is expensive. Those articles provide the examples from which the next generation learns bad habits (Becker, 1986).

Journal reviewers and editors are among the senior colleagues who play a critical gatekeeping role in the socialization of new higher education faculty. New scholars learn “notions of correctness,” including “values, norms, and postures” from the comments of reviewers and editors (Silverman, 1993, p. 506). Correctness in higher education literature, as in much other academic writing, is “less an agent of intellectual change than a vehicle for maintaining social stability in the face of change” (Kaufer and Geisler, 1989, p. 287). In his content analysis of all articles published in the top five higher education journals from 1986–1988, Milam (1991) found that all articles were concerned with the status quo, and none offered innovative or visionary ideas that practitioners say would help them improve practice (see Kezar, Chapter One).

To bridge the research-practice gap by communicating with administrators, faculty in other disciplines, and policy analysts, as well as with other higher education scholars, new higher education faculty should begin doing so early in their careers. Scholars establish patterns for publication during their tenure-seeking years—not during graduate school nor after receiving promotion (Boice, 1992). Publication patterns involve the rate at which new faculty submit manuscripts, the topics about which they write, and the audiences for whom they publish. The length of time required for attaining tenure virtually ensures that faculty members' early publishing habits will endure. The high stakes involved in up-or-out tenure decisions discourage new faculty from taking intellectual risks that might involve questioning the status quo, exploring innovative research topics or methodologies, or even communicating effectively with practitioners (Dunn, Rouse, and Seff, 1994; Tierney and Bensimon, 1996).

Experiences of assistant professors in other applied fields illustrate the risks involved. If assistant professors play it safe by waiting to communicate with practitioners until after tenure, they risk suppressing their creative energy and potential contributions to practice and scholarship. If they are too eager to communicate with practitioners, their community of scholars may soon silence them by denying tenure. For example, junior faculty who observed senior organizations scholars discussing the benefits of research that is relevant for both research and management practice realized that until tenured, they could not afford the luxury of such research. "One young faculty member expressed a certain sadness that his short-term career dilemmas had become quite clear: for the present he must orient himself to an institutional reward structure that precludes dealing with the pressing organizational concern that led him to the field in the first place" (Goodman, 1985, p. 350). No doubt he wanted to avoid a fate similar to that of a tenure-seeking faculty member described by Tierney and Bensimon in their study of new faculty socialization. The assistant professor was denied tenure because his seventeen publications were primarily in professional-level journals. As his department chair said, "Articles written for a lay audience do not meet with great acceptance" (1996, p. 66).

The costs of communicating with the "lay audience" of practitioners have been high for some assistant professors of higher education, who have been told that their articles in *Change*, *Academe*, or *Phi Delta Kappan* would not be included in the count of publications for tenure. The costs of *not* listening to, speaking with, or writing for higher education stakeholders, however, may be far higher for all higher education scholars. As Patrick Terenzini said in his 1995 presidential address to the Association for the Study of Higher Education, "Engaging in more practice- and policy-oriented research is, I believe, both a professional responsibility and a self-interested necessity. In the current financial climate, accountability driven as it is, we cannot expect continued public support for research that does not serve public needs" (1996, p. 8).

Communication to Bridge the Research-Practice Gap

According to Kezar's research (see Chapter One), one reason why practitioners seldom consult higher education literature is because publications typically report the current state of the academy but do not offer visions for the future. Visionary perspectives are needed if we are to bridge the research-practice gap. Socialization and professionalization theories help explain why current efforts to bridge the gap may fall short. With help from colleagues who are both scholars *and* practitioners, I found visionary perspectives about how to bridge the gap in applied communication theories (Gudykunst, 1998; Bolton, 1990), in a feminist philosophy of listening (Fiumara, 1990), and in the experiences of organizations scholars who had dealt with their own research-practice gap in the 1980s (Lawler and Associates, 1985).

Communication involves the creation of meaning as people exchange messages. There is no guarantee, however, that the people involved interpret the exchange in the same way. Therefore, "Communication is effective to the extent that the person interpreting the message attaches a meaning to the message similar to what was intended by the person transmitting it" (Gudykunst, 1998, p. 27). To increase the chances for effective communication requires listening, being open to new information, and being aware of more than one perspective when speaking (Bolton, 1990). Much scholarship, however, involves one-way communication, lecturing, rather than two-way communication, speaking *and* listening (Fiumara, 1990). In addition to content delivery and attention paid to how that content is interpreted, effective communication involves a relationship dimension that is inferred from how the messages are transmitted (Gudykunst, 1998). In the following sections, I explore how the concepts of listening and relationship may help new higher education faculty engage in research that informs both higher education theory and practice.

Listening. Despite the importance of listening and of being heard, "Whole disciplines are dedicated to the development and analysis of writing and of speaking and only marginal attention is paid to the reader and almost none to the listener," according to a recently retired academic administrator (Melander, 1999, p. 7). Listening involves trying to understand a speaker's perspectives and checking to see if one's perceptions of what the speaker said are accurate (Gudykunst, 1998). According to Italian feminist philosopher G. C. Fiumara (1990), "There could be no saying without hearing, no speaking which is not also an integral part of listening, no speech which is not somehow received" (p. 1). Failure to listen to one another throughout the academy may foster unnecessary and perhaps dysfunctional differences. Failure to listen also leads to stagnation of creative thought, which leads to research that must inevitably focus on the status quo. When we scholars do not listen, Fiumara says, "We can no longer share in 'creative thinking,' and we must confine ourselves more and more to circulating

within a given repertory, or arsenal, of terms and standard articulations, which can be summoned up each time in mnemonic fashion; almost a pledge to comply with standard ways of mirroring and with reproductive thinking” (pp. 166–167).

If failing to listen leads to division and stagnation, then engaging in *active listening* may promote understanding and innovation. Actively listening to practitioners is likely to help new higher education scholars develop or expand their research agendas. When Kezar (Chapter One) recently asked focus groups of higher education scholars to discuss what were current important issues that should be investigated, few offered concrete ideas. When asked the same question, practitioners in the focus groups suggested many specific topics. The focus of practitioners’ work is dealing successfully—or at least adequately—with current issues. When a fraternity pledge dies of alcohol poisoning, the dean of student affairs not only must cope with the current crises but also must consider how similar tragedies can be prevented. When a private liberal arts college president learns that enrollments have declined for the third year in a row, she not only must figure how to balance this year’s budget but also must figure how to improve yields in subsequent years and how to generate alternative sources of revenue. When an assistant professor in mechanical engineering is assigned to teach a new freshman design course that includes group projects, she not only must design a syllabus but also must determine how she will assess students’ design and team competencies at the end of the course to meet new engineering accreditation requirements. Listening to these practitioners, new higher education scholars can hear many important problems that would benefit from theory-driven investigation or evaluation (Chen and Rossi, 1983). Some organizational theorists have already realized that innovative scholarship results from listening to and learning from the expertise of managers and other organizational participants. For example, Lawler said, “In traditional scientific research the assumption is that expertise about the phenomenon being studied rests with the research scientist, not with the subject of the research. In most cases this is a safe assumption. But is it a safe assumption with respect to organizations and individual behavior in organizations? . . . Often managers and organization members are astute observers of the situation they are in, and their innovations in practice often precede theory” (1985, p. 6). Higher education practitioners and policymakers *are* astute observers, and new scholars can learn about fruitful areas for research from listening to their concerns and challenges.

Listening to practitioners’ and policymakers’ plans and hopes may also help assistant professors of higher education envision research ideas and conduct studies with a visionary rather than a retrospective focus. Organizations scholar Richard Hackman asserted that advancements in organizational theorizing are more likely to occur when scholars listen to managers and other organizational participants and then engage in application-focused research. Reflecting on the development of other social science dis-

ciplines, such as experimental psychology, Hackman said, “It may be that the best way to generate advances in basic theory is to do research that seeks solutions to real problems and to keep one’s eyes open for fundamental conceptual issues as one proceeds” (1985, pp. 146–147).

Building Reciprocal Relationships. The process of active listening promotes understanding and reciprocal relationship, even if it does not always—and should not always—promote agreement. The relationship between educational research and practice involves negotiation and dialogue (Peterson, 1998). According to Fiumara, “In recognizing the deeply interactive nature of every dialogue we discover that we share in both the problem and the solution without being able to escape into neutral and unrelated spaces” (1990, p. 190). Although there may be some utility in enumerating the differences between higher education scholars and practitioners (Birnbaum, 2000), innovative and rewarding partnerships between scholars and practitioners are more likely to result from focusing on the similarities between them. Organizational theorist Andrew Pettigrew (1985) observed that many good research skills are similar to good management practices. Scholars and practitioners both attack major problems, engage in constant intervention, have developed depth and breadth of knowledge, sometimes act with incomplete data using their experience and intuition, and ask for help when confused.

Similarity extends to identity when considering higher education scholars and practitioners. As instructors, higher education professors deal with issues of teaching and learning in their own classrooms. As members of department and university committees and senates, they deal with issues of organization and leadership. As employees, they are dependent on the financial health of their colleges, universities, and state systems. As members of the larger higher education community, scholars must personally confront issues of equity, access, quality, and accountability. Higher education policy scholar James Hearn acknowledged that “higher education is not only our area of expertise, but also our area of livelihood” (1998, p. 2). The research-practice gap is more likely to narrow when more higher education scholars recognize that they are also higher education practitioners.

Just as the concept of active listening reveals that practitioners can be a valuable source of research ideas, the concept of building relationship reveals the importance of speaking and writing in ways that are clear to practitioner colleagues as well as to scholars. Mutual respect on the part of scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and stakeholders is necessary if they are to work together to develop and conduct research that advances theory and improves practice (Hackman, 1985). Both critics and proponents of efforts to write for practitioners have characterized the process as “simplifying” technical analysis and specialized language for lay audiences who lack scholars’ expertise (Birnbaum, 2000; McColl and White, 1998). Hearn points out, however, that underestimating colleagues’ ability to understand complex issues can work both ways, “Just as policy makers may tend to

oversimplify policy *issues*, those from higher education may tend to oversimplify policy *making itself*" (emphasis added; 1998, p. 4).

When serving as members of faculty senates and university committees, higher education scholars often manage to communicate effectively with chemists, historians, engineers, linguists, deans of student affairs, and finance officers about college and university issues. Using similar clear communication techniques to explain their theories and research results is more likely to enhance rather than reduce higher education researchers' credibility with many of their scholarly and practitioner colleagues (Becker, 1986; Conrad, 1989; McColl and White, 1998).

Recommendations

Several leading higher education scholars have eloquently encouraged colleagues to bridge the research-practice gap (Conrad, 1989; Keller, 1985; Terenzini, 1996; Hearn, 1998). In this chapter, I have argued that although bridging the gap can be very risky for tenure-seeking faculty, the process can also provide them with meaningful topics to investigate, access to data, and better understanding of the utility of their research. New faculty can take some steps to bridge the gap even with minimal support from senior colleagues. Assistant professors willing to take the career risks, however, should have moral and practical support from the journal editors, senior higher education scholars, and practitioners who are likely to benefit from junior scholars' efforts. These recommendations are based on the literatures, my own experiences as an assistant professor of higher education, and on countless conversations on this subject with junior and senior colleagues, both faculty and administrators.

New Faculty. Developing professional friendships and working relationships with colleagues beyond the higher education scholarly community is the first step tenure-seeking faculty can take toward bridging the research-practice gap. Faculty who spend as much time networking with colleagues as they do on writing are among the most productive scholars (Boice, 1992; Creswell, 1985). If they do so nowhere else, new higher education faculty meet professors and administrators outside their departments when serving on university task forces or dissertation committees. By asking such colleagues to share conversation over lunch or a cup of coffee, new faculty can create opportunities to listen and learn about current important issues from practitioners. Such relationships can lead to opportunities to conduct theory-based evaluations of teaching, curricular, or administrative innovations on campus (Chen and Rossi, 1983). The next step involves integrating research with one's teaching or university service (Colbeck, 1998). Maintaining a participant-observer's perspective when serving on college and university committees enables a new faculty member to consider and develop researchable questions even while engaging in required service to the institution. Depending on the political climate at one's own institu-

tion, it may be possible to conduct such research on site, or it may be advisable to mold the ideas into a proposal to conduct the research at other institutions.

Once the research is done and the report drafted, new faculty should solicit critical feedback on their manuscripts from interested practitioners in addition to senior scholars (Boice, 1992). The current system for attaining tenure in most institutions rewards junior faculty more for publications directed toward a restricted audience of higher education scholars than for publications directed toward a broader readership. Although junior faculty members who wish to attain tenure must devote most of their writing time to addressing the scholarly audience, with a little help, they need not wait until tenure to also reach practitioners and stakeholders. Rather than trying to write for practitioners themselves, new faculty might seek assistance from their campus public information office. Public information officers are often experienced journalists and can help faculty reframe their research findings into short, tightly written press releases more likely to be read by administrators, legislative aides, or the general public than the faculty member's own carefully crafted scholarly articles.

Gatekeepers—Reviewers, Editors, and Senior Scholars. Scholars who serve as journal reviewers, editors, and members of tenure review committees make decisions that affect the overall direction of higher education research as well as the career paths of junior faculty. Editors and reviewers play a critical gatekeeping role, according to former *Journal of Higher Education* editor Robert Silverman, who said, "It is not enough that the authors get it right; the field should ask itself how it learns and grows as a field since it is gatekeeper qualities that foster such development" (1993, p. 510). Manuscripts accepted for publication in top higher education journals will not necessarily be simplified if they appeal to both scholars and practitioners. Instead manuscripts might meet two standards: the publications should help practitioners understand higher education in a way that will improve practice, and they should contribute to a theoretically useful body of knowledge (Lawler, 1985). Higher education journal editors might follow the examples of physics and biology journal editors. In their analysis of a stratified random sample of 350 articles from twelve top biology and physics journals, Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) found a noticeable shift from 1944 to 1989 in the way journals present scientific findings. Specifically, authors are increasingly highlighting statements of their experimental results in titles, abstracts, introductions, and section headings, whereas methods sections are presented in reduced type or in appendixes. This shift, which increasingly accentuates newsworthy information in journal articles, also provides evidence that scientific journals can and do adapt to readers' needs (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995). Certainly, editors of higher education journals could raise the standards for applicability and specificity in the *implications for practice* sections of journal articles. Too often, these sections include hastily written platitudes that show minimal understanding

of the likely utility or impact of research results on day-to-day practice in colleges and universities. Reviewers could contribute to the development of all scholars by providing suggestions for expanded and truly relevant implications for practice sections.

Senior scholars who mentor and review assistant professors of higher education for promotion and tenure are also gatekeepers whose recommendations ultimately shape the direction of research for the field as a whole. Terenzini asked, “Do we write for publication, and thereby, enhanced prospects for promotion and tenure? Or do we write to make a difference in the lives of others? That is not a dichotomous choice, of course, but the overlap at present is, I suspect, far smaller than it might be” (1996, p. 10). The choice, of course, ultimately rests more with senior faculty, who set standards for tenure and promotion, than with junior faculty, who are striving to meet those standards. Assistant professors’ efforts to reduce the research-practice gap can only be tentative until such efforts are strongly supported, if not enacted, by their senior colleagues. “Doing research that makes a difference,” according to organizational theorist R. H. Kilmann, “must, therefore, alter the design of research units, the performance criteria that guide their behavior, and the capacity of the system to adapt to the knowledge it creates—to practice what it preaches” (1985, p. 154). Higher education scholars who study faculty work, knowledge systems, and the impact of college experiences on learning seem ideally located to practice what they preach when it comes to fostering the work of junior faculty that advances both practice and theory.

There are several ways that senior scholars might help reduce the research-practice gap when reviewing junior faculty members’ portfolios. First, they might review all publications, including lay publications and evaluation reports for practitioners, for their contributions to theory and practice, rather than automatically rating articles published in scholarly journals as somehow better. Senior scholars might give more weight, however, to service that enhances practice rather than service to faculty members’ own departments or scholarly community. Finally, as a candidate’s portfolio moves up for review at the university level, senior scholars can make a strong case for well-designed and clearly written research that meets two high standards—the improvement of practice as well as the advancement of knowledge.

Practitioners. Administrators, policy analysts, and faculty in other disciplines can do much to enlist new higher education faculty in efforts to improve practice. Higher education faculty can provide service to their university communities in at least two ways. The first involves service on college and university committees similar to that performed by faculty in any and all disciplines. New higher education faculty in particular, however, should be nominated to serve on committees related to their areas of scholarly inquiry. That way, the committees benefit from the assistant professors’

background knowledge, and the assistant professors are likely to gain insight and information about current issues facing their own and other higher education communities. Often when campus issues are problematic enough to require more expertise than a faculty committee can provide, administrators hire consultants to conduct research or evaluations. Rather than hiring outside consultants, administrators might allocate funds to hire their local higher education experts to conduct theory-driven research (Chen and Rossi, 1983) that addresses institutional problems. Finally, practitioners can provide collegial feedback on assistant professors' manuscript drafts, paying particular attention to the implications for practice section.

Conclusion

The cost of silence for assistant professors who do not publish at all is very high. "Nonwriters," according to Boice, "have little say in shaping the policies, the funding, and the core educational materials of their disciplines" (1992, p. 161). Writing exclusively for an audience of one's scholarly peers in higher education, however, is another form of silencing. Those who do not write for practitioners are likely to have little say in shaping the policies, the funding, and the core educational materials of the higher education enterprise. New faculty can enhance the depth and applicability of their scholarship by building relationships with administrators and engaging in "the practice of listening as a process aimed at the birth of thinking and interaction" (Fiumara, 1990, p. 149).

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