SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH:
WHEN INFORMATION HAS IMPACT

Carl S. Dudley
Hartford Seminary

INTRODUCTION

I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for these two associations meeting together. In 1973 these two organizations first began joint meetings, about the time that I left 14 years as a parish pastor to became a teacher on the faculty of McCormick Theological Seminary. I joined both RRA and SSSR, and I have attended almost every meeting since then. During that quarter century I have written several books and numerous articles, workbooks, manuals, and guidelines. My primary focus has been the practical problems of religious leaders, lay and clergy, in congregations and judicatories. At the same time the content of my writing came directly and indirectly from the continuing dialogue between RRA and SSSR.

To this day I can remember the panels and papers where I discovered that *Gemeinshafi* in Ferdinand Tönnies (1957) could explain and predict behavior in small churches, so that listeners would approach me after presentations to ask when I had visited their church. I can recall the same power of explanation in Max Weber's concepts (Gerth and Mills, 1958; Eisenstadt, 1968) of religious asceticism and charismatic leadership, Ernst Troeltsch's ideal types (1960) of church and sect, and particularly the individual mystic as a perspective on the contemporary generation of seekers. I have used Louis Coser (1956) widely as a positive approach to religious conflict, and the Lionel Festinger (1956, 1957) discussion of cognitive dissonance has proved invaluable in many situations from seminary class in biblical studies to local committees on faith development and evangelism.

Over the years in our work together you made the insights of these giants come to life in ways that I could study in my own work and then translate into practical tools for use in the daily lives of congregational leaders. Consumer interest in this practical application is so great that our publications (your ideas, my printer) essentially paid for my five children to go through college, while the market keeps growing.

Therefore, I begin with immense personal and professional appreciation for the product of our conversations. In this year when we are especially conscious of our relationships, I want to explore some dimensions of the dialogue between SSSR and RRA. I believe that our annual joint meeting has and could continue to reflect an essential exchange between basic and applied research.

As we approach our combined 50th anniversary next year in Boston, many others have traced the distinguished histories of SSSR and RRA. Suffice to note here that the Religious Research Association has roots in the applied research tradition of H. Paul Douglass, while the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, in the shadow of Talcott Parsons, was organized to insure an emphasis on basic research in the sociology of religion. Over the past half century we have come much closer together, yet maintained separate organizations, membership, board, and journals. More than structure, each has distinctive questions, norms, ethos and other elements of culture -- one with a primary emphasis on understanding and the other with a push toward application.[1] I have discovered that even the same people act differently in the separate organizations, like lifelong church members from Georgia who move to California and no longer find time for worship. Over the years we have maintained amazing dialogue. Sometimes it has been clean and creative, sometimes we have switched positions to prove that we all do both; sometimes as an applied researcher I have experienced academic elitism, even arrogance, and sometimes responded in kind. Given all the overlapping interest and contingencies of our conditions, these have been good years, and they could be better.

SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH

Therefore my theme is "significant research." For statisticians "significant" has particular meaning, said with that amazing claim, a "level. of confidence." When Freudians say, "This is significant," it has a different meaning (perhaps they can claim a "level of experience"). In my view, "significant" research in the sociology of religion produces information that improves people's lives. With Shils, I want sociology to increase understanding, decrease pain.

Babbie admonishes that "we can't solve our problems until we understand them, and why they persist" (1995). I agree that information is not always immediately applied to action, and sometimes the loop between new information and changing lives travels slowly, through revised theory and paradigm change. But the ultimate social concern remains; as with Whitehead, "Unapplied knowledge is knowledge shorn of its meaning" (quoted in Selltiz, 1964).

Therefore, I want to address the challenge of research dissemination, since this lies at the core of significant research, since the joint meetings of SSSR/RRA have provided a unique opportunity for such dissemination for a generation, and since I believe our future strength and growth lies in purposeful tensions among various perspectives. I intend to affirm and to question the impact of our research within our disciplines. I will suggest several approaches that I think social scientists and religious practitioners could use more often to help the results of our studies have an impact among the people we study. The challenge of research dissemination needs to be explored several ways, as for example, with careful attention to changing media technology, with an eye to the constructive and sometimes oppressive politics of education, and with an awareness of the emerging voices of gender, generational, and ethnic groups of religious consciousness. I will focus on my own experience in studies of congregations and religious institutions (read "client"), and hope that others might find my views helpful elsewhere.

DISSEMINATION IN RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Over the years I have been honored and a little awed by participation in the parallel cultures of RRA/SSSR, which together are different from either church or seminary cultures,

in two fundamental ways. First, here I learned the explanatory power of sharply defined concepts and integrated social theory. Second, here I saw the function of careful attention to method as a set of disciplines that helps us to see the world more clearly, and to recognize at least some of our own biases. At the same time I found that both research and religious cultures have much in common, especially in similar values and social concerns.

In using sociological material, like many consultants and applied researchers, I am more likely to use revealing concepts than to borrow complex social theory (cf. Gouldnet, 1965). In fact, I am apt to mix and match concepts from a variety of sources, especially concepts that refocused congregational consciousness and mobilized the energy of members. For example, when I introduce Weber's "routinization of charisma," congregations discover that they are not the first to feel the drag of institutional inertia; by using the "culture of poverty," however controversial (Dudley, 1988), it gives communities an explanation outside themselves for their condition and it offers a target for change. Parenthetically, as someone who tries to make use of your research, however, often I find myself overwhelmed by the constant new inventions of analytical tools and scales. From my perspective (professional advancement notwithstanding), we would greatly assist the productive dissemination of basic and applied research if, as a group, we could agree on fewer frameworks of analysis, and use them longer and in more different situations (cf. Denzin, 1989).

Concerning the role of dissemination in research, initially I was misled since I approached this field through writing and processing financial grants. A major section in the introduction of every grant proposal contains promises that the results can, if properly understood, have an impact in the area of concern. Typically this claim appears in the introduction in language that is far more dramatic than descriptive. From this window, I thought dissemination must be important. But as I became a student of research methods, I discovered that dissemination is barely mentioned in foundational educational materials. There is a separate dissemination literature, but it is virtually absent in most primary textbooks on social research methodology. In the sequence of graduate education, dissemination, like teaching, is propagated through the culture, not learned in the curriculum.

Among you I learned that dissemination was the linear conclusion of disciplined scholarly research (Feeney, 1997). In the research culture I saw the concentric circles of sharing research findings among trusted colleagues, first through informal discussions in hallways and lunch rooms, and then in conferences and email conversations. When we become more informed and comfortable with our results, we publish them on web sites and in journal articles, and then make them public through books and news reports. As we argued about our findings in book reviews, footnotes, and classrooms, ripples of information spread, and the cycle of disciplined research begins again.

Disciplined linear dissemination of scholarly research is remarkably effective within clusters of professionals and among camps of various perspectives. Like any effective culture, we invent code words for arguments, as naming our debate over church attendance in the shorthand of "roll vs. poll." Linear dissemination provides both the cutting edge of creative thinking and the content by which our peers can judge validity, reliability, and relevance of our work (which implies the key role of dissemination in evaluation of both research and researchers, which lies beyond the scope of this paper). Such scholarly information is often important, sometimes dramatic. It is especially useful to report the findings of basic research, and for the dialogue that defines and reshapes social theory.

Linear dissemination dominates the training of young scholars and the medium of our conversations. If our information were limited to the papers from these annual RRA/SSSR meetings, we would conclude that linear dissemination is the only authorized and approved method. Or, more striking, if we read only the articles in either of our journals, disciplined linear dissemination appears to be the primary model that is practiced in the field. When we examine research proposals, dissemination is at the linear end of the research cycle. In a few brief words the researcher promises to translate research data into a report or publish a book, or perhaps have a conference among colleagues. Dissemination is invariably at the end, almost, it appears, an afterthought.

From a design perspective, I want to challenge the way our research falls short when dissemination is left to the end of the line. Sometimes when our primary interest is discovering new findings, we have not saved the energy for dissemination. Sometimes, for professional and institutional reasons, at the conclusion of a project we are already pursuing or pushed by commitments to the next project. But when we simply print our findings and "let dissemination take care of itself," it falls off the end of our plan, and severely limits the impact of the work we have already done.

Rather, like the social rituals of dialogue that are currency in the meetings of RRA/SSSR, we need intentional models of dissemination that include research partners from beyond our immediate professional peers. Alvin Gouldnet (1965) and Everett Rogers (1983) document ways that partners can improve the quality of the research itself,[2] while Selltiz et al. (1964) and Lindblom and Cohen (1979) show ways that partners substantially improve the chances that dissemination will have a more significant impact. Partners are effective, but, I am sad to report, such research designs may not help you professionally. Following Becker's analysis in early 1970, Denzin (1989) reports through the 1980s that although such innovative work may win awards, the safer course is more likely to produce professional advancement.

The equation is not complete, however, without mention of the substantial interest that foundations and funding agencies have recently expressed in dissemination as a measure of significant research. Staff of the Lilly Endowment, for example, have made it clear that at least half of its enthusiasm and financial support for a project is vested in intentional dissemination, and without such a plan funding is less likely. To take this invitation seriously, we need common language and working models to incorporate dissemination more fully and effectively into our research design. I propose five sources of partners for planned research dissemination.

FIVE SOURCES OF PARTNERS FOR RESEARCH DISSEMINATION

In their essay on *Useable Knowledge,* Lindblom and Cohen (1979) distinguish Professional Social Inquiry from ordinary knowledge by its grounding in social theory, disciplined methods, and particular issues. The authors maintain that the high standards of Professional Social Inquiry can be sustained in a variety of circumstances. In a similar way, partners for dissemination can be integrated into research design without any loss in standards of professional research.

Here are five sources: The most accessible partners come from other social sciences.[3] A second group of partners comes from members of the client population who join the research team. A third partnership can evolve out of the study itself as the authors seek to reach new audiences. A fourth kind of partnership develops when the researcher joins the client

community to help them generate essential information. A final partnership group erupts in times of crisis.

PROFESSIONAL TEAMS OF RESEARCH PARTNERS

In research on social issues that effect public policy, teams of professionals from different disciplines are common. I begin with a popular model to remind us that such partnerships are not new or strange. They often provide the foundation for seminal studies that dominate our professional literature (Selltiz et al., 1964). Some are integrated studies, like Robert Bellah team writing *Habits of the Heart* (1985), or Nancy T. Ammerman's research in *Congregation and Community* (1997). Many appear as collected essays from a common experience, like Demerath, Hall, Schmitt, and Williams' *Sacred Companies* (1998), and Becker and Eiesland's *Contemporary American Religion* (I 997). The challenge for such a group is to bring together the maximum diversity while maintaining a common core. Typically these teams are enriched by including racial/ethnic and religious, gender and generational differences as well. Such teams are designed to enhance the quality of research and multiply the avenues of dissemination.

Twenty years ago, in search of funding such an eclectic group called itself the Congregational Studies Project Team. The team had a research agenda to develop study tools and analytical frames to better understand congregations, and it had a dissemination agenda to raise consciousness about congregations and congregational studies in educational institutions and among religious leaders. From our diverse connections we assembled a list of several hundred scholars and practitioners who share an interest in congregations, and published a directory in 1981. The following year in Atlanta we sponsored a national conference on studying congregations that attracted over 400 academics, consultants, pastors, and denominational staff. We published the conference papers *(Building Effective Ministry,* Harper and Row, 1983) and a collection of analytical tools for congregational studies that we gathered from participants *(Whole Church Catalogue,* Alban, 1984). When we finally published the *Handbook for Congregational Studies* (Abingdon, 1986), the channels of dissemination were already in place.

In effect *we used the multi-disciplinary composition of our team to plant an interest in congregational studies in different worlds from which we came.* For example, I can trace the source of publications in several disciplines -- sociology of religion, organizational theory, philanthropy, ethnography, religious history, urban church development, social work, ethnic studies, immigrant groups, and theology for example -- all seeded or nourished from a common project. Responses from these publications have filtered back into the conversation of the team, precipitating a substantial revision of the *Handbook,* which has been published this year as *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Abingdon, 1998). Many others can testify to the ways that professional networks improve our research, while I am encouraging their use as intentional designs for research dissemination.

On the other hand, multi-disciplinary teams have liabilities. *The challenge for such a group is to define and accept a set of standards that is essential to a common task,* and sometimes expectations come into conflict. I recall once as an editor I received a threatening letter from the pastor of a case study we published. In the case the church was well disguised, but the pastor claimed that the case had been sent to his bishop by dissent parishioners who wanted the pastor relocated. Upon investigation we discovered that they made the connection because a practitioner on our team had visited the church, "just trying to be helpful." In that

moment we all re-learned the difference between the objectivity of research and the intimacy of consulting. Sometimes in our congregational studies team we experienced such sharp differences of values and commitment that civil communication simply disappeared. I remember one evening when a group of social analysts and religious practitioners watched a film that depicted a congregational disaster. In the discussion that followed, one practitioner, listening to the sociologists analyze the issues, smashed his fist on the table, called everyone else in the room "calloused atheists," and walked out. That did not happen every meeting, but generally conflict contributed to our insights at least as much as discovering common ground.

No design, however effective in its internal communication, will automatically eliminate our bias. For the Congregational Studies Project Team, our most difficult, unfinished business is to broaden the rational/Protestant perspective that we have assumed in the ground rules of research design. *Simply including articulate individuals from radically different views has not resulted in removing all of our initial bias.* After working several years to be inclusive, *Studying Congregations* still shows its primary roots in rational/Protestant logic that is embedded in the social sciences generally. Soon after it was published, for example, I received an email from a church leader in San Francisco protesting that the section on conflict sold out to the majority community because it did not reflect different ways that Asians and Alaskans settle disputes. Being multi-disciplinary is not necessarily multi-cultural.

In the Professional Network Approach, both cross-disciplinary conversation and dissemination are planned into the research design. Dissemination that addresses broad social concerns depends on our intentional use of these networks not only to strengthen our projects, but also to inform and involve professional colleagues in other disciplines.

CLIENT COLLABORATION

A second source of research partners is not as popular, but may be more respectful and revealing. In this approach the research team intentionally includes selected representatives from the target population (Rogers, 1983). The clients that join in this approach are seeking information, not transformation. The team adheres to a scholarly research agenda, to better know the situation objectively, without a partisan commitment to achieve particular changes. This distinction is important because client participation has been too often only identified with a change-oriented agenda. *Being There* (1997) by Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and Marler and *Gatherings in Diaspora* (1998) by Warner and Wittner are ethno-graphic studies in which teams of scholars became active participants who creatively solicited the insights of their client groups. I am now working in a major project using Client Collaborators to design and disseminate our work. The project was sparked by an RRA panel in St. Louis in 1995 where a few denominational researchers first explored the possibility of a common congregational survey in conjunction with the U.S. census in 2000. In the last three years, with the support of the Lilly Endowment, we have created the Cooperative Congregational Studies Project." Cooperative is significant because all participants must designate their own research director, and pay time and travel expenses to attend meetings and half of the direct cost of the survey research. In addition, each group must designate a key teacher to participate in the total project, with the special task to design and implement a strategy of dissemination. They want to know more, but they openly reject any a *priori* assumptions of planned change. With my colleague and co-director David Roozen, and now 60 of my closest professional and practitioner friends, we include more than 40 religious bodies who share Client Collaboration in all phases of the project from design to dissemination.

We began with eight mainline ("old line"), Protestant denominations that have research offices, that have been joined by an equal number of Protestant conservative groups with research capacity. Catholics are represented by the Research Forum; Jews participate through the Cohen Center at Brandeis University; the Mormons sent an official letter from the appropriate elder; four Orthodox Christian groups are connected through their seminaries. Historic Black Churches are developing an information Center in Atlanta, and the Muslim ties have been funded by overseas money. Finally we have three lists of independent/fundamentalist Christians, of about 5000 each, assembled through the publishers that serve as their only denomination-like links, and two lists of megachurches that overlap all of the above. All of this has employment implications: although only seven denominations have in-house research offices, but at least 30 others have working relationships with allied agencies, seminaries, colleges and universities. Denominational research jobs have changed hats, but they are available in a variety of new locations and liaisons.

Participation in the project makes another point. These 40+ religious groups were not intimidated by participatory research. We found in every case when we approached the senior denominational leader directly about participation, the answer was "No." But when we poked around within each group to find someone who was already engaged in their internal research, we found that the contact person could, with effort and wile, gain official sanction and financial support for their participation. From this I take a larger insight: Religious bodies are not interested in outsiders prying into their affairs. But those same religious groups are very willing to share information in a collaborative style of client participation. In fact, when the *Hartford Courant* ran a story on the 40+ groups in this project, the only response I received was a letter from a local Hindu society saying that they were offended by not being invited.

Note three effects of client collaboration: First, *it creates unexpected allies.* In this design mainline Protestant researchers are numerically in the minority (but compensated in noise what they lacked in numbers). Against this Protestant assertion, an unlikely coalition of Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Roman Catholic voices-who radically disagreed among themselves on the meaning of tradition-united in a chorus of protest against what they called the "evangelical-activist oppression of all existing congregational surveys." By "evangelical," of course, they rejected the language of "Jesus saves." More important, they reject defining congregations by "activist" language of program and belief, and requested measures for spiritual sensibilities and religious practices that they felt would more accurately define all of their groups, yet each one differently.

Second, *client collaboration helps participants to see themselves in a fresh light.* As this group explored our differences in religious heritage expressed in such areas as worship, leadership, piety, and sense of belonging, some participants found this activity profoundly moving. As they heard the faith of others, they discovered and affirmed their own faith in areas that they had taken for granted. We also found two areas of common ground. One is organizational -- all groups needed to involve volunteers, raise money, and settle conflicts, and virtually all had used the material of organizational consultants like Loren Mead and Lyle Schaller. The other common ground was spiritual -- all groups worshiped and worked to sustain spiritual communities. The absence of research literature that compared their common spiritual quest has presented a formidable challenge and creative edge for our project.

Third, *client collaboration reinforced the uniqueness of each dissemination design.* Some groups have officials (like bishops) or authoritative sacred texts designated to make decisions that give them unity, while other religious groups appealed to broad participation of congregations to give them strength. As a result, in planning dissemination some project participants were anxious to distribute the research findings as soon and broadly as possible, while others worded openly that the results of survey research might confuse congregations, which had neither practice or power to decide. The resulting dissemination designs were idiosyncratic and labor intensive.

In sum, dissemination through client collaboration can be exhausting. It has one compelling asset. Other forms of dissemination, like books and web sites, send ripples out from an epicenter center of information that dissipate with distance. In client collaborator research the consumer invites the information, so that, like a tidal wave in shallow water, research data gains the energy of acceptance as it approaches the shore. Invested labor pays off only when the client really wants to know.

MEDIATORS, TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS

A third kind of partnership can evolve from a combination of professional networks and/or client participants, when a basic researcher works closely with clients or applied researchers to produce practical application of previous research. A few authors seem able to bridge the gap, but most seem to settle on reaching a particular audience. We see these differences more vividly when the same authors provide parallel publications, one for a scholarly audience and the other for religious practitioners, as, for example, Hadaway and Roozen (and vice versa) on church growth (1993, 1995) and Hoge, Zech, McNamara, and Donahue on church finance (1996, 1997). The content is similar between each set of books, and both avoided the condescension of a bad children's sermon. Rather, in their academic publication both sets of books move from theory to practice, while in books for practitioners both begin with problems and then show the relevance of theory. Like the best of children's sermons, the practice oriented books may be more accessible to everyone.

For dissemination strategies, these publications show an important shift in focus. *The books for social analysts are constructed around conceptual considerations, what to look for and then what to look at (where to find it). Books for practical action tell the reader where to look first and then what to look for.* The first begins with theory, and then supporting evidence; the second begins with stories and cases, and then offers the discoveries. There is a large market for research dissemination through case bound workbooks written with the same discipline we invest in academic research.

Two giants that compete commercially in dissemination of religious research -- namely, Alban Institute and Percept -- take almost opposite approaches. Alban Institute begins with consultants to help congregations to define their problems, from which Alban generates its workshops and publications, building from the particular problems to more universal principles. Percept invests heavily in statistical packages of community and congregational analysis, and then trains leaders to access and apply these statistical data. Others, like Barna and Leadership Network, have developed a dissemination dialogue with clients who move with them from research to workshops and back again, like postmodern denominations that are disposable tomorrow.

At the moment there exists an industry of mediators and translators who broker the

research generated by members of RRA/SSSR. Some of these interpreters sophisticated, and appear shallow in appreciating research; some have insights, and others specialize in Delphic aphorisms about social With all the effort that members of our societies have invested in disciplined research, I am surprised that so little work is directed to studies of the introduced by consultants, interpreters, and spokespersons who translate your work into the vernacular of religious leaders. Some are excellent, some shoddy, and some are dangerous, and I share your concern that you will be quoted out of context or used for inappropriate purposes.

Therefore, as societies in dialogue, *I invite us together to spend some of our reserves to take a hard look at this middle layer of dissemination* from whom religious leaders learn most about the work we are Beyond studying others, I encourage more members of SSSR and RRA participate directly in dissemination at the conference and congregational I am not suggesting merely the application of basic research in practical the paradigm of theory-to-practice is dead (but not buried). Rather I am inviting basic and applied researchers to learn from each other -- and learn learning -- as we participate together in research dissemination.

CHANGE AGENT ALLIES IN DISSEMINATION

The fourth approach to dissemination announces the elephant in the sanctuary (Rogers, 1983; Schaller, 1998). Even more than translators and mediators, the change agent industry is the largest and most pervasive form of religious research dissemination, although it seems marginalized and often denigrated in the meetings of RRA/SSSR. I commend Suzanne Feeney (1997) for including the Change Agent in her models of dissemination. By acknowledging the elephant, she encourages religious research to accept the same practical concerns so evident in health, education, marketing, industrial, and other expressions of sociology. Change Agent dissemination shifts goals from awareness to action, from information to transformation. The researcher, the practitioner, the client, and the funding source make commitments toward particular results.

In applied research the basic tasks remain the same, with perhaps even greater urgency: to define problems, gather data, name patterns, and share results. It is partisan only in purpose; more than education, *the purpose of change agent dissemination is to give congregational leaders the tools to change their situation.* More than the work of an outside expert, the change agent process is a cooperative effort in which researchers help insiders to study for themselves, about themselves. In applied research the professional is surrounded and outnumbered, and must train the insiders to do the job together.

In the Change Agent approach, dissemination is not at the end of the process, but the center. Change agent research provides the congregation with the essential information that it needs for renewed commitments of members toward definable goals of ministry. It uses the research process to resolve problems by raising consciousness, training leaders and developing networks that can address the issues they face. Dissemination becomes the midpoint of the project -- the end is trained leaders, altered behavior, an energized congregation.

Gathering and analyzing information are only part of the process. *Change Agent research is not only a skill to be learned, but for congregational leaders it is a self-confidence to be gained.* When we used Change Agent strategy with the Church and Community Project in the Midwest, dissemination was achieved by a constant flow of information through conferences,

training workshops, and newsletters that provided a showcase for their successes, which were managed or written by participants themselves. In another way we discovered their need for self-confidence: when we began our work with congregations we believed that they could discover their social context by studying their communities. In practice we discovered the opposite, that self-confidence must precede self-study. Like individuals, congregations are skilled in denial, and in our project they could not see what they thought they could not change (Dudley, 1996). In all these ways, the first task of a change agent is to help church members believe that they can make a difference.

CRISIS COALITIONS

Crises coalitions are the most dramatic expression of participatory dissemination and therefore deserve special attention. Such emergencies are a step beyond the conditions that congregations want to admit. In an era of moving from management by objectives to cultural analysis, Russell Ackhoff made the situation clear:

> *"Managers are not confronted with problems that are independent of each other, but with dynamic situations that consist of complex systems of changing problems that interact with each other. I call such situations messes. Problems are abstractions extracted from messes by analysis; they are to messes as atoms are to tables and charts…Managers do not solve problems, they manage messes" (Schön, 1983:16).*

Crisis research begins with sorting out messes and identifying problems. In a classic article on "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," Ann Swidler (1986) provides two elements that are essential to dissemination of research in the trenches of congregational crises. First, she notes the difference between settled and unsettled situations, suggesting that, in unsettled times, participants have a more narrow focus on more specific behaviors and beliefs. Secondly, she suggests that culture should be construed as a tool kit for constructing strategies of action. *These two characteristics -- the narrow focus on specific behavior and belief and the wide array of options offered in the tool kit--provide an excellent description of dissemination materials that are most utilized among those who manage messes.* Lyle Schaller (1998), who has a genius for practical dissemination of social analysis (although he professes to be unburdened from partisan theology or social theory), provides an apt model throughout his distinguished career of offering the tool kit to those in need, typically 44 options to every situation confronted by the congregation, often well footnoted but always presented in the vernacular of the laity. Peter Kaldor and his associates (1994, 1995, 1997) have brilliantly combined disciplined research with user-friendly materials reflecting their studies of churches in Australia. Kaldor recognizes the mess confronted by local churches, and honors local leaders by not telling them answers but offering them options. Then they can decide for themselves the emphasis and the energy that will mobilize their congregation in conditions that only they know best.

In the opposite approach, James March and his neo-institutional associates (see DiMaggio in Demereth et al., 1998) have escalated Ackhoff's "mess" into a more fully developed "garbage can theory" of management. Rather than proposing that problems can be sorted out and resolved, March observes that non-profit institutions (like schools and churches) do not solve problems but defer them for later by hashing and rehashing the options. (A friend once defined these meetings as "the time when everything has been said, but not everyone has said it.") These erudite and endless conversations March calls "garbage can management," as he observes that educational administrators schedule numerous

strategic planning sessions and retreats of garbage can activity to distract the faculty's attention, while the administrators quietly make essential decisions for everyone. It's far from the participatory dissemination that we once idolized.

In summary, these dissemination approaches move from the pure scholarly to crisis management, but they are not mutually exclusive. Researchers can mix and match these approaches, even changing models as projects mature and the dissemination moment unfolds. Some basic research should be expressed linear dissemination, but most research would move more easily from important information to social significance with the addition of partners in the process. When we have defined the landscape more clearly, scholars will find it easier to engage in practical application, practitioners will have more access to scholarly research, and both can learn from the experience. Many others would join this exchange, D. Min. students and graduates, for example, moving toward more disciplined, comprehensive research, if the way were clearly marked and more inviting.

IMPLICATIONS

In RRA and SSSR we need to name and celebrate the historic gift of dialogue between basic and applied research that has been the unique character of our meetings together for thirty years. We need to identify and maintain the strengths of each culture in dialogue with the other.

For RRA and SSSR we need two separate journals, one to start at the top with Disciplined Linear Dissemination and work down the list, and the other to begin at the bottom with Crisis Coalitions and Change Agent strategies, and work up. In research design, we need to be more imaginative and articulate about our strategies of dissemination. We need some members who will define and champion particular approaches to dissemination, and we need some who specialize in spraining boundaries.

We need some research designs that place dissemination not at the linear end of our projects, but closer to the center, to make possible intentional development of professional networks, client participation, shared authorship to different audiences, change agent strategies, and crisis collaboration. In this process we can develop conversation partners far beyond the members of our associations. We need dissemination included in the way that research design is taught in graduate schools and reflected in commonly used textbooks. We need norms that encourage the dialogue between basic and applied research, like developing fewer new scales and sustaining interest in existing analytical frameworks. Like all prejudice, between academic researchers and applied practitioners we should rid ourselves of subtle put-downs and condescension, or over-reactions to perceived slights, and live together in a Lake Wobegone world where we are "all above average."

Since congregations are culturally distinct from professional researchers and practitioners, in our dissemination designs we should look more closely at the influence of mediating groups (such as consultants, denominational staff, seminary faculty, religious and secular press) who translate, filter, and perhaps distort the research we produce.

In all our work, we should treat congregations and other consumers as cross cultural opportunities, as respected clients, and as possible partners in research. We should offer to them our research as resources (not interventions) to be used as they best understand, and learn with them as they adapt research to the conditions of their world.

NOTES

1. Since the time of Douglass and Parsons many social scientists have made an effort to personally bridged the gap between basic and applied research, but few have made a similar effort to engage the participation of organizations and communities being studied in ways that strengthen the research and increase the impact of dissemination. For an overview of ways that participation impacts dissemination in organizations, see Bunker and Alban (1997).

2. Considering the variety of uses of "praxis" in the social sciences in the past half century it hardly seems necessary to argue that basic and applied research contribute to each other (cf. Schöen, 1983; Turner, 1994). A more dramatic recent breakthrough is seen among theologians who have advocated a similar reciprocity between systematic and practical theology (e.g., Schreiter, 1985; Browning, 1991).

3. I especially appreciate the pioneering work of Suzanne Feeney who outlined four models of dissemination, namely Traditional Model, Iterative Model, Change Agent Model, and Hybrid or Coordination Model (1997).

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