Over half of U.S. public school teachers have master’s degrees. Many courses that these teachers took to earn their degrees included reading and analyzing research studies. And many of these teachers wrote a master’s thesis or research papers to complete the requirements for the degree. Among those teachers without an advanced degree, most have been exposed to recent research in their discipline or educational specialty through professional development workshops, media articles, or classroom research projects. And whatever their undergraduate or graduate-level coursework, many teachers search restlessly in academic journals and professional literature for studies that will point to ways that they can improve what they do daily in classrooms. So most teachers have been either consumers or creators (or both) of research.

But that familiarity with research seldom stills the frequent and intense rhetoric from policy makers, researchers, administrators, and lay reformers who ask teachers to use “evidence-based practice” and “best practices” identified in research studies. They want teachers to incorporate results of scientific studies into their lessons on fractions and decimals, phonics, photosynthesis, and the causes of the Civil War.

Moreover, since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001—which mentions variations of “scientifically based research” over 100 times—the calls upon teachers to use research in classroom practice have multiplied. The federally funded What Works Clearinghouse, founded in 2002 to “provide educators, policy makers, and the public with a central and trusted source of scientific evidence of what works in education,” concentrates on empirical studies meeting rigorous standards of effectiveness as measured by standardized test scores. It’s no surprise, then,
that interest in getting teachers to use knowledge harvested from research literature, especially from experimental and quasi-experimental studies, has increased dramatically in the past decade.

Yet despite so many teachers being exposed to research in their graduate programs, an expanding empirical base for effective programs, and a large population of teachers familiar with the ins and outs of research, little of that knowledge has filtered into classroom practice. Decade after decade, critics have characterized teacher use of research as slim.

This marginal use of research by classroom teachers, however, has not occurred for lack of trying. For decades, university teacher educators have taught undergraduates and graduates how research studies are put together, identified studies that can improve practice, and assigned research projects. State, federal, and private efforts over decades have spread the results of research studies to teachers. Consider, for example, the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) that began in 1966. It contains more than a million documents, most of which are studies freely available to anyone. The National Diffusion Network (NDN) disseminated research on programs that worked in classrooms between 1974 and 1995. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) started its Educational Research and Dissemination program for classroom teachers in 1981.

Here, then, is a puzzle: we have highly educated teachers familiar with research joined to mighty efforts to channel scholarship into practice, and yet the bulk of the nation’s teacher corps seemingly ignores scholarship easily accessible to it.

There are reasons galore for this puzzle’s existence. For some critics of academic research, the primary reason is that most studies answer questions teachers seldom ask. So many studies are largely irrelevant to those issues that plague teachers daily. Other critics see the reason in teachers themselves, who are so immersed in a culture of practice where experience and stories carry far more weight than findings from scientific studies. And then there are those who point to the age-graded school and the structural constraints (e.g., schedules that leave little time for teachers to meet and discuss instructional issues, number of students taught) that fix teachers’ attention on daily logistics rather than applying results of scientific studies.
Whatever the reasons, most teachers, critics say, ignore the fruits of research studies that could be used to enhance both teaching and student learning. Instead, most teachers rely on experience-based practice—that is, the authority that comes from the knowledge and skills they've gained through prior experience and the wisdom of respected colleagues.

The situation, however, is not as grim as critics imply. Those familiar with the history of teaching know that certain ideas shaped and baked in academia, have, indeed, been adopted and adapted by teachers and put into practice in their classrooms. And that fact is an important clue to unraveling the conundrum.

Jack Schneider, a historian of education, has turned that clue into an eye-opening book. He does what gifted songwriters do: create a new melody or rearrange a familiar one, add fresh lyrics, and enthrall listeners. He does so by artfully building an original interpretation about teacher use of research. And his “song” will surprise teacher educators, policy makers, researchers, and lay reformers baffled over the puzzle of teachers who are knowledgeable about research yet seldom adopt scientific findings to improve their classroom practice.

The central question that drives *From the Ivory Tower to the Schoolhouse* is straightforward: what explains the fact that some scholarly ideas, and not others, have appeared in classrooms practices? Schneider answers that question by examining Bloom's taxonomy, multiple intelligences, the project method, and Direct Instruction—concepts stamped “Made in Academia.” Schneider travels through time, from a century ago to the recent past, to identify the features of those ideas that have made them accessible and useful to teachers in their daily work.

Not only does Schneider make the case for the key features of those four ideas that tie together their successful research-to-practice journey, but he also takes four very similar research-driven concepts—the affective taxonomy, the triarchic theory, project-based learning, and behavioral analysis, also baked in the ivory tower—that stumbled on their way into classrooms, seldom making it past the classroom transom. He shows that some features characterizing the successful transplant of research findings were missing in action in these comparable ventures.
In clear, crisp prose enlivened by spot-on quotes, richly detailed examples, and flashes of humor, Schneider offers readers—particularly teacher educators, researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and lay reformers—a fresh historical explanation for the puzzle of teachers and their uneven use of research to improve classroom practice.

In this fine book, Schneider shows how historical research not only begins unlocking policy conundrums but also can inform policies that might well bring teachers and scholars together to deal with the complexities of classroom practice. Whether the suggestions he offers in the closing pages, based on those research ideas that have informed and changed classroom practice, will indeed alter the historic breach between the ivory tower and the schoolhouse, I cannot say. But these suggestions surely got me thinking that they are worth trying in order to mend the unfortunate gap that persists between researchers and classroom teachers.

—Larry Cuban
Professor Emeritus
Stanford University