

SES SYMPOSIUM OUTLINE/RATIONALE 4 NOVEMBER 2010

Beyond impact: Connecting research to policy and practice?

The relationships between educational research, policy and practice are vitally significant and one of the perennial themes within the field of education. This is not surprising given that educational research, generally, has an orientation towards the improvement of educational policy and practice: what changes are the conditions under which these questions are being asked, the meaning of the key concepts that are drawn from in debate and the precise purposes of the work of policy makers, practitioners and researchers.

A number of recent developments have contributed to the renewed interest in questions about the interrelationships between research, policy and practice in education. One development is the discussion about evidence. This is not only about changing policy and practice to make them more evidence-informed or evidence-based, but also about changing research so as to generate useful and relevant insights. In some interpretations this is concerned with the production of scientific knowledge about 'what works'; for others, it is about exploring 'what might work in what specific contexts, why and whether that could be transferred to other contexts'. Within the UK the Teaching and Learning Research Programme, which ran from the late 1990s for about a decade, has put a strong emphasis on the need to engage policy makers and practitioners early on in the research cycle. In this way it has tried to provide an alternative for the traditional idea of dissemination to policy and practice only after the research has been conducted and completed. A further impetus for renewed interest in these questions has come from the Research Excellence Framework and its attempt to make 'impact' into one of the indicators of research quality.

Our aim with this symposium is not to identify the 'magic bullet' that will solve all issues once and for all, but to consider various perspectives and to engage in a conversation about meaningful connections between research, policy and practice in light of current developments and trends. We envisage that such a conversation will address questions about knowledge and research, about communication and interaction, about values and politics, about accountability and improvement, about usefulness and critical distance, and about what research, policy and practice can realistically expect and ask from each other. We will explore this through contributions from researchers, policy makers and practitioners, focusing on practical examples and theoretical reflection, and with attention for how these issues play out in other academic and professional fields.