

Executive Summary

There is increasing pressure across OECD countries for greater accountability and effectiveness in education policies and systems. Still, available information often does not provide the elements necessary for decision-making, either because the rigorous research relevant to policy needs has not been conducted, or the research that is available does not suggest a single course of action.

Evidence in Education: Linking Research and Policy explores the issues underlying the use of evidence in educational policy-making. It discusses what constitutes evidence for research in education, how that evidence can best be utilised, and possible solutions to challenges observed by participating countries.

Research is playing a newly important role for evidence-informed policy – but what counts as evidence?

The OECD Secretariat analysis argues that the recent re-emergence of this issue is due to a number of key factors, including:

- a greater concern with student achievement outcomes;
- a related explosion of available evidence due to a greater emphasis on testing and assessment;
- more explicit and vocal dissatisfaction with education systems, nationally and locally;
- increased access to information via the Internet and other technologies; and
- resulting changes in policy decision-making. These are accentuated by broader issues to do with the perceived legitimacy of policy-making in general.

At the same time, there has been a shift across most OECD countries to de-centralise decision-making in education, giving more responsibility and mandating to local authorities. Given greater information, less quality control, a more informed public, and a greater diversity of policy makers, the role of research for evidence-informed policy becomes newly important.

Part One also contains the contribution of two well-respected methodologists, Tom Cook from Northwestern University (United States) and Stephen Gorard from University of York (United Kingdom), who look at the need for quality research and the appropriate methodology in education research. This issue is tackled in the form of a dialogue in which each author first states his position in terms of the key concerns for education research methodology, and then exchange on what counts and should count as evidence. Cook and Gorard concur that experimental designs, and especially that of randomised control trials, should be given a stronger role, though they differ on their

exact place in the range of research instruments. For policy-making, is it a question of using the best available evidence, or should only the best evidence be used (which would imply that evidence that does not meet the gold standard could not be used)?

Brokerage agencies are key stakeholders in linking research and policy

Part Two looks at linking research to policy and the interface between communities of stakeholders. In doing so it provides a series of studies of existing and newly formed brokerage agencies. Chronologically they range from EPPI-Centre in the United Kingdom (formed in 1993) to the Knowledge Chamber of the Netherlands and the Danish Knowledge Clearinghouse, which were created as a result of the OECD/CERI workshop series that provided the basis for this publication.

The brokerage agencies are also distinguished in their goals and means, with New Zealand's Best Evidence Synthesis Programme providing an example of a brokerage programme embedded within the Ministry whereas the Canadian Council on Learning, although also federally funded, is separate from the provincial Ministries. The United States' What Works Clearinghouse works in collaboration with a number of other institutes and subcontractors, and also conducts consumer surveys and questionnaires to ensure that the service it provides is meeting the demands of the users (researchers, practitioners, policy makers, etc).

As part of the continuing effort to draw parallels between education and other subject areas and learn from relevant experience, Part Two also provides an example from the field of Social Care in the form of the United Kingdom's Social Care Institute for Excellence (www.scie.org.uk). From this contribution we can observe both the similarities of experience, goals, and efforts of a brokerage agency in this domain, as well as some shared challenges.

Implementing evidence-informed policy research: promising examples of national programmes

Several examples from the field, drawn from a number of different countries (Canada, Finland, Singapore, United Kingdom) are presented in **Part Three**. Canada's contribution looks at the launch of the National Children's Agenda, which focused on the long-term vision of fostering good Canadians by aiming for lifelong learners, productive workers, nurturing parents, and engaged citizens. Life as Learning (Finland) was set up as a national research programme aimed at encouraging the development of a research culture to support interdisciplinary and international research projects.

The contribution from Singapore is unique in that it is a non-OECD country with an unparalleled set of funding and research opportunities, including a strong database with data on the entire student population. Lastly the United Kingdom's Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) is an immensely complex initiative with assured medium-term funding (2000-2011) that aspires to improve the quality of education research in the United Kingdom as well as contributing new knowledge.

All of the contributions allow us a close look at the quality of the relationships between the primary stakeholders as well as how the project bridges the gap between the

evidence they can provide and the needs of the policy maker. This section thus serves as both a set of concrete examples interesting in their own right and as a way to observe the various theoretical issues discussed in this volume in practice. Similarly to Part Two, it includes an example from outside the Education field, in this case a programme governed by the Department of Human Resources and Social Development (Canada).

Politicians' perspectives

The evidence-based policy research debate has to large extent been focused on policy makers and researchers as the major players. In **Part Four** we hear the voice of the politician, charged with making decisions and evaluating the best way forward for the education system in their jurisdiction. Johnny Nilsson, the former Secretary of State for Education in Sweden, speaks of the experience of the past and some of the limitations and concerns of the politician in a period without the current emphasis on evidence-based policy. We hear also of the serious weight that has been placed on this process in the Netherlands, and how and why this work was so important to the Minister of Education, Science, and Culture, Maria van der Hoeven. The Netherlands has a number of initiatives that have followed from the OECD/CERI work and are looking to the future.

Jane Davidson of Wales uses her experience as the longest serving education minister in the United Kingdom to discuss the role of evidence in policy-making and the struggle she has engaged in to bring it to the forefront of the policy-making process. Finally we have a unique case study from Poland, which has recently brought together current and former Ministers and decision-makers in an on-going effort to raise the priority and profile of education research in policy-making in that country. Jerzy Wisniewski, former senior civil servant and CERI Governing Board member, contributes the challenges and aspirations of a country that is just beginning to focus on these issues.

Evidence in Education: Linking Research and Policy brings together international experts on evidence-informed policy in education from OECD countries. The report looks at the issues facing educational policy makers, researchers, and stakeholders – teachers, media, parents – in using evidence to best effect. It focuses on the challenge of effective brokering between policy makers and researchers, offers examples of policy-relevant research from Canada, Finland, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, and presents politicians' perspectives. This book provides a fresh angle on key issues facing policy makers, researchers, and school leaders today.