

The future of education research at IES: Research that is useful and used

Comments by Carrie Conaway • June 29, 2021

What characterizes research that is useful and used?

- Always relevant
- Often descriptive and localized
- Often internal or in partnership

What does research use look like?

- Instrumental: informing a specific decision
- Conceptual: influencing the problems we work on and the solutions we consider
- Social: making meaning together from research findings

What could NCER and NCSE do to promote research that is useful and used?

Demand

1. Fund studies on how to measure research use
2. Fund studies on mechanisms and enabling conditions for increasing research use
3. Fund training programs on research use for educators in preparation and in practice

Supply

1. Increase the voice of practice in guiding research funding
 - a. Reinvigorate the NBES board and use all 7 available lots for practitioners
 - b. Include practitioners in the review process to evaluate relevance and feasibility
 - c. Increase funding to support answering questions from practice
 - d. Ask practitioners what problems they're trying to solve, what they think their next big issue will be, what they're curious about.
2. Reduce the barriers to the grant application process, especially for start-up projects
 - a. Create a grant program to support immediate evaluation needs: short term, small dollars, simple application, one-month turnaround on review
3. Require stronger evidence of authentic partnership for studies in local education settings
4. Prioritize the types of projects that actually answer practitioners' questions
 - a. "What are effective strategies for solving my problem?" → meta-analyses and synthetic literature reviews
 - b. "Is it true for me?" → replications, descriptive work
 - c. "How and why does it work?" → inquiry on causal mechanisms, not just impacts
5. Fund research-practice partnerships to build local knowledge on local priorities
 - a. Differentiated to support RPPs at different stages of development
6. Fund training programs for researchers on how to work effectively with practitioners
 - a. Communication/translation (writing for non-academic audiences)
 - b. Navigating people and organizations in contested spaces

Market-clearing mechanisms

1. Fund research on what boundary spanners do and how they do it
2. Fund research staff in practice settings, and network them together
3. Fund convenings that bring researchers and practitioners together to make meaning from research