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Knowledge Brokers in Education: How Intermediary Organizations Are Bridging the Gap Between Research, Policy and Practice Internationally

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Abstract: Interest in how to better connect research to policy and practice is gaining momentum globally. Also gaining widespread agreement is the view that intermediary organizations have an important role to play in facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships between researchers, practitioners and policymakers in order to increase the mobilization of research and its impact in public service sectors. Knowledge mobilization (KMb) includes efforts to strengthen linkages between research, practice and policy in public service sectors. This special issue explores a range of intermediary organizations, networks and initiatives in order to showcase how research-practice-policy gaps are being addressed in different contexts.

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Intermediadores de conocimiento en educación: ¿Cómo las organizaciones intermedias están acortando la brecha entre la investigación, la política y la práctica a nivel internacional?

Resumen: El interés por mejorar las conexiones entre la investigación y los ámbitos de la política y la práctica está ganando impulso en todo el mundo. También esta generalizándose la opinión de que las organizaciones intermedias tienen un papel importante en la facilitación de asociaciones entre investigadores, profesionales y responsables políticos con el fin de aumentar la movilización de la investigación y su impacto en sectores de servicios públicos. La movilización del conocimiento (KMB) incluye esfuerzos para fortalecer los vínculos entre la investigación, la práctica y la política en los sectores de servicios públicos. Este número especial explora una gama de organizaciones intermedias, redes e iniciativas con el fin de mostrar cómo se están abordando áreas problemáticas en las relaciones entre la investigación-práctica-política en diferentes contextos.

Palabras clave: movilización de los conocimientos; intercambio de conocimientos; intermediarias; organizaciones de intermediación de investigación.

Intermediadores de conhecimento em educação: Como as organizações intermediárias estão fazendo a ponte entre pesquisa, política e prática internacionalmente?

Resumo: O interesse em melhorar as ligações entre a investigação e as áreas da política e prática está ganhando força em todo o mundo. Também esta generalizando a opinião de que as organizações intermediárias têm um papel importante na facilitação de parcerias entre pesquisadores, profissionais e políticos, a fim de aumentar a mobilização dos conhecimentos de investigação e seu impacto nos sectores dos serviços públicos. Mobilização do Conhecimento (KMB) inclui esforços para reforçar as ligações entre a investigação, a prática e política nas áreas de serviços públicos. Este dossiê explora uma série de organizações intermediárias, redes e iniciativas a fim de mostrar como elas estão lidando com problemas das relações entre contextos de pesquisa-prática-política em diferentes áreas.

Palavras-chave: mobilização de conhecimentos; partilha de conhecimentos; intermediário; organizações intermediárias na pesquisa.

The Rise of Knowledge Brokering

An emerging field of inquiry has arisen in order to address the oft-cited gaps between research, policy and practice called knowledge mobilization (KMB) in education and knowledge translation (KT) in the health sector (names vary across sectors and countries). KMB includes efforts to increase the use of *research evidence* in policy and practice in education. KMB occurs through iterative, social processes involving interaction among two or more different groups or contexts (researchers, policymakers, practitioners, third party agencies, community members) in order to improve the broader education system.

Much of the research that does exist on KMB focuses on research producing contexts (such as universities) and research using contexts (such as hospitals and schools) with very few studies addressing the intermediary organizations that often facilitate research use processes. This special issue uses the term ‘research brokering organization’ (RBO) to describe third party, intermediary organizations whose active role between research

producers and users is a catalyst for research use in education. Intermediaries are important because practitioners rarely come into contact with primary research directly from academic journals or lengthy research reports. Instead, educators engage with research indirectly through colleagues, professional development, the media, and often through various third party organizations. Because of the growing recognition of the prominence of intermediaries, research agencies (e.g. William T. Grant Foundation) and prominent scholars in the field are highlighting the importance of intermediaries' roles in KMb and emphasizing the need for empirical work on third parties in the KMb process. Cooper (2014) in a study of 44 RBOs across Canada identified eight major brokering functions of RBOs (Figure 1).

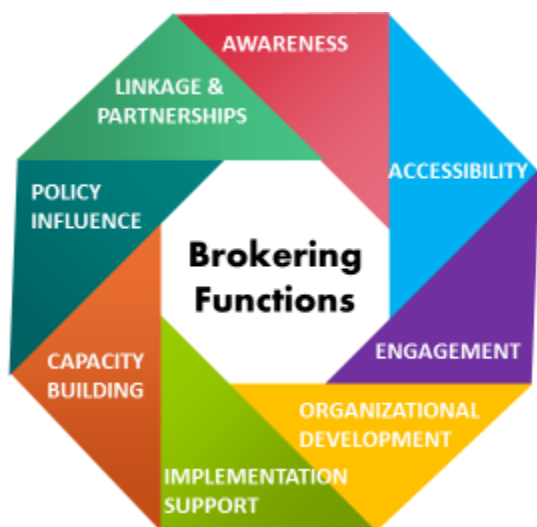


Figure 1. Brokering Functions of RBOs (adapted from Cooper, 2014).

The primary brokering function of intermediary organizations is usually increasing linkages and partnerships among diverse stakeholders. Other brokering functions attempt to increase accessibility and engagement with research by providing shorter, tailored research products that are meant to encourage wider dissemination and uptake. Innovative techniques, such as data visualization and web-based tools, are changing the ways in which research is presented and sometimes allows users to interact with the content in various ways. Brokering also happens at the organizational level, with intermediaries providing help with organizational development, KMb planning and implementation support. Capacity building, while widely acknowledged as an important part of evidence-informed change, is less prevalent than other functions although it remains a critical focus in successful change initiatives. Policy influence is also a brokering function of many intermediaries and takes on various forms -- from advocacy to building relationships with policymakers and media outlets. These brokering functions all seek to build bridges between research, policy and practice in order to improve societal systems.

It is now widely acknowledged that brokering has an important function to play in KMb and research impact. This special issue will explore the nature and impact of the work of RBOs in research mediation in education in Canada, the US and internationally. The special issue begins by looking at global issues, then drills down to national and local concerns.

This issue opens with an article by Jack Schneider that compares knowledge mobilization efforts across the “helping” sectors of nursing, social work in order to inform thinking in the

education sector. It also provides a framework including four factors that shape the movement of research into practice: visibility (research is accessible to working teachers and its quality can be determined by them), acceptability (research is understood as valuable by teachers and is compatible with their professional worldview), feasibility (research has practical applications that do not require a dramatic overhaul of the profession), and transportability (research, as well as teacher views on that research, can be easily shared across classrooms and organizations). The second paper, written by Paul Whitinui et al. discusses the origins of the World Indigenous Research Alliance (WIRA), a bottom-up movement of passionate Indigenous scholars who are making a difference for Indigenous peoples and their education. The WIRA collaboration showcases how intermediaries can share best practices across respective countries and help to co-design interdisciplinary research. Whitinui's et al. paper provides an example of how knowledge mobilization and evidence based initiatives can promote equity for disadvantaged groups. The article by Kochanek, Scholz, and Garcia provides a how-to-guide on how to set up multi-stakeholder collaborations based off of the American Institutes for Research (AIR) Logic Model which has successfully led to AIR researchers developing eight successful research partnerships. Kochanek's et al. contribution provides a theory-based approach on research-practice partnerships. Ng-A-Fook, Kane, Butler, Glithero, and Forte discuss how they were able to develop and extend a KMb network with two local school boards for the development and application of curriculum. Ng-A-Fook et al. develop a relational conceptual model for analyzing KMb networks among policy makers, educational researchers, and public school practitioners.

Alongside the growing momentum of brokering networks trying to bridge the gaps between research, policy and practice, is a struggle to find tools to measure knowledge mobilization efforts within networks. The second last paper highlights a methodology to explore evidence use across networks. Joelle Rodway uses social network analysis to explore how a school mental health network mobilizes knowledge across the education system in Ontario, Canada. Rodway's work reveals how social network analysis can be used to inform educational improvement initiatives longitudinally and also to measure how mobilization networks develop over time.

The final article by Scott, Jabbar, LaLonde, DeBray and Lubienski looks at how the increasing involvement of philanthropists in education policy is changing the education landscape in the USA, as intermediary organizations are converging and pushing incentivist reforms such as "parent trigger" laws, charter schools, vouchers, teacher merit pay or sanctions tied to teacher performance. This work is funded by the William T. Grant Foundation.

Together this set of articles offers diverse perspectives on networks and knowledge brokering efforts that are occurring to improve public service sectors. As knowledge mobilization and research impact agendas continue to increase globally, so too will interest in brokering and how to measure these efforts across multi-stakeholder, large scale systems.

About the Co-Guest Editors

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Dr. Amanda Cooper is an Assistant Professor in Educational Policy and Leadership at Queen's University in Canada. She is the Principal Investigator of RIPPLE - Research Informing Policy, Practice and Leadership in Education (www.ripplenetwork.ca) - a program of research, training and KMb aimed at learning more about how knowledge brokering (KB) can increase research

use and its impact in public service sectors by facilitating collaboration between multi-stakeholder networks.

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Samantha Shewchuk is an elementary school teacher and a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. Her research explores knowledge mobilization at the intersection of the education and child welfare sectors; more specifically, how outcomes for abused children can be improved by increasing research use in these sectors. She is the program manager of Dr. Amanda Cooper's RIPPLE program, Research Informing Policy Practice and Leadership in Education (www.ripplenetwork.ca).

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