Evidence and Educational Outcomes

Tom SCHULLER*

Abstract

In this paper, I address the issue of how evidence from research relates to educational policy and practice. First, I describe the rationale for and main findings of CERI’s Social Outcomes of Learning (SOL) project. These combine reflections on the methodological difficulties involved in tracing the causal links between education on the one hand and better health and greater civic participation on the other, with an analysis of the principal findings from research. Then, based on the findings from review work on the quality of educational research and the use of research in educational policy, I address the way evidence is used and sketched out how researchers, policy-makers and practitioners as well as the media and the public played their parts. I also describe work undertaken in Hungary on innovation in the educational R&D system which looked at ways in which different parts of the system communicated with each other, with particular reference to how a knowledge base is developed and used across the system. Finally, I touch upon a project exploring the potential implications of neuroscientific research for educational policy and practice. I conclude with a set of lessons which derive from these various pieces of work. I suggest that a key issue for the value of educational research is whether there is the right balance between research on inputs and processes on the one hand, and outcomes on the other. I reassert the importance of moving away from a simplistic linear model for understanding the relationship between research and policy or practice. Thirdly, I emphasize the challenge of crossing boundaries in order for research to have a stronger impact. Researchers need to cross disciplinary and methodological boundaries, and policy-makers need to cross sectoral boundaries. Fourthly, I reiterate the need for genuine experimentation and evaluation if progress in educational reform is to happen more quickly and effectively than it currently does. Finally, I return to the broader context, and raise the need for a wider general appreciation of what research can offer for the improvement of our education systems.

*Director Longview, formerly head of Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, OECD