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Modelising Scientific Mediation Processes: a Key to Facilitate Knowledge Brokering in Educational Practices and Policies?

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Proposal Information

Knowledge produced by research has a social value. Much of it can serve as a guide to more effective behaviours and practices for users whether practicing professionals or decision-makers. Furthermore, the use of research to improve educational practices has become a lively political and scientific debate since the concepts of evidence-based education or evidence-informed education were developed in Europe and the United States, then within international organizations (Gausssel, et al., 2017). Thus, for the past twenty years, the IFÉ (Institut français de l'Éducation) has been developing a mediation activity between research and educational practices. In this context, IFÉ's Veille et Analyses team has been focusing its work on the role of intermediaries in the transfer of research knowledge through a mediation or transformation process (Gausssel, 2014).

In this presentation, we propose to explore a conceptual framework for a mediation process for knowledge to be disseminated in the field of educational research and address some specific issues raised in the research literature on the matter:

- RQ1: What does characterize a mediation process?
- RQ2: processed in perspective, what implications could emerge for intermediaries and mediators in terms of brokering competencies?

Theoretical framework:

In Europe and other parts of the world, it has long been accepted that educational research can be very useful in improving educational policy and practice (Farley-Ripple, 2018; Godfrey & Brown, 2018; Weiss, 1979) ; at the same time, educational research is criticized for not being sufficiently in tune with practice (Malin & Brown, 2019; Cooper & Shewchuk, 2015), while teachers show great resistance in implementing research findings (Draelant & Revaz, 2022). The gap between research and practice has many causes, and at its root lie deep social, cultural and structural fractures, particularly when research dissemination is perceived as linear, unidirectional and potentially disempowering for practitioners – asking researchers to better disseminate work or teachers to better engage with research has not been particularly successful to date (Rycroft-Smith, 2022) –and therefore ineffective (Farley-Ripple & Grajeda, 2019; Malin & Brown, 2019).

Previous work on knowledge transfer – an interdisciplinary concern about how to disseminate knowledge created by research – has indeed shown that the development of a scientific mediation process between research producers and users (whether field actors or policy-makers) could be relevant to bridging the gap between these two communities (Cooper & Shewchuk, 2015; Hering, 2016; Turnhout, et al., 2013; Ward, 2017) and reinforce the usability of scientific knowledge. However, knowledge transfer goes through a mediation process that goes beyond a simple push towards those concerned (from researchers to decision-makers, from researchers to practitioners, from researchers to the general public).

A mediation process actually involves a number of tasks that complement each other. It is a composite interface that includes searching for information, evaluating that information, cross-referencing and interpreting the results, identifying emerging issues or, on the contrary, blind spots related to the studied subject; It means making knowledge appropriable, exploitable and usable (Meyer, 2010). This idea is echoed by many researchers, for whom mediation contexts play a key role: it is not enough for teachers to be aware of research that has proved its value, the conditions must be provided for them to change their practices as well (Gaussel, et al., 2017). The requirement to develop a simple and effective means of promoting research knowledge is reinforced by the need to find a way of translating scientific results and, consequently, to strengthen the operational links between education professionals and research producers through a mediation process, one of which is knowledge brokering.

Methodology or Methods/ Research Instruments or Sources Used

Drawing from previous work (Gaussel 2014, 2017, 2020), we used key words such as knowledge transfer, knowledge mobilization, brokering process, mediation context, research transformation, etc. to find key publications. We also took into account the scientific authority of the authors on the subject which included various academic fields – ranging from medical sciences to communication sciences, educational sciences and political sciences. We gathered about 150 articles from the English-speaking literature as a foundation for our research.

Fueled by reflections from scientific seminars on brokering processes (the seminars consist of a series of joint workshops led by the IFÉ's Veille & Analyses team members since 2022, the aim of which is to establish the team's mediation productions on a solid theoretical and methodological foundation), we then selected and evaluated, through a content analysis method, three conceptual frameworks identified in literature – the 'use triangle' (Levin, 2013), 'connections between research and practice' (Farley-Ripple, et al., 2018) and 'knowledge mobilization at the interface of research, practice and policy' (Cooper, et al., 2017) to work on a model of a mediation process.

Those seminars enabled us to problematize the issue from two different yet linked angles. The first one regards knowledge transfer through the mediation process (independently of the contents) and the second one leads, in perspectives, to the issue of the required competencies of brokers in a social context and more specifically in an educational context (Gaussel et al., 2017). Based on those observations, we were able to modelise – if still a work in progress – a mediation process designed to facilitate the transfer of scientific knowledge in education.

Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings

In analysing the impact of knowledge transfer through mediation in education, we found that open research cannot be a mediation process in itself – making science available doesn't just mean making knowledge available (Rycroft- Smith, 2022). This knowledge must be

reconstructed and mobilized in the specific context of use. We also note that science mediation does not yet seem to be an essential factor for most researchers (in the sense that they don't always factor the importance of mediation in their work). Nevertheless, some see it as an crucial task (Malin & Brown, 2019), and the activities and roles of knowledge brokers are being more and more closely studied to promote the use of research in education (Shewchuk & Farley-Ripple, 2022). These results open up the possibility of working further on a modelised mediation process based on these findings as part of our seminars.

In response to RQ1, we found that what characterized a mediation process was the necessity to:

- apprehend mediation as a process for transforming/translating research;
- set clear objectives regarding the benefits for the intended users;
- emphasize the dynamic, relational, contextual and interactive dimension of mediation;
- qualify the nature of the various mediation productions.

Regarding RQ2: different observations linked to mediation processes emerged as for what kind of competencies should brokers develop (whether an individual or a dedicated infrastructure such as ours) based on what we found: - knowledge is brokered to develop solutions to practical problems, to change practices and behaviours, to improve professional skills;

- brokers assume a vast variety of identities and activities;
- brokers should be able to identify research that can be mobilized to respond to the holistic nature of an educational situation;
- brokers should be able to produce synthetic reviews or research knowledge to provoke engagement with research on the users' side.

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