Special Issue on Knowledge Mobilization in and for Education

Editorial

Knowledge Mobilization in Canadian Educational Research: Identifying Current Developments and Future Directions

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In an era of evidence-based praxis across disciplines and societies, knowledge mobilization has become a buzzword. This buzzword, however, remains elusive and ambiguous. The term *knowledge mobilization* (KMb) emerged in the late 1990s in the field of education. Since then, scholars have used numerous terms to describe research-to-practice driven activities, including dissemination, knowledge exchange, knowledge transfer, knowledge translation, knowledge utilization, and knowledge mobilization (Skinner, 2007).

In 2006, the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) has launched the *Ontario Education Research Symposium* (OERS), an annual 3-day event at which “researchers, educators, and policy makers build networks and partnerships, gain insights into existing education research, identify gaps for future research, and share approaches for connecting research to practice” (OME, 2016). Building on the progress of the previous symposia, the 2016 *Networking & Partnerships: The Core of Achieving Excellence in Education* symposium focused on researcher-practitioner collaborations toward an accessible, integrated, and responsive education system.

Since 2006, *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada* (SSHRC) has been committed to: (a) mobilizing research knowledge among researchers, and between researchers and practitioners; (b) facilitating the development of partnerships between researchers and practitioners; and (c) assisting researchers and practitioners in developing networks, tools and best practices through KMb (Kishchuk, 2013). As a result, SSHRC launched *Knowledge Synthesis* and *Connection* programs, and participated in the development of a *Tri-Agency Open Access Policy on Publications* to improve access to the results of Agency-funded research. According to SSHRC (2015), KMb is “the reciprocal and complementary flow and uptake of research knowledge between researchers, knowledge brokers and knowledge users—both within and beyond academia” (para. 15).

Research shows that school-university research collaborations play an active role in decreasing the educational theory-to-practice gap (Baumfield & Butterworth, 2007). The School-Board-University Research Exchange (SURE) network—established in 2008 by the *London*

Region Managing Information for Student Achievement Professional Network Centre (MISA PNC) and comprised of 16 school boards and five faculties of education—is one of such partnerships committed to fostering school-university relationships and improving classroom practice (Martinovic et al., 2012). Since 2008, SURE has focused on developing and sustaining an active collaborative relationship among universities and school districts in the London Region to inspire a culture of inquiry, advance research skills, and promote knowledge exchange related to education research. The SURE researchers received a *SSHRC Public Outreach Grant: Dissemination* and a *Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research (KNAER)* grant to enhance knowledge mobilization in Ontario.

Building upon the success of Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) KMb Days at CSSE 2012 (Wilfrid Laurier University and University of Waterloo) and CSSE 2013 (University of Victoria), the SURE collaborated with the CSSE 2014 conference organizing committee to facilitate another engaging KMb Day in May 2014 at Brock University (See <https://csse2014kmday.wordpress.com/>). The 2014 KMb event was sponsored by the SURE Steering Committee, the MISA PNC for the London Region, the Ontario Association of Deans of Education, and the Faculty of Education, Brock University. This special issue of *Brock Education* is an outcome of this KMb event. Expanding the KMb discourses initiated by OME, SSHRC, KNAER, CSSE, and SURE, we feature five journal articles and a book review addressing the following questions: How to assess KMb efforts across educational systems? To what extent do educators use research to inform their praxis? How to make KMb work?

Provincial, National, and International KMb Developments

Cooper's article, "A Tool to Assess and Compare Knowledge Mobilization Efforts of Faculties of Education, Research Brokering Organizations, Ministries of Education, and School Districts," discusses the national and international trends that have contributed toward conceptualizing knowledge mobilization as a field of study. Her work answers important questions such as what are the push and pull factors that inform knowledge mobilization research and inquiry. The article is informative because it builds on the work of researchers focused on the study of knowledge mobilization and practical because it provides insight for researchers, networks, and knowledge brokers searching for a measuring tool to assess their knowledge mobilization efforts across organizations. Cooper reports that "The need to develop tools to measure research use as well as KMb efforts and processes is commonly discussed across sectors," and her KMb matrix tool fills this gap in the literature.

In their article, "Finding the Sweet Spot: Network Structures and Processes for Increased Knowledge Mobilization," Briscoe, Pollock, Campbell, and Carr-Harris report on the KMb practices of 44 KNAER-funded projects that have mobilized research-based evidence across Ontario. The authors discuss the role of the network structures, processes, and structure-process alignments in building KMb networks' capacity for increasing research use and improving student learning. The most successful KMb networks in this study were those networks that were able to strategically align their network structures and processes, and find a "sweet spot." The authors offer insights into the complexities of KMb networks' practices and guidelines for developing KMb capacity across provincial, national, and international networks.

Notwithstanding the implementation of various initiatives and strategies by research brokering agents to support the use of research-based evidence by educators, the widespread uptake of research knowledge utilization by educators especially in regard to informing

instructional practice has been problematic. The article by Lysenko et al., based on the results stemming from a pan-Canadian on-line survey of educators on their use of research, outlines a number of challenges confronting educators when using research knowledge. The authors advance a number of recommendations for universities, school boards, and knowledge mobilization agents to undertake in order to increase research evidence use by educators. The paper represents an extension of a previous quantitative study (Lysenko et al., 2014), but is enhanced by an analysis of qualitative data provided by teachers, school administrators, and professional staff.

Why School-University Partnerships Work

The article, “Exploring the Benefits of a Collaborative Inquiry Team in Education (CITE) Initiative to Develop a Research Community and Enhance Student Engagement,” scrutinizes a collaborative inquiry process, facilitated by university faculty in an elementary school in Ontario. Cantalini-Williams et al. collected and analyzed self-study data over a 5-month period and found that “the collaborative inquiry process with enablers of time, flexibility, and support from university faculty increased research acumen among the participants and subsequently increased student engagement.” The CITE team “named, framed, and proclaimed” applied educational research, utilized and discussed effective KMb strategies, documented enhanced teacher and student engagement and learning, and provided a set of KMb strategies for teachers, school administrators, and university researchers.

McQuirter Scott, Dortmans, Rath, Meeussen, and Boin reported on a case study based on a long-term school-university partnership exploring iPad use in Grade 3 classrooms. This partnership resulted in an exchange of iPad implementation strategies among participants. Moreover, teachers enhanced their leadership skills while university researchers experienced a high degree of learning about digital pedagogy, and shared the lessons learned with their Pre-service Education classes. The authors argue for flexible, trusting, and long-term school-university partnerships and acknowledge the role of such partnerships in bridging “the current gap between theory and practice in technology-enhanced learning.”

Future Directions

Ghazala Ahmed concludes this special issue on knowledge mobilization in and for education with her review of the Fenwick and Farrell’s (2012) edited book entitled *Knowledge Mobilization and Educational Research: Politics, Languages, and Responsibilities*. Ahmed describes this book as a critical review of knowledge mobilization and an informative collection of works originating from diverse provincial, national, and international educational contexts. According to Ahmed, the book provides “accounts grounded in empirical studies, real events, and existing organizations,” scrutinizes knowledge mobilization activities and outcomes, and urges scholars and educators to further explore the role of KMb in educational research, policy, and practice.

Proud of this special issue and its contribution to the field of KMb in education, we borrow from Dewey’ (1929) cautionary advice that research findings cannot “be converted into an immediate rule of educational art” (p. 19). Rather, research questions should be drawn from practice in a continuous manner in order to help teachers improve their teaching methods and competencies. Based on the articles featured in this special issue, we argue that KMb as an established field of inquiry that aims to “address the oft-cited gaps between research, policy and practice” (Cooper, 2012, p. 2) and will continue to shape educational research and praxis.

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