Pathways from Research to Policy: Implications for Researchers

Guest Lecture by Cynthia E. Coburn, Professor
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Abstract: In the last decade, there has been renewed interest in how policy makers in various fields use research in their decision making. Researchers wonder why some research ends up being influential in policy making while other research does not. Funders want to find ways that their investment in research can be more influential. Advocates argue that policy makers should be using the best information available to inform consequential decisions, especially when it affects children and youth. In this talk, I discuss what we know as a field about the ways in which research informs policy making. Rather than taking a normative stance, I discuss the nature of decision making in public agencies and the ways in which research enters into these practices, and the role of researchers and research-practice partnerships in these processes. I illustrate the discussion with evidence from my own studies of instructional decision making in urban school districts in the United States. I discuss implications for researchers, paying particular attention to new ways of conceptualizing the relationship between researchers and policy makers.

Cynthia E. Coburn is a professor at the School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University. Coburn studies the relationship between instructional policy and teachers’ classroom practices in urban schools. To date, Coburn has investigated this issue in a series of studies that tackle critical issues facing public schools: the relationship between reading policy and teachers' classroom practice, the scale-up of innovative mathematics curricula, data use at the district level, and the relationship between research and practice for school improvement. In 2011, Coburn was awarded the Early Career Award from the American Educational Research Association in recognition of her contributions to the field of educational research in the first decade of her career. Coburn has a BA in philosophy from Oberlin College, and a MA in Sociology and a PhD in Education from Stanford University.