Exploring the Field – The Wider Field

This document briefly introduces several areas within the 'wider field' of research around evidence-informed education. We use the word 'wider' in the sense that educational effectiveness, improvement and evidence-informed education are not central to the aims of these areas. However, from the perspective of evidence-informed education, these areas in the wider social research field can range from being peripheral (i.e., have a small potential contribution to understanding particular problems of education policy or practice) all the way to being fundamental (e.g., the 'basic' science and foundational theory that can be found in psychology, sociology and other disciplines, and can potentially underpin large amounts of educational theory and practice).

Educational Leadership and Management

There is more to educational leadership and management (ELAM) than fostering educational effectiveness and improvement (EEI). A quick look through a good leadership textbook (e.g., Bush & Bell, 2002; Earley & Greany, 2017) or mapping review (Tian & Huber, 2019) reveals a broader range of concerns, including leadership for social justice, the impact of specific cultural or circumstantial contexts on leadership, the experiences and perspectives of school leaders, and questions of vision and values for leadership. There are many concerns within the ELAM area that generally fall outside of EEI, What Works (WW) and (to a lesser extent) Evidence-Informed Practice (EIP). There is, however, a subset of the ELAM literature and activity that is focused on effective leadership, improving leadership, and leaders' role in educational improvement. There is therefore much to gain from evidence-informed practitioners being aware of this via WW and EEI research and/or directly.

Readers interested in the wider ELAM field may wish to consult:

- Authoritative texts and collections such as Bush et al. (2019), Greany and Earley (2021), Courtney et al. (2021);
- Journals, such as Educational Management Administration & Leadership, School Leadership and Management, Management in Education;
- Societies and conferences such as the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS), and 'Special Interest Groups'/strands in more general conferences (e.g. BERA, EARLI, EERA, ECER, AERA).

As we note above, we see this as the intersection of ELAM and Evidence-Informed Education and, as a result; it is therefore possible to locate research into effective leadership from authors associated with Evidence-Informed Education (or, more accurately, EEI). There are particular connections between leadership and educational improvement research concerning how school leaders can improve schools, develop teachers and improve student outcomes (e.g., Day et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2007). There is also relevant research

from outside of Evidence-Informed Education conducted by economists, policy researchers, evidence centres, and/or international organisations such as the OECD (Bryson et al., 2019; Helal & Coelli, 2016; Pont et al., 2008). We consider some of these areas of research in Chapter 9 as we discuss the links between effectiveness and improvement research.

Policy Analysis

There are many groups of researchers and policy actors who work on problems that are within or connect to Evidence-Informed Education questions. These stakeholders can include charities, think tanks, independent research institutes or consultancies, international organisations, local and national governments, as well as university centres. Some of these have a disciplinary focus (e.g., economics, sociology, political science) while others are multi-disciplinary or seek to address more general concerns. Some are more rooted in academia, others in professional or political groups, with many working across and between these spaces.

Policy work connects to both specific policies – e.g., whether England should abolish or expand its selective grammar schools (Morris & Perry, 2016) – and general policy questions – e.g., whether school autonomy will improve standards – as well as wider research on policy contexts, discourse, development and enactment. There is overlap between these areas and Evidence-Informed Education, and so some policy research can be said to emanate from within the field, some from outside from policy scholars or those within a disciplinary specialism (e.g., economics, sociology etc.). Many areas within policy research are relevant to or included within Evidence-Informed Education interests. Areas of particular interest include:

- School structures
- Economics and resources
- System evaluation
- Teaching professionalism and identity
- Curriculum and assessment

Delving into topics such as these reveals a range of research disciplines, interests and academic and organisational sources. To the extent to which this diverse area is brought together, it is in strands and interest groups in general research organisations and interdisciplinary conferences and groups.

Social Research

There are other areas of research which, in part, or from a particular perspective, help us answer the core Evidence-Informed Education questions and can be considered to be in the wider field. Notable areas in this wider field include researchers of educational assessment and evaluation, and (initial and continuing) teacher education. Other related areas are listed in the EEI Handbook which identifies several areas where 'useful perspectives were to be had' as the field has developed (p.79):

- Sociology of education
- Educational administration/leadership
- Human relations
- Cognitive Neuroscience
- Psychology of education
- Humanistic psychology

Searches for particular topics or areas of relevance to educational policy and practice will invariably reveal specialists working in these areas coming from a large range of research disciplines, perspectives and backgrounds.

References

Bryson, A., Stokes, L., & Wilkinson, D. (2019). Better schools for all? *London: National Institute of Economic and Social Research, www. nuffieldfoundation. org/sites/default/files/files/Better% 20Schools% 20for% 20All.*

Bush, T., & Bell, L. (2002). *The principles and practice of educational management*. Sage.

Bush, T., Bell, L., & Middlewood, D. (2019). *Principles of educational leadership & management*. Sage.

Courtney, S. J., Gunter, H. M., Niesche, R., & Trujillo, T. (2021). *Understanding Educational Leadership: Critical Perspectives and Approaches*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Day, C., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *52*(2), 221-258.

Earley, P., & Greany, T. (2017). *School leadership and education system reform*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Greany, T., & Earley, P. (2021). *School leadership and education system reform*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Helal, M., & Coelli, M. B. (2016). How principals affect schools.

Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2019). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management*, *40*(1), 5-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077

Morris, R., & Perry, T. (2016). Reframing the English grammar schools debate. *Educational Review*, *69*(1), 1-24. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2016.1184132

Pont, B., Nusche, D., & Moorman, H. (2008). *Improving school leadership, Volume 1: Policy and practice*. OECD publishing Paris.

Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2007). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why* (Vol. 41). Australian Council for Educational Leaders Winmalee.

Tian, M., & Huber, S. G. (2019). Mapping educational leadership, administration and management research 2007–2016: Thematic strands and the changing landscape. *Journal of Educational Administration*.