

Mobilizing Evidence to Reduce Educational Inequality: A Life-Course Perspective

Inequality in educational outcomes as a function of social and racial/ethnic background is generated and reinforced over the course of childhood and adolescence through environmental experiences that occur at home and at school. The cumulative effects of these multiple influences will not plausibly be overcome by a list of unrelated interventions, no matter how effective each is by itself over the short term. It follows that any serious attempt to significantly increase opportunity for historically disadvantaged children and youth must engage the adults who are important in a child's life to interact effectively with the child over the course of child and youth development. In this talk, I propose that how these adults mobilize, share, and use evidence can be crucial to this collaborative project. I'll illustrate these ideas with three case studies in which timely information about heterogeneity in student skill becomes essential in guiding and evaluating instruction. These and related rigorously evaluated trials suggest that we can envision changes in school practice at the pre-school, elementary school, and secondary school levels that have potential to substantially increase students' cognitive skills and sharply reduce racial/ethnic and social inequality.