



DR K-12 Reflections – Perspectives from the Field: What Research Do We Need?¹

Nancy Shapiro, University System of Maryland | June 6, 2016

On June 3, at the very end of the stimulating DR K-12 PI Conference in Washington, we convened a panel of practitioners who shared with the group “perspectives from the field.” Maryland State Superintendent Jack Smith, Baltimore City Chief Academic Officer Linda Chen, and I came to offer our thoughts and experiences with the DR K-12 PIs, and learn from the cutting edge research. As the moderator of that panel, I am happy to share some reflections on the session.

First, I would say that we were encouraged to be candid, and we welcomed the chance to engage with the research community in a dialogue that left us all wiser than when we started. We all seem to be on the same page about the importance of practitioner-research collaboration and the need for accessible and timely research to guide policy challenges and changes in teaching and learning at all levels of the educational system.

We started by considering how quickly things change: How should we be preparing the teachers of the students who will live out their lives in the 21st Century? What must we do to incorporate into teacher preparation what we are learning about how the brain works, new ways of using technology for teaching and learning, and new ways of thinking about career paths for teachers?

When we got down to cases, the panel raised some topics for the research community to consider: What are the instructional demands of the new Common Core standards and NGSS? What kinds of professional development will make a difference for student learning? How do you know? How should teacher preparation and professional development respond to the new content areas of coding, computational thinking, and engineering? Which instructional strategies make a difference? How can we maximize the positive aspects of instructional design and technology while avoiding the potentially harmful effects of too much digital screen-time?

The big challenges come at the intersection of research and policy: We need solid evidence to inform policy, but researchers frequently have difficulty gaining the trust and collaboration of schools and school systems. Jack Smith and Linda Chen made an important suggestion to the

¹ The plenary session [Perspectives from the Field: What Research Do We Need?](#) took place on June 3 at the 2016 DR K-12 PI Meeting and was led by Nancy Shapiro (moderator), Linda Chen, and Jack Smith.

research community: Make sure the schools are part of the planning of the project from the beginning. Too many times, university researchers approach schools and school districts with pre-fab plans and ask for data. If the questions the researchers are asking are not the questions that the district needs answered, the data requests are just more work for very little payoff. Practitioner-researcher collaborations require that the research questions be drawn from the shared interests of both partners. Researchers contribute strong methodology and grounded inquiry linked to prior studies, but the bottom-line message to the DR K-12 community from this panel is: Authentic questions for study and the data that will inform the findings of researchers need to come from the schools.