The first time I heard the term “evidence-based medicine” it was from a distinguished professor of public health, and two thoughts quickly crossed my mind. First, if using evidence was such a novel concept, then I wondered (aloud) what doctors had been doing up to now. My MD friend reassured me that medicine had always relied on evidence, but was now trying for an expanded and fortified definition of that somewhat fuzzy concept. In particular, he explained, the evidence movement had two basic aims: to lubricate the channels through which physicians learn about relevant research, and to help physicians know if and how to apply research findings in their clinical practice.

His summary evoked my second thought: in education we’ve been doing that for years, arguably even centuries, and if the medical profession wants to build bridges between research and practice it can safely turn to us for advice. Educators and education researchers have long struggled with multiple definitions and multiple sources of “evidence,” and have made considerable progress in connecting various forms of knowledge to the improvement of teaching, learning, and the organization of schooling. Indeed, in education we have moved beyond the simplistic notion of “research-into-practice,” and toward a more nuanced understanding of how practice can and should influence research.

This year’s annual meeting theme reflects our interest in a broadened exploration of these issues and our desire to revisit and reinforce the links between research, policy, and practice. The program hopes to expand the discourse about the meanings and uses of evidence, and, in particular, how education research influences—and is influenced by—many other research disciplines and traditions. The scholarly range represented in this program is really quite stunning.

President Lorraine McDonnell and I are so grateful to the program committee and to the thousands of AERA members who responded to our call. Your papers and presentations will surely enrich and expand the circle of knowledge.

Welcome to San Diego, and enjoy your time with colleagues, collaborators, and friends.

Michael J. Feuer
National Academy of Sciences
Annual Meeting Program Chair, 2009