2010 Program Theme

Education research sits inside what Donald Stokes calls “Pasteur’s Quadrant,” referring to the dual focus of building basic theory while simultaneously improving practice. This process occurs through attention to individual psychological functioning (cognitive, social, emotional); social organization of settings; curriculum design and assessments; educational policy; or historical, political, and economic circumstances as they influence opportunities to learn. Opportunities to learn within and across both formal and informal settings occur in the complex ecologies of peoples’ lives, not isolated in a single setting such as a school or family. These complex ecologies include people’s participation within and across multiple settings, from families to peer and intergenerational social networks, to schools and a variety of community organizations; and participation within and across these settings may be either physical or virtual. Our attempts to understand and influence such learning often try to strip away complexity for presumed efficiency.

Opportunities to participate in multiple settings and the norms for participation are influenced by larger cultural, political, and economic forces and institutions. Ubiquitous technologies empower and encourage all forms of communication and movement within and across all kinds of borders; transnational border crossing is increasingly common throughout the world. Different settings demand different norms for participation and, as a consequence, require that we recruit what and how we have learned in other settings of our lives as resources to help us make sense of new tasks and the new settings in which these tasks are carried out. There is also the question of how each new setting is organized to facilitate or constrain our recruitment of what and how we have learned in other settings. It is in this sense that learning entails cultural navigations.