2014 Program Theme

We live in exciting times in education research, where every day new ground is being forged in research design, methodology, instrumentation, and assessment. Questions regarding how people learn, what should be taught by whom, and to what ends remain at the core of our field, enveloped in a "cloud" of new ideas and technologies. In our rapidly changing world it is clearly time to take stock of the value of education research, of how it has spurred innovation, and of its problems and the potential solutions it can provide for improving the learning and well-being of children and adults. The theme for the 2014 Annual Meeting aims to encourage submissions that link the possibilities of education research, recognizing how evidence of varying types can be used for tackling persisting issues in education and for their innovative resolution.

Information is everywhere. How to ensure the veracity of information and evidence, especially in a global knowledge environment, presents a new set of challenges to our education research community. Increasingly, the need for customized learning has been driving the development of new technologies that provide more choices and opportunities for learning. Researchers and commercial vendors are looking to technology to customize learning and devise unique, efficient ways of obtaining data to assess academic progress, remediate problems, address embedded inequalities, and predict future outcomes. There are now multiple ways of obtaining information from social interactions that are both virtual and in-person.

Against this backdrop of technology, education researchers struggle with closing a widening achievement gap between rich and poor students; devising rational systems for measuring teacher quality; sparking creativity and interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; discovering how we learn and interpret content, behaviors, and social settings; seeking more equitable solutions for college access and persistence; assessing the affordances of online learning; and measuring system accountability and human learning with massive data.

Education research has laid a foundation for many of these issues, but they need to be revisited and reworked if we are to make wise, reasonable choices for the education enterprise of today and tomorrow. It is our challenge not only to embrace change and innovate in choosing what problems to study, and how—whether through micro-interactions in classrooms or trends across dozens of large-scale national, state, and district data sets—but also to critically examine and evaluate what has changed, what is changing, and what will likely change the educational futures of all students of all ages, particularly those with limited social and economic resources.

This year we encourage submissions that examine seriously the many changes occurring across education research, from its design to its implementation, in areas where we have had a major stake, such as learning, pedagogy, school systems, higher education, and education inequality. We also encourage submissions that address how we are now conducting and plan to work in an environment vastly different from that of even five years ago. We look forward to receiving your ideas on this theme. We hope to see you all in Philadelphia, that city of brotherly and sisterly love, where we can ring a new bell that reaffirms our pride in being education researchers and our visions for the future.