Problems in knowledge mobilisation: how knowledge changes when it moves between contexts

James Thomas¹

Frankfurt
4 March 2013
Outline

• Evidence to inform policy
  – In academic terms
  – In non-academic terms

• Discussion…
In academic terms...

• The review was a systematic, unbiased, scientifically robust summary of the current state of evidence

• Contains understandable limitations in terms of evidence that it is possible to gather currently

• Requires further interpretation regarding the applicability of the links between findings and policy / practice
Beyond the academy...

• The review received a mixed reception with responses polarised along the lines of people’s pre-existing views
• Clear that the review did not address many of the issues around which debate centred
Burdon of proof?

- There are many levels and definitions of what is expected in terms of proof in different contexts
- E.g. legal, philosophic, scientific
- Each has its own assumptions and operational definitions (e.g. the most probable event, reasonable doubt, and beyond the shadow of a doubt)
- Some of the differences between the systematic review and other arguments may be due to these different epistemologies
Can systematic reviews adjudicate between opposing positions around which debate centres? (Should they be expected to?)

Is there a place for theory in this debate?

Independence of review was questioned: should systematic reviews not be conducted by those with a record of primary research in the area?

In an uneven landscape of different requirements and understandings about what constitutes ‘proof’, where does scientific evidence sit; does it require translation into different models of proof?
Thank you

SSRU website: http://www.ioe.ac.uk/ssru/
SSRU's EPPI website: http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk

Email
j.thomas@ioe.ac.uk

The EPPI-Centre is part of the Social Science Research Unit at the Institute of Education, University of London