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Kooperative Handlungspraktiken im Kontext digitaler Bildungsprojekte.
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Co-Constructive Knowledge Mobilization Between Research and Practice

The ‹KONTEXT Grundschule› Project – A Short Article

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Abstract
In recent decades, the demand for evidence-oriented practices in education has increased significantly. As schools undergo ongoing digitalization, the need for evidence-oriented knowledge about digital learning approaches is also growing. Simultaneously, educational research is expected to provide practical knowledge that supports teachers. In reality, however, this transfer of knowledge is often insufficient: research results are frequently perceived as difficult to access and not compatible with school practice. Therefore, co-constructive approaches in which research and practice develop knowledge together are gaining in importance. However, such formats are still rare, and little is known about the conditions for successful collaboration. The transfer project described here addresses this gap and develops evidence-based, comprehensible, and practical information resources for elementary school teachers, with a focus on the digital support of students in the lower performance range. The development takes place in so-called transdisciplinary triangles consisting of teachers, education researchers, and science communicators, who work together in a structured process over several meetings. Initial evaluation results indicate that cooperation on an equal footing is possible. Clear roles, transparent communication, and organisational support emerge as key conditions for success; the evaluation is being continuously expanded and serves to discuss the potential and limitations of the format.

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KONTEXT Grundschule. Ein ko-konstruktives Transferprojekt zwischen Wissenschaft und Praxis – Ein Kurzbeitrag

Zusammenfassung
In den letzten Jahrzehnten ist die Forderung nach evidenzorientiertem Handeln in der Bildungspraxis deutlich gewachsen. Mit der fortschreitenden Digitalisierung von Schulen wächst zusätzlich der Bedarf, evidenzorientiertes Wissen über digitale Tools verfügbar zu machen. Gleichzeitig wird von der Bildungsforschung erwartet, praxisrelevantes Wissen bereitzustellen, das Lehrkräfte bei ihrer Arbeit unterstützt. In der Realität gelingt dieser Wissenstransfer jedoch häufig nur unzureichend: Forschungsergebnisse werden oft als schwer zugänglich und wenig anschlussfähig an schulische Praxis wahrgenommen. Vor diesem Hintergrund gewinnen ko-konstruktive Ansätze an Bedeutung, in denen Akteur:innen aus Forschung und Praxis Wissen gemeinsam entwickeln. Solche Formate sind bislang jedoch selten, und es ist wenig darüber bekannt, welche Bedingungen eine erfolgreiche Zusammenarbeit ermöglichen. Das hier beschriebene Transferprojekt setzt an dieser Lücke an und entwickelt evidenzorientierte, verständlich aufbereitete und praxisnahe Informationsangebote für Grundschullehrkräfte, mit einem Fokus auf die digitale Förderung von Schüler:innen im unteren Leistungsbereich. Die Entwicklung erfolgt in sogenannten transdisziplinären Dreiecken aus Lehrkräften, Bildungsforschenden und Wissenschaftskommunikation, die über mehrere Treffen hinweg in einem strukturierten Prozess zusammenarbeiten. Erste Evaluationsergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass Zusammenarbeit auf Augenhöhe möglich ist. Als zentrale Gelingensbedingungen zeigen sich klare Rollen, transparente Kommunikation und organisatorische Unterstützung; die Evaluation wird fortlaufend erweitert und dient der Diskussion von Potenzialen und Grenzen des Formats.

1. Introduction

Empirical evidence, including international large-scale assessments, indicates that a substantial proportion of students continues to fall short of minimum proficiency levels (OECD 2023; Diedrich et al. 2023). For many teachers, providing adequate support for low-achieving students and addressing increasingly heterogeneous classrooms remains a key challenge (Jude et al. 2025) and a central focus of professional learning, as teachers' professional competence has been linked to students' achievements (López-Martín et al. 2023). Research offers a growing evidence base on effective approaches (Slavin 2020). Additionally, the increasing availability of digital tools and the potential they offer for individualised instruction adds further complexity to selecting and applying adequate teaching approaches. However, bringing this evidence and everyday school practice together is far from straightforward (Wilkes and Stark 2023).

Accordingly, evidence-informed practice is still only partially realized (e.g., Kiemer and Kollar 2021). Structural and epistemic challenges contribute to this. For example, educational constructs are often less clearly defined and measurable than those in fields such as medicine – "blood pressure" is considerably more straightforward than "constructive support," one of the core dimensions of high-quality instruction (Klieme 2006; Renkl 2022). Moreover, research findings are sometimes inconsistent or inconclusive (Renkl 2022). Schools are inherently dynamic and social spaces. As Doyle (1986) observed, classroom environments are marked by, amongst others, unpredictability and a shared history of those involved. Hence, teachers operate within complex contexts and draw on situated knowledge about their students, institutional expectations, and past experiences (Bauer et al. 2015; Renkl 2022), which complicates the straightforward application of research findings. Furthermore, teachers' experiential knowledge has long received limited recognition in research (Hartmann and Kunter 2022) and discussions about evidence (Renkl 2022), even though research evidence is meant to enrich and refine experiential knowledge rather than replace it (Bauer et al. 2015; Stark 2017). Together, these factors contribute to what is commonly described as the research–practice gap.

Farley-Ripple et al. (2018) explicitly addressed this gap in their model, urging research to rethink the relationship between research and practice. They point out that knowledge mobilization is often conceptualized as a unidirectional process in which research evidence is transmitted to practice, and shortcomings are attributed primarily to schools and teachers. However, the gap is bidirectional: it is rooted not only in the structures and routines of practice but also in research (and other institutions, such as educational administration and policy, which we will not focus on here). On the research side, findings are usually published in academic journals aimed at scholarly audiences and rarely in formats accessible to practitioners (Bromme et al. 2016; Sander et al. 2025). On the practice side, teachers rely on different information sources often including experience-based resources and colleagues (Bråten and Ferguson 2015; Kiemer and Kollar 2021). They prefer resources that are easily accessible, understandable, and practically relevant rather than overly detailed, for example, regarding statistics (e.g., Kerwer et al. 2021). Across both sides, limited time further constrains sustained engagement with the needs, expectations, and norms of the other side (Hetmanek et al. 2015; Thomm et al. 2021).

In recent years, many approaches have been developed to bridge this gap (e.g., Seidel et al. 2017). Our project integrates several of these emerging strategies. We draw on a clearinghouse approach to create practitioner-friendly texts for teachers and we implement ideas of research–practice partnerships (RPP) and co-design principles through our "Transdisciplinary Triangles" (TTs). Hence, our approach differs from long-term science-practice collaborations, such as school networks or participatory research. In this article, we present our integrated approach, report preliminary results from accompanying research, and discuss implications for future research.

2. The Project "KONTEXT Grundschule"

The project KONTEXT Grundschule is part of a larger national transfer network lernen:digital (www.lernen.digital) and set up an online portal for primary school teachers (www.kontextgrundschule.de). This portal provides primary school teachers with evidence- *and* experience-oriented information on supporting children with low performance. Double-page texts cover specific topics and always take the use of digital tools into account. The project is additionally supported by a teacher association. Below, we will outline the background and in particular the co-constructive processes that lead to the creation of the texts.

2.1 Guiding Theoretical Assumptions

In their conceptual model reframing the relationship between educational research and practice, Farley-Ripple et al. (2018) highlight the distinct responsibilities held by researchers and practitioners across six interrelated dimensions. These dimensions – evidence, dissemination/search, interpretation, participation, frequency, and decision-making – represent critical points at which the interaction between research and practice can either be strengthened or inhibited. Rather than depicting knowledge transfer as a unidirectional approach, their framework emphasizes a bidirectional approach with reciprocal roles in shaping how research is produced, communicated, interpreted, and used.

The evidence dimension concerns the forms of knowledge that are generated and deemed credible. Researchers bear responsibility for producing rigorous evidence, while practitioners are responsible for the use of this evidence in decision-making processes. Dissemination refers to the communication of research findings and requires researchers to prepare knowledge in accessible forms while practitioners must seek and engage with such resources. These two dimensions align closely with the logic of clearinghouse approaches, where existing research is aggregated, evaluated, and made available to practitioners (Slavin 2008).

The next two dimensions in the model by Farley-Ripple and colleagues (2018), interpretation and participation, speak to the ways in which users make sense of evidence and collaborate in adapting it to local contexts. Interpretation requires practitioners to translate research findings into their own professional knowledge, often without direct engagement in the research process. Participation addresses the extent to which practitioners are included in shaping research questions, processes, and products. While it does not necessarily mean conducting research, it involves meaningful input into how evidence is contextualized. These dimensions resonate strongly with the principles of RPPs and co-design, which emphasize joint sense-making and contextual adaptation (Penuel et al. 2020).

Finally, the frequency and decision-making dimensions refer to how regularly research-practice interactions occur and how evidence-oriented information is ultimately integrated into practice and policy decisions. These dimensions are relevant for evaluating collaborative models and for identifying areas in which future research can further strengthen sustained engagement.

2.1.1 Clearinghouse Approaches

Clearinghouses are one widely used mechanism to enhance evidence orientation in education (Slavin 2008). They typically produce information resources tailored to specific audiences, often synthesizing research into accessible formats such as summaries, ratings, or best-practice recommendations (Seidel et al. 2017; Slavin 2008). To qualify for inclusion in most clearinghouses, studies must meet specific methodological standards, often only meta-analyses are included (Seidel et al. 2017). Clearinghouses started with the aim of communicating "evidence-based" information (Wadhwa et al. 2024). However, the definition of what constitutes "evidence-based" is far from standardized, and different clearinghouses operationalize the term in divergent ways (Wadhwa et al. 2024). In recent years, "evidence-informed" or "evidence-oriented" is considered to reflect a more realistic perspective (Stark 2017).

The underlying idea of clearinghouses is that informed intermediaries – usually researchers – translate complex evidence into usable knowledge for practitioners, who then access these curated resources. Clearinghouses aggregate and present research findings for a clearly specified audience. For example, in the UK, the Education Endowment Foundation provides synthesized evidence targeted at teachers, principals and administration (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/), while in Germany, the Clearing House Unterricht at the Technical University of Munich (CHU; Seidel et al. 2017) and the *digital und offen* (duo; https://duo.tuecede.de/) platform at the University of Tübingen (Schneider et al. 2021) serve mainly teacher educators. The CHU, as the first major clearinghouse initiative in the German educational landscape, has been well received by its intended audience (Diery et al. 2020). Clearinghouses are one important and useful lever to bridge the research-practice gap. When mapped onto the Farley-Ripple et al. (2018) framework, clearinghouses primarily address evidence and dissemination. A possible extension of this clearinghouse approach could be to combine it with collaborations between research and practice to also cover interpretation and participation.

2.1.2 Co-constructive Processes

Co-constructive principles align with a broader shift in educational research toward collaborative, problem-oriented approaches. Co-constructive processes involve teachers and researchers alike and aim to establish communication on an equal footing and recognition of teachers' needs and expertise (Brühwiler and Leutwyler 2020; Penuel et al. 2020). Indeed, collaborations in which teachers and researchers work together

toward a shared goal can improve educational practice and, ultimately, student learning (Shavelson 2020). Furthermore, uptake and use of jointly prepared resources is higher than for resources created by researchers only (Penuel et al. 2015). In line with this, co-constructive approaches have gained prominence in recent years, with RPPs emerging as particularly influential (Coburn and Penuel 2016). In RPPs, engaging with research findings, but also teachers' perspectives, is central (Schlicht-Schmälzle et al. 2024), as such engagement is intended to help both sides address challenges they encounter in their work (Coburn et al. 2013).

These collaborative dynamics directly correspond to two key dimensions identified by Farley-Ripple et al. (2018): participation and interpretation. Rather than viewing practitioners merely as recipients of evidence, co-constructive approaches position them as active contributors whose situated knowledge is indispensable. Of course, participation can take various forms, which means that teachers can be involved to a greater or lesser extent. In co-constructive work, interpretation is not an individual task but a shared process in which partners negotiate meaning, relevance, and implications for practice. These two dimensions thus form the conceptual core of co-construction and other collaborative models.

Empirical research shows that co-constructive processes can strengthen alignment between research and practice, improve the contextual suitability of knowledge products, and support organisational learning in schools and districts (Penuel et al. 2015). Co-design – a participatory approach in which stakeholders jointly shape interventions or tools (Penuel et al. 2007) – extends these benefits by placing shared interpretation and adaptation at the center of the collaboration.

There is growing evidence that such collaborative approaches can have tangible effects on educational practice: studies have documented improvements in the implementation of interventions aimed at enhancing student achievement (Booth et al. 2015) as well as positive impacts on instructional quality (Debarger et al. 2017). At the same time, findings on how frequently teachers draw on research vary considerably (Coburn and Penuel 2016; Farrell et al. 2018), underscoring the importance of understanding the mechanisms that support sustained engagement.

Despite their potential, co-constructive processes also face notable challenges. Even when partners share a common goal, teachers and researchers may struggle to understand one another (Farrell et al. 2022). This often stems from differences in professional language, leading to misunderstandings or misaligned interpretations of key concepts. Expectations regarding timelines, roles, and outcomes can also diverge (Coburn and Penuel 2016). Role ambiguity, differing assumptions about responsibilities, and variations in routines and decision-making structures may create friction (Coburn and Penuel 2016; Farrell et al. 2022). Moreover, trust must be built over time, yet time itself is a scarce resource for both groups. Many RPPs additionally involve conducting joint research as a core element – frequently cited as one of the defining principles distinguishing RPPs

from other forms of collaboration (Schlicht-Schmälzle et al. 2024). While strategies such as establishing shared norms, creating structured collaboration routines, and developing joint tools can help address these challenges, doing so requires sustained facilitation and organisational support (Henrick et al. 2017).

2.1.3 Toward an Integrated Approach

Recognizing both the strengths and limitations of clearinghouse models and co-constructive approaches, our project seeks to integrate both, thereby explicitly addressing the six dimensions identified by Farley-Ripple et al. (2018). By combining evidence aggregation and dissemination (clearinghouse approach) with collaborative interpretation and co-design (co-constructive approach), we aim to create a comprehensive model of research–practice interaction. Four of the six dimensions – evidence, dissemination/search, interpretation, and participation – are embedded directly into our implementation, while the remaining two – frequency and decision-making – are examined through (future) accompanying research. The following sections present our conceptual framework, describe the design of our co-constructive process, and report results from the accompanying research.

2.2 An Integrated Approach

2.2.1 The Information Texts

The texts represent the clearinghouse component of our approach and operationalize the dimensions of evidence and dissemination. Each text addresses a specific topic – for example, Intelligent Tutoring Systems or the assessment of student performance. The topics are identified following a standardized survey with primary school teachers as well as suggestions from the teachers' association and individual teachers (suggestions can be continuously submitted via the project website). To ensure that each text rests on a sufficiently robust evidence base, we assess the availability of existing research before selecting a topic; specifically, a topic is only pursued when at least one meta-analysis or systematic review is available. This dual criterion – practical relevance *and* a stable research foundation – addresses common challenges encountered by both practice and research.

All texts follow a uniform structure. A Key Message summarizes the central insight, followed by an introduction to the topic. The main body consists of an overview of the research evidence and a discussion of implications for practice. Each text concludes with a final synthesis. Additionally, all texts include sections focusing on (1) digital aspects of the topic (e.g., tools) and (2) how the topic relates to supporting low-achieving students. Optional materials such as worksheets, further resources, or external links can be included to deepen practical applicability.

2.2.2 The Co-Constructive Component: Transdisciplinary Triangles (TTs)

The information texts are created in so-called "Transdisciplinary Triangles (TT)". The TTs constitute the co-constructive component of our approach and operationalize the dimensions of interpretation and participation. Building on the theoretical foundations outlined above, we developed a co-constructive model tailored to the aims of the project. In contrast to classical RPPs (Schlicht-Schmälzle et al. 2024), our TTs do not conduct joint empirical research; rather, the overarching goal is the co-constructive development of texts that address the support of low-achieving primary school students and, in this sense, pursue the long-term goal of improving educational opportunities. Accordingly, the collaboration is not long-term but spans approximately four months – until the text is completed. Despite this temporal limitation, many conceptual elements of RPPs inform our approach, particularly regarding participation, interpretation, and the structuring of the collaborative work.

Each text is produced by a TT consisting of two primary school teachers, two researchers, and one science communicator. Teachers are recruited through various channels and volunteer to participate; a prerequisite is that they have fully completed their teacher training and several years of teaching experience. Researchers are invited directly. One researcher must hold at least a doctoral degree and have expertise in the topic of the text, while the second is a doctoral candidate writing a dissertation on the topic. Both researchers come from different research groups to ensure diversity of perspectives. The science communicator – who remains the same across all TTs and is also a moderator – brings expertise in science communication and journalistic writing, adding an additional professional perspective and ensuring easy comprehensibility of the texts.

The TT collaboration follows a pre-structured, time-limited process designed to address well-documented RPP challenges: lack of structure, insufficient trust, divergent expectations, and unclear roles (Henrick et al. 2017). The process includes several phases – getting to know each other, problem description, topic refinement, writing, and iterative review – organized into distinct "missions" and meetings. Missions take place between meetings, during which participants work on specific tasks, for example, gathering knowledge about the topic or drafting text passages.

Role clarity is ensured by explicitly defining who participates and why. This transparency is intended to mitigate common RPP difficulties related to role ambiguity and misaligned expectations. The science communicator, who also acts as moderator plays a bridging role by facilitating communication between professional groups, helping to establish a shared language, and ensuring that all voices are heard and valued. Accordingly, this person takes on a broker role in the process. This is particularly important given the known challenges of communication across professions, the need for equality in interaction, and the recognition of diverse forms of expertise. The goal of this project is not only to involve teachers as a kind of evaluating body in the TT process, but also to ensure that the various professions participate on an equal footing, which, if necessary,

can be facilitated by the moderator. In addition, the science communicator ensures adherence to the pre-defined process and provides journalistic editing of the final text to enhance clarity and readability for the target audience.

3. Preliminary Evaluation Results

To date, four TTs have been successfully completed, five are ongoing, and two are starting soon. To evaluate our approach, we administer a standardized evaluation questionnaire at the end of each TT. Here we present the results of the first four TTs. In total, $N = 18$ people participated, of whom 7 were teachers, 8 were researchers, and the science communicator participated in each TT.[1]

Satisfaction with participation was assessed using three items (e.g., "Participating in the project was worthwhile for me.", Cronbach's $\alpha = .58$). To assess the quality of the co-constructive processes we used nine questions (e.g., "In the project, all participants had an equal opportunity to contribute their perspectives.", Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$). Organisational aspects were measured using four items (e.g., "The time structure during the meetings was appropriate.", Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$). All items were answered on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 6 "strongly agree". Additionally, we provided participants with the opportunity to openly elaborate on positive and negative aspects as well as challenges during the process.

Figure 1 displays the results. Overall, participants showed high satisfaction with their participation in the TT. The co-constructive processes were evaluated positively, meaning that participants were able to contribute equally and that the individual perspectives were valued. Organization of the TTs was also rated positively. Descriptively, no major differences between professions can be observed.

1 Overall, however, the science communicator only completed the evaluation for two TTs and one teacher was excluded due to incomplete data.

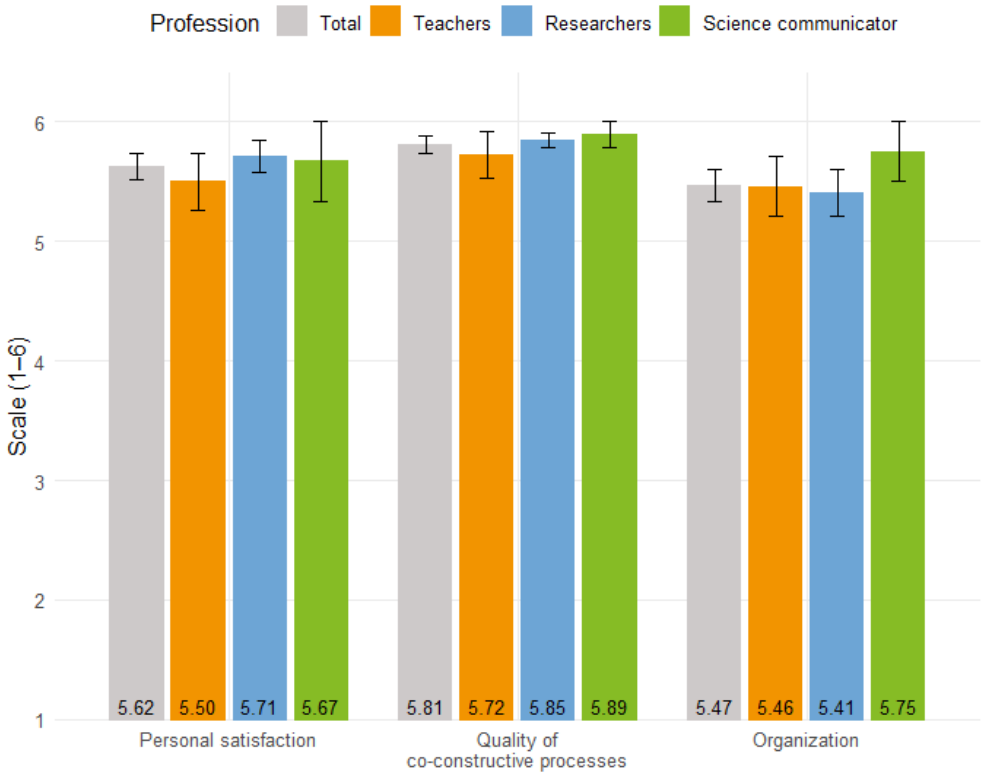


Fig. 1: Results of the Evaluation of the TT Process

Open answers reveal that participants appreciate the open and constructive atmosphere in the TTs. Teachers and researchers reported that they found the composition of the team and the different perspectives enriching. The science communicator was also praised. Negative feedback was comparatively low. In the first TT, it was noted as a challenge that too much text was produced and that it was difficult to shorten it afterwards. In the subsequent TTs, the text length was clearly communicated by the science communicator, and the template was adapted accordingly. Another challenge mentioned was the integration of different perspectives when translating knowledge into practical tips. Overall, positive feedback clearly outweighs the negative responses. Negative aspects or challenges were mentioned in isolated cases, while the positive aspects were listed by almost all participants.

4. Outlook

Throughout the implementation of the TT, several insights emerged that informed iterative refinements to the process design. One central learning concerns the composition of the TTs. Although early project plans included the option of involving teacher trainees,

this proved less feasible and desirable in practice. Teacher trainees typically possess limited classroom experience, which complicates the inclusion of several practical experiences. We therefore decided to restrict participation to fully qualified teachers, who can draw on stable classroom experience and possess greater flexibility in engaging with research-informed collaboration.

A second learning relates to the structure of the TT process itself. While the initial framework consisted of four meetings, the first TTs revealed the need for an additional meeting to have more time to work on the text and integrate feedback.

Despite the promising initial results, several aspects of the approach warrant deeper examination through future research. Firstly, it remains unclear whether and to what extent participants behave collaboratively and equally during the TT process. While the presence of a science communicator helps moderate communication and balance roles, and participants report that participation is equally possible for everyone, assessing actual parity in participation requires systematic analysis. We therefore plan to conduct discourse analyses to evaluate how interactional dynamics unfold within TTs, with a particular focus on indicators of mutual respect, shared decision-making, and balanced influence. To investigate this in future research, we recorded all TT meetings.

Second, the dissemination and reach of the texts require systematic evaluation. Website analytics will allow us to examine patterns of access and engagement, thereby informing the dimension of frequency. Understanding who accesses the texts, how often, and for how long will shed light on whether this format successfully addresses persistent dissemination challenges.

Third, the impact of the texts on practice remains an open question. To address the dimension of decision-making, we are currently planning an experimental study to investigate how exposure to the texts influences teachers' professional development. Such work is critical for determining whether the co-constructive and clearinghouse components translate into possible changes in educational practice.

4.1 Conclusion

Although, generally, the earliest possible integration of teachers into future research would be a desirable development, it is nevertheless necessary to make already existing knowledge publicly available and usable for and with school practice. In line with Biesta's (2007) conception of evidence-orientation as a set of choices that can inform teaching rather than as a singular truth, our integrated approach seeks to create spaces in which evidence can meaningfully interact with professional judgment. Overall, the combination of the clearinghouse approach with co-constructive principles offers a promising model for strengthening the relationship between research and practice. At the same time, several questions remain to be addressed, particularly regarding interactional equity, dissemination patterns, and the impact of evidence-informed materials

on decision-making. By continuing to expand research on mechanisms and outcomes, we aim to contribute to a more sustained and reciprocal connection between educational research and practice, including the transfer of knowledge on digitally supported approaches for supporting low-achieving students.

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