

Ellen Mandinach, PhD — Educational Psychologist

RESEARCH BEYOND ACADEMIA

Ellen Mandinach, PhD, knows people learn in different ways. That's why she's studying how classroom settings can work for everyone.

After earning an undergraduate degree in psychology from Smith College, Mandinach was not sure which career path she wanted to pursue. She did know a more traditional career path in psychology — in academia — was not what she was looking for; she wanted something a bit more hands-on.

Mandinach set her sights on psychological and educational measurement, enrolling in grad school at the Stanford University School of Education.

"I was privileged to be mentored by a fabulous quartet of scholars," says Mandinach. "It was there that I formed enduring interests in measurement, individual differences, educational technology and data analysis that are the foundation of my work."

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD FOR DIFFERENT LEARNERS

Upon graduation, Mandinach took a job as an associate research scientist at Educational Testing Services. There, she learned applied research. She directed an eight-year project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, wrote her first book and explored elements of educational technology.

She focused her work on areas that would help teachers and students perform better in schools. She developed a framework for information and communications technology literacy. She also conducted research to identify new ways of test-taking for individuals with disabilities.

TECHNOLOGIES TRANSLATING IN THE CLASSROOM

Mandinach found her next career opportunity at the Center for Children and Technology (CCT) in New York City, where she oversaw research, experimental trials and tests in educational settings that focused on data-driven decision-making.

"There is a strong emphasis among educational policymakers for educators to use data and evidence to inform their practice. So, data-driven decision-making is a hot topic," says Mandinach.

Today, Mandinach is a senior research scientist and the director of data for decisions initiative at WestEd. There, her work focuses on understanding what it means for teachers to be data literate and helping schools and state licensure agencies use WestEd research to transform their policies and practice.

"The research questions that I'm asking have to do with data-driven decision-making. What does it mean for educators to be data literate? What are the skills and knowledge required to be data literate? Given that information, what changes need to be made to educator preparation programs and state licensure requirements to incorporate data literacy?" Mandinach says.

According to Mandinach, the hope is that this research will have practical education applications such as transforming how educator training programs prepare teachers and administrators to use data more effectively in their practice.

"This is an emerging field where change comes slowly. If we better prepare educators to use data, it will help to make education an evidence-based field," she says



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PSYCHOLOGY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

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