

The Connect Effect: Working across Groups in a Community of Practice

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A Little About NASDSE

- We've been around since 1938
- We represent the state directors of special education
- “Committed to a performance-based educational system responsive to the needs of all children and youth, including those with disabilities.”

Thinking Like a Partner



- Everyone has something to share and everyone has something to learn about our most challenging community issues.
- States and stakeholders are turning varied perspectives into strategies to change the way we approach complex problems together

Our Time Together Today

- Ask
 - o Can we learn to work across boundaries of roles, agencies and levels to solve critical problems?
 - o Can we afford not to?
 - o To what extent are *Communities of Practice* and *Community Schools* approaches aligned?
- Describe
 - o The strategic advantage of partnerships with stakeholders
 - o Kinds of partnerships
 - o Communities of Practice (CoP)
 - o Examples of CoP for strategic advantage

Our Time Together Today

- Apply
 - o IDEA Partnership Framework to current issues
- Examine
 - o Some examples Communities of Practice
 - o Some scenarios that might be addressed through a CoP

*“ In theory there
is no difference
between theory
and practice; in
practice there is.”*

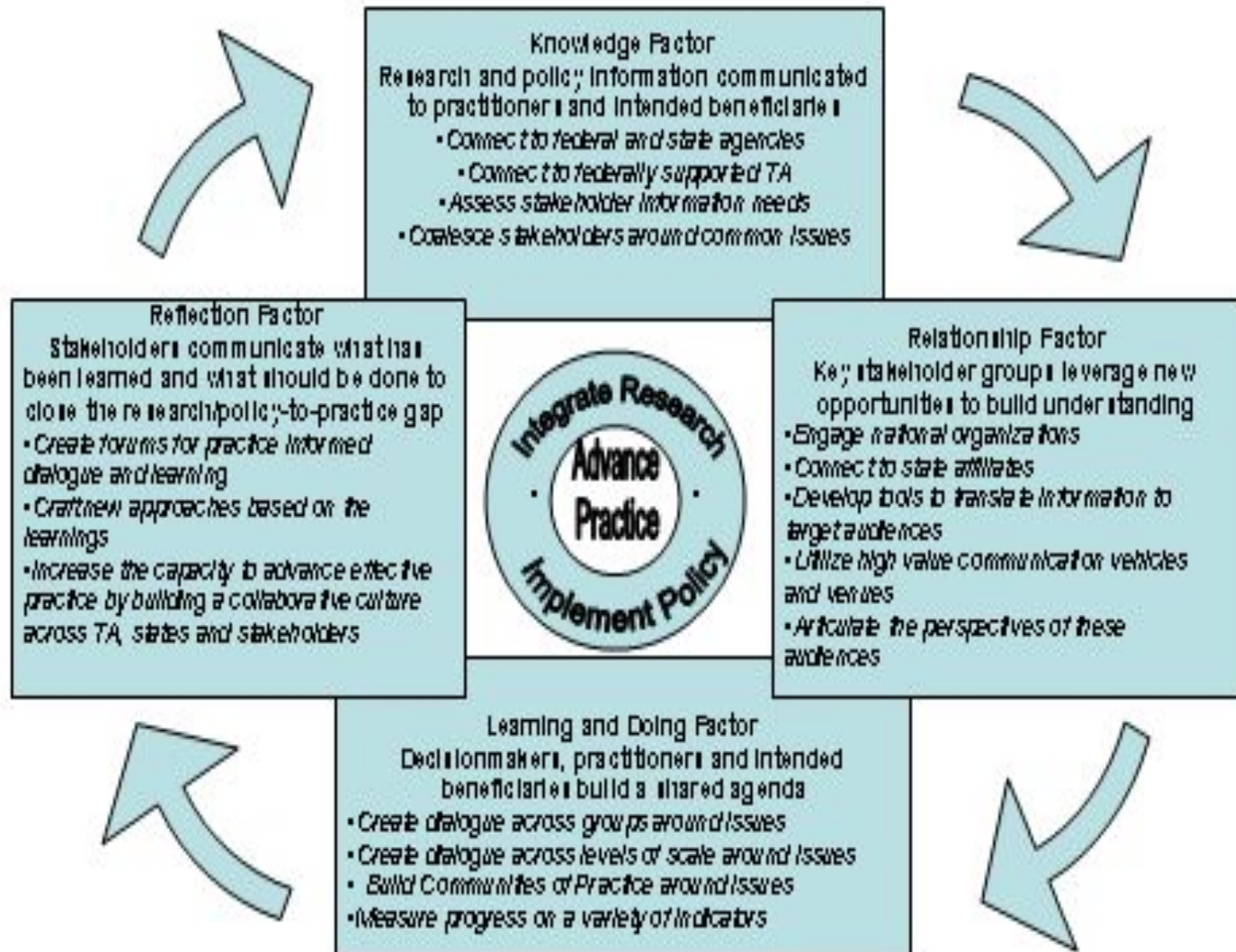
Yogi Berra



The IDEA Partnership

- The U.S. Department of Education's investment in stakeholder expertise
- An affiliation of 55 national organizations
- Collaborating across roles and settings
- Translating research and policy to practice
- Solving persistent and complex problems

Participatory Framework for Advancing Research and Policy to Practice



The Vocabulary of Collaboration: What Elements Matter?

Common Terms

- Partnership
- Coalition
- Community of Practice

Critical Elements

- Duration
- Role
- Depth
- Strategic Value
- ‘Push’ or ‘Pull’

Knowledge Management (KM): The New Focus on Information and Experience

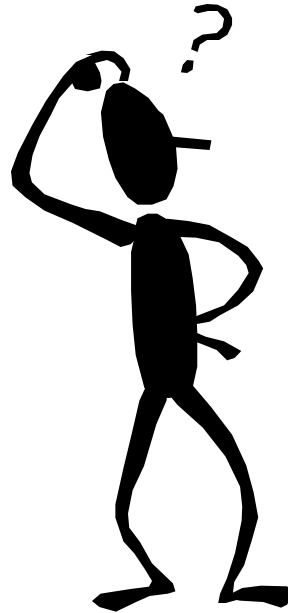


***“Knowledge is an
asset to be managed
like other assets”***

Etienne Wenger

Illusory constraints

**Substantial
constraints**



**Flexible
constraints**

Absolute and rigid constraints

Source: CA Dept of ED

Where Is the Value Added in Engaging the Stakeholders?

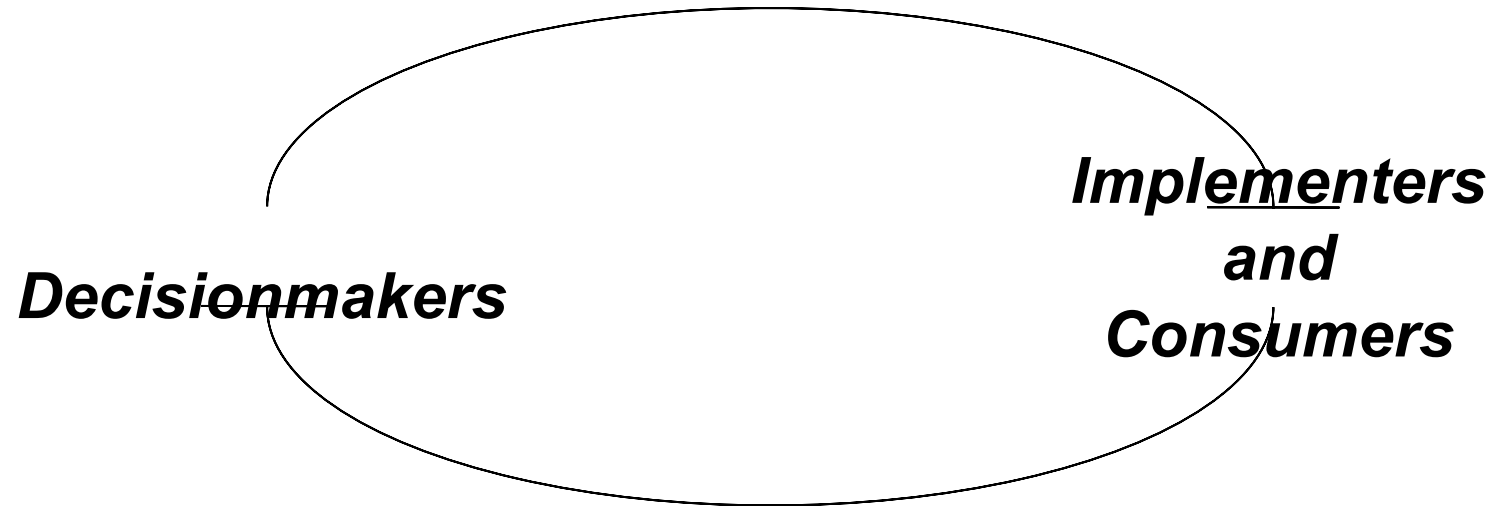
First Thoughts

- Build relationships that undergird real change
- Develop connections to extensive and deep networks
- Create customized messages
- Share aligned messages
- Extend the capacity to the state staff efforts by drawing on the reach of *existing* networks

Emerging

- Sense issues *before* critical points
- Specify the dimensions of an issue with those impacted
- Identify shared interests
- Move beyond organizational positions to shared interests
- Unite the state and the stakeholders around common goals
- Introduce *two-way* learning

Two-Way Learning: Partnering to Learn What Works



Communities of Practice: The Evolution of Knowledge Management

- Untapped knowledge resides with those who are closest to the work
- To reveal opportunities and gaps, leaders need to engage those who have a role in resolving persistent problems
- *Real* change requires that leaders, implementers and consumers build a shared sense of purpose around the change



What Do You Think?

**Can this style of leadership
be learned?**

**Can authority learn to share
leadership?**

Can This Leadership Style Be Learned?

- Belief (*in 'Smart Power'*)
- Leading by convening
- Using '*authority position*' to legitimize and propel
- Convey that decisionmakers *cannot* abdicate responsibility and oversight while demonstrating a willing to use other, more collaborative, strategies
- Intentionality
- Practice, practice, practice!
- Communicate, communicate, communicate!

What are Communities of Practice?



A way of working

- Involving those who do shared work
- Involving those that share issues
- Always asking “who isn’t here?”

A way of learning

- To create new knowledge grounded in ‘doing the work’
- With those who can advocate for and make change

What Do Communities Do?



- **Seek and invite others doing shared work**
- **Share learnings within organizations, agencies and roles**
- **Share learnings across organizations, agencies and roles**
- **Decide to go things together that will address a shared concern**
- **Create new knowledge grounded in ‘doing’ the work**

Why Are Communities of Value?

- **Provide the support that individuals need**
- **Respect the ‘expertise’ that individuals bring**
- **Recognize the differences in the settings where people do their work**
- **Seek commonality within differing viewpoints**
- **Unite individuals in action**
- **Focus on ‘learning’**
- **Use ‘learning’ to transform practice**



How Do Communities Make a Difference?



- **Use the natural bonds between people that do common work**
- **Maintain communication that strengthen natural bonds**
- **Keep community members focused on outcomes**
- **Use the ‘community status’ to bring attention to issues**
- **Use the ‘community status’ to engage the people that can help move the issues**
- **Move change to the ‘*Tipping Point*’**

We Need to be Able to Operate at the Intersection of Research, Policy and Practice

- States as leverage points
- Stakeholders as partners
- Federal agencies as collaborators
- Federal investments as resources
- Learning within states with the stakeholders
- Learning across states with peers
- Bringing it down to the local level

NASDSE, 2002

Communities as a State TA Strategy: The SEA Role in Supporting Practice Change

Shaping and spreading effective practice

- Sharing promising strategies
- Learning how and why they work
- Helping locals learn from each other
- Creating new knowledge across organizational boundaries
- Using durable networks to support and spread practice change

Reframing policy, research and practice

- Learning how to move from ‘knowing’ to ‘doing’
- Translating learning to policy
- Encouraging investments that will move the work
- Recognizing the value of all contributions to a more complete & effective approach
- Creating new relationships among policymakers, researchers & implementers

NASDSE, 2002

Understanding Shared Work

- Who is interested in this issue and why?
- What efforts are underway separately to address the work?
- What will make the shared work need fulfilling for others?
- How can we build new connections? What venues and communication vehicles will deepen connections?
- What goals can unite us?
- Reach out and invite!

How Can Separate Work Become Shared Work?

- Cross-walk initiatives
- Map current efforts
- Examine your networks
- Commit to building a ***‘Community’***
- Demonstrate the strategic advantage ***to*** the community to maintain their engagement
- Demonstrate the strategic advantage ***of*** the community to help build the culture for collaboration in the SEA

How Can We Build the Connections That Create Community ?

- Be intentional about collaboration
- Invest in collaborative strategies
- Plan together
- Create levels of community that reach the multiple levels
- Share training
- Do your '*real work*' through the *community*. The *community* is not an '*add on*'
- Invent new ways to connect
 - List serves
 - Forums
 - Routine Learning Calls
- Create issue focused *Practice Groups*
- Involve *Practice Groups* in advising and decision making
- Undertake shared work

What Does a CoP Look Like...

- In states/at the local level/in schools?
- Around issues
- *www.sharedwork.org*

New Eyes on Challenges Through Communities of Practice



*For you, is there value in
building a community for
strategic advantage?*

Common Scenarios that '*Beg*' for Community Approaches:

What Would You Do?

Scenario 1

- The SEA has invested in a large scale behavioral support program that is very effective for most students. Increasingly, more students are requiring interventions that are beyond the current scope of school resources. The SEA wants to refine current relationships and build new strategies with human service agencies.

Scenario 2

- The school district has invested heavily in programs and consultants to increase the quality of its core academic program and the professional development of its teachers. The results have been disappointing. An analysis shows that academic achievement is not improving. Teacher satisfaction is low. In a related finding, the district identifies high student absentee rates, high numbers of out-of-school suspensions and a moderately high rate of transience.