Designing Learning Communities to Support Policy Change: Sharing Lessons from the Field

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November 9, 2017

Presentation Overview

- Introductions

- Case Studies

- Discussion

- Debrief and Connections to AEA Theme

Introductions

- Name

- Affiliation(s)

- How do you support efforts to build and sustain learning communities?

Learning Communities

- Serve as forum for effective dissemination of evaluation and research

- Utilize distinct structures and facilitation approaches

- Numerous types
  - Evaluation learning circles
  - Strategic learning
  - Networked improvement communities

Case Study 1: Puget Sound Coalition for College and Career Readiness

- Convenes superintendents and college presidents across South King County since 2010

- Partners include state government, large local university, regional college access network

- Focus on college and career readiness and success

- Meetings every four to eight weeks with consistent format

Case Study 1: Puget Sound Coalition for College and Career Readiness

- Learning focus
  - Educational policies and reforms focusing on transition between high school and college
  - Postsecondary completion
  - Bringing a race equity lens
- Policy to practice changes since 2013
  - Growth of World Language Credit
  - Collaboration on college course placement
  - Increase in rigorous course taking
  - State promise scholarship support systems

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Case Study 2: Project Finish Line

- Convenes staff from seven community and technical colleges five times in 2015-2016

- Co-planned with adult learning expert and college staff

- Partners include Walla Walla Community College, local guest speakers, funder

- Strong emphasis on community building

  - Food served

  - Four-hour meetings

  - Interactive format

  - Focus on application of knowledge

Case Study 2: Project Finish Line Completion Learning Community

- Learning focus
  - Race equity tool
  - Growth mindset
  - Building data capacity
  - Sustaining and scaling effective programs
- Policy to practice changes since 2015
  - Emergency funding structures
  - Auto conferral of Associates degrees
  - Communications campaigns enabled by increase in investment in technology

Learning Communities: Shared Themes

- Policy change is a system-level endeavor
  - Shared planning
  - Adaptive orientation
  - Value of multiple perspectives in discussion
  - Value of strategic communication

- Key supports
  - Virtual hub for work
  - Adult learning frame
  - Staffing to ensure executive sponsorship

Think Tank Discussion

Reflecting on the case studies and your personal experience…

1. What do decision-makers and other users want to learn from evaluation, and what can be done to enhance the interest and involvement of evaluation stakeholders?

2. How can evaluators become knowledge-brokers within organizations and networks to enhance evaluation use and influence, and contribute to knowledge-based decision-making?

3. How can evaluation contribute to individual and organizational learning for evaluation sponsors and stakeholders?

Debrief and Discussion

- What are key takeaways from your think tank discussion?

- What are connections to the AEA conference theme?

Information Design: Evaluators must communicate to diverse audiences about the complexities of programs and their impacts. They strive to be accurate, compelling, and clear. At the same time, they are constrained by the time, attention, and training of audiences. To be successful, evaluators must develop strong information design skills, such as:

- data visualization techniques that transform mind-boggling complexity into clear, meaningful images;
- real-time data displays that help managers make decisions better and more quickly;
- storytelling that speaks to the part of our brains hardwired by evolution to learn from narrative;
- and multi-faceted communication strategies that leverage social psychology and social media to promote appropriate and timely use.

Information design plays a central role in evaluation. But what is good information design? How should it be taught and learned? Can we be persuasive and accurate at the same time? Have evaluation reports become obsolete? What roles can online and interactive technologies play?

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References and Resources

- Byrk, A.S. (2015). 2014 AERA Distinguished Lecture: Accelerating How We Learn to Improve. Educational Researcher, 44(9), 467-477.

- Coffman, J., & Beer, T. (2011). *Evaluation to Support Strategic Learning: Principles and Practices*. Center for Evaluation Innovation.

- Cohen, C. (2006, fall). Evaluation learning circles: A sole proprietor's evaluation capacity-building strategy, 85-103.

- Presentation and Materials: https://coalition.psesd.org/resource-repository/

- Puget Sound Coalition Website: http://coalition.psesd.org/

- Project Finish Line Website: https://coalition.psesd.org/project-finish-line/

- Puget Sound College and Career Network Website http://psccn.org/