Knowledge as a Cohesion Factor between Education Communities

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Outline of this talk

- Addressing the challenges that Board researchers face on an on-going basis, as stated in the conference call
- Knowing what [others] know; knowledge as a cohesion factor
- The role for educators’ networks-example of SURE network
- How to work from “ground up”? Example of UW and GECDSB collaboration
- Take-home messages regarding the conditions for effective partnerships between researchers and practitioners
Challenges for Board researchers:

- **Challenge**: achieving mutual reciprocity between and among stakeholders (e.g., dealing with unequal access to knowledge, and distinctions between producers and recipients of knowledge); enhancing professional development of educators and mobilizing knowledge to build capacity and spread; working together as a professional learning community and engaging in timely, public conversations on educational issues to create value added information for both researchers and practitioners;

- **Bigger challenge**: balancing research needs and implementation practicalities (to create opportunities for evidence-based approaches for establishing policy, decision making and implementing practices)

- **Bigger challenge**: adopting a common understanding of the measurement or assessment goals (e.g., how to collect, analyze, interpret, and report data clearly).
I will start with some bigger challenges:

- Balancing research needs and implementation practicalities (to create opportunities for evidence-based approaches for establishing policy, decision making and implementing practices)
  - evidence---practice gap
  - evidence---policy gap
  - policy---practice gap

- What is needed? Bringing evidence and practice together requires policy and management decisions (Brew, 2003).
Do we need cohesion? What is it?

- Is it: “group members’ inclination to forge social bonds, resulting in members sticking together and remaining united” (Carron, 1982, p. 124).
What is cohesion?

• Or, is it a more complex construct, such as:
  1. attraction to the group
  2. commitment to the task, and
  3. group pride?

Or something else?
Knowing what [others] know; knowledge as a cohesion factor

- Instead of simply adopting of a common understanding of the measurement or assessment goals...
Knowing what [others] know; knowledge as a cohesion factor

• …, we need to co-create a common understanding of the measurement or assessment goals.
We need to change perspectives on practitioner research...

... taking inquiry as intellectual stance and theory of action will disrupt this [old] assumption (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011).
Communities of practice & putting students at the centre, unite teaching and research

From Brew (2003):
My Experiences with Networks

The Knowledge Network of Applied Education Research (KNAER), the School-Board University Research Exchange (SURE), …
School Board University Research Exchange - SURE Network

The Association of Educational Researchers of Ontario (AERO) Fall 2016 Conference
SURE Network Mission

• To develop and sustain an active collaborative relationship among universities and school districts in the London Region in order to inspire a culture of inquiry, advance skills, and promote knowledge exchange related to education research.

• SURE is a flexible collaborative relationship between universities and school districts that is characterized by:
  • Focus on research, evaluation and scholarship.
  • Collaborative processes for research ethics review.
  • Appreciation of each others’ priorities, skills and contributions.
  • Creation, mobilization and utilization of knowledge.
We started from understanding academic – practitioner relationships

Current Status

Different priorities
Different pressures

World of Universities
Different strengths
Different language

World of School Districts

Slide from the Report to the London Region MiSA PNC, September 2008
In 2010, we conducted a Teacher Researcher Study

- There were three main questions driving our study:
  - How do elementary and secondary school teachers understand the term ‘research’?
  - What do teachers perceive to be the enablers or barriers to using research effectively in their classroom practice?
  - What is the role of school boards and faculties of education in enhancing teachers’ use of research?

- And, understood that there are different research agendas, priorities, and forms of research that educators engage in.
We identified barriers and enablers for using research effectively in classroom practice

**Barriers**
- Different understandings of research
- Work overload
- Lack of communication
- Top-down approach

**Enablers**
- Supportive administrators
- Research time built into the school day
- Supportive school culture
- School board-university partnerships

**Recommendations**
- Create research time
- Recognize teacher research
- Engage teachers in research discourse & collaborations
- Develop & sustain school board-university research networks

The School Board-University Research Exchange Network has mobilized knowledge....

...for researchers and practitioners:

- Established SURE website--created an online community;
- Organized Percolator events at central locations, showcasing collaborative research projects and generating future ideas;
- Participated and presented at regional, national, and international conferences (e.g., OERS, CSSE, AERA);
- Developed KM resources: videos, workshop materials, research briefs;
- Celebrated research by organizing research festivals;
- Piloted the 'match-making' website at Western University;
- Distributed small grants towards networking.
The target audience grew with each project...

Local Initiatives - U. Windsor with GECDSB

SURE Steering Committee (2008)

- Educator Use of Research Project (2010)
- 2 KNAER Grants (2011)
- SSHRC Public Outreach Grant (2013)

Report to Ministry (2012)

- Online Community & Festival (2013)
- 4 Research-to-Practice Festivals (2013-2014)
- 5 Instructional Videos for Teachers (2013)
Local initiative btw. U. Windsor and GECDSB: Developing research capacity from “ground up”

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Timeline of the GECDSB and U. Windsor CI Partnership project—2013/14

- **Project Cycle Begins:** Planning & Funding
- **Nov 2013 Launch Session**
- **Nov /Dec 2013 Ethics**
- **Dec 2014 Team Release Time**
- **March 2014 Team Release Time**
- **April 2014 Team Release Time**
- **May 2014 Learning Fair**

- Teams Engage in Cycles of Inquiry
- Central Office Partners to Support Inquiry and Professional Learning
- University Partners to Support Evidence Collection and Analysis, and Report Writing

The Association of Educational Researchers of Ontario (AERO) Fall 2016 Conference
• Provide professional learning opportunities related to inquiry, student learning and instruction.
• Partner with teams engaged in inquiry.
• Financially support the launch session, team release time, and the learning fair.

School Board
Central Office

• Collaborate to inquire into a common challenge of practice.
• Document learning.
• Engage in an ongoing cycle of inquiry: frame the problem; collect evidence; analyze evidence; celebrate and share.

Teachers and Principals

University

• Provide support for question framing, data collection and analysis, and sharing findings.
• Partner with teams engaged in inquiry.
• Financially support the launch session, team release time, and the learning fair.

Students
Take-home messages

• Effective partnerships between researchers and practitioners depend on the commitment of individuals and groups, strong (but not overpowering leadership) and funding.

• Policy and leadership decisions may bring evidence and practice together.

• We need to co-create shared understanding of the measurement or assessment goals.

• Knowledge brokering is a cohesion factor for all educators.
Some literature


