Principles of Mechanisms of Change Strand: Meeting Notes

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Working Session 1

1. Where is it as educational psychologists that we want to be manifest and situated, for example with regard to school policy and programs (e.g. schools, universities, societal levels, different ecological levels). Why do these matter? This question will be discussed at the first strand meeting to set the goals for the remaining sessions.
2. What is it that we want to emphasize as important with regard to promoting these issues (e.g., learning, development, policies, curriculum, assessment, teacher evaluation)?
3. How do we make this happen? We also mean by what processes and practices will we make this happen. How do we get our messages heard and by whom?.
4. If you were to choose one aspect of change to convey regarding policy and programs, what would it be (think of your own research/practice/work). How would you develop policy/programs to facilitate change? (we will likely do this as small group activities, so multiple perspectives will be identified here)

Question 1:

The field appears to be moving toward an identity shift, and the major theme is one of identity exploration. To that end, our diverse backgrounds within the field are points of strength. We should harness such diversity. Harnessing diversity means bringing each of our levels of focus in research (be it the individual, dyad, school, district level and beyond), finding mechanisms of change at this level, and applying to another level of analysis. To apply our work to another level of analysis, we must acknowledge that our own research becomes a part of the background. The research questions that guide a project should be in the hands of those affected by the project (e.g., teachers, administrators). Finally, each level of change is going to have a different set of mechanisms that influence change in unique ways. This means that there is a system of change that must be examined in each unique context.

We must try to create a "tent" for examining this system. Change occurs on primarily two levels. There is change within the system, and change that occurs at different levels of the system. We must identify the systems, and which aspects of educational psychology must study these systems. This may require a further refinement of the identity of educational psychologists, and extend their skills and competences in areas that are not being currently developed at the graduate level.

We identified that a major goal in Ed Psych is collaboration. Collaboration means we should be enabling people in other professions to identify their own level of analysis, enhance the role of others through the skills and areas of expertise we have.

Based on group collaboration in our strand, we formed these areas:

1) Focus on systems of development (the collective identity of educational psychologists)
    - Provide service to improve our situation among other groups
2) Teacher-level evidence should be improved on sustainability
    - Professional development, control at the policy level, and politics involved are all points that can influence change
3) Sustainability of Change and the Drop-Down of Policy
    - How policy changes "US"(quotes added for emphasis)
4) More than cognition is involved in learning
    - We should make our knowledge on this relevant

Working Session 2: Consultation of Skills and Collaboration within the Educational Project

Donald Stokes – There is a dichotomy of applicability and knowledge. It is the question of "works how?" vs. the question of "What works?"

Finding a solution to educational issues should be focused on user-oriented/inspired knowledge. The Educational Psychology we want is user-inspired. Another way of saying this is that the field needs supportive structures for users and researchers with design-based research to dialogue with other disciplines and with policy-makers.

Example: At the DoE, use teacher evaluation as an issue. Take practitioners, align a research team to supply resources, and supply structures to help the project.

Do policy makers want the research knowledge anyway?

If policy makers go to a person of Division 15, they should be provided with information based on where they are (e.g., resources), and then be assisted by the help of the researcher. They should also have access to research in public outlets. This may require educational psychology working more with journalists to publish content.

We should also be attuned to the power structures within policy. Using these power structures, we need to create a conversation around issues, and use the power structure to provide a complexity that can be scaffolded.

How do we approach implementation?

One was is through empowerment. The product of our knowledge/research is the project of the persons affected (teachers, administrators, students). It is NOT ours alone! We can be there to suggest and support as it progresses. The people we are serving decide where to take the project. Give them the tools of progress. One example is to provide teachers and administrators with skills in data analysis, so that they can measure small changes (and even small victories). In addition, the project stakeholders need to be the ones generating questions, and the researcher's questions based on logical steps in the literature, need to take a back seat.

Implementation can also be addressed through better marketing. Through marketing, we can achieve a better balance between our specialty and the needs of others. Avi Kaplan provided an example on this

idea. He was once tasked with providing a college with summative evaluations for professional standards. Teachers were generally displeased with the word, and so his research team worked with the dean to market the research as "formative evaluations" of professional identity. By engaging in focus-groups, teachers allowed the research team to see that teachers could create their own formative evaluations of professional identity. This construct was actually part of an apriori model by Kaplan, but was not marketed up front as such. The questions were also created by the teachers, which shaped the theory throughout the project.

How do we get the word out to others (public, policy-makers)?

Community defined problems can be the guide for our research questions.

We could also engage in proactive questioning that get at the answers policy makers want in advance. We need to use proactive questioning to anticipate their issues.

We could also create an internship process through collaborating with agencies such as the DoE, which allows doctoral students to collect data on current policy relevant issues. Forming an internship would have to allow interns to speak directly with the institution, and serve as a liaison. Further, at the local level, we could orchestrate forums that brainstorm solutions.

Do we need to create a different academic culture?

We need an academic structure that promotes and gives tenure to publish in other outlets, such as policy briefs. Further, academics should be encouraged to collaborate on issues that increase interdisciplinary work. This could also work top-down with other organizations such as IES, which creates a collaborative research grant. Lastly, journal publications in implementation and design-based research need to be increased, specifically within journals such as Journal of Educational Psychology and Journal of Experimental Education. The goal of such research is to target mechanisms of change in educational contexts.

Educational psychology currently has structures that do not support or facilitate the contextual approach, such as other disciplines like learning sciences.

This changes the context as guiding theory and evidence-based implementation. The theory becomes accurate as the context shapes it. Thus, we proposed areas that could be used as facilitative structures that address contextual issues in educational psychology.

1) Create an environment for researchers to engage in Collaboration and Dialogue with other professionals, researchers, and the public.
2) Scaffolding is the way that researchers can meet the problem on the level of the client or program needing help. From going down to what questions they want, we can introduce complexity and design.
3) Exposure and Communication are achieved through marketing and visibility with the goals moving toward distributing digestible (and even preliminary) research into policy-makers hands and into the classroom.
4) Altering the academic reward system has been stressed as needing revision from promotion structures to professional and scholarly contributions.

10-24/14 to 10/25/14

Working Sessions 3 and 4 combined

Our goals for this meeting were condensed into the following points:

- Create forums/space for educational psychology to provide the expertise in an area
- Provide teachers with the tools of change
- Change the minds of the public about educational psychology
- Change the incentive structures in academia

We then attempted to create concrete deliverables to our goals, and decided on sharing with the other strands specific "action-items" that we think the field should take on (presented in Summary of Action Items). These items involve APA and Division 15 as primary correspondents.

 One way to increase visibility for forums is through publically held talks, meetings at conferences with principals and teachers, and other social media outlets. We discussed some avenues for doing this, but if others exist, then it is recommended we utilize what is available.

We need to create more opportunities for advocacy work in the discipline.

We need to create training for doctoral students in applied aspects of the discipline:

- Coursework in educational psychology and others (program evaluation and policy)
- Interdisciplinary work and research
- Professional skill development seminars
- Publishing outlets emphasizing applied research
- Increasing relevance

We discussed the idea of publishing a paper on these points of new doctoral training for an applied educational psychology, which was taken up by Avi Kaplan.

Collaboration that occurs within the new discipline should be around working with other fields (engineering, medical sciences) that are eager to gain access to new ways of pedagogy and practice. At the departmental/college level, this also means that research opportunities are born out of collaborative symposia rather than a single departmental/program direction.

Lastly we need to redefine impact of the field into practice by using portals that teachers can contribute their judgment and evaluation of research that is carried out in classrooms. There are currently forums present, but we need more. Increasing these opportunities could create a conversation around common interests.