Leading Change in Early Childhood Education as a Systems Thinker

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Scramble for Words
Success of the **Haves**

Reinforcing Loop

**Allocation of Resources to Haves**

What happens to the Have Nots?
Circle of Concern

Circle of Influence

Adapted from S. Covey
The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
Influential Leadership Positions

Leading from the Top

Leading from the Middle

Leading from the Bottom

Adapted from Barry Oshry and David DeVane
**Top Leaders** have overall responsibility for some segment of the organization or some organizational function, whether as division head, project manager, team leader, instructor, and so on.

Adapted from Barry Oshry and David DeVane
**Bottom Leaders** have limited control over the resources needed to move projects or initiatives forward, yet have a unique perspective of the system that may be essential to surface when making decisions and taking action.

Adapted from Barry Oshry and David DeVane
Middle Leaders attempt to function between the conflicting needs, demands and priorities of others. They, too, have unique perspectives that are key in contributing to system understanding.

Adapted from Barry Oshry and David DeVane
Most likely you are all of these

**Top Leaders** have overall responsibility for some segment of the organization or some organizational function, whether as division head, project manager, team leader, instructor, and so on.

**Bottom Leaders** have limited control over the resources needed to move projects or initiatives forward.

**Middle Leaders** attempt to function between the conflicting needs, demands, and priorities of others.

Adapted from Barry Oshry and David DeVane
What is Systems Thinking?

Systems thinking utilizes **habits, tools and concepts** to develop an understanding of the **interdependent connections** within systems for the purpose of finding **leverage points** to solve problems.
Your system...any system is perfectly designed to produce the results you are obtaining.

(Adapted from Carr, 2008)
Habits of a Systems Thinker

Seeks to understand the big picture

Makes meaningful connections within and between systems

Surfaces and tests assumptions

Considers short-term, long-term and unintended consequences of actions

Observes how elements within systems change over time, generating patterns and trends

Considers an issue fully and resists the urge to come to a quick conclusion

Considers how mental models affect current reality and the future

Pays attention to accumulations and their rates of change

Recognizes that a system’s structure generates its behavior

Considers how mental models affect current reality and the future

Identifies the circular nature of complex cause and effect relationships

Changes perspectives to increase understanding

Uses understanding of system structure to identify possible leverage actions

Checks results and changes actions if needed: “successive approximation”
Which Habits of a Systems Thinker would help deepen our understanding of this case?

Which habits would help the leaders of the Cambridge School system?
Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action.

Peter Senge, MIT
Mind Grooving Exercises

Developing Awareness of our own Mental Models
I notice certain information & experiences.

Information & experiences around me
I notice certain information & experiences.

I add my own meaning. (cultural & personal)

Information & experiences around me
I notice certain information & experiences.

I add my own meaning. (cultural & personal)

I develop beliefs based on the meaning I add.
I notice certain information & experiences.

I add my own meaning. (cultural & personal)

I develop beliefs based on the meaning I add.

I do something based on my beliefs.

Information & experiences around me
I notice certain information & experiences around me.

I add my own meaning. (cultural & personal)

I develop beliefs based on the meaning I add.

I do something based on my beliefs.

My beliefs affect what I choose to notice in the future.

Information & experiences around me

Ladder of Inference

Adapted from The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook. Last modified 5/05
I notice certain information & experiences around me.

I add my own meaning. (cultural & personal)

I develop beliefs based on the meaning I add.

I do something based on my beliefs.

My beliefs affect what I choose to notice in the future.

Information & experiences around me
Managing your Ladder of Inference

• **Reflection**
  - Try to suspend judgment
  - Become more aware of your own thinking and broaden your observations
Using the Ladder of Inference

• **Reflection**
  - Try to suspend judgment
  - Become more aware of your own thinking and broaden your observations

• **Inquiry**
  - Inquire into other’s thinking and reasoning
  - Ask open-ended questions that seek clarification
Using the Ladder of Inference

• **Reflection**
  - Try to suspend judgment
  - Become more aware of your own thinking and broaden your observations

• **Inquiry**
  - Inquire into other’s thinking and reasoning
  - Ask open-ended questions that seek clarification

• **Advocacy**
  - Make your thinking and reasoning visible to others by describing what influenced your thinking and your actions
Rubber Band Exercise

Person A: What is happening now?
Describe the current state of early childhood education, Birth to 8 yrs, in our system, being sure to talk about equity. (30 seconds)

Person B: What are your hopes for the future?
Describe the vision for an equitable early childhood education system. As you describe the vision, begin to move away from Person A (current state), so that you can show the gap between now and the desired future. This will create tension. (30 seconds)

Be sure to keep it safe!
No matter how small the step, the time is now to take action on behalf of high quality early childhood education for all.
We thought the trouble people have in learning new theories may stem not so much from the inherent difficulty of the new theories as from the existing theories people have that already determine practices.

Argyris and Schon, 1974
Old habits are strong and jealous.
Seeks to understand the "big picture"

Changes perspectives to increase understanding

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Considers short-term, long-term and unintended consequences of actions

Considers how mental models affect current reality and the future
Makes meaningful connections within and between systems

Surfaces and tests assumptions

- Sugar
- Vitamins
- Super Star Cereal

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Uses understanding of system structure to identify possible leverage actions

Checks results and changes actions if needed: “successive approximation”
Recognizes that a system’s structure generates its behavior

Considers an issue fully and resists the urge to come to a quick conclusion
Identifies the circular nature of complex cause and effect relationships

Recognizes the impact of time delays when exploring cause and effect relationships
Observes how elements within systems change over time, generating patterns and trends.

Pays attention to accumulations and their rates of change.

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