HEADSTARTER NETWORK

Our mission is to serve as an early childhood education think and action network that explores, facilitates, and accelerates practitioner-based innovation.

Background

This year's Early Childhood Innovation Summit will have a **Master Class in Innovation: Foundational Principles**, led by Mitch Sava and Melissa Lobosco, on **Wednesday, June 28, 2023**, during the 2023 Early Childhood Innovation Summit in Newton, MA.

Following the lesson, conference attendees will go into Accelerator Circles. Accelerator Circles are breakout groups of approximately seven to 10 people who will work together on a specific topic impacting early learning. Attendees will be pre-assigned to a circle.

The topics for each Accelerator Circle are based on the most popular challenge/interest areas indicated by conference attendees during registration. The topics are:

- Child assessments
- Behavioral challenges in the classroom
- Brain development/neurodiversity
- Teacher preparation
- Technology
- Workplace culture
- Workforce recruitment
- Workforce retention

The Master Class and the Accelerator Circles are designed to reinvigorate attendees and unlock fresh thinking. The circles will meet twice over two days for 2 hours each day.

Your Role

As a facilitator of an Accelerator Circle, you are just as much a part of the circle as you are the group's guide. Your role is to aid the group to work together effectively and meet its goals.

You **do not** have to be an expert in the circle's topic to facilitate the group's discussion.

However, a good facilitator exhibits the following qualities: **comes prepared (i.e., reads the facilitator's guide)**, **remains objective**, **uses questions to guide** the discussion, and **keeps the group on topic** and on time.

Goals

Each Accelerator Circle should aim to accomplish the following:
- Clear articulation of issue pain points
- Firm grasp of impacted stakeholders
- Distinction between "low-hanging fruit" solutions and high-reach solutions
- Brainstorm possible pathways to solutions

Guiding Principles

These principles should guide all Accelerator Circle conversations:
1. Everyone is an innovator, and everyone can be a change agent.
2. We can always learn, no matter how much we already know.
3. Optimism is the fuel for collaboration.
4. Starting with "What if?" rather than "What's wrong?" opens a world of possibilities.

Getting Started

Wednesday, June 28, 2023

Meeting time: 2:45 p.m. - 4:45 p.m.

Introductions
After all group members have assembled, ask each person to introduce themselves. In addition to name and professional title/role, ask each person to give an adjective to describe themselves using the first letter of their first name. Alternatively, you can develop another short activity to get folks more comfortable.

Getting to work
Once introductions are complete, it's time to get to work. You have your assigned topic, and it's time to dig deeper. Use the following process/framework to guide the discussion. The process is broken up into stages: **Collect. Cluster**. **Create**. **Choose**. **Commit**.

Collect - This stage is collecting individual knowledge about the topic/issue.

1. Ask each circle member to brainstorm individually and write down pain points or factors related to the topic/issue using sticky notes for each one. Encourage them to think broadly and consider all aspects of the issue. Some questions to ask might be: Where is the problem happening? What groups are impacted by the problem? How does the problem impact groups differently? What makes the problem better? What makes the problem worse? **Allow a few minutes of quiet time for individual work**.

Cluster - This stage combines individual knowledge into collective knowledge, and the group works together to cluster or identify themes.

2. Share and cluster: Have each circle member share what they've written as pain points/factors. Write each pain point on a visible surface as they share or post the sticky notes to a poster board. Once all the pain points are shared, work together to cluster similar ones into groups. This helps identify common themes or patterns.
3. Once common themes or patterns emerge, draft problem statements by starting with "How might we" (HMW) questions. You do this by reframing each problem cluster as positive, open-ended "How might we" questions. For example, if a problem cluster is "Lack of student engagement during lectures," a corresponding HMW question could be "How might we create interactive learning experiences that increase student engagement during lessons?" NOTE: If there's time, you can move to the **Create** stage slated for Thursday's discussion.

Thursday, June 29, 2023

Meeting time: 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

<u>Create</u> - **This stage creates potential solutions or pathways to solutions.**

4. With the HMW questions identified, encourage circle members to brainstorm potential solutions or ideas. Give them time to individually jot down their thoughts or use a brainstorming technique. Also, see **Brainstorming Rules** at the end of this document.
5. Share and discuss solutions: Ask each circle member to share their ideas. As they share, write down their solutions on a visible surface. Encourage the group to build upon and refine each other's ideas through open discussion and constructive feedback.

<u>Choose</u> - **This stage identifies and selects the most promising solutions.**

6. Once all ideas are shared, facilitate a discussion to prioritize and select the most promising solutions. Consider their feasibility, stakeholders, potential impact, and alignment with the desired outcomes.

<u>Commit</u> - **Members commit to taking certain steps within their circle of influence to help move solutions closer to reality.**

7. For the selected solutions, work as a group to outline possible action steps, including who in the group and who is not currently at the table could advance these efforts. Assign tasks as relevant to individuals to further support possible solutions.
8. Follow-up and support: Establish a system for the interested members of the group to stay connected, check in on progress, provide support, and offer each other resources.

Tips To Help You Engage Your Group and Maximize Their Ability To Work Well Together:

Questions That Gather Insight or Gain Clarity:

1. Regarding our assigned topic, what specific challenges or obstacles are you facing in your program/center/workplace?
2. Is there any aspect of our assigned topic you find particularly frustrating or difficult to address?
3. Tell me about your experience with…
4. What are the best/worst parts about…?
5. Can you help me understand more about…?

Additional Examples of How Might We?

1. How might we improve student engagement and participation in the classroom?
2. What strategies or approaches could we explore to enhance collaboration among circle members and share best practices?
3. How might we leverage technology to support and enhance teaching and learning?
4. How might we create a more inclusive and diverse classroom environment that meets the needs of all students?
5. What innovative approaches could we consider to personalize learning and meet the unique needs of each student?
6. How might we overcome the limitations or constraints of our current resources to enhance the learning experience?
7. What strategies or interventions could we implement to address student motivation and reduce disengagement?
8. How might we foster a positive and supportive school culture that encourages continuous growth and professional development?
9. How might we improve communication and collaboration between teachers, parents, and the broader community?
10. How might we integrate real-world, authentic learning experiences into the curriculum to make it more relevant and engaging for students?

Brainstorming Rules (*source: IDEO Design Thinking Toolkit for Educators, Second Edition*)

1. Defer judgment. There are no bad ideas at this point. There will be plenty of time to narrow them down later
2. Encourage wild ideas. Even if an idea doesn't seem realistic, it may spark a great idea for someone else.
3. Build on the ideas of others. Think "and" rather than "but."
4. Stay focused on the topic. Keep your brainstorming question in sight to get more out of your session.
5. One conversation at a time. All ideas need to be heard so that they may be built upon.
6. Don't be afraid to be visual. Draw your ideas.
7. Go for quantity. Set an outrageous goal— then surpass it. The best way to find one good idea is to develop many ideas.

If you have time, here are additional resources to review:

Edutopia

- [Improving Schools through Design Thinking](#)

IDEO

- [Design Thinking for Educators](#)
- [Codesigning Schools Toolkit](#)
- [IDEO_DTEdu_v2_toolkit+workbook](#)

Thank You!