Disseminating interventions using systems thinking

A summary of

How to cite this NCCMT summary:

Categories: Method, Knowledge dissemination

Relevance For Public Health

This method was designed for use in school-based health promotion interventions but could be used when implementing interventions in a variety of community settings. As an example, a public health nurse or public health manager who is hoping to implement school-based health promotion activities may benefit from considering strategies at multiple levels with a focus on collaboration and partnerships with stakeholders.

Description

This method offers a conceptual framework to disseminate interventions using systems thinking. It is based on the Gatehouse Project, a school-based intervention designed to promote health and emotional well-being by supporting changes in the school environment and at the individual level. For this method, dissemination involved using an ecological and systems approach to understand and enhance relationships and context to effect school-wide change.

Systems thinking involves understanding and building on relationships and changing contexts (political, cultural, etc.) to bring about change. For more information on systems thinking and case examples of using a systems approach for knowledge translation, click here. Figure 1 illustrates multiple contextual factors influencing dissemination activities in school settings.

Key learnings from the Gatehouse Project include:

- Use an ecological perspective early in planning by identifying factors and strategies at multiple levels, including individuals, small groups, the school and broader contexts.
- Dissemination is not a linear, one-way transfer, but rather a connecting web or learning space where participants interact and share knowledge.
- Foster partnerships with stakeholders, including inter-sectoral partnerships between education and health.
- The intervention will be shaped and influenced by factors in the local school context.
- Dissemination of the intervention will also be influenced by contextual factors.

The model identifies the following components, and their inter-relationships, which influence dissemination planning (additional tools are identified for appropriate components):

- Intervention development: researchers and program developers
- Relationships
- Participants/audience: see Engaging stakeholders: A planning tool
- Dissemination decisions: see Knowledge Translation Planning Primer
- Broader context, including community values, organizational context: see A&T tool

The Gatehouse Project dissemination program was designed to:

- bridge gaps between research and practice and between health and education;
- contribute to health promotion that supports education goals and practices;
- build capacity of groups and individuals to promote health and well-being; and
- lead to changed practices in individuals and schools.

These summaries are written by the NCCMT to condense and to provide an overview of the resources listed in the Registry of Methods and Tools and to give suggestions for their use in a public health context. For more information on individual methods and tools included in the review, please consult the authors/developers of the original resources.
With this in mind, the authors identify eight different ways of disseminating information, each with its own strengths and limitations (see Table 1), with six key points for planning for dissemination, no matter which medium is chosen.

Implementing the Tool

Who is Involved?

Public health staff or program managers would be responsible for using this method's six steps for planning dissemination of school-based health promotion interventions. Education staff (teachers, counsellors, administration) would be part of the professional partnership with public health staff.

Steps for Using Tool

No matter which method(s) is chosen, the authors outline six key points for planning dissemination of school-based health promotion interventions:

1. Start planning early.
2. Consider a range of strategies for a range of participants and partners.
3. Understand school change and teacher learning process.
4. Consider what all the participants bring to the work.
5. Pay attention to the relationships and processes as well as the work.
6. Understand and monitor the broader context.

Evaluation and Measurement Characteristics

Evaluation
Information not available

Validity
Information not available

Reliability
Information not available

Methodological Rating

Unknown/No evidence

Tool Development

Developers
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Method of Development
Information not available

Release Date
2010

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### Resources

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<th><strong>Title of Primary Resource</strong></th>
<th>Harnessing complexity: taking advantage of context and relationships in dissemination of school-based interventions</th>
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<th>Emerging ecological approaches to prevention, health promotion, and public health in the school context: Next steps from a community psychology perspective</th>
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