
Spheres of Influence

Purpose of the Tool

The purpose of this tool is to help you and your study group take a step back from your innovation project work to look beyond your immediate environment and consider the broader impact your innovation project work may have on various stakeholder groups. This tool may be used to intentionally target particular individuals and/or stakeholder groups, as you plot a path forward for your innovation project work.

TAKING STOCK

Suggested Time Commitment



You'll probably need at least an hour to engage in this activity, and you may return to this activity frequently throughout your inquiry project work.

When & How

This tool is meant to be used when your study group is at an advanced stage of implementing its innovation project. You will need chart paper, markers, sticky notes (Post-Its), and pens or pencils to map out the spheres of influence related to your innovation project work.

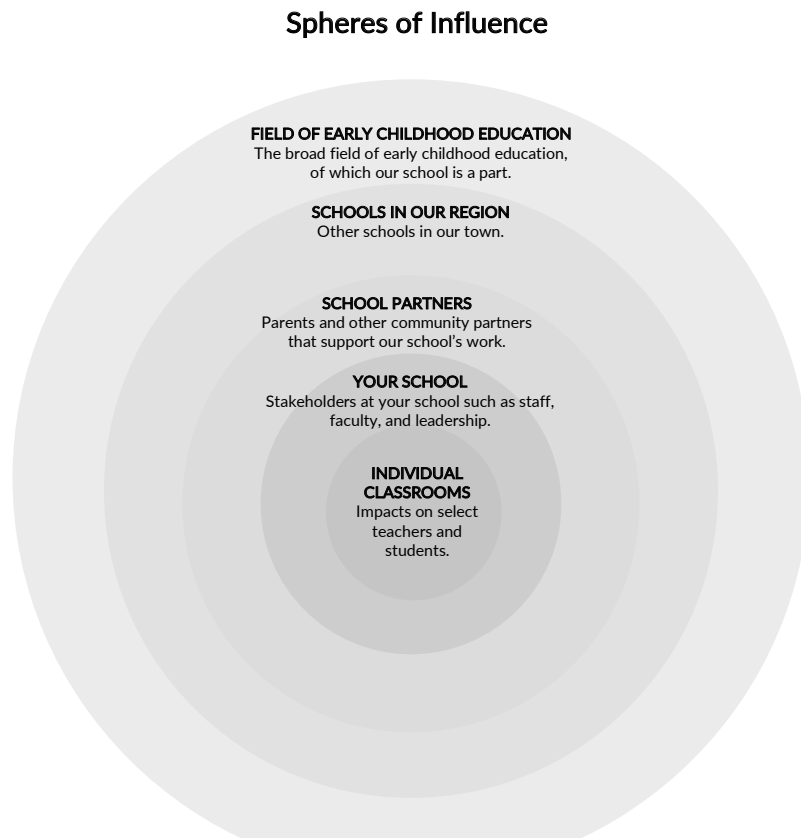
Steps

1. Name your spheres of influence

As a group, come up with a list of spheres of influence: contexts in which your Creating Communities of Innovation project is having (or could have) an impact. For example, you might imagine your project having a local impact in individual classrooms, across multiple classrooms within a department, or throughout your larger school community. You might also imagine your project one day having broader or more far-reaching impacts, such as impacts on other teaching and learning contexts within your local geographic area, the broader community surrounding your teaching and learning context, or even the field of education writ large. Think in aspirational terms and try to envision a range of types of impact from local to far-reaching.

As a group, try to narrow your list to no more than five or six spheres—those where it feels most important to have an impact through your CCI project. On a large piece of chart paper, draw concentric circles and label each one with the name of one of your spheres of influence. Start in the center with the spheres that are closest to school or classroom practice, moving to spheres that are increasingly further from your specific teaching and learning context (such as the broader field of education) as you move to the larger circles (see Figure 1, following page).

Figure 1. A sample spheres of influence diagram (for educators interested in early childhood education).



2. Reflect on impact

Take personal reflection time for each group member to think about how the study group's innovation project has had an effect on each of these spheres. Keep in mind:

- Reaching more or larger circles doesn't necessarily mean greater impact—there is no one “best” circle in which to have the impact of your project felt.
- Impacting others might not only happen through direct, in-person interactions—consider the reach of any dissemination of your project's work or ideas that might have happened through presentations, published writing, online materials, etc.

Each group member should take some sticky notes and write the ways in which their innovation project has had an influence within the spheres identified. Study group members should place their sticky notes at the appropriate point on the spheres of influence diagram you created in the last step. Place sticky notes in between the spheres or in multiple spheres if needed. You might not have anything in one or more of the spheres you identified.

3. Take a look

Once all group members have contributed their sticky notes, take a few minutes of quiet looking time to read each other's contributions.

4. Debrief as a group

Reflect through a group conversation on the following questions:

- Are we having impact (and if so, the right kind and amount/degree of impact) in the spheres of influence that are most important to us?
- Are there any spheres where we aren't having an impact right now, but might like to in the future?
- Are there any spheres we are influencing that we might want to step back from, in order to focus that energy on other aspects of our work?

5. Looking forward

Take a moment to think about any implications for moving your work forward.

Attributions and Additional Resources

The concept of spheres of influence and the accompanying activity and diagram are loosely based on Bronfenbrenner's well-known ecological systems theory.

