Building an Infrastructure for Education Research and Improvement: The Strategic Education Research Partnership Model

Suzanne Donovan, SERP Institute
Catherine Snow, Harvard Graduate School of Education
Phil Daro, SERP Institute

The SERP Approach

Engage in long-term research, development, and implementation (RDI) partnerships with school districts for purposes of generating lasting improvements in educational practice

- Recruit researchers to work on problems of practice
- Draw upon the expertise of practitioners at all stages of the work
- Embed the work in school settings
- Engage education designers who can shape knowledge and ideas into tools for experimentation, evaluation
- Respond to district needs while designing for scale
- Follow the contours of a problem through the system
- Generate genuinely new knowledge

Model

- Establish "field sites" - district settings that serve as long-term sites for research, development, and implementation (RDI)
- Maintain stable structures and processes to ensure:

  (1) Relevance, responsiveness, and mutual accountability.

  Core Group: *routine meetings among district leaders and SERP staff*

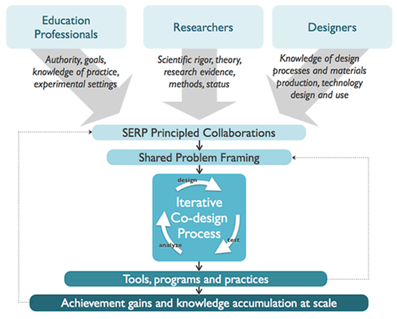
  (2) Incorporation of existing knowledge from research and practice

  Design Teams: *interdisciplinary teams of researchers, practitioners and designers who frame problems and envision solutions*

  (3) Generation of knowledge and tools

  Working Groups: *teams that carry out the research, development, and implementation*

- Iterative processes lead to rethinking of a design, or reframing/broadening of the problem and its solution.



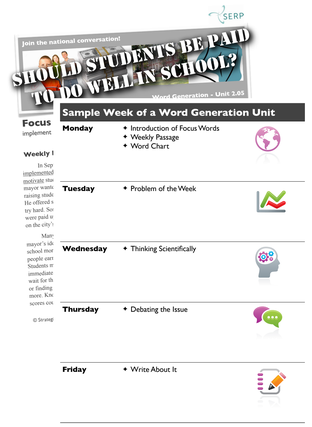
Claim 1:

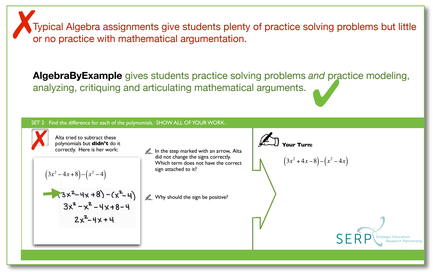
Shared authority and accountability in the SERP model leads to problem definitions and solutions that more effectively balance research knowledge and the constraints of practice.

Example:

Word Generation, a cross-content area literacy program responds to a district identified problem that students are not prepared in middle school to comprehend high school texts:

- responsive to research by providing repeated exposure (daily experiences) for students that build their academic literacy through reading, writing, and discussion across the content areas
- responsive to practice constraints by limiting content area teachers' responsibility to one day a week for a short period (15-20 minutes)
- addresses limited tolerance of content area teachers for addressing literacy by designing tasks that build literacy using subject area content





Example:

AlgebraByExample, 42 assignments for Algebra 1 topics that:

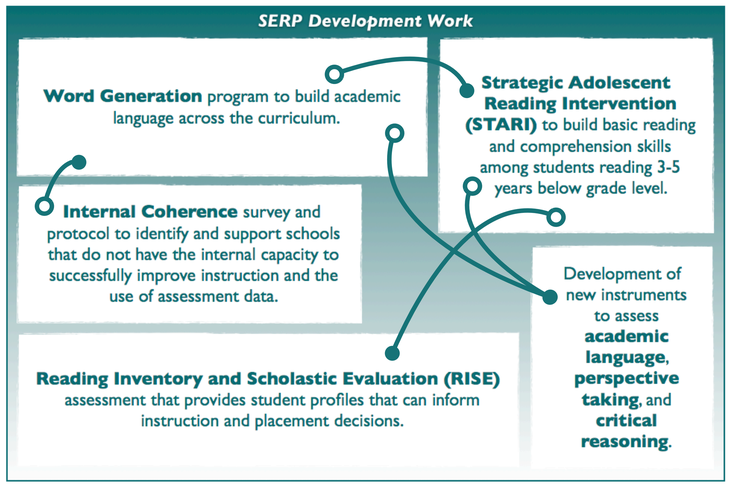
- build on knowledge base regarding the effectiveness of interleaved worked examples in addressing misconceptions and improving math performance
- respond to the tension between senior administrators who demand improvements be integrated into the regular curriculum, and the demands of algebra teachers that their routine practice not be upended

Claim 2:

Interdisciplinary collaboration allows for a multi-pronged approach that promises more coherent and effective problem solving.

Example:

Boston Public Schools Problem:
How do we prepare middle school students to comprehend high school texts?



Synergies across initiatives include:

- Expanded attention of the RISE to differentiating students who read at a 2nd grade level from those reading at a 3rd or 4th grade level to allow for better placement decisions
- Common instructional strategies across the Word Generation and STARI programs
- Use of Word Generation as a strategy to build internal coherence in schools
- Capacity to measure the moderating effect of academic language, perspective taking, and critical reasoning on reading comprehension promoted by Word Generation and STARI

Challenges

(1) **Funding:** model requires a systems approach and sustained investment that is inconsistent with existing funding opportunities

(2) **Scale:** model requires a level of commitment from districts that cannot be sustained unless the investment is substantial enough to be of high importance to the district

(3) **Expertise:** bench depth must be built in 4 areas:

- partnership development and management
- the methods and processes relevant to research in practice settings
- design for end users in education
- soliciting and evaluating proposals to conduct sustained, systemic RDI efforts

Strategic Education Research Partnership Institute
1101 14th Street NW
Suite 300
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 223-8555
info@serpinstitute.org

SERP Website
serpinstitute.org

SERP Collaborator Gateway
serponline.org

Websites for specific initiatives:

Advancing Academic Language for All!
aala.serpmedia.org

Catalyzing Comprehension through Discussion and Debate
ccdd.serpmedia.org

Content Area Literacy Survey
cals.serpmedia.org

Internal Coherence Assessment and Protocol
ic.serpmedia.org

RISE Reading Assessment
rise.serpmedia.org

Sense-making in Mathematics
math.serpmedia.org

STARI Reading Intervention
stari.serpmedia.org

Word Generation Academic Language Program
wg.serpmedia.org

5x8 Card Observation Tool
serpmedia.org/5x8

Coming Soon:

Algebra by Example
Diagnostic Lessons for Middle School Mathematics

Field Sites:
Boston | San Francisco | Oakland | Minority Student Achievement Network
Other Partner Sites:
Baltimore City | Dennis-Yarmouth (MA) | Everett (MA) | New York City

SERP Strategic Education Research Partnership

The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grants R305A100150 and R305F100026 to Strategic Education Research Partnership Institute and Grant R305A090555 to Harvard University. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.