Transcript #10: Using Dialogue Guides

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Building shared understanding and engaging in shared implementation efforts are central to the mission of the Partnership. Many have found Dialogue Guides an invaluable resource in supporting these efforts.

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They are tools for bridging the gap between what we know from current education research and what we see and do in current practice. Education stakeholders all over the country can interact in focused conversations using these materials.

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A reflective process, dialogue guide sessions are interactive discussions that examine assumptions held by those in differing roles, roles that cause us to come to the table from differing perspectives. The goal is to support those involved to seek common ground and build consensus on the issue at hand.

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The benefits of engaging in dialogue in a structured way are numerous. By using the available materials, it is easier to invite others to the table. Once at the table, carefully structured questions engage all and honor the variety of perspectives on the issue. Then, as each contributes collaboration becomes a natural outgrowth.

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Dialogue guides have three components. The topical brief is a short, one- to three-page maximum, article or summary of policy or research available now to the field. Reaction questions acknowledge differing perspectives and support the group in seeking common ground. Application questions support the group in coming to agreement on implications and planning for the future.

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Dialogue guides are located in numerous places on the Partnership website: within collections, user guides, dialogue guides, and creating dialogue. Let us take a brief look at a couple of these sections.

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Within the collection on Common Core State Standards there are currently three dialogue guides dealing with Common Core and policy. The first one addresses the question of what can be accomplished using the Common Core. There is a brief document for all to read.
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When you click on the dialogue guide starter you find a set of questions for the facilitator to engage the group. Here you see a sample of reaction and application questions.

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Notice that under the section on collections there is a section entitled User Guides. The materials inside user guides are similar to those in collections; the difference is that collections are built around an issue and user guides are built around a Technical Assistance Center and materials available there. Below the User Guides there is a section with a complete collection of dialogue guides built on the current federal special education statutes and regulations.

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For example within the 2004 Regulations you will find topics that are new or changed, and when you click on one of the blue font hotlinks you are taken to a listing of regulatory changes. Clicking on highly qualified…

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…takes you to a listing of regulatory changes in that area. The first issue deals with highly qualified in relation to special education teachers. When you click on this hotlink…

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…you are directed to the specific change in that regard and the sets of reaction and application questions. These dialogue guides are also accessible at the US Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs website.

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A broader array of dialogue guides can be located by clicking on Topical Issues on the right side of the page or moving to the left and clicking on Creating Dialogue. Here you will find a list of topics and by clicking on one of them you will be directed to several dialogue guides addressing the particular issue. This section will continue to grow as stakeholders like you provide suggestions to the Partnership.

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A valuable tool for anyone wanting to facilitate a dialogue session is the Facilitator’s Handbook. It is located here and within each of the collections.
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The Dialogue Guide Facilitator’s Handbook provides information on organizing and convening a dialogue activity. There are valuable tips on being a facilitator as well as a clear description of the differences among debate, discussion, and dialogue. The handbook is clearly written for even the most novice facilitator.

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As you use the dialogue guides, we encourage you to tell us about your experiences by clicking on Your Voice. This is also the place to let us know of additional topics you would like to see addressed through dialogue materials.