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# Beyond Knowledge Brokers

## Uncovering Resource Architects in knowledge mobilization

Marie Lockton, Anita Caduff, Alan J. Daly, Martin Rehm

We know that individuals and organizations external to educational and policy systems—including academic research institutions, practice-based groups, and intermediary organizations—play a crucial role in generating, gathering, and interpreting evidence for wider distribution.<sup>1</sup> However, we know very little about how their resources enter into conversation and use.

Historically, no term has existed to describe them beyond knowledge broker, which is non-specific and includes both internal and external brokers, whose activities differ. This general term is inadequate for describing the scope, complexity, and importance of those external to educational and policy systems who not only introduce knowledge into these systems, but also work with practitioners and policymakers to revise or co-create insights and resources.

“Knowledge broker” is inadequate for describing the scope, complexity, and importance of those external to educational and policy systems.

**At the outset of our work, SOSNetLab sought to understand and define what characterizes the work of successful knowledge brokers external to educational and policy systems.**

## Background

Knowledge mobilization is the process of moving knowledge to where it will be most useful.<sup>2</sup> This process is iterative, multidirectional, and often collaborative and co-productive.<sup>3</sup> Brokers connect otherwise disconnected individuals or groups and are critically important for the mobilization of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Much of the prior research has focused on knowledge brokers who “pull” knowledge into their systems or organizations (e.g. educators, educational leaders, district personnel).<sup>5</sup> However, brokers external to educational and policy systems who introduce knowledge into these systems are equally critical. Therefore, we set out to better understand this group and their role in knowledge mobilization.

## Data and Methodology

Our study examined the experiences of five well-known, equity-focused organizations in the United States working to broker evidence-based resources into different levels of education systems—from classroom teachers to state-level policymakers. We inductively coded 18 hours of interviews to establish themes. Through member checking, we ensured validity and provided an opportunity for participants to add nuance to the findings.



## Findings

Our analysis revealed that these effective knowledge brokers situated outside of educational systems who introduce knowledge to educators and policymakers engage in activities that involve much more than brokering. Beyond brokering knowledge to practitioners and policymakers, they engage their audiences to:

- » build trusting and collaborative relationships;
- » learn about the schemata, contexts, identities, needs, and concerns of audiences
- » collaboratively create and revise useful, timely resources;
- » support their audiences in building capacity; and
- » learn from and collaborate with other experts.

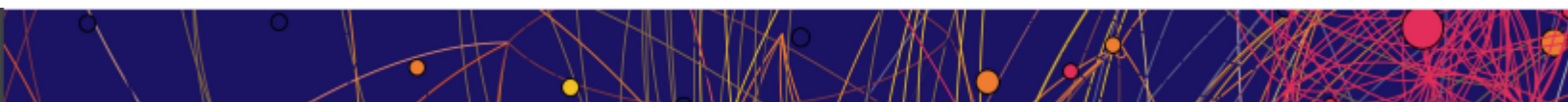
In seeking to characterize this type of broker external to systems, we searched for a metaphor to better capture their work, deciding that these actors are more aptly called “Resource Architects.”

| <b>ARCHITECTS</b><br>To successfully design a building:  | <b>RESOURCE ARCHITECTS</b><br>To effectively mobilize knowledge:   |
|--|--|
| Collaborate with and learn from other architects and experts like engineers, developers, project managers. | Collaborate with and learn from researchers and thought leaders internal and external to their field of expertise. |
| Build trusting relationships with their clients.   | Build trusting relationships with their audiences.   |
| Understand the landscape and building regulations.   | Understand the audiences’ contexts and structures they’re working in.  |
| Build capacity among their clients to understand the structure design and construction processes.          | Build capacity among their audiences to adapt new ideas and resources.   |
| Learn from their clients about their needs and wants, and design a house accordingly.                      | Learn from their audiences about their needs and wants, and create and revise resources accordingly.               |
| Evoke positive emotions with their designs.  | Evoke positive emotions, such as compassion or excitement, when engaging with their audiences.                     |

**More than simply producing and disseminating research, Resource Architects design carefully crafted resources to meet the specific needs of their audience. They create the right content for the right people at the right time.**

## Looking Ahead

Resource Architects are active players in bringing research evidence and knowledge into public discourse, policy, and practice and, as such, should be the focus of future study and efforts toward knowledge mobilization. This study provides valuable insights into the role of resource architects and provides a functional descriptor for this group of organizations that do so much more than brokering knowledge.





## Endnotes

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sosnetlab@gmail.com



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