The Early Childhood Educator Preparation Innovation Grants: Lessons from Initial Implementation

Gateways to Opportunity Higher Education Forum
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Our Mission

To provide objective and reliable evidence for Illinois P-20 education policy making and program development.

Ensuring Research-Informed Education Policy for Illinois

What we will discuss today

1. Background & Purpose

2. Methodology of the Study

3. Results

4. Recommendations

5. Your comments/questions

Background: Goals of the EPPI Grant

1. Develop models of effective early childhood educator preparation

2. Foster partnership development between two- and four-year preparation programs and other community-based organizations.

3. Promote articulation (foundation of the EPPI grant)

4. Support ECE programs is designing curriculum to incorporate new program requirements

5. Build capacity in key areas of need

6. Create opportunities for innovation program implementation

Purpose of the Implementation Study

1. Examine the initial implementation of proposed grant activities

2. Identify barriers

3. Identify catalysts

4. Consider sustainability of the grants' impact

Partnership Development Theory

- Many of the themes and subtopics paralleled the benefits, challenges, and success factors identified in McQuaid's (2009)

- Although McQuaid's (2009) study focused on the job placement agencies, many of his arguments were directly applicable to the community college and four-year partnerships

Complexity of Early Childhood Education

- There is high degree of complexity regarding ECE itself, as well as in the preparation of early childhood teachers.

- ECE is inclusive of a wide array of roles and responsibilities within myriad of public and private settings, both in and out of schools.

- Depending upon an early childhood educator's role(s) and responsibilities, there could be multiple degree, licensing, and/or credentialing requirements from one or more agencies.

- Relatedly, there are numerous entry points into the early childhood workforce that result in a wide-range of jobs.

Overview of Methods

1. Systematically reviewed proposal narratives for each project

2. Developed interview protocol

3. Conducted the interviews

4. Coded responses

5. Analyzed responses for overarching themes and sub-topics as well as their relationship to partnership development theory (McQuaid, 2009)

Review of Proposal Narratives

- **Unique contributions of each project**

- **Commonalities / overlap**

  - Improving articulation

  - Partnership development

  - Gateways Credentials

  - Addressing emerging standards and program requirements

  - Improving field-based experiences

Developing the Interview Protocol

- **Went through several iterations**
  - Used the project narratives to develop a draft version

  - Obtained initial feedback internally at the IERC

  - Obtained feedback from the Board of Higher Education, INCCRRA, and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD)

  - Received final feedback from Stephanie Bernoteit.

  - Made some slight adaptations after the first couple of interviews.

Questions on the Interview Protocol

- **Focused on major goals and activities associated with each project**
    - –Barriers to implementation
    - –Catalysts and levers allowing for implementation
    - –Innovations and enhancements to articulation
    - –Program/curricular enhancements

Questions on the Interview Protocol (cont.)

- Real and potential impacts
- How far along the parters were in the implementation process
- Ways in which new standards and program requirements were being met
  - Articulation
  - Overall
- Overall thoughts about the grant process

Different Versions of the Interview Protocol

Four different versions:

a) four-year partners

b) community college partners

c) community-based partners

d) for those associated with more than one site

Interview Participants

- Worked with the principal investigtors to identify 53 individuals from the 12 projects sites; 48 were unique.
  - 21 were from four-year colleges, 28 were from community colleges, and four were community-based partners (e.g., Head Start Administrators)
- There was some overlap as five of the individuals were associated with two EPPI grants(community colleges).
- In the end, we inteviewed 45 unique individuals.

Characteristics of the Grantees

- Six public four-year institutions were involved in partnerships

- Six private four-year institutions*

    - *One is located in Iowa, but worked with partners in Illinois.

- 19 individual community colleges from 17 different community college districts.

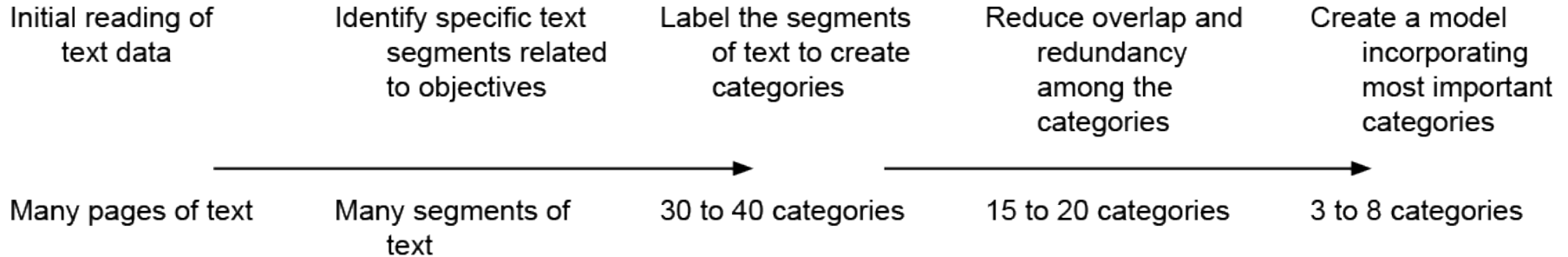# Geographic Location of Project Sites
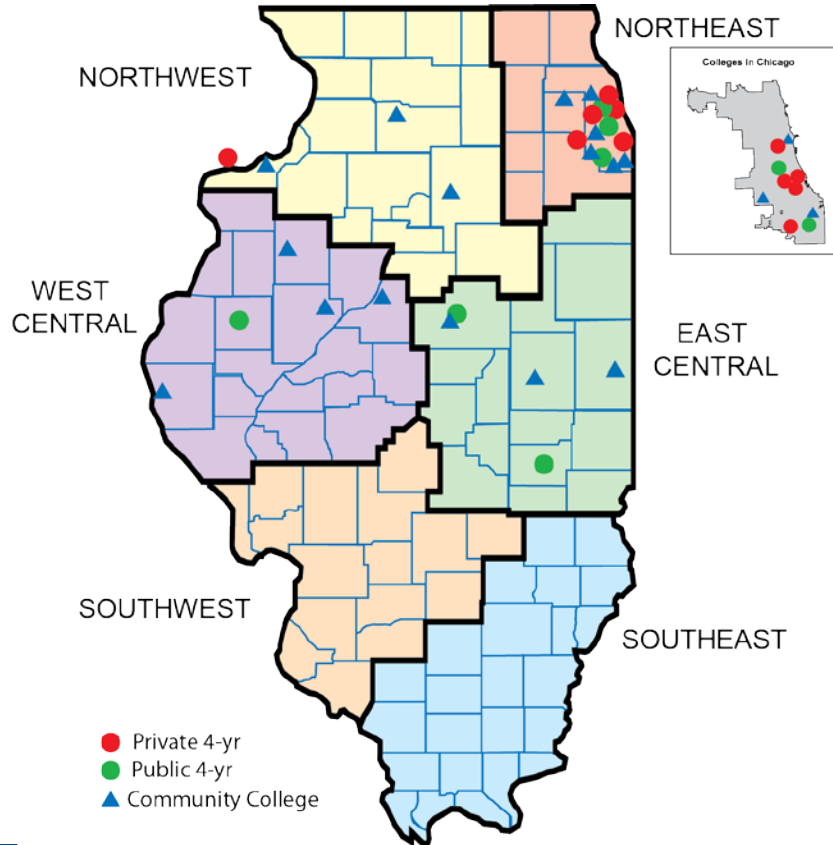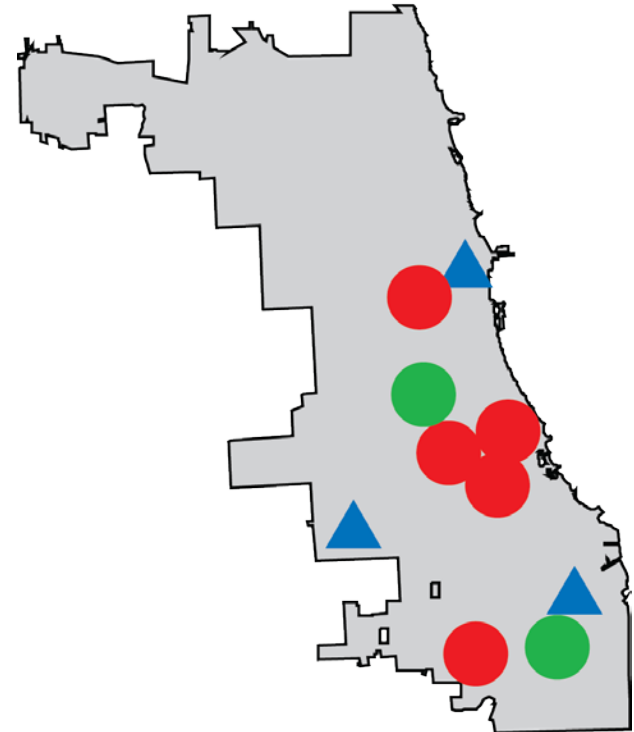
Interview Process

- Digitally recorded the interviews

- Developed detailed summaries structured with the interview protocol

- Provided interviewee with the opportunity to clarify statements, retract statements entirely, and even provide entirely new ideas

- In some instances we asked the interviewees to provide clarification regarding some of their responses

- Validated summaries were cleansed of identifying information and uploaded to a qualitative software package

Coding Process

The Coding Process in Inductive Analysis

Initial reading of text data	Identify specific text segments related to objectives	Label the segments of text to create categories	Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories	Create a model incorporating most important categories
Many pages of text	Many segments of text	30 to 40 categories	15 to 20 categories	3 to 8 categories

Source: Adapted from Creswell (2002, p. 266, Figure 9.4) by permission of Pearson Education, Inc. (© 2002, Upper Saddle River, NJ).

Overarching Coding Structure

- Based somewhat on the interview protocol.

- Overarching goals of the implementation project.

- Each theme had between two and six sub-topics.
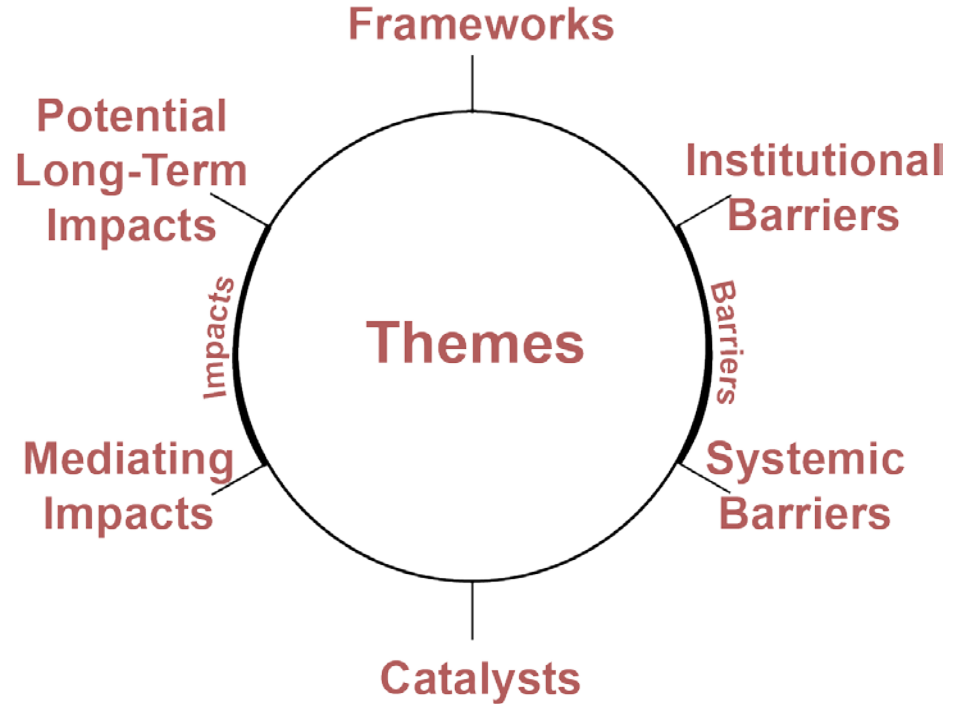
Motivation for Participation

- Improve articulation between community colleges and four-year institutions.

- Build partnerships and networks among community colleges and four-year programs.

- Four-year partners also discussed the potential for increased recruitment of transfer students, as well as an increase in diversity of their early childhood students.

- Increasing degree completion of transferring students as a desired outcome of the collaborations and grant activities.
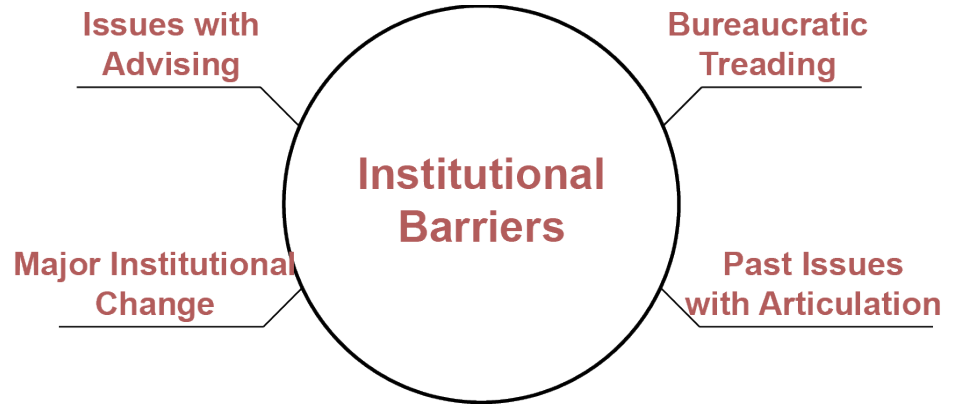
Motivation for Participation cont.

Meeting students' needs

1. Ensuring a smooth transition to decrease credit loss and increase affordability for students

2. Providing support to pass the Test of Academic Proficiency

3. Creating opportunities to provide secondary ESL endorsements

4. Developing support structures to help students succeed after the transfer

5. Increasing marketability among graduates

Institutional Barriers

- Institution or partnership specific
- Preventing goal attainment and/or partnership development
- Most were historical in nature
- Often wedded with a catalyst

Issues with Advising

Bureaucratic Treading

Institutional Barriers

Major Institutional Change

Past Issues with Articulation

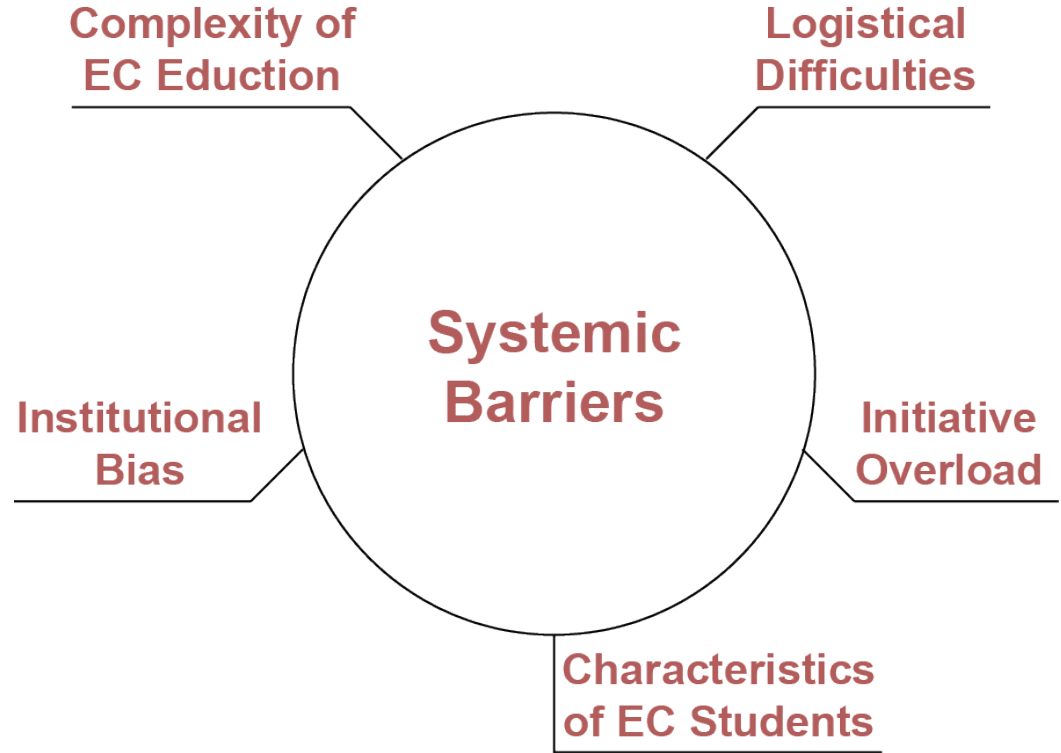# Sub-Topics within the Institutional Barriers Theme

- **Bureaucratic Treading**

  – Operating within institutional contexts and cutting through red-tape

- **Past Issues with Articulation**

  – Usually historical

- **Issues with Advising**

  – Need for clearly communicated transfer pathways

- **Major Institutional Change**

  – Turnover/ program change

Representative Quotes within the Institutional Barriers Theme

- **Bureaucratic Treading-** *"*What always seemed to get lost is when things move from the faculty member to faculty member they are fine because they know each other and are in the same field. But when it advances through the systems that are in place, people don't understand."

- **Past Issues with Articulation-**"This institution has historically struggled with articulation and transfer for students."

- **Issues with Advising-** *"*Previously, transfer was up to the discretion of whoever was in the counseling office and was more vague."

- **Major Institutional Change-** "The original grant proposal was developed by two administrators, both of whom are no longer in those positions and are no longer in the College of Education."

Systemic Barriers

- Global/ common among multiple partnerships
- Defined the challenging contexts in which the partnerships were operating
- Particularly, the contexts that impede timely goal attainment

Complexity of EC Eduction

Logistical Difficulties

Institutional Bias

Systemic Barriers

Initiative Overload

Characteristics of EC Students

Sub-Topics within the Systemic Barriers Theme

- **Logistical Difficulties**
  - Mostly centered on time-related issues

- **Initiative Overload**
  - Related to new standards, initiatives, and program requirements

- **Characteristics of EC Students**
  - Ascribed characteristics of EC students, particularly community college students

Sub-Topics within the Systemic Barriers Theme cont.

- **Institutional Bias**

  - Notion that four-year institutions have traditionally been viewed higher on the educational hierarchy

- **Complexity of EC Education**

  - Generally discussed in the student context

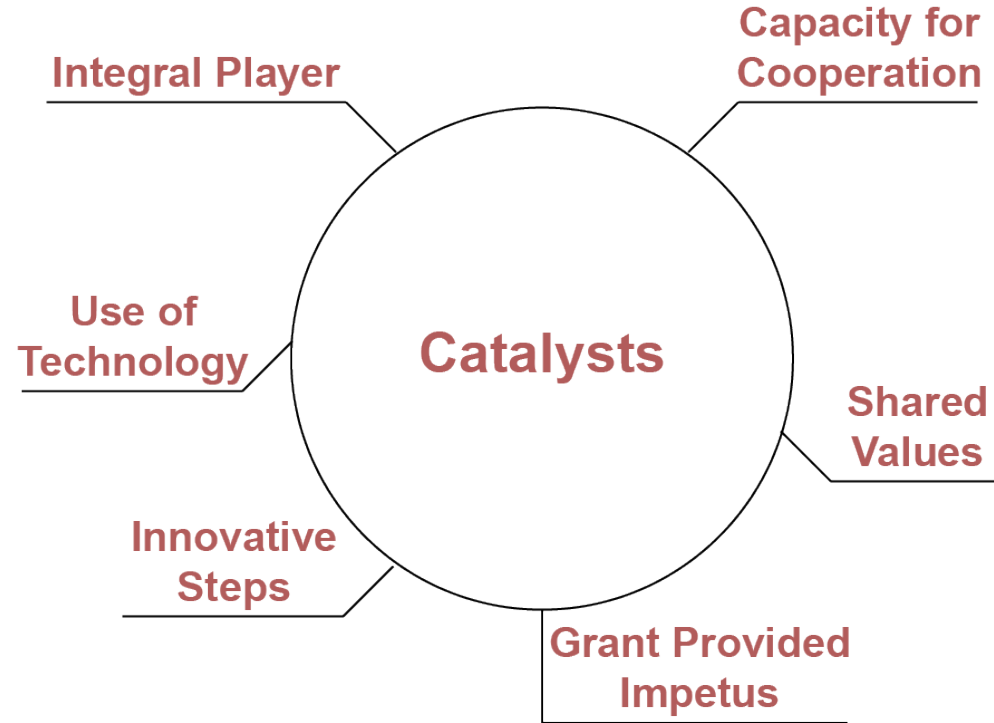# Representative Quotes within the Systemic Barriers Theme

- **Logistical Difficulties-**"Good things don't happen in three months, creativity takes time."

- **Initiative Overload-**"Illinois teaching requirements have changed and consequently courses need to be changed. Individual institution requirements also caused additional fitting of puzzle pieces."

- **Characteristics of EC Students-**"I learned that community college students are a very different group than typical four-year students. Many work full time, commute to school, etc."

Representative Quotes within the Systemic Barriers Theme cont.

- **Institutional Bias-**These students seem to perceive the community college as more or less a continuation of high school, and they are ready for something different.

- **Complexity of EC Education-**"... if community college students are provided with any more information related to the hurdles of passing, let alone meeting the costs, of additional expectations, they may further see entering the field of education as unenticing and overwhelming."

Catalysts

- Provided movement towards goal attainment
- Many adopted from McQuaid's (2009)
- Often a response or reaction to a historical or contextual barrier

Integral Player

Capacity for Cooperation

Use of Technology

Catalysts

Shared Values

Innovative Steps

Grant Provided Impetus

Sub-Topics within the Catalysts Theme

- **Shared Values**

  - Gaining a contextual understanding of the partners

- **Capacity for Cooperation**

  - Related to the ability of the individual partners to effectively engage in the partnership and add value to the process

- **Grant Provided Impetus**

  - The grant provided the structure and support to meet goals

Sub-Topics within the Catalysts Theme cont.

- **Innovative Steps**

  - a) advising; b) test preparation; c) dissemination/sharing; and d) integration of community college transfer students

- **Use of Technology**

  - were placed in the context of overcoming barriers, either systemic or institutional

- **Integral Player**

  - key player as being integral to achieving grant-related goals and many times the key player was the principal investigator

# Representative Quotes within the Catalysts Theme

- **Shared Values-** "Previously these discussions have been an institutional focus, now they are focused around the students."

- **Capacity for Cooperation-** "The opportunity to meet face to face was great. Communicating with them via email is one thing, but gaining an understanding of them as people and knowing their teaching styles was extremely beneficial."

- **Grant Provided Impetus-** "The grant was the 'dike' to hold off other responsibilities/commitments for a short time to focus on grant activities."

Representative Quotes within the Catalysts Theme

- **Innovative Steps-** "Additionally, everything that is done is being presented to a wider audience. When possible the two-year representative is included in these presentations."

- **Use of Technology-** The only barrier is distance from the other meetings, which was fixed by an online meeting service.

- **Integral Player-** The participant reported the importance of proper leadership from a non-authoritarian principal investigator who is very open to the ideas of all the partners.

Potential Long-term Impacts

- Overarching
- Could not be measured in the timeframe of the grant

Societal/Systemic Improvement

Professionalizing EC Workforce

Potential Long-term Impacts

Enrollment
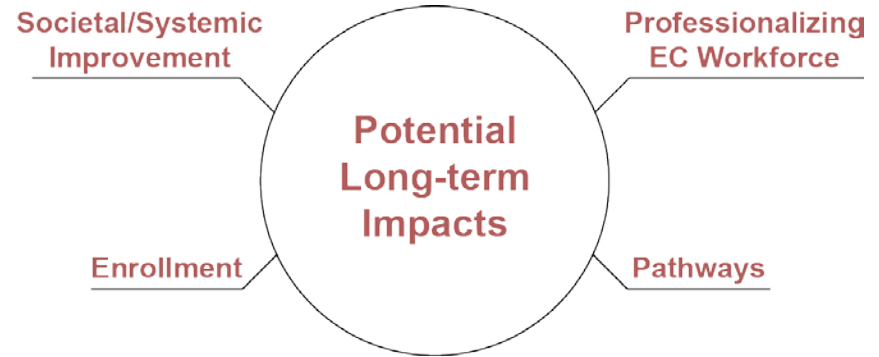
Pathways

Sub-Topics within the Potential Long-Term Impacts Theme.

- **Professionalizing EC Workforce**

  – raising the aggregate level of professional expertise in the field

- **Pathways**

  – increasing the number of educational and/or career pathways for students

- **Enrollment**

  – impacts on enrollment for both sides of the partnership

- **Societal/Systemic Improvement**.

  – larger societal impacts with a heavy emphasis on improved learning situations for children

# Representative Quotes within the Potential Long-Term Impacts Theme

- **Professionalizing EC Workforce-** "*Raise the ability to be able to talk to the general public, families, school district, legislators about issues, now that they'll have the language.*"

- **Pathways-***"This articulation will make early childhood education more affordable for students, will allow them to work while they are in college, and allow them to move around."*

Representative Quotes within the Potential Long-Term Impacts Theme

- **Enrollment-** *"The partnering institutions will benefit from well-trained students who want to go on to become teachers and who can diversify the teaching pool."*

- **Societal/Systemic Improvement-** *"Ultimately, our clients are young children, so we want the best possible program and the best model of delivery."*

Mediating Impacts

- Already budding, direct result from grant
- Precursory in nature
- Framework for long-term impacts
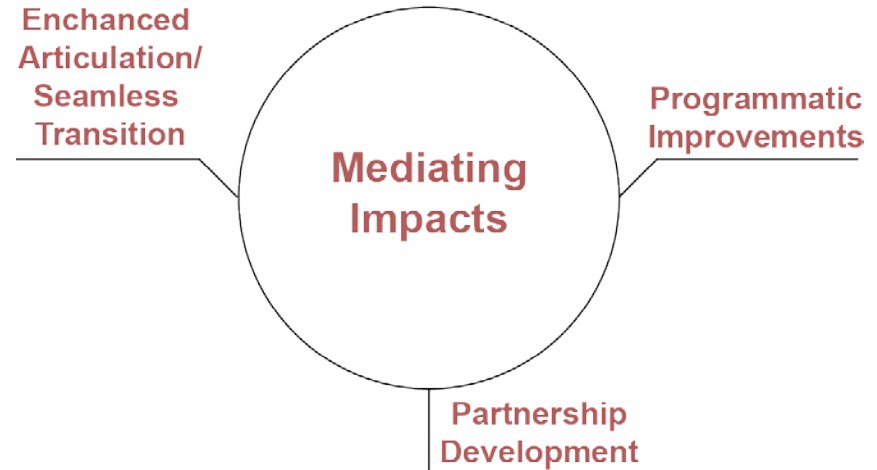
Sub-Topics within the Mediating Impacts Theme.

- **Programmatic Improvements**

  - improvements generally involved both the breadth and depth of curricula

- **Partnership Development**

  - both a grant-related impact and catalyst allowing other grant-related goals to be accomplished

- **Enhanced Articulation/Seamless Transition**

  - provided the framework for many of the other grant-related activities and it had a precursory relationship with attaining other goals

Representative Quotes within the Mediating Impacts Theme

- **Programmatic Improvement**- *"*They are now getting exposure throughout their college experience, rather than right at the end when they do their student teaching."

- **Partnership Development-**"The partners, the institutions, and the individuals are the main reason that I believe this grant has been working so successfully."

- **Enhanced Articulation/Seamless Transition-** "Still working on articulation, but hoping for a seamless 2+2 program."

Frameworks

- Neutral references to new program requirements and standards.

New ECE Program Re-design

Frameworks

Considering New Program Requirements
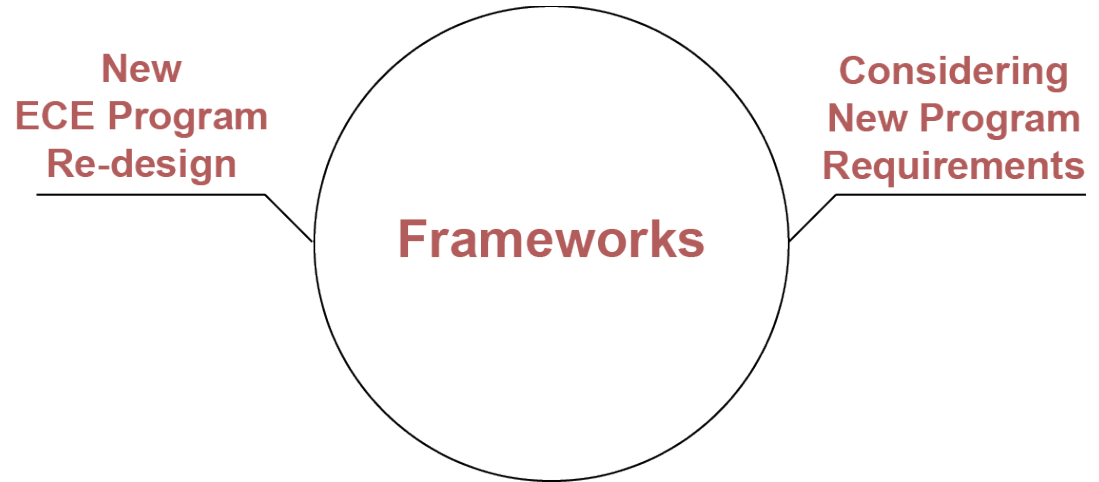
Sub-Topics within the Frameworks Theme

- **Considering New Program Requirements**

    Usually framed with the Gateways Credentials

- **New ECE Program Redesign**

    ECE, as a whole, is in transition with several emerging program requirements.

Representative Quotes within the Frameworks Theme.

- **Considering New Program Requirements-**"Credentialing will be worked right into the coursework. When students enter their first semester, they will be enrolled and walked through the Gateways Registry."

- **New ECE Program Redesign-**"The first goal was a complete redesign of the early childhood program to address the evolving standards including those stemming from various bodies such as the state and professional organizations."

Views of the Current Grant Process

1. Almost exclusively positive

– Many respondents mentioned their intentions or hopes of applying again

"Grant opportunities like these push us to do this difficult work that we would not have done otherwise."

"This current grant provides a wonderful and outstanding model."

– Initial skeptics were pleasantly surprised at the end

"Often wondered if it would all lead to the end goal of reaching the students. But it did…It was incredibly worthwhile to go through the whole process."

Views of the Current Grant Process

2. Cataylst for new dialogue and conversation

"The grant has allowed for a bigger conversation of the education system as a whole and has allowed for institutions to realize how similar they are."

"Those people that applied for the grant are not only motivated to help their institutions, but are also motivated to help the profession."

Views Regarding the Grant Process

3. Overall the structure and support were beneficial, probably more so than the money

"The grant provided the structure and support necessary to accomplish the goals and move from talk and discussion to action."

"The money is the draw for this kind of work, but the money isn't sustained in terms of following through. But because the grant got us started, it contributed to both the commitment and to the work."

Views Regarding the Grant Process

4. Practical benefits such as moving forward with program changes and collectively dealing with new requirements and mandates

"Starting conversations with actual teaching practice of the institutions; if relationship starts here, you can build trust. These conversations often start on the wrong foot and it can be difficult to veer the conversations back. Also focusing on standards or anchoring on anything that is important to all the institutions is productive and constructive and helps ease the more difficult conversations."

Major Findings

- Most of the partnerships were moving towards achieving their grant-related goals

- The grants had a fairly large positive impact, particularly in terms of:

  - partnership development;

  - in enhancing articulation pathways between the partners;

  - Integration of the Gateways Credentials into programs and into the transfer process.

- Some of the themes and sub-topics that were established in analyzing the interview responses were directly related to key ideas within partnership development theory, as described by McQuaid (2009).

- Identified barriers were often wedded to a catalyst

Major Findings cont.

- Views regarding the grant system and the partnerships were not universally positive

  – The grant system perpetuated existing perceived biases

  – The short timeframe was sometimes viewed in a negative light

- Another interviewee mentioned that although the partnership in question has traditionally been strong, the grant did not lead to significant change.

Select Innovative Steps: Cross-Advising

- Sound advising practices mediate the influence of formalized articulation

- It serves as an academic, advising, and cultural bridge

  - Best practices identified by Karp (2014) and Council of Independent Colleges (2014)

- High-touch services

- How to bring such advising practices to scale and establish their cost effectiveness?

Select Innovative Steps: Cultural Bridge

- Related to Tinto's (1987) Theory of Integration

- Creating an environment that allows for a psychological and social attachment to be formed

- Transfer shock

- Create opportunities for transfer students to be active in both institutions during their first two years to ease the transition

Select Innovative Steps: Articulation and Early Commitment

- Developing such highly structured transfer was a common goal with the overwhelming majority of the partnerships.

- Specificity is the key to such agreements, in terms of the sending and receiving institutions, the majors, and articulated courses.

- Slight deviations from the plan or uncertainty about a major at the beginning of one's college career might necessitate additional time to degree completion.

- We argue that more must be done to get community college students potentially interested in ECE to commit to that major earlier in their academic career.

  - Dual-credit could be one option

Recommendations for Practice

- Frame discussions and goals using a student-centric approach

- Include necessary players at the table

- Rotate meeting sites, at times hold meeting in informal settings

- Integrate community-based entities into the partnership

- Within-institution communication

- Use technology to supplement traditional face-to-face meetings and enhance the flow of information between partners

Final Thoughts

- Need for Continuity
  - Beyond the funding period and scope of the grant
  - So the accomplishments outlive the current partners
- Grant was important in moving the partnerships past many of the identified barriers
- Grant provided structure allowing for programmatic and curricular enhancements
- Grant necessitated accountability

Final Thoughts cont.

- Amicability within the Profession

"There are no mean people in Early Childhood."

"…same heart…."

"…early childhood educators are not mean and very creative when given the opportunity."

"Everyone in Early Childhood is nice."

Questions?

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