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Reflections on Developing a Cross-Institutional Team

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About EdPrepLab

Educator Preparation Laboratory (EdPrepLab), an initiative of the Learning Policy Institute and Bank Street Graduate School of Education, aims to strengthen educator preparation in the United States by building the collaborative capacity of preparation programs, school districts, and state policymakers. Linking research, policy, and practice, EdPrepLab supports preparation programs that are equity-focused, student-centered, and grounded in the science of learning and development and seeks to expand these approaches nationwide. This brief describes a portion of inquiry-based work between three members of the EdPrepLab network: Montclair State University, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley).

Acknowledgements

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edpreplab.org

Introduction

Today's educators need to develop the knowledge, skills, and disposition to support all students in deeper learning. Educator Preparation Laboratory (EdPrepLab) works to strengthen educator preparation in the United States by building the collaborative capacity of preparation programs, school districts, and state policy makers. Through cross-programmatic sharing of innovative practices, including models and artifacts of educator preparation practice, EdPrepLab's network of preparation programs helps build leadership and high-quality practice through collaboration, research, and documentation.

This narrative explores how an inquiry team made up of three different institutions was formed and shares tools developed by EdPrepLab to support this process. We detail how the team, which was comprised of participants from Montclair State University, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley), considered their own individual institutional goals and how their combined inquiry would be enriched by their collaboration. The tools are:

- **Tool #1:** Educator Preparation for Deeper Learning Conversation Guide (see page 3)

- **Tool #2:** Tips for Organizing Your Inquiry Group (see page 4)

Led by Jennifer Robinson, Executive Director, Center for Pedagogy, and Rebecca Cheung, Program Director, Principal Leadership Institute, the creation of the collaborative inquiry group emerged over many months of formal and informal conversations between participants and other faculty at their respective institutions. Through their work, we have learned that there are several things to keep in mind for supporting effective cross-institutional collaboration. The following recaps five key learnings from this work:

Reflections

1. **Understand your own institution's goals and think about how your potential partner's goals align. Get clear on your collective institutional interests and find synergy.** As they were getting to know each other as individuals, Rebecca and Jennifer became clearer about their collective institutional interests in this project. Through their intra-campus work with their own colleagues, they were able to define what they wanted to study and what they wanted to use this process for, and bring that to each other. For example, UCLA and UC Berkeley have a sister relationship, and in the last 7-10 years there has been more of an effort for educator preparation programs from both institutions to cross-collaborate. They came into the EdPrepLab project knowing they wanted to use it to deepen their collaboration, but also learn from others. In addition to learning from Montclair State, this project will help them meet that goal.

2. **As you investigate your own institutional needs, think about who you can learn from.** Jennifer knew that faculty in Montclair State's teacher education program were inspired by the work being done at Center X and the UCLA teacher education program. At the same time, Berkeley had recently created a new integrated structure in their school where issues that cut across teacher education and doctoral preparation are integrated, and that was of interest to Montclair State.

3. **Create a process for forming a team, sharing, and collaborating at your own institution that is sustainable.** Consider how to onboard faculty to the project. In a cross-institutional collaboration, it may not make sense to have equal numbers from each institution participate. For Rebecca and Jennifer's team, the number of participants from each institution is proportional to their size: there are three people involved from the two UC schools, while Montclair has over eight because Montclair's program is bigger in size and scale. To form her internal team at Montclair State, Jennifer and the dean identified who in their teacher preparation program and education leadership program would be best suited for the project. The dean reached out to the department chairs and asked if they would like to join or bring on other faculty members. At the start, they wanted to have as many people as possible think together about how an inquiry project might be crafted, though they recognized some might not stay involved as closely as others.

4. **Establish a process for doing the work that supports effective collaboration while being respectful of everyone's time.** Recognize what individuals can contribute and know your faculty and the politics of your own institution. Faculty are very busy, and Rebecca and Jennifer wanted to create a balance between keeping everyone engaged and involved without taking up too much of their time. As leads of the project, Rebecca and Jennifer have been able to guide the work, and manage the project, and liaise with their faculty to keep them involved and get their input without having them attend dozens of meetings. Through formal and informal conversations with their team members, they have been able to capture everyone's interest and ideas and then record what they think everyone wants. From there, they are now drafting a proposal for all of the team members to read in advance of a large group meeting to get everyone's input. Knowing your faculty means knowing how much to ask—Rebecca and Jennifer are striving to find a balance that will keep their faculty engaged and get their perspectives, but not over ask. They have both developed a lot of trust with the people that they work with so they can have pre-meetings with smaller groups and be trusted to communicate their needs without asking them to attend a lot of meetings, as the logistics of getting three institutions on two coasts together can be complicated. They try to get input, fill in the gaps, and continually ask for feedback to find out if what they are representing is clear.

5. **Find ways to connect informally to brainstorm and discover shared interests.** Personal relationships matter, and the building of trust takes time. Rebecca and Jennifer had never met before this project started, but over many months their paths crossed in a variety of gatherings and meetings. Over time, they were able to get to know each other, learn about each other's institutions, and they noticed a converging interest.

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TOOL #1: EDUCATOR PREPARATION FOR
DEEPER LEARNING CONVERSATION GUIDE

This guide from EdPrepLab is designed to help institutions consider who to partner with and how to begin to structure a project.

Tool

Forming Inquiry Groups

The goal of this document is to support you with guiding questions as you begin to:

- Brainstorm inquiry questions
- Map out the possible scope of your work
- Consider who/which institutions you might partner with
- Think about how your project might be structured
- Identify what kind of support you will need from EdPrepLab

Before our next meeting, you should identify the line(s) of inquiry that you are interested in and note on your calendar the corresponding meetings for that line so you can be sure to attend.

Prior to the meeting, please engage in discussion around your ideas for your inquiry. You don't need to have a formal question or project outline yet, but you should be able to answer the questions below. As we discuss your ideas at the lines of inquiry meetings, we anticipate individuals and groups from other institutions will become interested in each other's ideas and this will facilitate the formation of groups.

Questions to Consider:

1. Who in your institution is involved in this work? Who do you want to be involved and why?
2. What are your aims? How do these support your institutional goals?
3. What is your capacity? Consider available time, funding, and human resources.
4. Will you approach this as one whole project for your institution, or will individual faculty members go in multiple directions?
5. List any questions you would like to have clarified by EdPrepLab during your individual institutional call.
6. Are there other institutions that you'd like to work with? Who are they, and would you like EdPrepLab to facilitate a call with them?

TOOL #2: TIPS FOR ORGANIZING YOUR INQUIRY GROUP

This tool provides a set of tips from EdPrepLab designed to help inquiry teams stay organized, collaborate effectively, and establish a cadence for meetings and working together.

Tool

Collaboration: Establishing a cadence for meetings and working together

- Schedule group meeting times
  - At least one representative from each institution should attend each meeting

- Establish collaboration guidelines
  - We suggest five to seven norms to help the team collaborate effectively

- Identify the roles and responsibilities of team members
  - Divide up the project management
  - Identify other jobs that may need to be done as part of your work and identify point people for them (you may wish to do this at your first meeting)

- Create a timeline for writing the proposal
  - Identify the process you will use for writing the proposal and completing the budget. Will leads draft it and send for feedback? Will you divvy up parts of the proposal to different team members? You can complete the proposal in whatever way works for your team

- Identify the tools and practices your team will use for collaboration
  - How will you keep track of notes and next steps? (e.g., a shared Google Document?)
  - Will you expect people to review materials in advance of meetings? If so, how much time will materials need to be complete for others to review, and how does that impact due dates?

Staying Organized: Divide up roles to ensure the team stays organized and on track

- Organizing meetings. Identify point people to:
  - Schedule meetings
  - Create agendas for meetings
  - Facilitate meetings
  - Take notes during meetings

- Ensuring deadlines are met. Decide how you will:
  - Track deadlines
  - Send reminders
  - Review materials before they are submitted

- Communicating with others. Have someone lead communication, which may include:
  - Sending updates to EdPrepLab as needed
  - Organizing calls with EdPrepLab as needed
  - Ensuring team members who miss meetings are caught up before the next meeting
  - Addressing questions/concerns of team members in a timely manner