ILLINOIS EDUCATION RESEARCH COUNCIL

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

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Introduction

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) sought to evaluate the implementation of the Early Childhood Educator Preparation Program Innovation (EPPI) grant. The grantees consisted of partnerships that included community colleges, four-year institutions, and in some cases community-based entities or schools, such as Head Start programs. The four-year institution in the partnership was required to be the fiscal agent for the grant and had to be accredited with a currently approved early childhood educator preparation program. These grants were competitive and the proposals required that the potential grantees demonstrate the extent to which their grant-related activities furthered the work of the Illinois Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge.

In 2012 and 2013, the state of Illinois was awarded a total of $52.4 million in federal funds through the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. These funds were used to strengthen the training and support of early learning personnel, create and implement the ExceleRate Illinois Quality Rating and Improvement System, and align all early care and education programs with high-quality early learning and development standards. The Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD), IBHE, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and The Center: Resources for Teaching and Learning, in conjunction with the Illinois Early Learning Council's subcommittee on Higher Education Learning and Professional Development, collaborated to develop the Early Childhood Educator Preparation Program Innovation (EPPI) Grant. Further, a committee called Higher Education Learning and Professional Development (HELP) initially developed the broad ideas that evolved into the EPPI grant. The first grant application opportunity was offered in 2013 for work done by institutional partners—the EPPI grant recipients—during 2014.

In summary, the overarching goals of the EPPI grant were to: a) develop models of effective early childhood educator preparation; b) foster the creation or further development of partnerships between two- and four-year preparation programs and other community-based organizations such as preschools; c) promote articulation and alignment of curriculum between two- and four-year programs; d) support early childhood educator preparation programs in designing curriculum to incorporate new state standards and program requirements, such the requirements for becoming Gateways entitled;[1] e) build capacity in key areas of need, such as early math learning; and f) create opportunities for innovation in program implementation.

The EPPI grantees, or the partnerships, were able to use grant funds to advance one or more goals of the grant and address the specific challenges/opportunities for their respective programs and partnerships.

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[1] The Gateways credentials are standards of professional and educational achievement. Institutions become entitled by aligning their coursework with certain state and national benchmarks. In order for individuals to become entitled, they need to fulfill a combination of credit hours, content areas, hours of supervised experience, and professional contributions. http://www.ilgateways.com/en/entitled-institutions

The purpose of the grant was reflected in the aims and goals of this implementation study of the individual partnerships and in aggregate the grant itself. The main goals of this study were to: a) examine how the grant recipients were implementing the changes set forth in their grant proposals; b) identify initial barriers to implementation of grant activities; c) identify catalysts that aided in goal attainment and/or partnership development; and d) consider the sustainability of the impact of the grant-related activities. Through structured telephone interviews, the Illinois Education Research Council (IERC) solicited a brief description of major activities associated with the grant; catalysts and/or levers enhancing grant activities; barriers inhibiting implementation of grant activities; and successful strategies utilized to overcome barriers. There was also a specific emphasis on articulation activities within the partnerships. Articulation was considered a foundational component of the EPPI grants.

Complexity of Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Before we describe the methods we thought it would be important to briefly mention the early childhood (EC) landscape. As described by Nelson, Main, and Kushto-Hoban (2012) and Whitebrook (2014) there is high degree of complexity regarding early childhood education itself, as well as in the preparation of early childhood teachers. Early childhood education is inclusive of a wide array of roles and responsibilities within myriad of public and private settings, both in and out of schools. Adding to the complexity is the fact that 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, not only for workforce entry, but also continued employment in the given ECE setting (Whitebrook, 2014). Relatedly, there are numerous entry points into the early childhood workforce that result in a wide-range of jobs, such as child care workers, caregivers, educational administrators, preschool teachers, teacher's aides and assistants, to name a few. Institutions of higher education preparing early childhood educators are impacted by these complexities in that they must design programs that address the myriad state and national professional standards and licensing requirements relative to workforce roles and requirements.

Although higher education institutions do a large share of the preparation of early childhood educators, the development of EC teachers does not rest solely with them. The preparation and development of EC teachers includes the various entities for whom they work, such as community based organizations, private for-profit early childcare and education providers, etc. (Nelson, Main, & Kushto-Hoban, 2012). Whitebrook (2014) describes how some ECE teachers do not participate in pre-service education and their formal training as ECE teachers might not start until they are employed in the field; therefore their first job often doubles as practice teaching. Yet, there has been an increase in educational requirements in programs such as Head Start, which necessitates attending a college or university (Whitebrook, 2014).

Methods

Overview of Study

This qualitative implementation study provides a systematic review of the progress EPPI grant recipients have made in implementing the objectives set forth in their respective proposals by winter 2014. The vast majority of the grant recipients were notified by IBHE of the approval of their respective grant proposal in December 2013, with a couple of the partnerships being notified shortly thereafter in spring 2014. Therefore, most recipients began their grant-related work in February 2014 with a formal end date of December 2014 (just under one year). Because of the timeframe of our evaluation and the length of time it takes to develop partnerships and get curricular changes approved, we also sought information regarding planned action specific to the grant-related objectives. We assumed many of the goals would be achieved outside the timeframe of the current grant.

Interview Participants

The principal investigator (PI) for each grant/partnership was contacted via information provided by IBHE. The PIs were asked to provide their detailed contact information, as well as the contact information of up to five additional individuals who were associated with the grant-related work. In total, we obtained the contact information for 53 individuals from the 12 separate partnerships. One individual was identified after the interview phase commenced. During an interview with a PI, it became clear that an administrator at one institution was integral in the progress made in articulation with the partnering community college. As a consequence of this discovery, that administrator was interviewed as well. Although different within each partnership, the interviewees were often field placement supervisors, administrators, program coordinators, and early childhood faculty at four-year institutions and/or at community colleges. In many instances, the interviewees served numerous roles. Of the individuals that were identified for interviews, 21 were from four-year institutions, 28 were from community colleges, and four were from community agencies such as Head Start or a local school district. It should be noted that five of the identified individuals were associated with two separate EPPI partnerships, all representing community colleges. Consequently, there was a total of 48 unduplicated individuals that we attempted to interview. Interviewees were contacted via email using an online scheduling service. In the end, we heard back from all 48 of the potential interviewees and conducted interviews with 45 of them. Two of the individuals we did not interview mentioned they were uncomfortable answering questions related to the grant due to them possessing only a cursory knowledge of the project or only serving as the fiscal officer for the grant.

Of the 12 EPPI grant holders, six were from public four-year institutions and six were from private four-year institutions, with one located in Iowa, but partnering with an Illinois community college and Illinois-based Head Start program. There were a total of 19 individual community colleges associated with one or more of the grants, representing 17 different Illinois community college districts. The geographic distribution of the grant recipients and consequently the interviewees, favored the northeast region of the state

(Figure 1). There were no grantees from either the southwest or southeast regions of the state.[2] It should be noted that there is only one public four-year in both the southwest and southeast regions and the large majority of public and private four-years are located in the northeast region. Therefore the regional distribution of the grant recipients was somewhat representative of the distribution of higher education institutions (and population) in the state. Another consideration in the geographic distribution of the EPPI grants was that the grants were competitive and awarded based on proposals.

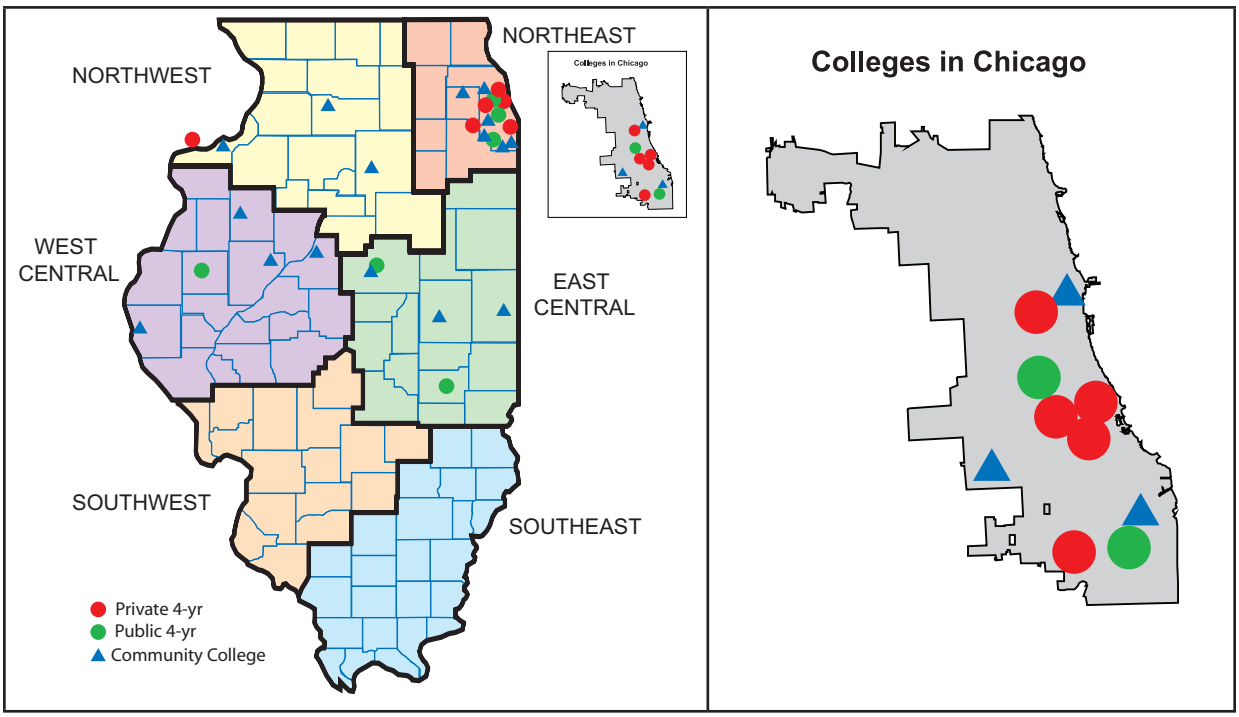

Figure 1. Location of participating postsecondary institutions across the state of Illinois and a detailed map of Chicago.

Developing the Interview Protocol

Interviews were guided by a protocol that was initially constructed by commonalities identified in the project narratives and the overarching goals of the EPPI grant and this implementation study. Feedback on early drafts of the interview protocol was obtained internally at the Illinois Education Research Council (IERC), from Evergreen Research and Evaluation, and from representatives from IBHE, the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA), and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD).

The final protocol (Appendix A) focused on major goals and activities associated with each partnership, and included barriers to implementation, catalysts and levers allowing for implementation, innovation and enhancements specific to articulation, as well as program/curricular enhancements. Additionally, the interviewees were provided the opportunity to share overall thoughts and opinions regarding the grant process that were not touched upon in any of the interview questions.

[2] A second round of EPPI grants has targeted central and southern Illinois community college and four-year higher education institution (HEI) partnerships.

The original interview protocol was customized according to the interview participant's role. For instance, the protocol for the community-based partners, which were often Head Start administrators, had a limited focus on articulation and more of an emphasis on internships and field-based experiences. In total, there were four slightly different versions of the basic interview protocol: a) four-year partners; b) community college partners; c) community-based partners; and d) for those associated with more than one site. Some slight adaptations were made to the interview protocol after the first interviews were completed mostly for relevancy purposes and to reduce on the length of time it took to conduct the interview.

Conducting the Interviews

Interviewees were contacted via email using an online scheduling service that provided potential blocks of times for the interview to be conducted. Interviews were conducted over the telephone and were digitally-recorded to ensure the accuracy of notes. It took between 30 and 90 minutes to conduct the interviews. Generally speaking, the interviews with the PIs took somewhat longer than the interviews with other partners. Instead of using full transcription, we developed detailed summaries following the format of the interview protocol, using written notes from the interview along with the digital audio recording of the interview. Completed summaries were sent via email to the interviewees for validation. Interviewees were instructed to review the summaries and provided the opportunity to clarify, correct, or exclude any of the summarized information, or add entirely new ideas. Most of the interviewees made minor edits to the summaries—mainly for clarification purposes—and substantive changes were fairly rare.

Validated summaries were cleansed of identifying information (for both individuals and institutions alike) and uploaded to Dedoose, a web-based application for mixed-methods research. Dedoose provides an encrypted collaborative environment, for managing, coding, and analyzing the responses to interview questions.

Creating the Codes and Themes

In a similar manner to the development of the interview protocol, the coding structure was initially constructed around the framework of the barriers to implementation, catalysts and levers allowing for implementation, innovation and enhancements specific to articulation, and program/curricular enhancements. The first draft of the coding structure was developed for the purpose of presenting initial findings at a meeting of the EPPI grant recipients in December 2014 at St. Xavier University (Chicago, IL). The presentation focused on the the last two items on the protocol and included an analysis of about half of the interviews (the validated interview summaries we had received back at the time). The last two items centered on views regarding the current grant process and additional comments. The analysis of these responses provided an initial glimpse into the commonalities in the text and was used to inform the development of the overall coding structure as we identified emerging themes.

We then used the inductive approach by Thomas (2003) to further develop the coding

structure by engaging in data reduction. This approach to analyzing qualitative data aims to develop a coding model that has 3-8 categories (Creswell, 2002); this however proved challenging given the broad range of goals associated with this evaluation study, which were to identify a wide array of activities, motivations, barriers, catalysts, and impacts.

At first we used the parent code categories of "Articulation," "Barriers," "Catalysts," and "Real and Potential Impacts." Each parent category had between 3-8 sub-topics. After the initial coding structure was developed, test trials of the codes were conducted on the summaries to determine the emerging themes. Some alterations were made to the initial coding structure, such as the merging, creation, and deletion of codes.

After careful consideration, it was decided that most of the initial sub-topics falling under articulation better fit into other categories. For example, the articulation sub-topic, formalizing articulation, seemed to fit better in the original Real and Potential Impacts category. We also found that there were too many subtopics within both the Barriers and Real and Potential Impacts themes. For Barriers, there seemed to be a natural distinction between those that were more systemic in scope and those at the institutional level. Regarding Real and Potential Impacts, some were more long-term in nature, whereas others were mediating impacts that would potentially allow for the more long-term impacts to be realized. In the end, and as shown in Figure 2, we were left with the final themes of: a) Systemic Barriers; b) Institutional Barriers; c) Catalysts; d) Potential Long-term Impacts; e) Mediating Impacts; and f) Frameworks. Frameworks was, for the most part, an acknowledgement that standards, assessments, or a program re-design were used to frame some of the activities associated with the grant. This was done at either the institutional level or across more than one of the partners associated with the grant. The responses falling within the frameworks category tended to be neutral and therefore we hesitated coding them as Catalysts or within either of the barriers themes.The final coding structure, leading to our themes and sub-topics, was validated both internally by IERC staff and externally by an IBHE representative.

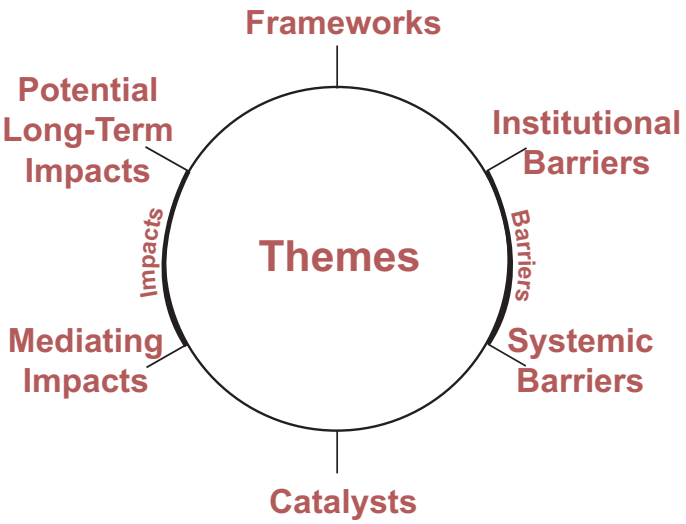

Figure 2. Final themes emerging from the qualitative analysis.

Each interview summary was systematically examined by a primary and secondary coder. Primary coding for each summary was conducted by a researcher who did not conduct the given interview. Secondary coding was conducted by a different researcher, who may or may not have served as the interviewer for that summary.

Partnership Development Theory

After sharing the coding structure and emerging themes with an IBHE representative and receiving input during the presentation at St. Xavier, we decided to use partnership development theory as an additional lens through which we analyzed the results. We found that many of the themes and subtopics paralleled the benefits, challenges, and success factors identified in McQuaid's (2009) description of partnership development theory. Although McQuaid's (2009) study focused on the development of partnerships among job placement agencies, we felt that many of his arguments were directly applicable to the community college and four-year partnerships that were an integral part of this overall grant. For instance, he uses the term mutualism to describe building effective partnerships through established networks of communication. We found that many of the grantees used such networks and previous relationships to frame their partnerships.

Results

Reasons for Participating in Grant

Before addressing the major themes within the responses, we provide a brief summary of what motivated institutions to participate in the grant. Not surprisingly, the most cited reason was to improve articulation between community colleges and four-year institutions. This was a foundational aspect of the grants. Participants discussed different avenues for articulation efforts including improving the quality of instruction, developing standardized processes for advising and transferring, increasing and coordinating field experiences, and addressing the evolving early childhood standards, including the Gateways credentialing framework.

Another often cited motivation to participate in the grant was to build partnerships and networks among community colleges and four-year programs. Participants expressed the desire for these collaborations to result in improved communication and shared resources (e.g., course materials, advising guides, up-to-date information about changes in the field). 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. Community college and four-year institution participants also mentioned improving degree completion rates of transferring students as a desired outcome of the collaborations and grant activities.

The last major area for reasons for grant participation involved meeting students' needs. Responses relating to this area included: 1) ensuring a smooth transition to decrease credit loss and increase affordability for students; 2) providing support to pass the Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP), which replaced the Basic Skills Test, and met the requisite cuts scores on the ACT;[3] 3) creating opportunities to provide secondary ESL endorsements;[4] 4) developing support structures to help students succeed after the transfer; 5) increasing marketability among graduates; and, 6) providing professional development for current practitioners. Overall, all participating grantees cited multiple reasons for participating in the grant depending on the needs and circumstances of their particular institution. We turn next to the discussion of the overarching themes of responses.

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[3] Defined as a minimum composite score of 22 and minimum combined English/Writing score of 19. http://www.isbe.net/licensure/html/testing.htm#scores

[4] The ESL endorsement requirements include: ESL clinical experience equal to 100 clock hours or three months teaching experience with ESL students and credits totaling 18 semester hours distributed among the following course areas: linguistics; theoretical foundations of teaching ESL; assessment of the bilingual students; methods and materials for teaching ESL; cross-cultural studies for teaching limited-English-proficient students; and an elective (an additional bilingual or ESL course). http://www.isbe.net/licensure/html/esl_endorsement.htm

Theme 1: Institutional Barriers

Identifying barriers was one of the goals of this implementation study. Any interview response related to preventing project goals from being fully attained or negatively impacting partnership development were assigned this code. Also, things that competed with project-specific activities were coded as a barrier. We note that many of the responses coded as barriers were often coupled with a grant-specific catalyst that allowed the partnership to overcome, or at least move towards overcoming it. Further, some of the statements that were coded as barriers were often providing a historical context and included clauses such as, "prior to this grant," as a way to qualify responses. In fact, such statements often suggested that the identified barriers were overcome due to grant specific activities.

After initial coding and the identification of emerging themes, we decided that the barriers tended to fall into one of two major categories. There were barriers specific to the institutional setting that were identified as negatively impacting goal attainment at one or more separate institutions, as well as barriers that were more systemic in nature, impacting the EC field as a whole. We opted to treat each of those major categories as its own theme. We begin by describing institutional barriers and the subtopics of: a) bureaucratic treading; b) past issues with articulation; c) issues with advising; and d) major institutional change (Figure 3). Direct quotes are within quotation marks and italicized, whereas paraphrased quotes are in regular font. Also, a wider range of representative quotes and summaries for each theme and sub-topic are provided in the tables located in Appendix B.

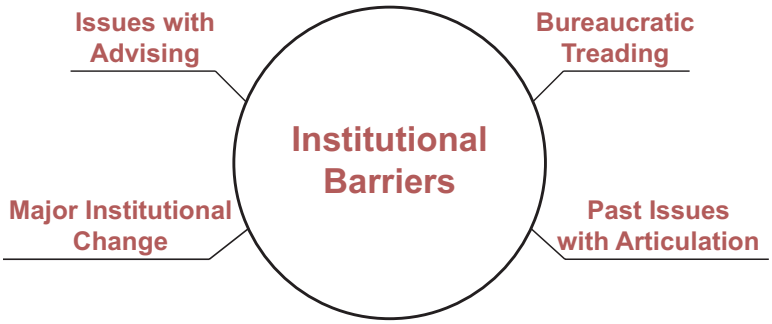

Figure 3. Sub-topics within the institutional barriers theme.

Bureaucratic Treading

Several interview responses centered on the amount of time, energy, and effort it takes to get programmatic changes approved at the various administrative levels required by their college. This was often described as either preventing project-specific goal attainment or at the very least slowing it down so that the goals would not fully be achieved during the timeframe of the grant.

> *"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."*

Direct quotes are within quotation marks and italicized.

For the most part, interviewees alluded to agreements in principle in terms of smoothing out the transfer process with improvements to articulation, although in many cases there was still a need to get such agreements formalized and/or officially approved.

> *"There is a strong agreement in place between the community college and the partnering four-year focusing on articulation that lays out the transferability of the coursework. However, it has not been officially approved by upper administration. There is a meeting scheduled in the near future where official approval for the agreement might occur."*

It should also be noted that some of responses were more related to the timing of programmatic review (i.e., the college's curriculum committee only meets in the fall) with the alignment to the current grant-related activities, as opposed to the burden associated with going through the review itself.

Paraphrased quotes are in a regular font.

> The participant mentioned the need to go through the curriculum committee in early fall and the faculty senate which convenes in late fall or early spring.

Many of the interviewees specifically mentioned the red-tape associated with not only making programmatic changes but also getting articulation agreements formally approved, however, a couple of the interviewees discussed the difficulty they had working through some of the administrative requirements associated with the grant at their institution, such as getting subcontractor awards with their partners approved.

> One community college participant mentioned her willingness to have the four-year partner manage the grant as the PI due to administrative barriers at her institution.

> *"There are a lot of challenges with the work of getting subcontracts approved and executed."*

Past Issues with Articulation

Another sub-topic within the institutional barriers theme was past issues with articulation and this was almost universally from the community college perspective. It should be noted that not all community college partners maintained such a viewpoint. Some of the responses within the sub-topic centered on previous articulation agreements that have existed on paper, but did not provide much benefit to students, particularly EC students. The troubled history of the Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) was also mentioned, mostly in the context of articulation. Within some of the responses from community college partners, there also seemed to be the viewpoint that articulation was working sufficiently well with a single four-year partner, but that singular success did not translate well to other four-year institutions. In essence, responses from the community college partners indicated the desire to provide more and better transfer opportunities for their students. Embedded within these responses were some of the drawbacks from the community college transfer student's perspective, namely credit loss and its correlates, such as extending time to bachelor's degree completion and increased costs.

> *"Currently, coursework does not transfer well to four-year institutions and this institution wants to be better aligned with coursework and curriculum."*

"Previous to the grant, articulation discussions with partnering institutions were not very successful."

"In the past it has been a struggle getting both two-year and four-year institutions to get together for articulation to talk about what's best for our students."

"This institution has historically struggled with articulation and transfer for students."

Although past issues with articulation were identified as an institutional barrier, at the same time such issues seemed to be a main motivating factor for participation. There was one particular response from a community-based partner that provided a unique perspective, almost taking a consumer viewpoint in terms of articulation issues. The response directly implied that credit loss or duplication of coursework across community colleges and four-year institutions was an inefficient use of resources, because the community-based agency at which the respondent worked was often reimbursing her employees to get their associate degree and ultimately their bachelor's degree; and therefore paying for the same coursework twice. The silver lining embedded within a lot of these responses was an acknowledgement that this barrier existed in the past and the grant-related activities were setting the framework to overcome the barrier.

"At another four-year, they tended to transfer in as sophomores rather than juniors, losing a year of coursework. This was a big problem for the center in that the center pays for the college classes."

Issues with Advising

Another institutional barrier, which is arguably related to issues associated with articulation, was advising or the lack thereof. Because advising was explicitly mentioned as a barrier a relatively large number of times, we treated it as its own sub-topic rather than folding it into the past issues with articulation sub-topic. For the most part, advising issues were raised in the context of transfer and the overwhelming majority of the interviewees who mentioned it were associated with community colleges. Many of the responses within this sub-topic centered on the lack of uniformity or how at times transfer decisions were left up to the interpretation of an individual at the receiving four-year college, such as a counselor, who may or may not fully understand early childhood education. Even when there is a counselor who understands early childhood education and helps facilitate the transfer process, without a formalized or uniform agreement, a related problem remains. If that person leaves due to staff changes, the informal system changes and arguably collapses.

"Previously, transfer was up to the discretion of whoever was in the counseling office and was more vague."

"Advising has to be clear about what different degrees and certificates allow the students to enter into their desired career; it is very complicated."

"At times, early childhood students get poor advising because someone doesn't fully understand the transfer process specific to early childhood students."

Other issues within advising were related to the complexity of EC as a field and a lack of understanding the transfer issues specific to EC students. Advisors and transfer coordinators may not be fully aware of the various pathways into the profession for EC students. Another viewpoint that emerged from these responses is perhaps a partial acceptance of the responsibility for some of the issues associated with advising for transfer students, or at least an understanding that a lot can be done by those within EC to help overcome the issues. This viewpoint included the recognition that those in EC need to do a better job of communicating the unique needs of its transfer students to advisors and counselors and there needs to be a concerted effort to provide such individuals with up-to-date, concise, and easy to use information. Further, this information needs to be communicated to the students as well.

> *"We need to be concentrating on the lack of consistent resources for advisors."*

> *"There is a need to help support students going through the transfer process to better ensure their success at the four-year and to see how the program works in terms of transfer."*

Major Institutional Change

Another sub-topic within this theme was major institutional changes that impeded or prevented goal attainment and/or partnership development. Unfortunately, some of the changes were fairly institutional specific and therefore cannot be discussed without giving away the identity of an institution and potentially an interviewee. Nonetheless, there were a few ideas emerging within this theme that were fairly generic, such as administrative changes at the institutional level, or having a principal investigator, or other key player move on from the project. Some of the issues associated with such a change were recognized from both the four-year, where the change was typically occurring, and community college perspectives. This recognized barrier seemed to stem from the lack of concordance between the author of the grant proposal and the person implementing the grant-related activities. In other words, the person now responsible for grant implementation, was not the person who developed the implementation plan, and this served as a barrier.

> *"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."*

Theme 2: Systemic Barriers

As shown in Figure 4, systemic barriers were identified as being more global in scope, potentially getting in the way of goal attainment across multiple partnerships. This theme included sub-topics such as: logistical difficulties; b) initiative overload; c) characteristics of EC students; d) institutional bias; and e) complexity of EC education. A few of the barriers were closely related to the institutional barriers described in the previous section. For example, some of the new state requirements were identified as being associated with bureaucratic treading within institutional barriers and initiative overload within systemic barriers. We opted to discuss those barriers in this section. Many of the sub-topics within the systemic barriers theme defined the challenging contexts in which the partnerships were operating, particularly the contexts that impede timely goal attainment.

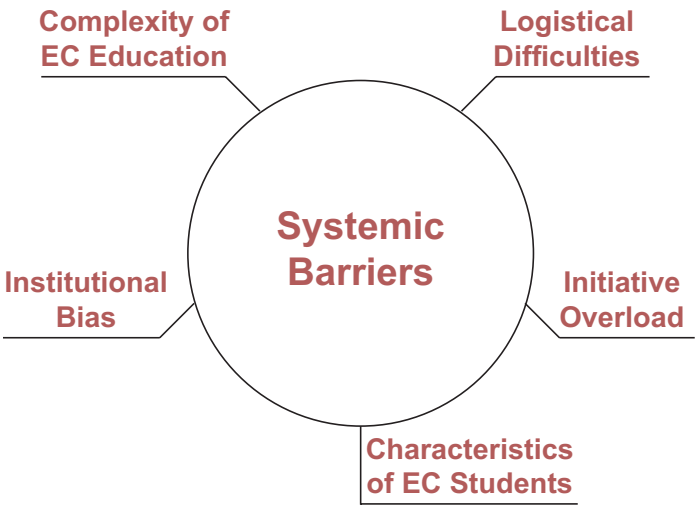

Figure 4. Sub-topics within the systemic barriers theme.

Logistical Difficulties

The first set of systemic barriers was often associated with logistics and mostly centered on time-related issues from a couple of different perspectives. One perspective was specific to the grant program itself, in that the funding period was fairly short, as was the amount of time to respond to the request for proposal.

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

> *"In my view, the problem with the grant is it came so hastily... We had until the end of the first week in December to partner and develop a grant. That's why we're all frazzled. We haven't had a chance to chew on this."*

The other perspective centered on time constraints related to other/competing responsibilities outside the grant. For example, some of the community college partners were essentially one-person academic departments with both teaching and administrative responsibilities. This, at times, was described as making it difficult to devote enough time to grant-related activities. For these responses, there was the implication that the full attainment of project goals was possible, but generally not within the timeframe of the grant. Another logistical barrier that was evident in some of the responses was the geographic distance between partners; however,

technology was often mentioned as something used to overcome it (this will be discussed in the catalysts section).

> *"Hard for a one-person program due to time constraints."*

> The partnership covers a huge geographical area; some partner sites are three hours away.

Initiative Overload

New standards, initiatives, and program requirements were oftentimes viewed as systemic barriers. In some cases, they were associated with the characteristics of ECE students that are described in the next section. For instance, requisite TAP or ACT scores for licensure program entry were viewed as definitive barriers among many respondents. However, this tended to relate back to the characteristics of some of the ECE students who might have difficulty meeting the cut-score requirements. Many of the responses provided the viewpoint that student goal attainment, such as successfully gaining acceptance into a licensure program, and project goal attainment among the partners (or the lack thereof due to barriers) were interdependent.

> *"If they don't pass the TAP prior to transferring to the four-year they can't progress all that much in their Early Childhood junior/senior level study track if seeking licensure."*

Another barrier related to standards was the dynamic nature of the standards themselves, as well as the numerous layers of institutional, state, and professional standards/requirements that programs need to continually address. In fact, some of the respondents mentioned the dynamic nature of standards and the continuous stream of new initiatives necessitating a complete program redesign.

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

Characteristics of Early Childhood Students

Another sub-topic was associated with the ascribed characteristics of some of the early childhood education students themselves, with a particular emphasis on those who attend community college. Yet, some of the ascribed characteristics of the EC students at community colleges were also evident regarding descriptions of their four-year counterparts. It should be noted that these characteristics were acknowledged by all groups of respondents (four-year, community college, and community partners), but were not viewed as universal among all ECE students. Further, the responses were not universally negative in nature. The responses were often placed in the context of how such characteristics create barriers for some, or a select group of ECE students, such as first generation college students and non-native English speakers. One set of responses focused on the number of EC students that are nontraditional (based on age) and the fact that many work full-time in EC centers, while attending college. The dual nature of ECE students, particularly those at community colleges, was embedded in some of the responses. Such students were perceived as being more diverse and having more work experience (relative to direct four-year college entrants) but

may have difficulty moving past some of the systemic barriers within the pipeline (such as meeting all of the requirements for direct licensure program entry). In other words, although some of these students may be academically underprepared, many have key competencies and important strengths that are important in serving the needs of the community, such as being bilingual or understanding the resources and supports available to families and young children from their area. In many of the related responses, the barriers facing the students were viewed as preventing goal attainment specific to the partnerships.

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

> *"Students are trying to balance life, jobs, etc. Passing all the tests in English when it is not their native language can be very challenging and may discourage students from enrolling in the degree program."*

Early childhood students, particularly those at community colleges, were sometimes viewed as taking a relatively long time to decide upon their major or taking a less linear path in making such decisions.

> *"What was reaffirmed by the community college partners was no matter how hard they try to get their students to commit to one area of education, their students are not easily ready to commit. The eventual transfer students tend to fall into their specific educational area over time."*

This was often related back to impeding timely student-specific goal attainment at the community college after transitioning to a four-year institution. At times, this was viewed in the context of affordability, such as not having sufficient financial aid due to prolonged enrollment and the fact that four-year colleges have higher tuition (relative to community colleges) and some charge more than others.

> *"They take courses they like rather than need, don't know what they want, and sometimes run out of financial aid before they finish."*

Institutional Bias

Institutional bias was one of the more universally reported barriers and responses reflecting this were generally reported from the community college perspective. This bias referred to the notion that four-year institutions have traditionally been viewed higher on the educational hierarchy than community colleges and the coursework is generally viewed as being more academically rigorous.

> *"A lot of the community college programs are NAEYC accredited and the four-years will say they aren't equivalent even though the accreditation is the same, meaning they should have the same rigor."*

Yet, in one response, a similar perceived bias from the students' perspective was evident. This came from one of the community college partners.

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

A few of the community college respondents suggested that the grant program itself perpetuated this bias, in that four-year colleges were required to be the grant-holders. This was viewed as a limitation for community colleges in that if they wanted to build additional transfer destinations for their students within the context of the grant, it required partnering with multiple four-year colleges and therefore being a part of multiple grants. This was relative to four-year colleges that were able to partner with multiple community college partners within one grant (which they managed).

> *"It's all based on the university perspective first. They get the grant and then go to the community colleges. Why does it have to be that way? Why can't grants go to the community colleges and then go to the University?"*

On the other hand, a few of the community college respondents had mentioned their complete lack of desire for managing the partnership grant, mostly due to their lack of desire to take on additional administrative responsibilities.

A somewhat related institutional bias favoring the four-year partners was evident in the descriptions of the partnership-related activities specific to articulation that were described in a few instances as somewhat one-sided. In other words, the context for articulation was developed using the ECE program at the four-year as the basis, rather than both programs having equal input.

> *"The four-year's approach was 'here's our program' and then look to see how the community college's courses fit into their program."*

Complexity of Early Childhood Education

One of the major sub-topics within the systemic barriers theme was the overall complexity of early childhood education. This perspective was present in responses from interviewees from four-year institutions and community colleges alike, and generally was discussed in the student context. For instance, the complexity of early childhood makes it difficult for students, particularly community college students, to efficiently navigate the field. In the responses, there were some instances when the complexity was discussed from the outsider perspective, such as getting academic advisors to fully understand the transfer process specific to ECE. The complexity not only centered on programmatic requirements specific to articulation and program entry, but also additional expectations associated with licensure and credentialing. Some of the responses included the idea that the complexity of navigating the early childhood education pipeline might serve to dissuade potential community college students from seeking entrance into the field.

> *"... 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."*

Other responses implied that recent programmatic enhancements at a given four-year institution have served to make the transfer process more complex in relative terms, but not necessarily insurmountable.

> *"The redesign made the program very unique and challenging to transfer into."*

Theme 3: Catalysts

Catalysts were defined as activities that resulted in grant-related goal attainment, or the movement towards such goal-attainment. The following sub-topics were included within the catalysts theme: a) shared values; b) capacity for cooperation; c) grant provided impetus; d) innovative steps; e) use of technology; and f) integral player (see Figure 5). Some of the sub-topics were adapted directly from McQuaid's (2009) description of success factors in the theory of organizational partnerships, such as capacity for cooperation and shared values.

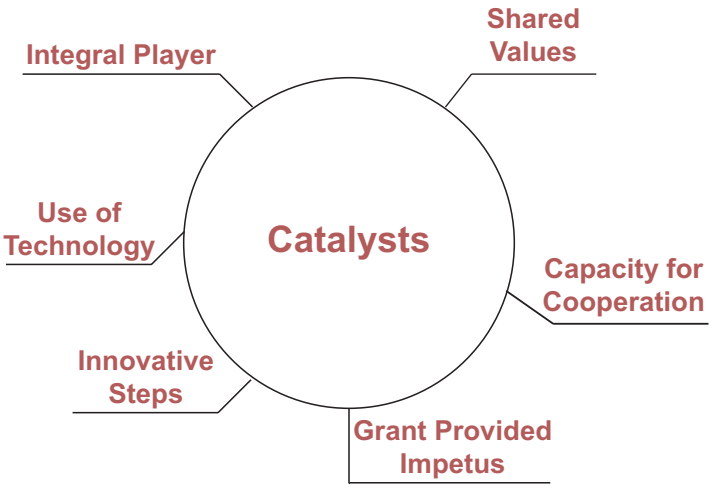

Figure 5. Sub-topics within the catalysts theme.

Shared Values

Shared values was one of the sub-topics related to McQuaid's (2009) description of partnership development theory that permeated many of the responses. In fact, shared values was the catalyst with the highest frequency count. Many of the partnerships seemed to establish a 'common ground' and 'shared values' by anchoring their discussions with what was best for the students, what would improve learning outcomes, or what would allow the partners to address emerging program requirements. This allowed the partners to overcome some of the traditional barriers to partnership development and ultimately goal attainment, such as turf protection and institutional bias (which was described in a previous section). In fact, many of the responses centered on the idea that parity was achieved (institutional bias was overcome) upon the establishment of shared values. What often spurred the establishment of shared values were activities associated with gaining a contextual understanding of the institutional setting of their partners, such as rotating the meeting sites and meeting the partner's students.

> *"I really had no clue what the 2-year institutions face, and there is a healthy suspicion on their part about what our aims are, what our students are really like. This process has brought us together in a way I hadn't expected."*

The participants described how having wonderful collaborators has helped. All partners have taken ownership and everyone is working together.

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

Capacity for Cooperation

The capacity for cooperation sub-topic centered on the premise that goal attainment can be enhanced by the ability of the individual partners to effectively engage in the partnership and add value to the partnership process (McQuaid, 2009). As argued by McQuaid (2009), individuals involved in partnership development need to be creative to ensure flexibility in the sharing of information and resources, hence the need for enhancements to communication. An extension of that argument is that those involved in developing the partnership also have to be willing to be creative and flexible. Many of the interviewees brought up the idea of communication in the context of partnership development and oftentimes mentioned the importance of regular face-to-face meetings, augmented with a constant sharing of information between the partners.

> *"Focusing on what could be implemented, doable, and that is a good thing. Make sure the goals and activities are developed to make a difference, but that they can also be attained."*

> *"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."*

The viewpoint that providing organization to meetings and the activities that would occur outside of meetings via agenda setting and developing committee structures was fairly common in many responses.

> *"Structure is the most important thing. The participant wondered what innovation should look like and was not not sure if the ideas she had been hearing about were innovative. Structure is more important than innovation."*

The use of technology, such as online meeting platforms, was mentioned several times as a way to supplement face-to-face meetings and overcome some of the systemic barriers associated with logistics, such as time constraints and the geographic distance between partners.

> *"Meetings have worked very well, this partnership has also used an online video meeting website that helps with the long distances between some of the institutions."*

Another idea related to McQuaid's (2009) partnership development theory that was evident in the capacity for cooperation sub-topic was having the necessary players at the table. In other words, those involved in the partnership needed the authority to engage in decision-making (within institutional contexts) and this was stated in several of the responses. One of the main viewpoints involved the inclusion of administrators in the meeting structure, either as participants or in keeping them up-to-date about the progress being made in the partnership, so that decisions could be made and acted upon.

> *"Clear examination of the goals and then having the time and actual players in place to reach the goals and make things happen. The goals were all things we knew we needed to work on, but without the structure in place they are difficult to accomplish. The grant provided the structure for the meetings and getting the right people together."*

The idea associated with having the necessary players at the table was not limited to administrators with decision-making authority. Other partnerships incorporated outside individuals who were experts in early math and early literature into the discussions on the program redesign. Also, another partner incorporated members who work at their institution's admissions office. While these occurrences were not as frequent as the incorporation of administrative personnel, they do speak to the importance of including players who can provide meaningful and related perspectives.

Grant Provided Impetus

The grant structure was identified, in and of itself, as a catalyst for goal attainment and partnership development. In essence, many interviewees felt that the grant provided the necessary structure for goal attainment and this was evident in three separate ways. First, the grant and the financial support attached to it signaled the importance of the grant-associated work to their superiors, providing outside validation. This was evident from both the community college and four-year institution perspectives. This validation allowed the grant recipients to arguably navigate the bureaucratic barriers that often arise during the approval process for programmatic changes in a somewhat easier fashion. In some instances, formally partnering with a well respected faculty member at a four-year institution provided similar validation for community college partners and was considered a catalyst.

> *"The grant got the attention of the people who can approve things. We are all busy. When we have the power of the grant and the title, people paid attention and came to the meetings. They learned more about the field, particularly with the four-year partner at the table. The grant was a very positive experience on their end."*

Second, the grant provided the recipients the financial means to justify the dedication of their time to grant-specific activities. In other words, the grant-related activities were no longer competing with day-to-day responsibilities (or were not competing as much) and became a legitimate part of a given partner's workload.

> *"The grant gave us the funding for that time to work over the summer and to be relieved of other academic responsibilities during that timeframe; without that, we wouldn't have had our house in order and it wouldn't have happen."*

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

Third, the grant acted as an impetus by holding recipients accountable for the attainment of grant specific goals, not only to the funder, but more importantly to each other. In many instances, interviewees mentioned how similar goals have been established during professional meetings in the past, such as formalizing articulation agreements, building better partnerships, establishing new programs, etc.; but, when individuals return to their respective institution, current work responsibilities compete with the attainment of new goals. The grant, along with the outside validation, dedicated time, and the accountability requirement associated with it, moved many of the partnerships towards accomplishing goals that were not attained in the past.

> *"The grant provided a way to frame the partnership and hold the partners accountable for actually accomplishing the goals, rather than merely talking about it at meetings."*

The participant reports this work has been going on behind the scenes for 10 years. "It's great to be able to fund people to do this work finally."

Innovative Steps

In this section we discuss some of the more commonly used innovative steps that were identified during the qualitative analysis such as: a) advising; b) test preparation; c) dissemination/sharing; and d) integration of community college transfer students.

Advising. Many of the responses that were coded within this category involved some sort of enhancement to advising. As noted in the barriers section, the present state of advising, particularly for community college students, was viewed as a definitive barrier for many of the partners. One of the more interesting approaches to advising was referred to as cross-advising and entailed having an advisor from a given four-year college embedded at the community college partner to directly answer questions related to the transfer process. Other approaches to advising included having clearly articulated pathways developed, so that students can easily track their progress towards transfer and degree completion. Similar ideas included the development of streamlined/simple program materials that could be shared with students and advisors/counselors alike. The idea behind such approaches was to better account for what was described as vague or incomplete program materials. A complementary idea was to create the platform in which future changes to advising materials could easily be integrated, as many interviewees mentioned the dynamic nature of early childhood education.

> *"We are also working on a cross-advising program that would allow community college students to comfortably explore early childhood options at the four-year. Previously students were not sure how courses would transfer and sometimes students have expressed how intimidating it can be to understand the landscape and interworking of the four-year. Now I can give the contact information of a representative from the four-year who will show interest in the student and will inform them about everything they need to transfer. Often the overwhelming nature of the four-years deters potential transfer students. This process has already been implemented and we are already noticing positive changes."*

> *"The other big change for the community college is there is now a dedicated adviser liaison. All of the other advisers can go to her with questions regarding child development students. She meets with everyone regularly."*

Test Preparation. As discussed in the barriers section, many of the respondents mentioned the TAP and/or ACT cut-scores for licensure program entry as a barrier. The other side of the coin was the innovative approaches to test preparation to allow students to move past that barrier. Some of the partnerships contracted with a private company for ACT preparation and others allowed for current community college students to gain access to a TAP preparation course offered at the four-year college for free. However, it is still too early to tell if these programs made much of a difference.

"There was also discussion about the TAP test and how the four-year could help the community college students prepare for the exam. The four-year partner offers preparation courses for potential transfer students on a non-credit basis. The non-credit course prepares transfer students for the test and it wasn't something that was addressed before by the community college."

Dissemination/Sharing. Dissemination/sharing was addressed from a few perspectives within the innovation sub-topic. One perspective involved the strategic sharing of project-related material, such as progress reports, with higher-level administrators. This was done to engage the administrators with the project and keep the project on their radar. Another perspective involved disseminating and sharing grant-related products to others outside the partnership and was often discussed in the context of professional meetings.

"Additionally, everything that is done is being presented to a wider audience. When possible the 2-year representative is included in these presentations."

Integration of Community College Transfer Students. Another set of innovations identified in the responses could be viewed through the lens of Tinto's (1987) theory of integration. Tinto's (1987) theory posits that student integration into the college, or a feeling of psychological attachment to an institution, is a central factor in student attrition or its corollary, retention. Several interview responses included aspects of making a seamless psychological transition from a community college to a four-year university. Interviewees relayed how sometimes the size, bureaucratic tendencies, and/ or the prestigious reputation of a four-year institution could make the transition seem intimidating to community college transfer students. To counteract these previously discussed barriers, some of the grant recipients developed innovative steps to smooth that transition process. One set of innovations was the development of a bridge program, which was more long-term in nature, and the other was a series of institute days for community college students interested in a specific four-year institution, which was more short-term in nature. The bridge programs were designed to integrate the potential transfer students into the student life/culture at the university through a student organization, whereas the institute days demonstrate the feasibility of attending a university and serve to motivate potential transfer students.

"We are tremendously conscious of that and really thinking about supports; making sure we do some sort of bridge program from the community college partner to the four-year. Thinking about a summer program, doing some outreach beforehand, so community college students will really understand what the transition process looks like, how excited the four-year is about them transferring, and what the EC program looks like and how they are being prepared for it at the community college."

"The most recent Institute Day was in December. One student who had won a state award, and was Hispanic, talked about her experience and served as an inspiration to other students, made a real impact. It made the students really see that they could go on for a 4 year degree—it was a goal and a dream that they could now really imagine."

Use of Technology

Many of the responses falling within the use of technology sub-topic were placed in the context of overcoming barriers, either systemic or institutional. For example, all of the partners from one grant specifically mentioned the geographic distance between institutions serving as a potential barrier to goal attainment, but also discussed how technology was used to overcome that barrier in the form of online meetings and conference calls. In fact, online meeting and document sharing platforms were mentioned in several of the responses across multiple partnerships.

> The partnership is really strong; everyone is collaborative and very eager to support one another. The only barrier is distance from the other meetings, which was fixed by an online meeting service.

> *"The Go-To-Meetings were good. These meetings were brief one-hour meetings, but they helped keep the partners in constant contact, responding to questions, and allowing for face-to-face communication."*

One of the responses provided the viewpoint that the grant should formally integrate the use of technology as a way to overcome some of the logistical barriers associated with scheduling face-to-face meetings.

> It would make it easier for anyone, if you set funds aside for technology. It would be a lot easier to communicate and communicate more often, rather than going back and forth in terms of scheduling face to face meetings. It is easier to find commonalities across time when you don't have to travel. Cost is an obstacle, but Skype is free. Yet, it might not meet the needs for a large conference call.

Integral Player

Some of the interviewees mentioned a key player as being integral to achieving grant-related goals and many times the key player was the principal investigator. In the context of partnership development theory this could be viewed as both positive and perhaps negative if that key player is too dominant. However, it is rare when there is an equal degree of expertise and insight among all partners. In other words, most partnerships will be naturally imbalanced; however, it is recommended that no one person dominate the partnership related activities. Similarly, in the responses there was the viewpoint that the integral player should be non-authoritarian in their leadership style. A few of the responses included the viewpoint that it was important to have a designated person to provide structure to meetings, by engaging in such activities as establishing goals, agendas, and assignments. In such responses, this person was identified as the principal investigator.

> The PI's focus on getting the grant has been really helpful. As much as the community colleges and four-year colleges need each other, the PI's focus on it has made it useful and helpful and seem like something that can be done for the CC students.

> 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.

Theme 4: Potential Long-Term Impacts

In a similar fashion to barriers, impacts were placed into one of two categories, mediating impacts and potential long-term impacts. We did this for two reasons. One was that we had a relatively large number of sub-topics within the larger overall impacts theme. But more importantly, many of the impacts were short-term in nature, while others could only be measured outside the timeframe of the project. The short-terms impacts, whether realized or planned, were arguably mediating the long-term impacts of which nearly all were anticipated or perceived. We used this distinction for the sub-categories. We begin by discussing the potential long-term impacts theme which included the following sub-topics: a) professionalizing the EC workforce; b) pathways; c) enrollment; and d) societal/systemic improvement (Figure 6).

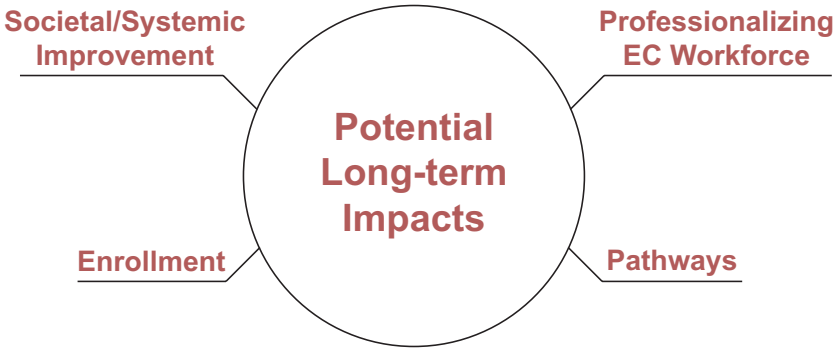

Figure 6. Sub-topics within the potential long-term impacts theme.

Professionalizing the Early Childhood Workforce

Many of the responses included some sort of reference to professionalizing the early childhood workforce, which was one of the major sub-topics within the potential long-term impacts theme. Several responses referred to newer EC students being able to talk the professional language of the field, engage in self-reflection regarding their teaching practices, and effectively communicate with parents and community stakeholders. The long-term impact of raising the aggregate level of professional expertise in the field was often viewed in conjunction with early childhood providers being able to hire from a larger and better qualified pool of job candidates. The professionalization of the field also seemed to be related to a movement towards requiring a bachelor's degree and licensure in many early childhood centers. In essence, the viewpoints offered in many of the responses reflected two highly related issues, one being that the grant-related activities would provide the framework for programs to respond or react to the professionalization of the field (new requirements and expectations from employers), while also providing the field with graduates with wider and deeper ranging pedagogical skills.

> *"Our efforts are toward the high quality people that need proper training, rather than just meeting minimum requirements of DCFS."*

> *"Raise the level of expertise. 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."*

> *"Centers are needing and wanting people with a bachelor's degree and it is something the field is requiring. It will create a bigger pool of well-trained applicants."*

Pathways

Another sub-topic within the potential long-term impacts theme involved how grant-related activities would increase the number of educational and/or career pathways for students. We note that some of the more educational-specific pathways were highly related to what will be discussed within the section on enhanced articulation/seamless transition, which we included within the mediating impacts theme. Yet, the pathways described here are more intermediate and long-term in nature and most emphasized improved and/or increased employment opportunities. Some viewed the Gateways Credentials as insurance in the event an EC teacher candidate does not earn a bachelor's degree or fails to gain licensure, as it is recognized as a symbol of quality by employers. In fact, many of the partners viewed the grant as a way to obtain Gateways entitlement at the program level. Some of what was discussed specific to pathways was more of an enhancement, such as making the pathway more affordable or removing traditional obstacles from the pathway in the form of building class schedules around traditional work schedules, such as having classes on the weekends or evenings.

> *"Students will be able to complete their bachelor's degree, previously the students could not see the financial benefit to continuing education because they had to pay to retake courses they completed at a community college."*
>
> *"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."*
>
> Embedding the Gateways Standards and preparation for the edTPA assessment into courses is a benefit for their employment options.

Institutional Enrollment

Another sub-topic within the potential long-term impacts theme was related to institutional enrollment and these responses were generally reflective of perceived positive impacts on enrollment for both sides of the partnership, community colleges and four-year institutions alike. In fact, many of the interviewees perceived the grant-related activities as being related to a positive impact on enrollment for their partners. A related idea is described in partnership development theory as symbiotic inter-dependency, or the extent to which benefits for one partner produce mutually beneficial outcomes for other partners without conflict (McQuaid, 2009).

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

Another viewpoint was that four-year institutions would not only experience an increase in enrollment due to grant-related activities, but see a better-prepared and more racially diverse group of community college transfer students coming through the transfer pipeline. In fact, most of the related responses integrated at least two of the following ideas: a) increased program enrollment; b) increased racial/ethnic diversity; and c) increased academic qualifications of the transfer students. In other words, it was fairly rare for a response to merely focus on increased program enrollment without mentioning one of the other positive impacts.

"They get a more diverse student pool, the community college student population is 75% Spanish-speaking, and so they get more students who haven't necessarily gone to the four-year in the past."

From the community-college perspective, there was more variation in the tenor of responses with most being framed in a positive way and a few responses recognizing both threats and opportunities associated with grant-related activities. On the positive side, many expressed the notion that since articulation was now framed with the Gateways Credentials, they would experience an increase in their enrollment as a result of more individuals seeking such credentialing. On the other hand, one response included the idea that course-specific enrollment at the respective community college in early childhood education might decrease as a result of the partnership, as the students would be taking more ECE-specific coursework after transferring to the receiving four-year institution; but the interviewee maintained a willingness to make that sacrifice in an effort to open up an additional transfer pathway for students. Another community college-specific view was that as academic rigor is increased due to grant-related activities (and other factors), there might be a temporary decrease in program enrollment prior to the previously described positive impact. However, this was viewed more from the lens of opportunity, with the related threat being described as administrators lacking the patience to allow programmatic enhancements to come to fruition.

"I believe we're in a transition period in the field. It's exciting but we have to be able to weather the storm. My colleague and I are worried that the administration is going to look at our numbers, because I think they will go down before they go up, and we have to convince them to let us hang on and we've got to get out there and get the best high school students…"

Societal/Systemic Improvement

A major sub-topic related to long-term impacts involved a recognition that grant-related action or planned action had implications beyond making programmatic improvements and smoothing the transition for transfer students. Many of the interviewees explicitly mentioned how their grant-related activities would have larger societal impacts with a heavy emphasis on improved learning situations for children, who were at times described as 'clients.' Better serving the needs of the community was another viewpoint interlaced within some of the responses and in a few cases was mentioned as part of the mission of a given four-year institution.

It is redefining our roles as teacher educators. We are having a tremendous impact on communities and they are shaping what we do. It has really grounded us in the work we do in the schools.

"Ultimately, our clients are young children, so we want the best possible program and the best model of delivery."

One of the more nuanced responses involved how grant-related activities, namely the heavy emphasis on early math, could help move beyond the discriminatory bar that mathematics sometimes plays in society.

The partner sought to ameliorate the issue of math being a discriminatory bar in society, preventing persons who are not the dominant culture, including females, from the best economic futures.

Theme 5: Mediating Impacts

The mediating impacts theme included sub-topics that were more precursory in nature and provided the framework for other, longer-term impacts to potentially be attained. As shown in Figure 7, mediating impacts included the following sub-topics: a) programmatic improvement; b) partnership development; and c) enhanced articulation/seamless transition.

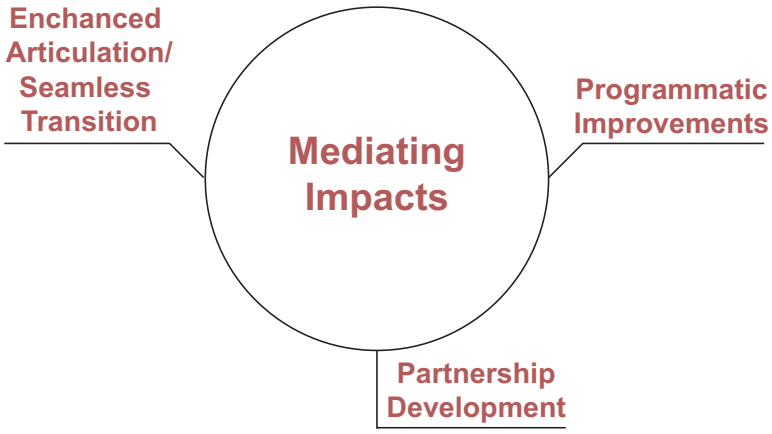

Figure 7. Sub-topics within the mediating impacts theme.

Programmatic Improvements

Programmatic improvements was a major sub-topic within the mediating impacts theme. In addition to pressure to meet new or approaching standards, the motivation behind some of the programmatic improvements seemed to be the given faculty's receptivity of demands in the field and conscious awareness of their communities. Improving field-based opportunities was one common way the grant recipients worked to enhance their programs and make them more reflective of actual classroom experience. These improvements generally involved both the breadth and depth of the field-based experience, such as increasing the number of hours required while working towards facilitating higher cognitive learning strategies. Often the strategies incorporated reflective teaching practices similar to those required by the edTPA.[5] In a few instances, there seemed to be a push to integrate field-based learning earlier in a candidate's undergraduate experience, rather than having more/most of it towards the end. While this trend served to make articulation more challenging in some instances, the partners who moved in this direction seemed to be very pleased with the enhancements and the promise that they hold.

[5] The edTPA assessment is not currently mandatory but as of September 1, 2015, all teacher candidates for licensure will have to pass such an assessment in order to complete their teacher preparation programs and apply for licensure. The edTPA is meant to serve as a capstone assessment and complements other assessments of teacher readiness required by ISBE and the candidate's individual program of study. It is designed to measure teacher candidate effectiveness in the classroom by focusing on student learning and includes a review of a teacher candidate's authentic teaching materials, including short video clips of instruction, lesson plans, student work samples, analysis of student learning and reflective commentaries. http://www.isbe.net/licensure/pdf/higher-ed/edTPA/edTPA-informational-doc.pdf

All courses are connected to field observation. Field observation is not a passive experience. It is very hands-on and rigorous.

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

Adapting curricula to allow EC students to be more responsive to the needs of diverse learners was an important aspect of programmatic improvements. EC faculty seemed to be using the grant to move towards integrating coursework that would not only enable the students to develop such skills, but also satisfy ESL and special needs secondary endorsements. This was often done in the context of enhanced articulation, so that community college transfer students would be afforded the same opportunities to develop these important skills, and earn the same credentials, as their peers who directly enrolled at four-year colleges.

"Innovation and change was needed because of the diverse needs of society, as the demographics and the market have changed and both have become much more diverse."

"All the students will be well equipped to meet the needs of diversity in their classroom, especially with special education and ESL."

Increasing academic rigor, improving the instructional quality, and improving the classroom experiences of the teaching candidates were also evident in the programmatic improvement sub-topic. Often these enhancements involved an increased emphasis on self-reflection, using assessments to guide instruction, and the integration of evidence-based practices. There was also a viewpoint that curricular enhancements could have more of an immediate impact on community college students, as many are often working at early childhood centers and attending college at the same time. In other words, they would be able to immediately apply what they are learning in the field.

""I believe the assessment, methodology, and teaching strategies have increased rigor for the students, as well as creating attainable outcomes of knowledge of assessment and performance as well as a more well-rounded understanding of what early childhood actually is."

"The innovations will totally enrich the classroom experience by making it very hands-on and requiring higher-level cognitive learning. There will be a focus on connecting and applying the theory to the actual experiences in the field-based opportunities."

Partnership Development

Partnership development was another vitally important mediating impact. However, it was often described by interviewees as both a grant-related impact and catalyst allowing other grant-related goals to be accomplished; therefore we opted to include it within the mediating impacts theme. It should be noted that not all of the partnerships were able to overcome the systemic and institutional-level barriers they encountered. In essence, some partnerships were more successful than others, not only in terms of how they were developed or their authenticity, but also how the partnership positively impacted the attainment of other goals. When partnership development was mentioned, it was done in a very positive light. Many of the interviewees spoke to the importance of the partnership itself in meeting grant-related goals and objectives.

> *"We were able to reach our goals and implement our plan because of the partnerships that were created. Each member was willing to share and help guide other institutions during the process. We all worked together seamlessly."*
>
> *"The partners, the institutions, and the individuals are the main reason that I believe this grant has been working so successfully."*

Some of the responses provided that viewpoint that the partnership played an integral role in the Gateways entitlement process. In essence, there was evidence that the partners with more experience with Gateways entitlement (usually a community college) assisted the less experienced partners (usually a four-year institution or another community college within the partnership) in going through the process.

> Through the partnership grant we have been able to help the other community college better understand the ECE Gateways Credentials and the other community college partner intends to submit for EC level four this semester.

In many of the responses there was the notion that the partnership needed to be embedded within the organizational structure of the member institutions, so that it could outlive the individuals representing the institutions within the partnership and also outlive the grant. McQuaid (2009) suggests that there needs to be a maintenance of trust and certainty between the organizations to sustain the partnership; and continuity of the partnership's membership (not necessarily the specific individuals representing the organizations) and the partnership's purpose/mission are things that lead to such trust. Partnership development was also viewed as being important from the point of view of less experienced partners or partners who were new to the state. For such individuals the partnership and associated work provided what was described as a professional development opportunity. Partnership development was also described as providing the necessary support or the framework for accomplishing other goals not specific to the grant-related activities.

> *"We need to build relationships into the organizational culture, so that they can sustain administration and faculty changes."*
>
> *"This is a very positive and effective way to do a grant and focusing on partnerships and consortia is the way to go. These things happen in little pockets and people forget or retire, but the bigger the community the grant impacts, the more staying power it will have."*

One group of EPPI grantees formed a consortium (referred to in the quote above), which was mentioned in a universally positive light by those involved, particularly in terms of building partnerships outside of the colleges involved in each individual EPPI grant. The individual partners mentioned the importance of the opportunities to learn what the other EPPI grantees within the consortium were doing, particularly in terms of how they were responding to new program requirements and developing ways to overcome identified barriers. Another perceived benefit of the consortium was the chance to expand articulation opportunities to the other colleges within the consortium, community colleges and four-year institutions alike.

Enhanced Articulation/Seamless Transition

We considered enhanced articulation among the most important mediating impacts because it arguably provided the framework for many of the other grant-related activities and it had a precursory relationship with attaining other goals. For example, articulation ostensibly provided the framework on which a number of educational and career pathways were potentially enhanced.

Planned and/or actual formalization of articulation agreements between partners often involved the identification and approval of specific ECE coursework after what was often described as a course by course alignment process. This required examining the specific learning objectives in each course across institutions, along with the assessments to determine if the learning objectives had been met. Many of the responses within this sub-topic centered on the idea of establishing guided pathways for students that would remove the uncertainty associated with transferring coursework, ideally eliminating credit loss during transfer. When discussed, the pathways were often described as full articulation and in some cases '2+2 agreements,' and included both licensure and non-licensure options (based on the partnership). In many instances the formalization of articulation led to secondary endorsements in areas such as ESL.

Most of the articulated pathways that were being described in the responses required the completion of an associate degree at the community college. One such innovative approach included the full articulation of an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) program with a four-year partner that would result in a non-licensure ECE bachelor's degree in four years with an option for a fifth year that would lead to a master's degree with licensure. Articulating the AAS degree was considered innovative because historically, the AAS was not viewed as a transfer degree at all. In fact, some four-year institutions had policies preventing such degrees from be included in transfer agreements. The applied nature of the AAS program has traditionally been viewed in a positive light by some ECE students, as many are working full-time in the field. Therefore, this AAS articulation agreement opens up a pathway to a bachelor's degree and eventually licensure to a group that was largely ignored in transfer/articulation discussions in the past. The fact that the bachelor's degree could be completed in four years (2+2) makes it even more impressive.

> *"Students will be able to move seamlessly from the two-year to the four-year without having to jump through a whole bunch of hoops, without having to reapply and retake classes. The right hand will know what the left hand is doing."*
>
> This partner is very grateful to be apart of this grant. This partner has never seen anything like this articulation work before. This is a "tremendous shift" in thinking and discussing articulation.
>
> *"Still working on articulation, but is hoping for a seamless 2+2 program."*

A couple of the responses mentioned taking a more holistic view of articulation agreements and focusing on everything from the freshman year at the community college through bachelor's degree completion and licensure at the four-year institution, rather than the 'seam' that exists between one's sophomore and junior years. The viewpoint was to encourage the students to focus on the end goal, rather than just the transition.

> *"They are in the process of building a new continuum for students beginning in freshman year rather than focusing on the 'seam' or 'transition' between institutions."*

This partner would also like to meet with the students to tell them more information about the four-year institution, so that they can start with the "end in mind."

The planned expansion of articulation to other institutions outside of the direct partnership was a major idea conveyed in several responses within this sub-topic. Although this was generally discussed from the community college perspective (as it relates to addition four-year destinations) and to a lesser extent the four-year perspective.

> *"The field wants more education, more experience, so the partnership with the four-year or any other higher education institution makes sense. We need to encourage our students to complete their Associate's degree and then to look forward."*

The activities associated with articulation seemed to be related to the viewpoint that transferring would be an uninterrupted or seamless process that took the guesswork out of course selection from the student's perspective.

> *"There will be a formalized agreement for this program. There will be a template for students who start out at a community college and want to finish at our four-year institution. This template will tell the students exactly what they need to do."*

Theme 6: Frameworks

The frameworks theme was developed to describe the interwoven nature of grant-related activities and emerging standards and program requirements within Early Childhood Education and included the sub-topics of: a) considering new program requirements; and b) new ECE program redesign. The standards and program requirements were often described as motivating factors or requirements that could be fulfilled as the partnership moves toward achieving its goals (Figure 8). In many instances, such requirements were often described in a matter-of-fact or neutral fashion. The more negative responses reflecting new requirements were included within one of the barriers themes, depending on the context. Although, to a certain extent, it could be argued that these requirements/standards could fit within the catalysts theme, we felt they provided the scaffolding for larger discussions, or were met by default as the partnership moved toward achieving other goals.

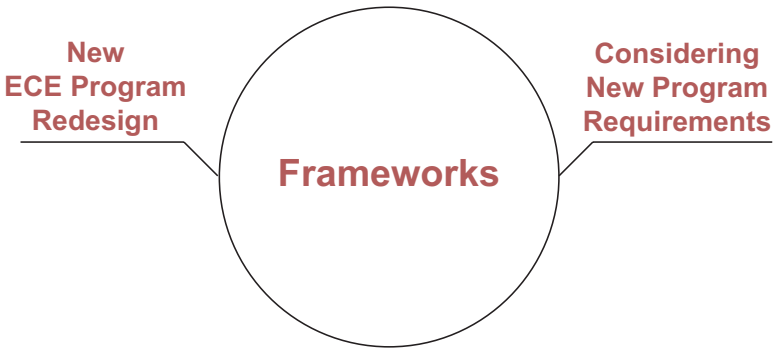

Figure 8. Sub-topics within the frameworks theme.

Considering New Program Requirements

Many times, discussions between partners regarding articulation were framed using new program requirements, namely the Gateways Credentials. Several interviewees specifically mentioned developing articulation agreements in such a way that level three requirements were part of an associate degree program and level five requirements were met during the baccalaureate program. The overarching idea was that Gateways credentialing requirements would be directly integrated into the articulated coursework and not exist as add-on requirements. Preparation related to assessments, such as the edTPA, were also used as a way to frame articulation discussions. In many instances, the partnerships were preparing the community college students to provide evidence of effective teaching practices, which would eventually support candidate performance on the edTPA. The Illinois Professional Teaching Standards (IPTS) and other professional standards such as those developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) were also used to frame some of the articulation discussions.

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

> *"Part of this process has been looking at the big ideas that are common among the institutions and how the institutions assess students. Through these discussions, we were surprised about how similar they are in main ideas and assessment."*

> *"In terms of the edTPA, the community college is considering ways to make the students more familiar with some of the concepts, skills, and language associated with the assessment, so that they would be ready for it after transferring to the four-year."*

New Early Childhood Education Program Redesign

The other sub-topic within the frameworks theme was program redesign and it was strongly related to the new program requirements sub-topic that was previously described. The main idea within this sub-topic was that ECE, as a whole, is in transition with several emerging program requirements. This was viewed by some of the interviewees as an opportunity to redesign programs, essentially creating the framework that allowed partners to simultaneously meet grant-specific goals (with partnership development and articulation in mind) and address these new program requirements.

> *"We recognized the grant as an opportunity for more thoughtful program design and an opportunity to collaborate. The whole idea of redesign in light of new standards was an attractive and innovative approach."*

> *"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."*

Next Steps/Additional Work to be Done

One of the final questions of the interview protocol centered on the participants' plans for continuing the grant-related work after the grant period ends. We felt that this information was extremely important due to the short time-frame of the grant which provided only limited opportunity to experience intermediate and long-term impacts, such as increasing or diversifying program enrollments. Responses to this question were generally positive. In fact, many of the participants mentioned a willingness to continue grant-related work even if additional grant funding was not obtained.

The most frequently mentioned topic was the desire to maintain the partnership that was developed during the grant period. Continued collaboration included work on new projects and working towards being inclusive of other community colleges and four-year institutions. Finally, another common topic was the desire to apply for an extension to complete the current grant's activities or seeking additional funding to take the next step in terms of new programming or articulation work between the four-year institutions and community colleges. Grantees' responses focused on how an extension would help them overcome the barriers of limited time and financial resources. It would be beneficial to follow up with these EPPI grant recipients to determine the extent to which such activities have continued past the grant cycle.

The nature of the responses was usually based on how far along the given partnership was in getting formal approval for articulation agreements. Partnerships that were further along in the formal approval process, seemed to be eager to test the agreement with a pilot program or implementing student-centered support like bridge programs or scholarship funding. Such partners also discussed the importance of getting articulation information in the hands of advisors and potential students. One participant even discussed that they need to be recruiting transfer students for the fall 2016 semester.

Closely related to this idea was the need to monitor and evaluate the work that was completed, essentially determining the extent to which intermediate and long-term goals have been achieved. In addition to implementing changes in program design and advising processes, these participants were also interested in how these changes would affect the individual programs and the field of Early Childhood Education at large.

As discussed throughout this report, many of the articulation agreements being developed were at the mercy of the bureaucratic realities of higher education. Consequently, many participants discussed future work along the lines of formalizing agreements, and developing advising processes and materials (based on the articulation agreements). Other planned work was more institution specific and included common goals like program redesign and gaining Gateways entitlements, but also included innovative ideas like the development of online courses, creating a common data management system across partnering institutions, or professional development with an emphasis on curriculum.

Discussion

Our qualitative analyses generally revealed that most of the partnerships were moving towards achieving their grant-related goals with some variation based on the circumstances surrounding the given partnership. For instance, there were a couple of partnerships in which the current principal investigator was not the original author of the grant and this discordance served as somewhat of a barrier to goal attainment. However, as a whole, the interviewees believed that the grants had a fairly large positive impact, particularly in terms of partnership development, but more specifically, in enhancing articulation pathways between the partners, and allowing the partners to better integrate the Gateways Credentials into their own programs and into the transfer process.

We also found that 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). For instance, the most frequently mentioned sub-topic within the catalysts theme was establishing a shared philosophy between the partner institutions. This was directly related to McQuaid's (2009) shared values and involves the idea of making the work relevant for each partner associated with the grant, regardless of the institution.

It should be noted that views regarding the grant system and the partnerships were not universally positive. A strongly stated viewpoint from a few of the community college partners (not all) was that the grant system perpetuated existing biases that place four-year institutions higher on the educational hierarchy. The short timeframe of the grant itself, and in the period leading up to the grant after it was announced were sometimes viewed in a negative light. A couple of the interviewees provided positive feedback regarding the overall grant structure and the partnership, but suggested developing a stronger system of checks to ensure each partner was meeting their grant-related obligations. Another interviewee mentioned that although the partnership in question has traditionally been and continues to be strong, the grant did not lead to significant change, either positive or negative, within the partnership.

We tended to find that the identified barriers were often wedded to a catalyst that allowed the partnership to overcome, or at least set up the structure for overcoming, the given barrier in the intermediate future. In other words, it was fairly rare that a barrier was mentioned without noting what was being done to deal with it and in many instances the barriers were mentioned in sort of a historical context. Several times, the grant, or grant-related activities were identified as the catalyst allowing the partnership to move past a given barrier.

Next, we discuss a few of the innovative ideas that were identified during the interviews in the context of some of the institutional and systemic barriers. This is not an exhaustive list of the innovative approaches that we identified.

Cross-Advising

We found cross-advising to be an innovative approach for numerous reasons. First and foremost, it enabled some of the partnerships to contend with one of the more popular systemic barriers that was identified in the study, namely the traditional issues associated with advising. Further, without proper advising, whether it is cross-advising or advising in some other form, other innovations (such as fully-articulated transfer programs) would not be possible or at least not fully actualized. Collins, Navarro, and Stinard (2011) argued that even the most well formed articulation agreement would not work if the advisors lacked the ability to understand and communicate it to transfer students. In other words, sound advising practices mediate the influence of formalized articulation.

The premise of cross-advising fits within some of the best practices associated with advising transfer students as identified in Karp (2013) and a few of the exemplary practices in transfer strategies identified by the Council of Independent Colleges (2014). Karp (2013) suggests having transfer advisors specialize in specific disciplines, as well as being knowledgeable about the labor market for the profession. Both of those ideas were explicitly mentioned in the descriptions of cross-advising provided by the interviewees. Similarly, cross-advising would also serve as both an academic and advising bridge as described by the Council of Independent Colleges (2014). In essence, the cross-advisors from the four-year institutions would be knowledgeable in the specific subject matter, which provides the academic bridge. They would also spend time at community colleges to help with the traditional information gaps between community colleges and four-year institutions, providing the advising bridge.

Finally, cross-advising arguably provides what is referred to as a cultural bridge to the four-year institution (Council of Independent Colleges, 2014), but in a somewhat narrow fashion. Some of the community college partners mentioned how the perceived size of four-year institutions makes the transfer process seem overwhelming to prospective transfer students. The cross-advisor can serve as the point of contact, providing a familiar/friendly face for the students who make the transition to the receiving four-year institution. In the right circumstances, this would help make transfer students more comfortable in their new, four-year college environment.

The one drawback associated with cross-advising is that it falls within what is often described as 'high-touch' services, particularly with the specific emphasis on early childhood education. This leads some to wonder how to properly balance bringing such promising practices to scale (i.e., replicating the specific institutional and programmatic approach) with bringing the desired outcomes to scale (i.e., helping more early childhood educators from the community colleges transfer and complete their bachelor's degree with limited resources), especially outside the scope and timeframe of the current grant. Others have made the argument that private four-year institutions are better-suited to provide such high-touch services to students than their public counterparts (Council of Independent Colleges, 2014). We feel that further investigation is necessary to determine how to bring such advising practices to scale, in addition to establishing the cost effectiveness of such efforts.

Building a Cultural Bridge

A couple of the partnerships integrated the development of bridge programs into their grant-related activities. One provided what could be described as a relative short bridge, in the form of a series of institute days; whereas another provided a somewhat longer and wider bridge. We note that the partnership offering the institute days initially planned to have the faculty from the four-year institution teach upper-division coursework on the community college partner's campus, which would have provided what is described above as an academic bridge. However, there was concern that this may have served as a barrier to the transfer students developing an attachment or a feeling of belonging at the four-year institution.

The series of institute days and the bridge program served the same purpose, providing a cultural bridge for transfer students. The term 'cultural bridges' refers to the activities that might help the social and psychological orientation of the community college transfer students at their receiving four-year institution, which we argue is fairly similar to Tinto's (1987) theory of integration. Although the theory of integration was developed with direct four-year college entrants in mind (as it relates to retention), it could be argued that it is equally important for transfer students who have to contend with what has been historically described in the literature as transfer shock (Hills, 1965; Cejda, 1997; Keely & House, 1993). Although transfer shock, as described in the previously mentioned research, tends to be measured using academic outcomes (e.g., first semester GPA), it could be easily argued that the "shock" is highly correlated with integration. Townsend and Wilson (2006) discussed the difficulty transfer students can have in making the 'cultural' transition to their receiving four-year institution.

We argue that anything that can be done to increase the feeling of social and psychological belonging to a four-year institution among potential community college transfer students is beneficial. Further, the approach of the partnership with the wider and longer bridge seemed particularly promising, in that it attempted to build the cultural bridge fairly early at the community college, rather than waiting until the students were closer to the "seam" between their sophomore and junior years (which would still be beneficial). One of the specific activities associated with the bridge program was allowing the community college students to participate in professional learning communities at the four-year institution, which meet every semester. As described by one member of the partnership, the idea is to create opportunities for the potential community college transfer students to be active in both institutions during their first two years to ease the transition, so they are part of the four-year community prior to coming to the four-year institution.

Full Articulation and Early Commitment to the Field

Many of the interview respondents maintained the viewpoint that there was a need to reach out to community college students as early as possible to help them navigate the transfer process. Despite general articulation agreements, the transfer process can be daunting and inefficient, so highly structured transfer pathways are one solution. Developing such highly structured transfer pathways, sometimes described as 2+2 transfer agreements, was a common goal with the overwhelming majority of the partnerships. As the name implies, such agreements guarantee that if students take the prescribed sequence of courses at a community college, transfer, and then take the prescribed sequence of courses at their receiving four-

year institution, they will graduate in four-years. 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 for the given student.

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, so that such students can fully experience the benefits of these better articulated transfer pathways. Although improving articulation agreements would probably lead to less credit loss during the transfer process compared to what existed in the past, without such an early commitment from students, it would remain difficult for them to graduate in four years, while meeting all of the licensure requirements. Therefore, we recommend outreach efforts aimed at early awareness of EC stretching as far back as possible. In fact, a few of the interviewees mentioned dual-credit, or offering college-level courses to high school students, to help ease the transition between high school and college. Perhaps, dual-credit could be used as a recruiting tool for ECE programs, making the fully articulated programs more of a reality, not only due to the early commitment, but earning college credit while still in high school would provide a cushion in the event they need to retake a course. Further, if there is an earlier commitment, it provides additional time for the students (and programs) to overcome one of the commonly identified barriers to goal attainment, namely the difficulty some ECE students have in passing the TAP test.

While the partners have made meaningful strides in their work towards fine-tuning articulation agreements, the barrier associated with entry into a licensure program upon transfer remains. If ECE students, particularly the community college transfer students, are having difficulty meeting the requisite cut-score for entry into a licensure program, then the work accomplished by some of the partnerships will have been in vain. Some partnerships have attempted to overcome this barrier by focusing on the ACT rather than the TAP, with partnerships providing test preparation in one or the other; however the effectiveness of these interventions remains unclear.

Non-Licensure Baccalaureate Programs

One possible solution for the difficulties candidates sometimes have in gaining entry to licensure programs was the development of a broad and flexible bachelor's degree program tied to the Gateways Credentials framework. Although the program would not directly result in ISBE licensure (there was a fifth year ISBE licensure option), it removed the aforementioned barrier, providing a pathway to a bachelor's degree along with Gateways Credentials for the given transfer student population. It should be noted that a bachelor's degree combined with the Illinois Gateways Credential is not an alternative to ISBE licensure but an option very much in demand in the early childhood education workforce. It often results in employment for early childhood entities such as Head Start, child care providers, and family specialists. Although some of the interviewees specifically mentioned the view that the field is moving towards requiring ISBE licensure, as previously stated, early childhood education emcompasses quite a bit more than the jobs requiring state licensure. So while this flexible program seems promising, we recommend more research in this area, particularly in terms of workforce outcomes.

We believe that programs need to be mindful of their efforts to professionalize the early childhood workforce, while also making strides to maintain and increase diversity, both of which were major goals of many of the partnerships. Ideally, programs and in aggregate the field, can have both (a move towards professionalization and diversity). But we argue that focusing too much on one without considering the other, could lead to negative consequences.

Major Findings Relative to the Goals of the Overarching Grant

Develop models of effective early childhood educator preparation.

Our analysis revealed that some of the partnerships were currently in the process of developing new and innovative models of early childhood educator preparation, or determining ways to adapt a recently developed model at a four-year institution to make it better suited for community college transfer students. This does not mean that the other partnerships lacked effective early childhood programs. In fact, nearly all of the partnerships mentioned some sort of program redesign based on new standards and/or program requirements. Because of the relatively short time-frame associated with the grant (less than one year), it is too early to determine the effectiveness of the new models and the promising practices that have not yet had the opportunity to fully emerge.

Foster the creation or further development of partnerships between two- and four-year preparation programs, schools, preschools, childcare centers, and other early childhood settings for the purposes of improved educator preparation.

The analysis showed a consistent development of strong partnerships between community colleges and four-year preparation programs. Although, in our opinion, some partnerships were stronger and more authentic than others. While many of the four-year institutions and community colleges had existing, and for the most part strong, relationships with preschools and childcare centers, we found that only a few of the grantees fully integrated such schools and community-based organizations into the partnership.

Promote articulation and alignment of curriculum between two- and four-year programs.

Although articulation and alignment of curriculum across partner institutions were manifested in a variety of forms, our analysis confirms that, overall, the grant was highly successful in this regard. Due to common bureaucratic barriers, none of the interviewees were able to confirm that enhancements to articulation had been formalized and officially approved at the time of the interviews. However, it was fully evident that many of the interviewees were showing promising strides towards the attainment of this goal.

Support early childhood educator preparation programs in designing curriculum to incorporate new state standards for educator licensure, Gateways Credentials, as well as what young learners should know and be able to do.

As supported by our analysis, the grant was very successful in this regard. The Gateways Credentials was probably the most heavily incorporated set of standards, with many partnerships fully integrating the credential requirements into their articulated curricula. The most prevalent framework was community college students earning Gateways Levels 2-4 at the community college and then Level 5 at their receiving four-year. In terms of Gateways, we also found a lot of evidence of the more experienced partners (usually a community college) assisting the less experienced partners (usually a four-year institution or another community college within the partnership) in going through the Gateways entitlement process.

Build capacity in key areas of need including but not limited to, early math learning, bilingual/English language learning, infant/toddler development, and special education.

Our analysis revealed that the implementation or adoption of these key areas were considered by most partnerships, with the bilingual/English language learning being given the most attention. This is perhaps related to the changing demographics in Illinois[6] and the statewide ESL requirement for district-based preschools.[7] We found the partnerships emphasizing early math learning were highly motivated and integrated dissemination into their grant-related activities, which should help in building capacity in that area.

Create opportunities for innovation in program implementation, including but not limited to, quality field experience placements, assessments to demonstrate candidate progress toward or attainment of key competencies, flexible pathways to further degree/credential attainment for the current workforce, and Gateways entitlement.

Comparison of the grantees indicated that some sites were more innovative than others in implementing programmatic changes. To a certain extent, the partnerships implementing more innovative programmatic changes could be described as stronger and arguably more authentic. In terms of assessment, some of partnerships framed a portion of their grant-related activities around providing evidence of effective teaching practices, which would help support candidate performance on the edTPA. As previously described, most of the partnerships used the Gateways Credentials as one way to frame their grant-related activities and fully integrated them into the articulated programs.

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[6] Latinos are now the state of Illinois' largest minority group. http://igpa.uillinois.edu/system/files/Illinois_Population_Change_IGPA_0.pdf

[7] By July 1, 2016, preschool teachers who provide native language/ESL instruction to EL students must also hold the English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual endorsement that corresponds with the teaching assignment. http://www.isbe.net/bilingual/pdfs/preschool_faq.pdf

Recommendations for Practice

Based on our analysis, we would recommend the following strategies for improving partnership development. In our view, many of these suggested strategies would be fairly easy and inexpensive to accomplish.

Frame discussions and goals using a student-centric approach. Rather than starting the partnership discussions with the more technical aspects of articulation in mind (described by one interviewee as the "A" word), we recommend shifting the emphasis to how students can benefit from the institutions working collaboratively. Several participants suggested "looking at the problem through the lens of the students" to best meet their needs.

Including necessary players at the table was an important aspect of meetings that commonly came up. The responses providing this viewpoint tended to fall into two categories. The first category involved the inclusion of additional faculty and admissions staff, mostly for the purpose of providing additional perspectives and expertise. The second category tended to focus on the inclusion of administrators with decision-making authority, such as deans and department heads, for the purpose of obtaining their buy-in as the grant-related activities were occurring. It was suggested that the latter helped overcome some of the institutional barriers that were identified.

Rotating meeting sites from partner to partner and, at times, holding meetings in informal settings. Holding the meetings at different sites helps to promote parity amongst the partners, arguably allowing the partnerships to overcome the barriers associated with institutional bias. Another strategy to develop stronger partnerships is to periodically meet in an informal setting. Although there was not a high occurrence of this in the current study, it did seem to be extremely beneficial in overcoming traditional barriers to partnership development such as protecting one's turf. Meeting on a regular basis, monthly or bi-monthly, was also suggested by participants.

Integrate community-based entities into the partnership. Some of the recipients identified individuals from community-based entities, such as Head Start Programs, as grant partners. These field-based partners provided unique perspectives as both consumers (with the product being the teacher preparation programs) and current/eventual employers of early childhood education teacher candidates. These professionals are "in the trenches" and can provide a direct link to the field.

Within-institution communication. Although a greater emphasis is often placed on communication between institutions in terms of partnership development, within-institution communication should not be overlooked. This type of communication was shown to be very important in getting administrative buy-in at the institutional level, which was identified as a way to overcome some of the institutional barriers.

If geographic distance between partners is an issue, or there are time constraints, supplement traditional face-to-face meetings using more technological-based approaches. It is important to note that this should be done after partners have met face-to-face a few times. Simple and free or relatively inexpensive technologies helped many of the partnerships overcome some of the identified logistical barriers.

Collaborative technologies. Another consistently important idea related to building successful partnerships was the constant flow of information between partners. Traditional technologies like telephone conferencing and email often spurred this communication, but for more specific tasks, file share applications (e.g., Google Docs, Dropbox) helped the partners literally stay on the same page. The use of these technologies seemed to help partners better share information about their individual courses (syllabi, objectives, etc.). Web-based applications (e.g., Skype, GoToMeeting) provided a platform for meetings. Lastly, one participant suggested setting grant funds aside for technology use.

Final Thoughts

Based on many of the responses, we found that the grant was extremely important in moving the partnerships past many of the identified barriers, such as historical issues associated with articulation and advising. Further, the grant provided the structure from which many of the partnerships developed curricular and programmatic enhancements to the ways in which early childhood educators are prepared. The grant itself necessitated accountability from a couple of different perspectives. By default, the individual entities associated with each EPPI grant received money and were therefore accountable to the funding agency. But more importantly, the individual entities forming these partnerships were also accountable to each other. A great deal of innovative work began as a result of the grant that arguably would have not been started without it. In essence, the grant and the structure associated with it provided the momentum to move the partnerships forward, without being overly rigid or prescriptive. As highlighted in the quote below, the grant was viewed by some of the interviewees as flexible and non-linear, much like traditional descriptions of the pathways into the early childhood workforce.

> *"Most grants are pretty linear and restrictive. This one was not. I felt like we were given a lot of autonomy, it was loose and flexible. That flexibility let us be creative."*

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Appendix A

Basic Interview Protocol

1. Tell me a little about yourself, such as
   A. Your current position and any previous positions at your college? With any of the partner sites identified in your grant?
   B. Describe your involvement in the Early Childhood Innovation grant?
2. This next set of questions focuses on the activities that were mentioned in the grant proposal associated with your partnership.
   A. To begin, please describe why your institution decided to participate in this grant?
   B. Could you tell me about some of the goals and activities in the grant proposal?
   C. What was the motivation behind these major goals and activities?
   D. So far, what have you been able to put into place?
      a. If you have been able to implement the activities you proposed without major changes, what enabled you to do so?
      b. If you made any changes to your planned activities, what were the reasons?
3. To what extent have you integrated new standards or incorporated new requirements into your program as a result of this grant?
4. Please describe the ways in which the activities identified in your grant improved/enhanced articulation between your institution and your partners?
   A. Which of these activities have worked really well?
   B. To what extent was each of the following considered when you modified your formal articulation agreements?
      a. Gateways Credentialing Framework
      b. Providing a seamless transition for community college transfer students
      c. New teaching and learning standards
      d. The new edTPA assessment
      e. Specific needs of teachers, including working with English Language Learners, Early Math, working with children with special needs
      f. New English as a Second Language/Bilingual endorsement requirements
      g. Other considerations?
   C. Please describe how any informal articulation agreements have changed as a result of the grant.
5. How do you see the innovations you made, or plan to make, impacting:
   A. The future teaching practices of your students?
   B. The classroom experiences of your students?
   C. The field-based experiences of your students?
   D. The employment opportunities for graduates of your program?
   E. Opportunities for career advancement for the graduates of your program?
   F. Opportunities for career advancement for current practitioners?
   G. Early childhood centers/providers in general?
   H. Your institution?
   I. Your partnering institutions?

6. What are some of the things you have done to ensure ongoing communication and collaboration between you and your partnering institution(s)?
7. Do you have any suggestions for strengthening your partnership? If so, what are the barriers preventing you from doing what you suggested?
8. In terms of the collaborative activities with your partners, what has worked well at your site that you would recommend to others?
9. What are your plans for continuing your grant-related activities after the grant ends? What, if anything, would be needed to sustain your grant activities?
10. What are your overall thoughts about using similar grant processes to address changes in the ways we prepare and support the professional development of early childhood educators?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Appendix B*

Table B1. ***Representative Summaries or Quotes within the Institutional Barriers Theme***

Bureaucratic Treading (58)	• The participant mentioned the need to go through the curriculum committee in early fall and the faculty senate which convenes in late fall or early spring. • *"The redesign process at our institution will go on for a year or two."* • *"I was surprised by the fact that other four-year institutions won't touch parts of the AAS because of institutional barriers; some programs are not allowed to consider the AAS for articulation – institution policies prohibit them."* • One community college participant mentioned her willingness to have the four-year partner manage the grant as the PI due to administrative barriers at her institution. • *"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."* • *"There is a strong agreement in place between the community college and the partnering four-year focusing on articulation that lays out the transferability of the coursework. However, it has not been officially approved by upper administration. There is a meeting scheduled in the near future where official approval for the agreement might occur."* • *"There are a lot of challenges with the work of getting subcontracts approved and executed."*
Past Issue with Articulation (24)	• *"Articulation is currently at a standstill due to finding solutions to differences of programs."* • *"At another four-year, they tended to transfer in as sophomores rather than juniors, losing a year of coursework. Big problem for the center in that the center pays for the college classes."* • *"This institution has historically struggled with articulation and transfer for students."* • *"Previous to the grant, articulation discussions with partnering institutions were not very successful."* • *"It was somewhat common to have a community college transfer student with 90+ hours of credit; and in examining what could be accepted at the four-year, for the most part they were able to accept only 12 credit hours or perhaps 20 credit hours in total counting the general education courses. So credit loss for transfer students interested in early childhood was a huge issue."* • *"In the past it has been a struggle getting both two-year and four-year institutions to get together for articulation to talk about what's best for our students."* • *"Currently, coursework does not transfer well to four-year institutions and this institution wants to be better aligned with coursework and curriculum."* • *"Previous to the grant, articulation discussions with partnering institutions were not very successful."* • *"In the past it has been a struggle getting both two-year and four-year institutions to get together for articulation to talk about what's best for our students."* • *"This institution has historically struggled with articulation and transfer for students."*

* The number within the parentheses indicates the number of responses (not the number of individuals) coded within each sub-topic

Table B1. ***Representative Summaries or Quotes within the Institutional Barriers Theme***

Issues with Advising (11)	• *"Previously, transfer was up to the discretion of whoever was in the counseling office and was more vague."* • *"At times, EC students get poor advising because someone doesn't fully understand the transfer process specific to EC students."* • *"Advising needs to be improved. Getting them on the right path is sometimes a barrier."* • *"Concentrating on the lack of resources for advisors that are consistent."* • *"Advising has to be clear about what different degrees and certificates allow the students to enter into their desired career; it is very complicated."*
Major Institutional Change (19)	• *"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."* • *"Had some difficulty in that the participant wasn't the original author of the grant."* • *"In July, the person in charge of education programs retired and left a hole in the grant…"*

Table B2. *Representative Summaries or Quotes within the Systemic Barriers Theme*	
Logistical Difficulties (54)	• *"Good things don't happen in three months; creativity takes time."* • *"Time becomes a barrier because of other administrative or academic responsibilities."* • *"Hard for a one-person program due to time constraints."* • The partnership covers a huge geographical area; some partner sites can take three hours to travel. • *"In my view, the problem with the grant was that it came so hastily... We had until the end of the first week in December to partner and develop a grant. That's why we're all frazzled. We haven't had a chance to chew on this."* • *"There is a need to help support students going through the transfer process to better ensure their success at the four-year and to see how the program works in terms of transfer."*
Initiative Overload (52)	• *"Illinois teaching requirements have changed and consequently courses need to be changed. Individual institution requirements also caused additional fitting of puzzle pieces."* • *"Help the students pass ACT + writing with a score of 22 or better. This has been holding back students."* • *"If they don't pass the TAP prior to transferring to the four-year, they can't progress all that much in their Early Childhood junior/senior level study track if seeking licensure."* • *"The HDFS project, although it wasn't dramatically changed, it took a little longer than anticipated. The CC is just now offering the curriculum. They had to get, Child Development, the Gateway Credentials, and the Infant/Toddler coursework approved. The participant had to submit the program changes associated with the Gateways through ICCB, IBHE, as well as HLC, because it is an applied career program it needed to go all the way up."*
Characteristics of Early Childhood Students (46)	• *"Students are trying to balance life, jobs, etc. Passing all the tests in English when it is not their native language can be very challenging and may discourage students from enrolling in the degree program."* • *"Learned that community college students are a very different group than typical four-year students. Many work full time, commute to school, etc."* • *"Really concerned with the student disposition, coming with reading and writing deficits and needing help with soft skills, professionalism, etc."* • *"The students need to be built up."* • The participant reiterated the importance of being responsive to the needs of the early childhood workforce. Ideally everyone would get a license, but not everyone can get one and not everyone has the desire. • Foresees a possible struggle with students' response to new standards, specifically edTPA. Students are worried about taking years of courses and not achieving licensure. • *"What was reaffirmed by the community college partners was no matter how hard they try to get their students to commit to one area of education, they students are not easily ready to commit. The eventual transfer students tend to fall into their specific educational area over time."* • *"So I have historically had students that in my view shouldn't even be in college."* • *"They take courses they like rather than need, don't know what they want, and sometimes run out of financial aid before they finish."*

Table B2. ***Representative Summaries or Quotes within the Systemic Barriers Theme***

Institutional Bias (39)	• *"It's all based on the university perspective first; they get the grant and then go to the community colleges. Why does it have to be that way? Why can't grants go to the community colleges and then go to the University?"* • *"The four-year's approach was 'here's our program' and then look to see how the community college's courses fit into their program."* • *"We have courses that are equivalent already, but the four-years have to protect their enrollment."* • These students seem to perceive the community college as more or less a continuation of high school, and they are ready for something different. • *"Personally, I wish we could all get on the same page, but I still feel there's a barrier between community college and four-year."* • *"A lot of the community college programs are NAEYC accredited and the four-years will say they aren't equivalent even though the accreditation is the same, meaning they should have the same rigor."*
Complexity of Early Childhood Education (23)	• Advisers are often confused with early childhood. It highlighted both how complicated early childhood could be and how ineffective the academic program has been in communicating the needs of the students to others. • *"The redesign made the program very unique and challenging to transfer into."* • *"... 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."* • The participant mentioned how early childhood is one of the most complicated degree programs at the four-year. • Advising issue was due to the complications of the EC world.

Table B3. *Representative Summaries or Quotes within the Catalysts Theme*

Shared Values (121)	• *"We were all pretty much doing the same thing at the same time. Sitting down and collaborating with all the other community colleges, we all found out that we were all heading in the same direction at the same time. The process allowed the players to get on the same page, share ideas, and offering the same type of class, same rigor, same assessment, same idea, pretty much offering the same class no matter where it is given."* • *"Previously these discussions have been an institutional focus, now they are focused around the students."* • *"I really had no clue what the two-year institutions face, and there is a healthy suspicion on their part about what our aims are, what our students are really like. This process has brought us together in a way I hadn't expected."* • *"Motivation to respond to the student's needs better, was the most important factor in implementing these goals."* • *"Physically meeting and getting to know context of each institution has worked well. Starting conversations with actual teaching practice of the institutions, if relationship starts here, you can build trust."*
Capacity for Cooperation (178)	• *"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 described as extremely beneficial."* • Rotating the locations of meetings allowed for each partner to better understand the institution and context the participants work in. Clear communication of role and what was expected of each partner allowed each participant know to how much of a time commitment the grant would be. • *"Face to face contact. Sitting down and listing out goals that are achievable."* • *"Focusing on what could be implemented, doable, and that is a good thing. Make sure the goals and activities are developed to make a difference, but that they can also be attained."* • *"Was able to obtain more meaningful information from all science, mathematics, and reading early education professors at the four-year college, and information from early childhood education providers themselves. Wanted to make sure the programs are meeting the needs of the community and multiple stakeholders."* • *"Regular and frequent communication. Not ignoring messages, at time the grant partners responded minutes later to email."* • *"Clear examination of the goals and then having the time and actual players in place to reach the goals and make things happen. The goals were all things we knew we needed to work on, but without the structure in place they are difficult to accomplish. The grant provided the structure for the meetings and getting the right people together."* • *"Structure is the most important thing."* • The participant wondered what innovation should look like and was not not sure if the ideas she had been hearing about were innovative. She felt that structure was more important than innovation.

Table B3. ***Representative Summaries or Quotes within the Catalysts Theme***

Grant Provided Impetus (90)	• *"The grant got the attention of the people who can approve things. We are all busy. When we have the power of the grant and the title, people paid attention and came to the meetings. They learned more about the field, particularly with the four-year partner at the table. The grant was a very positive experience on their end."* • *"The grant was the 'dike' to hold off other responsibilities/commitments for a short time to focus on grant activities."* • *"Grant gave them the funding for that time to work on over the summer and to be relieved of other academic responsibilities during that timeframe; without that, we wouldn't have had our house in order and it wouldn't have happen."* • *"The grant offered support for goals that they were already working towards; namely standards alignment and Gateways."* • The participant reports this work has been going on behind the scenes for 10 years. "It's great to be able to fund people to do this work finally." • *"The partners are not getting rich off the grants but it allows institutions to set aside time. Understanding people and their institutions takes time."* • *"Excellent, we would not have undertaken the work around articulation without this grant. There have been challenges because the program at the four-year is entirely field-based, so we had to think creatively about the transition process for transfer students from the CC partner. We were excited about opening up the path from the CC partner to the four-year and increasing this workforce."* • *"The grant provided a way to frame the partnership and hold the partners accountable for actually accomplishing the goals, rather than merely talking about it at meetings."*
Innovative Steps (85)	• *"The other big change for the community college is there is now a dedicated adviser liaison. All of the other advisers can go to her with questions regarding child development students. She meets with everyone regularly."* • *"We are also working on a cross-advising program that would allow community college students to comfortably explore early childhood options at the four-year. Previously students were not sure how courses would transfer and sometimes students have expressed how intimidating it can be to understand the landscape and interworking of the four-year. Now I can give the contact information of a representative from the four-year who will show interest in the student and will inform them about everything they need to transfer. Often the overwhelming nature of the four-years deters potential transfer students. This process has already been implemented and we are already noticing positive changes."* • Cross-advising will start in early November with the early childhood representative from the four-year on the community college campus. • *"The most recent Institute Day was in December. One student who had won a state award, and was Hispanic, talked about her experience and served as an inspiration to other students, made a real impact. It made the students really see that they could go on for a four year degree – it was a goal and a dream that they could now really imagine."* • *"We are tremendously conscious of that and really thinking about supports; making sure we do some sort of bridge program from the CC partner to the four-year. Thinking about a summer program, doing some outreach beforehand, so CC students will really understand what the transition process looks like, how excited the four-year is about them transferring, and what the EC program looks like and how they are being prepared for it at the CC."* • *"Used a monkey survey to measure two-year students' interest in continuing to the four-year. Due to some changes in the four-year institution's location offerings, this partnership may form a cohort with the students."* • *"Currently, the partners are looking at what each institution can offer online. The goal is to give students who have the capabilities to take online courses from other institutions, even if it is outside the student's district. This is referred to as "stackable" and "portable" courses."*

Table B3. *Representative Summaries or Quotes within the Catalysts Theme*

Innovative Steps (85) *(continued)*	• Microteaching lessons:the PI from the four-year developed what the student teachers would do in the classroom and how they would document it by filming it. The participant provided substantive feedback into the microteaching process. • Dual credit is not associated with the Level 1 at the HS. However, there is a dual credit course that the high school students can take: Intro to Early Childhood Education. • *"One of the original ideas was for the community college students to remain at their institution to complete their second two years, by bringing the faculty and classes from the four-year institution to them."* • *"They need to have passed basic skills test to move into the four-year program and graduate in a timely manner. Offering study sessions for potential CC transfers from the partners at the four-year institution, even prior to being admitted to the four-year."* • *"Additionally, everything that is done is being presented to a wider audience. When possible the two-year representative is included in these presentations."* • *"There was also discussion about the TAP test and how the four-year could help the community college students prepare for the exam. The four-year partner offers preparation courses for potential transfer students on a non-credit basis. The non-credit course prepares transfer students for the test and it wasn't something that was addressed before by the community college."*
Use of Technology (60)	• The partnership is really strong; everyone is collaborative and very eager to support one another. The only barrier is distance from the other meetings, which was fixed by an online meeting service. • *"The Go-To-Meetings were good. These meetings were brief one-hour meetings, but they helped keep the partners in constant contact, responding to questions, and allowing for face-to-face communication."* • It would make it easier for anyone if you set funds aside for technology. It would be a lot easier to communicate and communicate more often, rather than going back and forth in terms of scheduling face-to-face meetings. It is easier to find commonalities across time when you don't have to travel. Cost is an obstacle, but Skype is free. Yet, it might not meet the needs for a large conference call. • *"LiveText is a good idea. The grant helped serve as a catalyst to move on and expedite some of the portfolio work."* • We share a lot of emails. I've been invited to the other innovation grant meetings on a regular basis and I invite them to ours. • *"Go-To-Meeting video conferencing was a great time and distance saver. Loved it."*
Integral Player within Partnership (16)	• This partner credits the PI with the success of the group. Describes how this PI was a task manager that made sure that the needs and goals were met. • *"My department chair has been instrumental in this work."* • The participant reports the importance of proper leadership from a non-authoritarian principal investigator and who is very open to the ideas of all the partners. • The PI's focus on getting the grant has been really helpful. As much as the community colleges and four-year colleges need each other, the PI's focus on it has made it useful and helpful and seem like something that can be done for the community college students.

Table B4. ***Representative Summaries or Quotes within the Potential Long-Term Impacts Theme***

Professionalizing Early Childhood Workforce (158)	• *"Early childhood centers are ending up with a better product."* • *"The whole grant complements the field of early childhood to the level of making it much stronger in using professional language."* • *"Again, talking to these higher quality positions, if our students say I have a level 3 or a 4 level Gateway ECE credential, we're hoping that as time goes by that will mean a lot to that employer."* • *"Centers are needing and wanting people with a bachelor's degree and it is something the field is requiring. It will create a bigger pool of well-trained applicants."* • All graduates should now be able to speak the language of the profession. • *"Raise the level of expertise. 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."* • *"Our efforts are toward the high quality people that need proper training, rather than just meeting minimum requirements of DCFS."*
Pathways (144)	• *"This articulation will make early education more affordable for students, will allow them to work while they are in college, and allow them to move around."* • Embedding the Gateways Standards and preparation for the edTPA assessment into courses is a benefit for their employment options. • *"Students will be able to complete their Bachelors degree, previously the students could not see the financial benefit to continuing education because they had to pay to retake courses they completed at a community college."* • The participant is hoping that the changes in employment opportunities will be very positive, given the implementation of Gateways Credentials. • Pathway to licensure will have a big impact; finishing with the four-year will also impact employment opportunities. • Previously, many of the credits/courses did not cross over, this new approach helps community college students gain access to pathways to bachelor's degrees, licensure, and potentially a master's degree. • *"Credentials are huge to keeping a job. An employer often tells graduates that credentials are necessary for career advancement."*

Table B4. ***Representative Summaries or Quotes within the Potential Long-Term Impacts Theme***

Enrollment (71)	• The four-year institution will get an influx of students who previously were not able to continue. They will also get a diverse pool of new students. This two-year's students are diverse in a number of ways and the field needs practitioners who reflect the community they serve. • *"The partnering institutions will benefit from well-trained students who want to go on to become teachers and who can diversify the teaching pool."* • *"They get a more diverse student pool, the community college student population is 75% Spanish-speaking, and so they get more students who haven't necessarily gone to the four-year in the past."* • The early childhood program at the community college could experience a decrease in enrollment in some courses due to this partnership... However, even though this might negatively impact EC enrollment at the community college in some courses, the students would benefit with the stronger pathway to the four-year partner. It also provides an additional choice in terms of a four-year to which to transfer and right now the students have so few choices. • *"I believe we're in a transition period in the field. It's exciting but we have to be able to weather the storm. My colleague and I are worried that the administration is going to look at our numbers, because I think they will go down before they go up, and we have to convince them to let us hang on and we've got to get out there and get the best high school students…"* • This institution will get more students because of the opportunity for Gateways Credentials.
Societal/Systemic Improvement (55)	• *"This experience has been productive, practical, mutually beneficial, and gratifying because we can see the benefits for children."* • *"In our mind, the mission of the four-year institution is to serve the locality by working with the community college partner."* • *"It is redefining our roles as teacher educators. We are having a tremendous impact on communities and they are shaping what we do. It has really grounded us in the work we do in the schools."* • *"The better educated our teachers are, the better our children/preschoolers will learn."* • *"The grant has allowed for a bigger conversation of the education system as a whole…"* • *"Ultimately, our clients are young children, so we want the best possible program and the best model of delivery."* • *"Wanted to make sure the programs are meeting the needs of the community and multiple stakeholders."* • The community college trains the workforce that raises the children of the area. • This grant has given this institution a "leg up" in continuing to cooperate and collaborate in the best interest of kids in terms of their education. • This partner seeks to ameliorate the issue of math being a discriminatory bar in society, preventing persons who are not the dominant culture, including females, from the best economic futures. • This partner is very grateful to be a part of this grant. This partner has never seen anything like this articulation work before. This is a "tremendous shift" in thinking and discussing articulation. • *"Still working on articulation, but is hoping for a seamless 2+2 program."*

Table B5. ***Representative Summaries or Quotes within the Mediating Impacts Theme***

Programmatic Improvement (255)	• *"The partnership also allows practicum students to experience classroom life."* • All courses are connected to field observation. Field observation is not a passive experience. It is very hands-on and rigorous. • *"They are now getting exposure throughout their college experience, rather than right at the end when they do their student teaching."* • *"Innovation and change was needed because of the diverse needs of society, as the demographics and the market have changed and both have become much more diverse."* • *"All the students will be well equipped to meet the needs of diversity in their classroom, especially with special education and ESL."* • *"As an institution, we are totally committed to making sure that our students are totally equipped to deal with fact that the majority of the students coming to them are no longer going to be dominant culture kids."* • *"I believe the assessment, methodology, and teaching strategies have increased rigor for the students, as well as creating attainable outcomes of knowledge of assessment and performance as well as a more well-rounded understanding of what early childhood actually is."* • *"The innovations will totally enrich the classroom experience by making it very hands-on and requiring higher-level cognitive learning. There will be a focus on connecting and applying the theory to the actual experiences in the field-based opportunities."*
Partnership Development (191)	• *"We were able to reach our goals and implement our plan because of the partnerships that were created. Each member was willing to share and help guide other institutions during the process. We all worked together seamlessly."* • *"The partners, the institutions, and the individuals are the main reason that I believe this grant has been working so successfully."* • *"This is a very positive and effective way to do a grant and focusing on partnerships and consortia is the way to go. These things happen in little pockets and people forget or retire, but the bigger the community the grant impacts, the more staying power it will have."* • *"The partnership piece of the grant is key and it was also the most motivating."* • *"'At times, I felt like I was in a bubble and that I wasn't aware of everything that was going on in the field. Being a part of the consortium popped that bubble."* • *"We need to build relationships into the organizational culture, so that they can sustain administration and faculty changes."* • The relationships built from this process will help this institution with future projects with the state and other institutions. Now this institution is much more aware of what is going on in the state and has built relationships with other institutions' faculty. This partner now feels that there is a network of support. The relationships built will perpetuate the work that is being done. • Through the partnership grant we have been able to help the other community college better understand the ECE Gateways Credentials and the other community college partner intends to submit for EC level four this semester. • *"I was new and it was all brand new to me. I just appreciated the guidance and the support. I learned a lot about my own curriculum at the school, I learned a lot about everybody else's too. These have people been doing it a lot longer than I have and they accepted me as one of them. And I did appreciate their efforts, and their patience, and their training."*

Table B5. ***Representative Summaries or Quotes within the Mediating Impacts Theme***

Enhanced Articulation/ Seamless Transition (119)	• *"In terms of the process, the partners brought program descriptions and examined the degrees offered by the community college partners and eventually got down to the course level and syllabus level. The process allowed for the identification of five or possible six courses that could be directly transferable from the community college to the four-year."* • *"Students coming through the CC partner into the four-year, earning their teaching license, it is a huge step for the options in terms of articulation... We are offering 2+2 with licensure and ESL endorsement, so the career potential is huge."* • *"Also, the four-year is offering articulation with the potential for multiple credentials, which generally isn't offered with articulation. The four-year is also committing to making this a four-year program for the transfer students, as long as they get their associate in two years at the CC partner."* • *"There will be a formalized agreement for this program. There will be a template for students who start out at a community college and want to finish at our four-year institution. This template will tell the students exactly what they need to do."* • *"The other four-year partner developed a new BA program in Human Development and it hasn't started yet, with a 5th year option for licensure. The four-year program would provide the Gateways level 5 credential."* • *"The field wants more education, more experience, so the partnership with the four-year or any other higher education institution makes sense. We need to encourage our students to complete their Associate's degree and then to look forward."* • *"Students will be able to move seamlessly from the two-year to the four-year without having to jump through a whole bunch of hoops, without having to reapply and retake classes. The right hand will know what the left hand is doing."* • *"Our students are prepared to transfer without fear of their classes being unaccepted for transfer."*

Table B6. ***Representative Summaries or Quotes within the Frameworks Theme***

Considering Standards and Assessments (163)	• *"Knowing the AAS degree is not transferable as a full degree; then looking at the level three credential certificate that would transfer; this would give my two-year more completers."* • *"Credentialing will be worked right into the coursework. When students enter their first semester, they will be enrolled and walked through the Gateways Registry."* • *"Part of the goal of their grant is that all partners will become Gateways accredited at their appropriate levels. Part of this process helped facilitate the development of their six classes and contributed to creating the articulation pathway."* • *"We also spent time looking at how assessment is done at partnering institutions, in hopes of coordinating or sharing work on the incorporation of edTPA."* • *"In terms of the edTPA, the community college is considering ways to make the students more familiar with some of the concepts, skills, and language associated with the assessment, so that they would be ready for it after transferring to the four-year."* • *"The grant has been timely since they had already been trying to work with community partners to look at courses that articulate to the university and make sure they meet the new Illinois professional teaching standards."* • *"The process of making the syllabi and following the matrix of standards (NAEYC, Illinois Professional Teaching Standards, and the Gateways standards) helped make sure everyone was headed on the same direction."* • *"NAEYC standards and the accreditation system was helpful in the conversation about articulation."* • *"Part of this process has been looking at the big ideas that are common among the institutions and how the institutions assess students. Through these discussions, we were surprised about how similar they are in main ideas and assessment."*
New EC Program Redesign (30)	• *"This institution has wanted to make changes for a number of years and saw this as an opportunity to make substantial changes in how students move from one program to another."* • *"When the institution realizes it needs new programs, things move forward. Usually you need the big stick of state approval or accreditation to encourage a complete program redesign."* • *"We design the courses together so the courses are theirs as much as they are the four-year institution's."* • *"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."* • *"A brand new program was needed; can't put new wine in old wine bottles."* • *"We recognized the grant as an opportunity for more thoughtful program design and an opportunity to collaborate. The whole idea of redesign in light of new standards was an attractive and innovative approach."*

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