Scaling Deeper Learning for Equity

Lessons Learned from the Deeper Learning + Diffusion and Scaled Impact Initiative

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Introduction

In this research brief, we present findings from the Deeper Learning + Diffusion of Innovation and Scaled Impact Initiative (DL+D initiative). Funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Hewlett Foundation) in 2018, the goal of the DL+D initiative was to generate knowledge about how fundamental shifts to teaching and learning could be scaled within public school systems efficiently, expediently, and equitably. The initiative aimed to "develop empirically-driven, practical approaches to get from proof points of deeper learning practices to equitable and scaled impact."[i]

To help generate new knowledge about scaling deeper learning equitably, the Hewlett Foundation funded 10 research–practice partnerships (RPPs), collaborations that are intentionally organized to leverage diverse expertise to accelerate educational improvement or equitable transformation through engagement with research.[ii] All RPPs included at least one school district and a research partner; half also included a technical assistance partner that provided implementation support. The foundation initially planned to fund each RPP for 3 years; however, this timeline was extended for many of the RPPs due to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Deeper Learning Competencies

Research–practice partnerships were allowed to choose their focal deeper learning practices as long as the practices targeted at least two of these deeper learning competencies:

- Mastering rigorous academic content (*required*)
- Critical thinking/problem–solving
- Working collaboratively
- Communicating effectively
- Learning how to learn
- Developing and maintaining an academic learning mindset

The Hewlett Foundation also funded the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to facilitate a cross-RPP learning community and engaged SRI Education to conduct a retrospective evaluation of the initiative. This research brief draws on a document review and interviews with key personnel from each RPP to identify six key lessons learned from across the DL+D initiative.[iii] These lessons are informed by both the challenges and the successes that the 10 RPPs experienced and are broadly useful for any school district or funder interested in catalyzing complex instructional improvement at scale and with attention to equity.

Lessons Learned

The DL+D Initiative Grantees

The RPPs funded through the DL+D initiative varied both with respect to the partners involved and the deeper learning practices they targeted. Many of the RPPs were new partnerships, but several pre-dated the DL+D initiative. The school system partners ranged from large urban districts to a consortium of rural districts, although most RPPs involved a single large district. The focal deeper learning practices also varied substantially, and some RPPs shifted strategies over the course of the initiative. The final focal practices ranged from specific instructional strategies, to efforts to build leadership capacity and shift mindsets, to broader shifts in accountability systems (Exhibit 1). Notably, four RPPs focused on scaling a version of project-based learning.

Exhibit 1. Focal Deeper Learning Practices by Research–Practice Partnership (RPP)

RPP	Deeper Learning Practice
Scale a version of project-based learning (PBL)	
High Quality Project Based Learning (HQPBL) Project	Scale Gold Standard PBL, a set of design and teaching practices, across all grade levels and subject areas in two partner school systems in New Hampshire and Hawaii.
Inquiry Hub	Diffuse culturally relevant, phenomenon-based science teaching in Denver Public Schools through co-designed high school chemistry and biology curricula.
Oklahoma City Education Research Alliance (OCERA)	Diffuse deeper learning practices by implementing collaborative PBL, an inquiry-based active social studies pedagogy, in seventh grade and Action Civics in 12th grade, in Oklahoma City Public Schools.
Transformative Student Voice	Diffuse youth participatory action research in Denver Public Schools through a stand-alone course and by integrating it into humanities classes.
Build leadership capacity and/or shift mindsets	
Berkeley-Hayward Partnership[a]	Build instructional improvement capacity of school-based instructional leadership teams and district and school leaders through co-design and continuous improvement processes in Hayward Unified School District (California).
DIG Deeper	Bring about the equitable spread of mindsets and teaching practices that support Broward County Public Schools (Florida) students' engagement in deeper learning through critical thinking.
Leadership and Change Management	Build mindsets and capacity of school and district leaders to manage shifts to more student-centered instruction in Colorado Springs School District 11.
Reflective Practice	Foster a school culture centering creativity, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and character/compassion by guiding leadership teams in Anaheim High School District (California) through a reflective school envisioning process.
Improve measurement or accountability systems	
Best for the Future	Create toolkits and rubrics to develop self-direction, collaboration, communication, and creative thinking, with the eventual goal to incorporate assessment of these skills into New Hampshire's alternative school accountability assessment system.
Student-Centered Accountability Project (S-CAP)	Refine, validate, and expand an alternative peer accountability system that considers curriculum and instruction, professional learning, vision and leadership, learning climate, resources allocation, and connection to families and communities in rural districts in Colorado.

[a] The Berkeley-Hayward Partnership modified its focus each year in response to district needs.

Lessons Learned

The 10 RPPs varied dramatically on key dimensions such as district context, partnership goals, and the amount of progress they made in scaling their target deeper learning practices. Thus, there is no "one story" of the DL+D initiative. Further, in most cases we know little about the depth of instructional change or the resulting student outcomes. Looking across this varied group of partnerships, however, can be useful for understanding what works and what does not work when it comes to scaling deeper learning practices for equity. In this section, we draw on both the challenges and successes the RPPs experienced to distill six key lessons learned from across the initiative.

Begin with a clear vision for equity and prioritize it during all stages of the work

The goal of the DL+D initiative was not only to scale deeper learning practices, but to do so in an equitable manner. The 10 RPPs varied both with regard to how they conceptualized equity in their work and how clearly they defined their vision for equity. For example, all the interviewees from one RPP described equity as central to their mission, but each person described how they attended to equity differently: ability to track outcomes for student groups, language accessibility, or an approach that recognizes the whole child. These answers touched on various stages of the work, but their divergence suggests a lack of a shared vision.

The experiences of the RPPs highlight the importance of beginning with a clear vision for equity and returning to it throughout the life of the project, including strategic planning, equity metric development and monitoring, resource development, communication, site selection, and supports. A member of one RPP shared,

Prioritizing Equity at All Stages

The experiences of the RPPs underscore the importance of prioritizing equity during all stages of the work:

- **Strategic planning:** Conceptualize and define equity and plan how it will be attended to in the other stages. Include perspectives from teachers, students, and their communities.
- **Equity metrics:** Set and monitor clear equity metrics for teacher and student outcomes.
- **Development:** Solicit broad input or co-design resources or curriculum. Where possible, embed opportunities for student voice.
- **Communication:** Craft messaging to reach students and schools furthest from opportunity.
- **Site selection:** Tailor recruitment strategies for schools that serve students furthest from opportunity.
- **Supports:** Provide supports to enable participation of schools furthest from opportunity.

I think I always had to remind myself to keep [equity] front and center, because we get caught up in the logistics of everything. As we spoke to schools, making sure we really reinforced that [this approach] is for all students, because we would have schools say things like, "Those kids were receiving special education services. They are in another room, so they are not receiving [it]." So, we had to just keep that conversation alive too and just reminding when we speak about those furthest from opportunity, that includes students with special needs. It includes low-income [students].

The importance of embedding equity at all stages of the work is underscored by the experience of one RPP. Members of this RPP were intentional about centering equity in their strategy for site selection at the start of the initiative, but they did not follow through on this strategy consistently. The RPP members created scaling maps, which were intended to ensure that the schools furthest from opportunity in each district received training first. In one district they worked with, where

"We felt always committed to ... a definition of equity that also is more around process and voice. So it's not just about experts designing a solution for those furthest from opportunity, but creating contexts and learning environments, and systems where people who are furthest from opportunity are part of understanding the problem and coming up with solutions."

—RPP research partner

state accountability and district culture were aligned to encourage experimentation in the classroom (even in Title I schools), the scaling rolled out according to plan. However, a different district abandoned the scaling map and offered supports to volunteers first. In this district, the schools serving the highest proportions of students furthest from opportunity were not among the first served.

Another RPP found that lack of accessibility for English learners was contributing to inequitable access across the schools in the district. A member of this RPP noted,

Our city is very segregated … And so the schools mirror that, obviously. So one of the things that we noticed is that where language support was needed at certain schools, it was not necessarily needed at other schools, but we had to make that available so that everyone could participate.

Several RPPs' visions for equity went beyond serving students furthest from opportunity. These RPPs also embedded principles of equity and inclusion in the planning

and development process by engaging stakeholders, ensuring that materials were accessible to all student populations, and integrating culturally responsive teaching principles and opportunities for student voice into the instruction practice itself. One RPP used a student survey to gather information about students' interests to guide curriculum development. Although the RPP members found the survey results to be valuable, they concluded that a more comprehensive process that included student focus groups as well as input from teachers and other community members would enable a fuller understanding of students' interests. Engaging community stakeholders also proved to be a successful strategy for ensuring a continued focus on equity in the face of leadership turnover in one district. Members of another RPP wished they had engaged the community more in planning and development for this same reason.

Many RPPs learned the importance of seeking teacher input during strategic planning, both to ensure feasibility and because teachers have a deeper understanding than district-level staff of the needs of their student populations. Interviewees from one RPP explicitly said they wished they had gotten more teacher input at the beginning of the initiative. In the middle of the grant period, the RPP created a teacher advisory committee that provided valuable insights into how to make the work more feasible for teachers and accessible for their students.

In addition to beginning with a clear vision for equity, any effort to scale deeper learning practices equitably must also navigate district norms and culture to be successful. Often, the norms and culture of a district, as much as its written policies, are what keep inequitable structures in place.

Take an honest assessment of your district's norms and culture

Through their efforts to scale deeper learning practices equitably, several RPPs in the DL+D initiative realized the truth of the famous business adage "culture eats strategy for breakfast."[iv] Three RPPs focused their work on shifting mindsets as a result of this realization. These RPPs discovered that educator mindsets and norms of behavior were a major barrier to ensuring the students furthest from opportunity had access to deeper learning practices. For example, one RPP conducted a survey of all teachers in the district and found that nearly three quarters of respondents felt that half or fewer of their students were *able* to think critically. As a result, the RPP decided to focus first on shifting educator mindsets.

"Learning a better way to do something is an important step, but if you are not fundamentally sold on why a better way is needed, don't believe in the potential of all students, or don't feel personally committed to the solution, you will revert to your old habits once external supports are removed. This is far too common within our school systems."

—RPP proposal to Hewlett Foundation

In another RPP, the partners knew from prior work that there was a cultural disconnect in the district between a subset of innovative school leaders already experimenting with deeper learning practices and central office staff who had a more compliance-oriented mindset. The lack of district-level support for the work meant that it was difficult to scale beyond the subset of innovative, early-adopter schools. This RPP also conducted a survey in 2019 and found very few schools rated "strong" on measures of effective leadership or teacher collective efficacy (9% and 2% of schools, respectively). This RPP focused its work on shifting central office staff mindsets, developing school leader capacity for change management, and building stronger relationships between school and district staff.

Several RPPs also found that district norms were different for higher and lower performing schools. For example, in the district partnering with one RPP, the lower performing schools, which served higher proportions of students from low-income households and from racial/ethnic minority groups, were subject to different accountability structures and did not feel free to engage in innovative work. That RPP first recruited schools by asking for volunteers, but it got more of the higher performing schools. A member of this RPP described the problem:

> *Our middle layer of management, I guess you could call it, principal supervisors, that layer, gets so focused on a single standardized test score as the outcome of education that many of our schools were missing out on the opportunity to engage with deeper learning because people don't see it as a way to that test score, and it was being limited to schools who were already high-performing.*

As a strategy for shifting these norms, two RPPs focused on changing measurement and accountability systems to align with deeper learning competencies. By developing and implementing measurement and accountability systems that include these competencies, the RPPs aimed to encourage school leaders to prioritize a broader range of skills and teachers to embrace new deeper learning practices.

Culture change can begin centrally or in a subset of schools, but ultimately it needs to permeate all levels of the system to be effective.

Invest in all levels of the system

The DL+D initiative allowed RPPs to choose their focal deeper learning practices. However, a common aim across all deeper learning practices is to produce significant shifts to teaching and learning. When such significant shifts are required, implementation challenges become more likely. As a result, vertical alignment across all levels of the system—district, school, and classroom—becomes increasingly important to ensure that teachers are receiving consistent messaging and support.
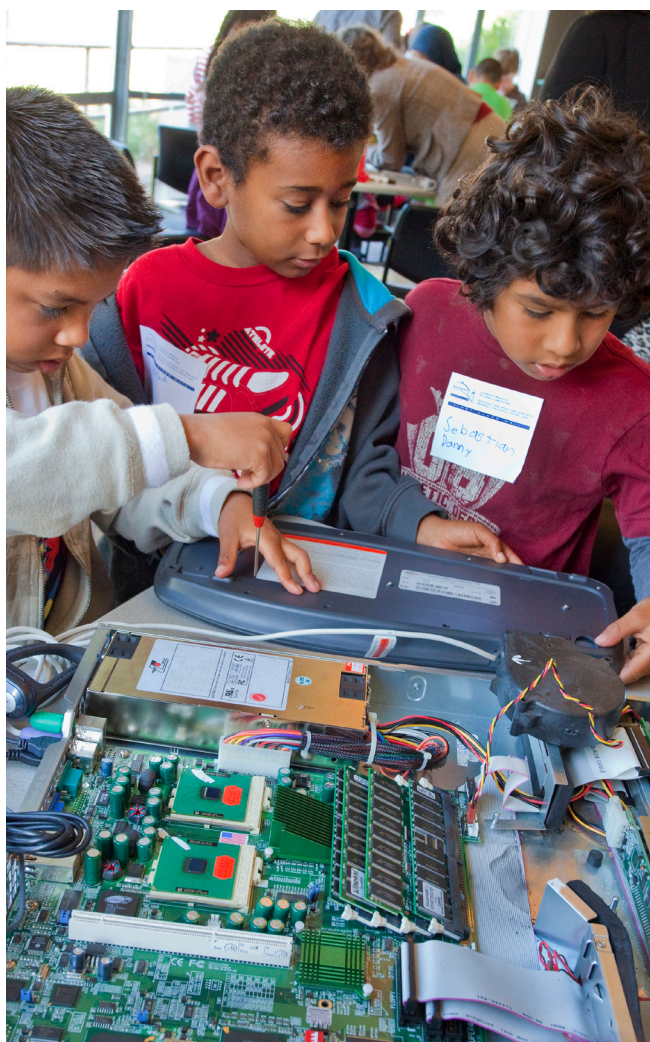
A member of one RPP explained, *"When [the deeper learning practice appears] like a messy type of learning, teachers don't feel as confident or as in control of it, and people walk in, I think [teachers] are like, 'oh, they're going to think I'm a bad teacher.'"* To combat this fear, RPPs learned that they needed to reassure teachers that this type of teaching is aligned to both their school leaders' expectations and the district's system for evaluating teachers.

To ensure that school leaders' expectations for teaching aligned with the initiative's goals, several RPPs intentionally trained school leaders before teachers. In one of these RPPs, members felt the leaders needed to make changes to the school systems before teachers could meaningfully engage in the work (e.g., by creating space in the schedule for collaborative planning time). A member of this RPP shared,

> We saw that there were challenges if there weren't people at a position of authority creating the resources, time, and space to do this work. You could get people going, get them excited, but it's difficult to sustain if the leader of the school is not in support of the practice, given the degree to which it really requires some teachers to really transform how to do their work.

Other RPPs trained school leaders first because they believed that if school leaders understood the deeper learning practices they were trying to scale, they would be more likely to support teachers in their implementation, to help message what matters, and to not undermine the initiative. One RPP member in a decentralized district

shared, *"There are some real challenges there with site-based decision-making and with just the pressure teachers get from the administration to do things in ways that are just an anathema to this model."* To combat these challenges, the RPP led a group of principals and assistant principals through a co-design process for identifying the non-negotiables of what they would like to see in their classrooms.

In addition to getting school leaders on board, RPPs in the DL+D initiative found that district central office staff also played an important role in the success of their scaling efforts. Because school districts are complex organizations, we devote the next two lessons to RPPs' learnings about how to engage districts in scaling deeper learning practices.

Multi-Tiered Supports: High Quality Project Based Learning (HQPBL)

Through the HQPBL project, PBLWorks supported two school systems, one in New Hampshire and the other in Hawai'i, in scaling Gold Standard project-based learning (PBL) across all grade levels. Between 2018 and 2020, over 1,200 teachers across the two school systems—more than half the teachers in each district—participated in PBLWorks professional development. Importantly, the project's multi-tiered support strategy included professional development and support at the classroom, school, and district levels to ensure the conditions needed for high-quality PBL.

District level
- Professional development for a district leadership team
- Coaching and support for a district coordinator
- Annual systemwide presentations of student learning (i.e., student exhibitions)

School level
- Professional development and coaching for school leadership teams, including sessions focused on vision, culture, capacity-building, and continuous improvement
- Implementation planning
- Leadership walks, school visits to see how school leadership teams are creating the conditions for high-quality PBL

Classroom level
- Three-day professional development workshop focused on designing or adapting a project aligned to Gold Standard Essential Design Elements
- Commitment to implement at least two high-quality projects each year
- Two sustained support visits to deepen practice

Engage multiple departments to ensure coherence and sustainability

A key learning from across the RPPs was that, in addition to striving for vertical alignment of messaging and supports across the levels of the system, it is also important to seek horizontal alignment across the departments within the district central office so that the initiative does not become siloed in a single department. As a member of one RPP shared,

> *To me, it just comes down when you're doing a design thinking process, for example, you want minds at the table that come with different perspectives … and I think we took the same approach inside a district. If it was only people from Curriculum and Instruction, then it's going to live only in that department. So it was important for us to branch out. We created a map of all of the different departments in the district that could feel siloed, such as Professional Development and Curriculum and Instruction, and started to think, "Can we at least get one from each of those to engage?"*

Several RPPs found that working across departments was key to removing barriers to implementation and ensuring that school-level staff hear a consistent message from district staff. One district staff member explained, *"They get a lot of different messages from people. One office will come in and say they are looking for this thing, but then the principal supervisor comes in and looks at different data. So that's hard for the schools."*

Research suggests that when teachers are asked to make substantial shifts to their instructional practice, it is critical that they receive coherent messaging from each component of the "instructional guidance infrastructure," which includes standards, pacing guides, materials, assessments, systems that are dedicated to teacher support and evaluation, and coaching.[v] However, responsibility and authority related to each of these components are often divided into separate departments within a school district, such as curriculum and instruction, professional development, and data and accountability.

RPPs employed different tactics to achieve coherence across departments. Several RPPs strategically included district-level staff in their trainings, such as instructional coaches or the assistant superintendents who

coach principals. Other RPPs worked to get representatives of different departments in a room together to brainstorm how to make their messaging more coherent. For example, one RPP held a focus group of district administrators. This focus group helped key leaders realize that some of the structures in their district, such as having separate departments for curriculum and instruction and professional development, were making it harder to scale innovations in learning. Ultimately, the district decided to combine the two departments. Another RPP used a consultancy protocol to expose district staff to problems of practice in the schools. This meeting format sometimes helped surface friction points, where schools were receiving different messages from different departments.

In addition to creating coherence, engaging multiple departments in a school district can also support the sustainability of an initiative in the face of leadership turnover. Faced with turnover in partner district leadership, some RPPs found that distributing ownership for an initiative across multiple departments buffered the disruption, helping to sustain support for an initiative when a superintendent leaves. A member from one of the RPPs that experienced superintendent turnover shared,

> [T]he way in which [district staff member] has gone about her work, there is legs to the work and there is traction for the work that is true that may well continue … so much of her focus has been relationships across departments so that the experiences of the schools, the expectations between central office and schools, they are coherent.

This distributed ownership for the work was particularly important in districts with centralized decision-making authority. Some RPPs employed a similar strategy at the school level by engaging school leadership teams.

Aligning District Instructional Systems: The Oklahoma City Education Research Alliance

The Oklahoma City Education Research Alliance (OCERA) is a collaboration among the nonprofit Generation Citizen, Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS), and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University. OCERA aims to advance students' civic participation by embedding collaborative project–based learning (CPBL) in the district's social studies courses.

OCERA strategically engaged multiple departments in OKCPS to align instructional systems and messaging in support of scaling CPBL. These efforts included training all instructional coaches in the district in CPBL and offering aligned professional development to teachers, in addition to:

- Developing a document that crosswalks teacher evaluation criteria to CBPL practices

- Coordinating with principal supervisors to clear a 2–week window for districtwide CPBL implementation

- Restructuring schedules so that same–grade teachers across the district could have common planning time

- Ensuring that CPBL units could count for one of the performance task benchmarks which teachers are required to complete each quarter

Tailor your scaling strategy to the power dynamics in your district

Achieving both vertical and horizontal alignment within a school district is beneficial for any instructional improvement effort. However, there is no one-size-fits-all scaling strategy that will work in every district, in part because decision-making authority with regard to instruction varies greatly across districts. Some districts involved in the DL+D initiative centralized power at the district level, whereas other districts were very decentralized with a strong culture of site-level autonomy. Where districts fell on the centralization–decentralization continuum led RPPs to focus more or less attention on the district level (versus the school level).

In districts with centralized authority, gaining buy-in from district leadership was critical. When successful, getting the right leaders on board in a centralized district can be extremely effective. For example, one RPP regularly presented to the district cabinet. As a result, district leaders bought into the work of the RPP and supported scaling by reducing testing and removing district benchmarks.

Conversely, in a centralized district where the main champion for the deeper learning work did not have strong positional authority within the district, the RPP had to convince leadership of the alignment between the deeper learning work and the district's strategic plan. For example, part of the way through the grant period, one RPP strategically changed the name of the instructional practice they were trying to scale from a version of PBL to *Inquiry*, to help district leaders understand how it fit within the district's priorities. This

rebranding contributed to the leaders getting behind the work and taking several major steps to facilitate the spread of the instructional practice. For example, the district designated 2 weeks of instruction during the spring semester for all seventh-grade social studies teachers to try out an inquiry-based unit and restructured schedules to allow these teachers to have the same preparation period to facilitate collaborative planning time. Reflecting on this strategic rebranding, one of the RPP members shared,

> Before [getting leadership on board] there was such a bureaucracy … it was like the leaders of the principals had to know what was going on and they okayed it. Then they sent it down to the principals who then, I mean, it was just so many lags of communication … Teachers were like, "well, if I do this, will that put me behind when it comes to benchmark exams?"… Once we got the upper administration on board, they said everybody in seventh grade is going to be doing this in this window of time … That clearing that time and making it this is the window and everybody's doing it really gave teachers some breathing room.

In decentralized districts, a more ground-up approach to scaling may be required. One RPP working in a district with strong site-level autonomy strategically engaged teachers in co-designing and piloting its curriculum. In addition to making the curriculum stronger, this teacher-level input helped build buy-in. In this

district, each school makes the final decision of what curriculum to adopt, and ultimately 83% of the schools chose to adopt the RPP-developed curriculum.

Another RPP working in a decentralized district targeted recruitment efforts to engage more schools in the deeper learning work. After assessing which schools were participating by region, the RPP members realized that they were not reaching one of the lower income regions of the district. They hired a full-time community organizer to build relationships with the schools in this region. Although the RPP could retain this organizer for only a short time, due to staff turnover and a district hiring freeze, the organizer was able to engage several schools from the underrepresented region in the work before leaving.

Balance instructional guidance with professional autonomy

Convenience and adaptability are key factors in determining successful implementation. Reforms or innovations that are too difficult to implement or that are incompatible with existing practices are unlikely to stick.[vi] Some RPPs learned that they need to strike a balance in providing teachers with well-developed, high-quality materials accompanied by implementation supports while also providing professional autonomy and opportunities for teacher input, building teachers' ownership and understanding of the key components of a new practice or approach so they can adapt it to their local contexts.

Several RPPs developed instructional materials, such as curricular units, toolkits, or rubrics, to support uptake of the deeper learning instructional practice with fidelity. They also provided guidance, such as instructional videos or professional development workshops, to help teachers make deep shifts to their practice. However, while providing materials and extensive supports for implementation can encourage uptake by making teachers jobs easier, teachers may resist this approach if they believe the curriculum does not honor their expertise as professionals or meet the needs of their local contexts by taking into account their students' lives and interests. Further, multiple studies of efforts to change instructional practice have found that teachers enact instructional reforms though the lens of their preexisting beliefs and practices, often adopting superficial features of the reform without making more profound changes to their teaching.[vii]

As an alternative approach to achieve more profound change, several RPPs engaged teachers in an inclusive co-design process, helping to ensure quality by leveraging teachers' expertise while also building

> *"When we're talking about giving students voice and choice, our teachers don't have voice and choice. So we had to even activate some of that so that they could even facilitate this type of work, and that really meant we're asking them to do this for students. How do we turn [the teachers] on in the same way?"*
>
> —RPP project director

ownership. One RPP provided stipends to teachers if they designed a unit that would be vetted and could become part of an online resource bank that other teachers in the district could use. Another RPP struggled to gain traction for an instructional practice in its district until part of the way through the grant period, when they involved teachers in co-developing materials and immediately began seeing broader adoption.

This co-design process can help build understanding in partner school systems about which elements of a reform are core and which can be adapted, ensuring adaptations do not reduce the rigor or depth of the learning experience.[viii] In addition to supporting authentic uptake, productive adaptations are crucial for scaling in an equitable manner, enabling culturally responsive adaptations to local context while also maintaining fidelity to the core elements of a practice.

Leveraging Co-Design: The Inquiry Hub

The Inquiry Hub engaged Denver Public Schools (DPS) teachers in a co-design process to develop units for a high school chemistry curriculum that supports culturally responsive, phenomenon-based science instruction. The RPP aimed to develop a curriculum that addresses the science standards while supporting minoritized groups and communities in exploring their questions about the world. The co-design process included mechanisms to capture students' interests and was designed to help build ownership and understanding of the curriculum among DPS teachers. The full co-design team included lead unit writers as well as teachers who both wrote units and tested curricular materials in their classrooms.[ix]

- As a first step, the district science coordinator and 2–3 teachers identified a group of related standards that the unit should cover and then worked with researchers to unpack and clarify these bundled standards.

- Lead unit writers then identified possible anchoring phenomena—observable phenomena that students could use their science knowledge to explain or predict—along with related design challenges.

- The RPP surveyed students about their interests and perceptions of important problems.

- The full co-design team participated in a 5-day workshop to decide on a driving question for the unit and outline a sequence of lessons.

- For a year following this workshop, the full co-design team wrote, reviewed, piloted, and revised the unit, building in instructional routines to solicit students' interests.

The RPP also established a continuous improvement process to track implementation. This process involved using student exit ticket data to help researchers understand how students experienced the curriculum and to identify areas for teacher professional development. These data helped the RPP identify a need for professional development on how to help students connect daily activities and lessons to larger unit goals.[x] Further, teacher interviews revealed the need to provide more learning opportunities for teachers to develop student agency.

Conclusion

The Hewlett Foundation's DL+D initiative was an ambitious effort to learn about how to equitably scale profound shifts to instruction in U.S. public school systems. Despite the major disruption of a global pandemic during the grant period, the initiative affirmed what many educators already knew: that equitable expansion of deeper learning is hard and requires a deliberate focus on equity at every stage, from planning through development and supports.

Several RPPs found success in accelerating uptake of a new instructional practice through co-design processes designed to solicit input from teachers and students. This approach holds promise for creating instructional practices that are more equitable because they are culturally responsive and tailored to local contexts and student interests.

Another successful strategy for spreading focal deeper learning practices was intentionally aligning district systems in support of the work. Some RPPs encountered significant obstacles that prevented them from gaining traction for a new practice within a district and, as a result, had to revise their original approaches. These revised approaches reflected greater understanding of the partner school systems and in some cases led to districtwide uptake. The experiences of these RPPs underscore the importance of understanding the district context, including the existing cultural norms and power structures, and crafting a coherent approach to scaling that is tailored to this context. Further, the RPPs' challenges and successes point to the need to secure broad support for an initiative at the district, school, and classroom levels and across departments.

Importantly, several RPPs learned that simply making deeper learning practices available to all schools did not result in equitable scaling. Reaching students furthest from opportunity requires special attention to the culture, norms, and infrastructure that prevent the schools serving these students from engaging in innovative practices.

Finally, 3 years is a short time frame for any effort to catalyze deep instructional change at scale. Although many of the RPPs in the DL+D initiative made substantial progress in spreading their focal deeper learning practices during the grant period, the work is ongoing. Ultimately, to understand if any of these efforts succeeded at equitably scaling deeper learning, RPPs will need to collect systematic data on students' experiences and outcomes, disaggregated for the students furthest from opportunity. Without these data, we cannot know whether any of these strategies have managed to upend historical and ingrained patterns of inequity.

Additional Resources

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching collaborated with representatives of the DL+D initiative RPPs and external experts to develop three resources to support practitioners' efforts to scale deeper learning:

- A Framework for Scaling for Equity
- Partnering to Scale Instructional Improvement: A Framework for Organizing Research–Practice Partnerships
- Designing for Deeper Learning: Challenges in Schools and School Districts Serving Communities Disadvantaged by the Educational System

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Endnotes

i   William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. (2017). *Deeper learning + diffusion of scaled impact. Concept paper + request for letters of interest.* http://www.hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Deeper-Learning-Scaled-Impact-Request-For-LOIs.pdf

ii   Farrell, C. C ., Penuel, W. R., Coburn, C. E., Daniel, J., & Steup, L. (2021). *Research–practice partnerships in education: The state of the field.* William T. Grant Foundation. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED615899

iii   SRI conducted interviews in summer 2021 and spring 2022, including 14 interviews with school system staff, 16 with researchers, 8 with representatives from technical assistance organizations, and 3 with staff from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. SRI also conducted a document review for each RPP, including the original proposals to the foundation, progress reports, final grant reports, and other summaries the RPPs prepared on their work (e.g., presentations, journal articles, book chapters). The final grant reports were not yet available for two RPPs at the writing of this brief (DIG Deeper and Transformative Student Voice).

iv   This quote is attributed to management consultant, Peter Drucker.

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