Beyond Learning Communities 101
– Implementing Learning Communities –
Lessons Learned from MDRC's Learning Communities Demonstration

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Outline

• Session Overview

• Project Background

• Why Implementation Research? What we are learning and how we learned it.

• Implications and Conclusions - What this means for you?
Learning Communities Project
Background

• MDRC’s Opening Doors Project

• National Learning Communities Study
  National Center for Postsecondary Research

• Six site, random assignment study

• Sample intake began Fall 2007

• http://www.mdrc.org
The Research Team

http://www.PostsecondaryResearch.org

http://www.mdrc.org

http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu

http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu
Demonstration Sites

Hillsborough Community College, Tampa, Florida

• Targets first-semester freshmen and links a developmental level reading course, Reading I or Reading II with SLS 150, a College Success course.
• Multi-campus site

Kingsborough Community College, Brooklyn, New York

• Occupationally-specific, career focused learning communities
• The only college in the study that does not target freshmen.

Queensborough Community College, Queens, New York

• LC’s link two developmental level courses
Community College of Baltimore County, Baltimore, Maryland

- LC's link a college-level credit course with English 052 or Reading 052 and include a one-hour session each week with a trained instructor, a Master Learner (ML), who helps support the students in studying for the courses
- Multi-campus site

Houston Community College, Houston, Texas

- LC's link a developmental level Math Course with a Student Success course.
- Multi-campus site

Merced College, Merced, California

- LC’s link a developmental English courses with a variety of courses; developmental reading, math, counseling or a content level course.
Technical Assistance Role of MDRC and Rachel Singer

- **MDRC**
  - Worked with sites to set up study
  - Provided technical assistance and feedback
  - Worked with outside consultants to provide technical assistance
  - Conducting research to determine LC Impacts

- **Rachel Singer**
  - Director of Academic Affairs, Kingsborough Community College
  - Provided technical assistance
  - Extensive experience with LC’s through KCC, working with MDRC and Ford Grant
The Learning Communities Models

Course A

Course B

Theory of Change

Support Services and LC Enhancements

Administrative Support

Faculty Development

American Association of Community Colleges
Implementation Research

• Why conduct implementation research?
  • Did LC’s get a fair test in all six sites?
  • Were they implemented as intended?
  • Were they robust?
  • How different were the experiences of the students in the LC’s from those of other (control) students?

• How did we conduct our research?
  • Site visits, interviews and observations
Emerging Implementation Findings

Key areas-

- Faculty Collaboration
- Curricular integration
- Active learning strategies
- LC enhancements
- Theory of change
- Expansion

What does this tell us?
The Importance of Support

Key areas-

- Administrative support – What it really means and how it makes a difference. (effective collaboration demonstrated from the top down i.e. Academic Affairs and Student Services; clear support of faculty and program needs)

- Faculty Development (getting buy-in from faculty, encouraging innovation and participation, compensation)
What needs to be present to support and help grow a learning community program?

- Support from top administrators
- Transparent collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Services
- Faculty buy-in and faculty development
- Clear intentional strategy, using designed LC’s, aimed at improving student success
Supporting LC's

Administrative Support

• **What does Administrative Support mean?** (insuring buy-in, keeping stakeholders “in the loop”, getting funding, supporting faculty development, encouraging innovation)

• What happened when administrative support was present? (faculty felt connected and valued, team work was evident, buy-in was clear)

• What happened when administrative support was lacking? (people working at cross purposes, there was no real ownership or plan, things did not move forward)
Supporting LC’s (continued)

Collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Services

Why is it so important?
- Part of the planning process. They are the linchpin for successful enrollment into learning communities
- Knowledgeable about student centered initiatives
- They play a key role in reaching out to students

What happened without this collaboration:
- Low or no enrollment into LC’s
- Little or no support for student ‘trouble spots’ or personal roadblocks
- Scheduling block programs became an issue
- Registration blocks are overlooked
Supporting LC's (continued)

Faculty buy-in and development:

Why it is so important?
- Faculty need to be supported in the work they do
- For most faculty this is a new way of teaching
- The ideas of intentionally linking disciplines requires “development”

What type is needed?
- Connections among courses-integrative assignments
- Collaboration among LC team professionals (faculty, counselors, librarians, tutors)
- Active pedagogy/active learning/reflection
- Integrative learning

What should sites consider?
- Planning
- Compensation
- Cultivating campus leaders.
The KCC Story

What did KCC do differently in this study?
• The challenges and success with expansion

Could or should KCC have done anything differently?
Site Stories – Overcoming Implementation Challenges

...And how can these emerging findings help strengthen the Learning Communities on your campus?
Activity:

How would you rate your college’s LC effort in the following areas:

- Faculty Collaboration
- Curricular Integration
- Active learning strategies
- LC enhancements
- Is there a consistent LC message and is real buy in communicated?
- Expansion
- Faculty Development
- Administrative Support

What action can you take to strengthen any of these areas?

Before you take action, what additional information will you gather?

Please take a moment to jot these down. Create a checklist.
What did the LC program students say?

“I know my teachers talk to each other…”

“It’s cool. I don’t really talk to the students in my other classes.”

“I know my teachers want to see me succeed.”
What's Next?

• MDRC Report Published late 2009
  www.mdrc.org

• Kingsborough Forum at AACC 2009
  Learning Communities:
  Transforming Process, Policy and Practice
  Monday, April 6
  3:00 PM – 4:00 PM