

# Data Use Problems of Practice: Motivating and Engaging Faculty

*How can you bring faculty together, organizationally and ideologically, to forge a vision of common work centered on using program data and student learning artifacts to improve both individual and collective practice?*

It's 9 a.m. on the day of the all-program data retreat, and the room is filling early with faculty, field supervisors, grad students as well as several cooperating teachers, many of whom are graduates of the program. There is a sense of an extended family reunion as people greet one another. The program director briefly welcomes the group saying, "I thought we'd start by welcoming new members of our community." Projected on the screen behind her are pictures of all the new babies born over the last several months, along with a set of photos of all the new mothers. "Okay...let's see how good you are at making connections. Who belongs to whom here?"



The group erupts with laughter as they try to match babies and mothers.

The tone soon shifts as the group quickly engages in reviewing the carefully prepared agenda for the day. The new edTPA scores are in, and the director has created several handouts that allow program members to see the data in several ways, including those for the students that they had taught themselves, as well as scores for all candidates. The group quiets as everyone becomes absorbed in examining the data. The program director asks the group to move into program-level teams (elementary, secondary, special education) and interpret the data through the lens of three questions: What do these data suggest we are doing well? What issues/areas appear problematic and need our attention? What kinds of evidence (e.g., candidate work sam-

ples, course assignments, field observations) would help us understand the problem better?

The groups discuss these questions for some time, and then report their findings, sharing their ideas and identifying needs for deeper inquiry into specific issues. Ad hoc teams are identified and charged with examining several sources of data related to these issues and returning with recommendations for collective action.

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on the same page."**

The program director then directs the group's attention to a slide she has prepared showing edTPA scores for rubrics related to "Academic Language". This has been an area of program-wide concern for several years, and the group is eager to see how candidates have performed this year. They have taken significant collective action over the last year to provide technical assistance to each methods instructor, helping them infuse specific performance expectations around teaching English language learners (ELL) into their methods courses. And the data this year suggest they are on the right track—candidate scores are up, and a sample of candidate work confirms that there is encouraging improvement in their integration of academic language concerns into their lesson planning and classroom assessment methods. In reviewing the gains, the faculty members who have historically held primary responsibility for teaching ELL content observe that it took all of them—methods course instructors, supervisors, and cooperating teachers—working together to achieve the observed improvements. There is a palpable sense that this is a team victory.

Later, as the meeting ends, a field supervisor talking with one of the course instructors is overheard saying, "I love these meetings; it just feels like we are all on the same page."

The scene at the retreat, and the program culture described above did not spring full-formed from the head of the Program Director or faculty leaders; rather, it evolved over time. However, it did begin with the program leaders' strategic actions aimed at motivating faculty engagement.

Below, we describe several strategies that program leaders have used to motivate and engage faculty and staff around data use activities. These are not intended as prescriptions for your program—but rather as promising practices you may find useful, and consider adapting for your local context:

### Articulate local values

Faculty are often concerned about the effects of new accountability policies, fearing that local program voice, values, and identity will be buried under new mandates and measures. One program we visited had spent considerable time supporting faculty to articulate its local values and goals—those things they felt were special about the program, and were anxious to preserve. Faculty and staff referred repeatedly to this list of “valued outcomes” as they reviewed new and existing data on program outcomes, and these conversations served to make an ongoing commitment to local values transparent and concrete.

### Get data on the table

One of the many challenges programs face is making the need for improvement visible to faculty. In many of our site visits, faculty talked about the experience of confronting the ways new kinds of data challenged their assumptions about what candidates were able to take up from coursework and implement in their classroom practice. Teaching performance assessment data were a particularly powerful tool in this regard—with candidate work samples often demonstrating in a concrete way that specific practices they had been taught in their coursework were not being used in their classroom practice.

### Distribute leadership responsibility

Leadership responsibilities are often engaging and motivating in themselves, and we noted that the most successful leaders at the sites we visited were good at creating and sharing leadership opportunities throughout their programs. These leaders were keenly aware of “nodes” of energy and interest in both individual faculty, and existing “communities of practice”, and cultivated engagement and commitment to the data use process by inviting these

groups to investigate specific issues and make recommendations for action to the larger program. Leaders made sure to distribute “air time” at program meetings widely across program participants, as leadership responsibilities were taken up by both individual faculty and small ad hoc working groups.

### Make individual practice a resource for collective learning

Faculty, field supervisors, and other staff in many (perhaps most) teacher education programs function in relative isolation from one another—resulting in lost opportunities to learn from one another...not to mention loss of coherence in the program as a whole. Programs we visited had often created ways of making individual practice, whether situated in courses or in fieldwork, more visible and accessible to all program members by making time at program meetings to present and discuss specific courses, assignments, evaluation tools and other artifacts of practice.

### Never waste a crisis

Whether it is budget cuts, new mandates, or the publication of negative outcome data, crises can create a clear context for collective action as well as an opportunity for program leaders to reify the sense that “we are all in this together”. In fact, failing to bring people together to face these challenges can lead to isolation and demoralization among faculty and staff, as people retreat into the silos of their individual work. An important goal for program leaders in these situations is to preserve a sense of local control over the work. One leader put it this way: *“It isn’t just to satisfy an accrediting agency; it isn’t just to do the minimum to get approved; it isn’t just about satisfying a doubting public; it’s really about taking control of your own institution and charting a course for doing what we do better as an integral part of the everyday work.”*