

The Urban School Leaders Collaborative: A school-university partnership emphasizing instructional leadership and student and community assets

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In an effort to prepare urban school principals as instructional leaders, this paper describes a new partnership program, the Urban School Leaders Collaborative (USLC), jointly developed by a major southwestern university and an urban school district. Although there are growing calls for such school-university partnerships (Whitaker & Barnett, 1999), there is no more urgent need in America to identify and prepare quality school leaders to serve urban communities, especially ones that face economic hardships and serve large numbers of children with special learning needs (e.g., in this district 87% of students are economically disadvantaged, 50% are classified as at risk, 14% are Limited English Proficient). In attempting to capitalize on the instructional leadership talent of teachers in the district, the first USLC cohort consists of 15 Campus Instructional Coordinators (CICs), all of whom were selected for this role because of their commitment to improving student achievement and serving their district, which has an 85% Hispanic, 10% African American, and 5% White student population. CICs are released from their teaching responsibilities to assist other teachers to improve their teaching and assessment practices. The cohort is racially mixed and has an equal number of elementary, middle, and high school CICs. In describing the beginnings of this new initiative, the authors: (a) share insights about the important factors coalescing to form the USLC partnership; (b) explain the recruitment and selection process; (c) provide an overview of how the program is organized and delivered, including team teaching, online delivery, and the use of district specialists; (d) describe attempts to provide financial support for tuition expenses; and (e) compare this new model with an existing partnership program offered by the department for several years.

As we begin the 21st century, one of the challenges facing public education is how to attract qualified candidates to become school principals (Barker, 1996; Fenwick, 2000). For a variety of reasons, the principalship has become less attractive in recent years, which has spurred districts and universities into action. One of the prominent strategies to recruit, attract, and prepare aspiring principals is by forming a partnership between the university and local school districts. While this is not a new or novel strategy (Grobe, 1990), the urgency of finding and placing well qualified principals in our schools requires mutual cooperation and collaboration between these two organizations. School districts interested in “grooming their own” benefit by identifying and

nurturing talent within their systems; universities benefit by enriching their pool of candidates and involving district personnel in the delivery of the programs.

Generally speaking, partnerships are created to deal with a problem of mutual interest (i.e., filling the void of qualified applicants for the principalship), where both partners' contributions are recognized and valued (Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Island, 1986). In some cases, partnerships have been found to reduce costs, eliminate duplication of services, and expand professional networks (Vermont State Department of Education, 1987; Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1991). Other advantages include renewing both organizations through the exchange of ideas, information, and personnel (Cole, Tomlin, & Renick, 1999; Essex, 2001; Goodlad, 1991; Walsh, 2000); developing mutual appreciation for the contributions of university faculty and practitioners in preparing future teachers and administrators (Cole et al., 1999; Klein & Dunlap, 1993); and blending research and practice to develop new knowledge and teaching and learning strategies (Essex, 2001; Swanson, 1995).

Given the increasing popularity of school-university partnerships for preparing school principals, the purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze a newly-formed partnership between the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) and the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department (ELPS) at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), referred to as the Urban School Leaders Collaborative (USLC). We begin by briefly reviewing some of the qualities of effective partnerships before describing features of the USLC, including the events coalescing to form the partnership, how the program is being designed and delivered, and how the first cohort of students is reacting to the program. The paper concludes with an analysis of how the USLC reflects what is known about partnership development, noting areas for future refinement.

When Are Partnerships Successful?

As partnerships have emerged, interest has increased regarding the elements, structures, or events that can positively influence or inhibit their success. Although not a great deal of broad-scale, systematic research has been conducted on partnerships, individual collaboratives have been described and analyzed (United States Department of Education, 1995). In a review of various types of business and educational partnerships, Grobe (1990) contends they:

- Involve top-level leadership in decisions
- Develop programs that are grounded in the needs of the community
- Create an effective public relations campaign
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities of each partner
- Employ strategic planning and develop long-term goals
- Utilize effective management and staffing structures
- Ensure that shared decision making and local ownership occur
- Provide shared recognition and credit for all personnel involved
- Commit resources that are appropriate and well-timed
- Provide intensive technical assistance
- Create formal written agreements

Are patient with the change process and gradually expand the involvement of others (as cited in Barnett, Hall, Berg, & Camarena, 1999, p. 491)

Besides these general admonitions, other factors can enhance or impede school-university partnerships. For instance, effective partnerships between teacher education program faculty and school districts exist when: (a) classroom teachers are involved in meaningful ways, (b) each partner gains from the experience, (c) leadership does not remain stagnant, but revolves as necessary, and (d) the university provides rewards and incentives for faculty participation (Dodge, 1993).

Closer examination of the literature reveals three major themes for successful school-university partnerships. First, various *organizational support structures* must be in place, such as acquiring financial resources (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Goodlad, 1991; Walsh, 2000), developing written guidelines for the operation of the partnership (Epanchin & Colucci, 2002; Essex, 2001; Greene & Tichener, 1999; Harper & Sadler, 2002; Maxson & Schwartz, 2001; Walsh, 2000), identifying the needs of faculty and teachers (Digby & Gartin, 1993; Epanchin & Colucci, 2002; Klein & Dunlap, 1993), and documenting and regularly communicating the results of the partnership (Clark, 1999; Epanchin & Colucci, 2002; Essex, 2001; Evans, Lomax, & Morgan, 2000; Goodlad, 1991; Mullan & Kochan, 2000; Osguthorpe, 2000). Second, *effective leadership*, particularly obtaining support from top-level leaders (Epanchin & Colucci, 2002; Essex, 2001; Osguthorpe, 2000), using leadership teams in program implementation (Clark, 1999; Klein & Dunlap, 1993; Rakow & Robinson, 1997), and identifying who will lead the initiative (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Mullan & Kochan, 2000), can influence whether a partnership thrives or flounders. Finally, *trust development* among members cannot be underestimated. Because most partnerships evolve, trust must be re-established as new leaders and participants become involved. Kennett (2000) maintains that partners must remember that trusting others takes time to develop and can be affected as changes in membership occur.

Another way of examining successful partnerships is to determine what factors can prevent them from reaching their goals. Clearly, if school and university partner members are not willing to devote considerable time, effort, and energy to the endeavor, the likelihood of success is greatly reduced (Essex, 2001; Greene & Tichener, 1999; Mullan & Kochan, 2000; Walsh, 2000). Another major stumbling block is when there is a lack of shared understanding of the partnership's goals and/or expectations for the project are based on invalid assumptions (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Peters, 2002). Barnett and his colleagues (1999) suggest there are three categories of roadblocks to success:

- *Cultural barriers* exist when the norms of the participating organizations conflict with one another (e.g., different status and reward systems between schools and universities, variations in the language and jargon used in these two educational systems).
- *Regulatory barriers* emerge whenever the policies and regulations of the organizations conflict (e.g., when external requirements from federal agencies are in opposition to local collective bargaining agreements).
- *Personal barriers* can thwart the partnership (e.g., individuals are unwilling to commit to the partnerships due to time demands, unclear goals, or lack of structure for reporting results).

With this background on partnerships, we now direct our attention to describing the recently-formed USLC.

The Urban School Leaders Collaborative

Formation of the Partnership

Discussions about offering a “fast-track” master’s degree and principal certification program through the ELPS Department that would emphasize instructional leadership and school-university collaboration began in the fall of 2001. The initial discussions were initiated by Blandina Cardenas, Dean of UTSA’s College of Education and Human Development (COEHD), with the superintendents of two of the largest school districts in the San Antonio area. At the request of the dean, a third district was included, and Betty Merchant, chair of ELPS, was asked to meet with the superintendent of this district. Since he was in the process of retiring, this superintendent did not pursue the idea nor did his successor, who decided to focus on other issues in his first year in the district. Although both of the superintendents with whom the dean spoke were initially very interested in participating in a collaboratively designed program, only one of them sustained interest. The non-participating superintendent explained that his district was involved in several other initiatives related to administrator preparation and training, and he did not at the time feel ready to undertake another program.

SAISD Superintendent Ruben Olivarez, however, never wavered in his commitment to collaborating with UTSA. One of the factors that played a critical role in his decision was the impending shortage of administrators who were knowledgeable about instruction and responsive to the needs of students and families served by the district. Another important factor was his long-standing friendship with our dean, with whom he shared a deep commitment to equity and social justice, and in whom he had the highest level of trust and confidence. Once they clarified their mutual interest in exploring a jointly created master’s program for principal preparation, the dean asked our department chair to discuss the matter with the ELPS faculty and to assess their interest in collaborating with SAISD on the design and delivery of such a program. The faculty agreed to participate, despite some reservations about whether or not their existing obligations would permit them to implement the program as intended. The decision to collaborate with SAISD in this effort was communicated to the superintendent and his assistant superintendent in mid-April 2002. The initial design of the program was accomplished through several meetings between our department chair and an SAISD assistant superintendent who was charged with working out the mechanics of the program. Our dean also had input into the design of the program, which was organized so that students would graduate with both their master’s degree and their principal certification in six semesters. The program became known as the *Urban School Leaders Collaborative*, as suggested by the SAISD superintendent.

The composition of the team changed slightly during that time with the addition of a member of the central office curriculum and instruction team. In late July 2002, the assistant superintendent, the curriculum and instruction specialist, and Peggy Stark, from the SAISD special programs office, met with our department chair to review and finalize the program. The assistant superintendent who had been working on the program was given other responsibilities, as was the curriculum and instruction specialist. With the departure of these members of the design team, Peggy and our department chair became the primary contact persons for their respective institutions and worked closely on the mechanics of the application process.

Early in the inception of the USLC, one of the most important aspects of the collaborative concerned student selection. Our dean and the superintendent agreed to an arrangement in which principals of all the schools in SAISD would be asked to nominate prospective applicants for the program who had distinguished themselves as outstanding teachers. In many of the schools, these individuals had already been designated as Campus Instructional Coordinators (CIC), who are relieved from fulltime classroom teaching to mentor other teachers, assist with curriculum development and instructional improvement, and coordinate student assessments. Packets of

information were sent to each of the schools and principals shared these with the teachers they felt would be good candidates for the program. Teachers could also self-nominate. The assistant superintendent was charged with collecting the applications and submitting them as a group to the UTSA Graduate Programs Office to be reviewed for university admission.

Our original plan was to start the program in the summer of 2002, and to provide three courses, one taught by the SAISD superintendent, the second by the COEHD dean, and the third by the ELPS department chair. At the end of May 2002, however, there were not enough applicants to warrant starting the program in the summer, so our dean and the superintendent decided to postpone the program until fall 2002 to allow more time for people to apply to the program and additional time to finalize the remaining details of the program design. In the meantime, the superintendent and his administrative team were searching for sources of foundation funding to defray part or all of the students' tuition expenses.

In early August 2002, the assistant superintendent sent an email to all of the principals in the district, describing the collaborative as follows:

We are trying to recruit teachers and other certified staff who are interested in becoming CICs. The partnership we are establishing with UTSA will allow SAISD personnel to earn a mid-management credential and a Master's in Administration with an emphasis on Curriculum and Instruction as it pertains to SAISD. This unique experience will bridge theory and practice the SAISD way. Local administrators and teachers will be called on to work hand-and-hand with UTSA professors as courses are offered throughout the program. Dr. Olivarez will be one of the first clinical professors from the SAISD family.

Please let teachers and staff on your campus know of this unique and exciting opportunity. At this point, this opportunity is self-funded but the District is looking for grant funding. The first classes will be held beginning in January, 2003.

By mid-September 2002, 56 teachers had applied for the USLC, and by early October, the district had selected 24 of these applicants and forwarded their applications to UTSA for review by the Graduate Programs Office. For various reasons, not everyone in this group decided to submit their full application packet. The district had not been able secure tuition support as originally hoped, and this discouraged some people from pursuing admission to the program. In December 2002, a cohort of 15 students was identified to participate in the USLC.

Program Design and Delivery

The UTSA Master of Arts and Principal Certification Program consists of 45 semester requirements (i.e., 15 three-hour courses). The design of the USLC required students to complete these course requirements over six semesters, which is faster than the typical on-campus student. To initiate the program, our dean and department chair team taught two courses in the spring of 2003 at one of the SAISD campuses. During the summer of 2003 the cohort enrolled in two courses, one of which was taught by Encarnacion Garza, an ELPS faculty member; this class met at one of the district's high schools. This current semester (fall 2003) students are taking three courses: two are being integrated and team taught by ELPS faculty Alan Shoho and Bruce Barnett and the third is an on-line school law course overseen by another ELPS faculty member, David Thompson. Students will complete the additional 24 credit hours in the next three semesters, graduating from the program in December 2004.

In September 2003, a meeting was held with the SAISD superintendent, the ELPS department chair, and Encarnacion Garza, a personal friend and long time colleague of SAISD Superintendent Ruben Olivarez. When hearing about the progress of the program, the superintendent expressed great satisfaction, indicating his interest in beginning another cohort in

the near future. Because of the financial pressures faced by these students in completing this condensed program, the superintendent recommitted himself to obtaining funds to offset some of the students' expenses. He promised to make these funds available this fall.

A critical part of the collaborative was the agreement to link course work with relevant issues and topics in SAISD and, whenever possible, to use course assignments that would related to students' jobs. Additionally, we agreed to co-teach courses with district personnel if possible. We envisioned these co-teaching assignments might occur later in the program, rather than at the beginning.

The design and delivery of the USLC cohort program is different in numerous ways from UTSA's regular master's degree program. First, the selection of the cohort students was a joint two-stage process where the school district selected the members of its staff they wanted to support and then forwarded the recommendations to the university, whereby the selected applicants were subjected to the university's academic admissions process. In selecting the people the school district wanted to support, all the CICs (at least one per campus) were invited to apply. In addition, other district employees were encouraged to submit applications. Upon receipt, SAISD leadership reviewed and selected a cohort of personnel they would support in the program. While the school district worked separately from the university in the initial selection process, this method improved our typical self-selection process for applying to the program.

Second, while we are using the same course numbering as our regular program, some of the courses are being delivered together, utilizing teams of two professors who plan and teach two courses simultaneously. This is a dramatic departure from our regular program where courses are delivered by individual professors with little or no discussion among colleagues. For example, following their Monday evening class, one team of professors de-brief and plan their next class meeting. These planning sessions take approximately two hours by reflecting on the previous session, brainstorming ideas for delivering course content, and devising activities to connect course assignments with the required readings. After each planning session, an agenda for the next class, showing topics to be covered, activities, and course assignments for the upcoming Monday's class is delivered electronically to all the cohort members.

Third, most courses are taught in schools within the SAISD system. In our regular program, courses are delivered at one of the two UTSA campuses once a week from 5:30 pm to 8:15 pm. The team taught, integrated courses are offered on Monday evening from 4:30 pm to 8:30 pm. The professors, prior to class, review the agenda and take responsibility for various topics and activities during the session. When one professor is leading the discussion, the other observes, adds comments, and participates with students in the learning process.

The final difference in course design and delivery between our regular program and the SAISD cohort program is that some courses are being delivered entirely online through WebCT. This is an experimental trial to see how students learn and are receptive to full online instruction. In contrast, while our regular program utilizes online electronic resources in many courses, it is instructor dependent and unsystematically planned and utilized.

Student Perceptions

One of the most important expectations of this program has been for students to participate in deep personal and professional reflection. Student perceptions were collected in the summer of 2003 by Encarnacion Garza as part of his course evaluation. An analysis identifies common themes in their responses: (a) bonding, (b) reflection, (c) transformation and personal growth, (d) safe environment, (e) confirmation, (f), collaboration, and (g) being appreciated and valued. The following student reflections illustrate these themes.

Bonding

Our cohort group has bonded together through honest discussion and respect for differing viewpoints. We all have come to know each other and have become foundations of support regardless of the position we hold in the district. Thank you for providing a vehicle for practical knowledge and guidance. (Student #1)

The members of the cohort are like my family members. I like to refer to the group as a *CO-HEART*. We have bonded and are supporting each other as we pursue our Master's degrees. (Student #12)

It made for a very cohesive group. We are all unique and we grew to respect each person's "uniqueness." (Student #10)

Reflection

We, in essence, looked into "our box" so that we could start thinking out of the box. (Student #10)

The best part was the reflections. It was so crucial to reflect on everything we learned. This course went so fast that without the reflection we wouldn't have been able to internalize all that we learned. (Student #3)

The reflections also helped with the idea that we are not alone in the role of principal. Even though we have common visions and goals as educators we are not, as one of our guest speakers put it, "one of the guys or girls anymore." But we do have each other to depend on, to be honest and give us non-biased advice. (Student #3)

Personally, I have examined who I am and what qualities I bring to school to help guide students and teachers. I have also learned that I need to take care of myself in the whole process. I need to keep myself mentally and physically fit in order to do the best job possible. (Student #8)

Transformation/Personal Growth

Regardless, the group has transformed into an empowered circle of energy. Individuals whose voices were barely heard last semester are louder. I appreciate the growth. I have an appreciation for my classmates. I always did, but you always wonder where you stand. I would truly go to battle with anyone of them at my side. That is what we are facing, a battle. (Student #6)

This summer I feel as if I have grown by leaps and bounds. (Student #5)

Personally, I am much more comfortable, self assured, and driven since I am surrounded by people who are undertaking the same endeavor as I am. People that are caring, focused, determined, and willing to do whatever it takes to help children. I know I am developing stronger leadership qualities because of the cohort. (Student #4)

EDL 6973 was not just another class. Rather, it was a life-changing experience an authentic experience, causing one to look inward, to reflect, to think, to empathize, to self-monitor and to personally adjust. I am sure that I couldn't just be speaking for myself, because these experiences were shared by our group - our SAISD / UTSA Cohort. I learned so much, and grew personally. Our Cohort grew as a whole as well. Dealing with controversial issues caused us to grow together, not apart. (Student #2)

I have grown more in the past three weeks in some areas of my personal and professional life than in the thirteen years of my teaching career. (Student #8)

Safe environment

I have been given the opportunity to express my views in a safe forum. My colleagues have been given the same opportunity. The topics discussed were appropriate, and timely. We make attempts as educators to address variables that affect student learning, but only scratch the surface. (Student #6)

Your self-reflection helped me to feel safe about opening up to myself and my hidden agendas, baggage. (Student #3)

You built a safe and secure environment for us as a class. One of the things you said throughout the course was to do what is best for kids. You modeled that with our class by doing what was best for us to learn and experience from this course. (Student #3)

Confirmation

My acceptance into the cohort program came as a surprise to me. Not for lack of confidence, but rather because I wasn't even sure that this was a path I was willing to take. I never saw myself as anything but a teacher. I enjoy and excel at my job, so why would I try to get out of the classroom? At the start of last semester, with Dr. Cardenas and Dr. Merchant, I felt quite sure that I would go through the program, earn my master's degree, and return to the classroom. I still had no intention of becoming a principal at any campus. As the semester progressed, I became unsure of what would happen after graduation. Dr. Cardenas had certainly planted the seed of principalship as a possibility for me. (Student #5)

... one of the many things that was beneficial was the modeling of certain assignments that were key to this class. I really appreciated and valued you sharing with us your educational core values and platform. It really helped me to see that it wasn't as hard and complicated as I had made it up to be. (Student #3)

Preparing students and those who serve them is a greater challenge than ever. The analysis of experiences and opinions through interviews of district-level administration, principals and teachers provided valuable insight to a range of perspectives. (Student #7)

It has been very interesting to be among of group of people who share the same views on the education of children in the district. Thanks to our professors, we have all gained a better understanding of the relationship between personal insight and leadership. (Student #1)

Collaboration

I am thankful that we had the opportunity to interact with people in positions of leadership from our own district. They affirmed the information and the concerns that our discussions brought up. (Student #11)

Our closing activity of the Supervision and Evaluation course was an extension of the Spring 2003 semester. Each student in the cohort worked on an SAISD school improvement effort. (Student #7)

Our instructors in the Spring, Dr. Merchant and Dr. Cardenas, were also dynamic, supportive, caring and encouraged us to be risk takers, those who will develop and create our schools to foster the risk of investing in ideas to think about different alternatives. (Student #7)

We were very lucky that you were the facilitator for this journey. Dr. Cardenas mentioned and spoke on leading from behind. I believe she called it leader as shepherd, or servant. (Student #6)

I do wish we could meet the intended UTSA professors. When we met you, Dr. Garza, and Dr. Pino it helped us to get to know you and see the aim of the cohort. The unknown future professor(s) is such an uncertainty. But now that it has started so well, I can imagine it only getting better. (Student #4)

Being Appreciated and Valued

I recommend that other individuals from our district be afforded the opportunity to participate in a cohort. I feel that the model has built the capacity of leadership in our group. It has allowed the opportunity for us to communicate our vision, and reevaluate where we stand. I can say that there is not a person in my group who I could not work with, or work for. I know these people, they are about education. I really appreciate the opportunity to learn this way. (Student #6)

Participating in the UTSA/SAISD Urban Leadership Cohort has been an inspiring learning experience. The work is challenging. I look forward to completing this program to be able to serve SAISD students to a greater degree. Hopefully, other SAISD personnel will have the opportunity to be a part of other similar cohort initiatives. (Student #7)

I know that this cohort experience is one that I have been blessed to be in. I do feel like we are being home grown to be strong leaders. I can't imagine going through a Master's program without being in a cohort. I know that this experience is one that I wish others could benefit from. The district is full of potentially strong leaders. So many leaders already in leadership capacities could benefit from this type of leadership process. (Student #4)

This entire cohort experience has been a positive learning experience. We have grown together. We have grown accustomed to being open to all points of view. Being that we are all professional people, we treat each other with a high level of respect. This approach to a Master's degree is definitely a model that should continue. (Student #4)

I am thankful that I have had the opportunity and the ability to take part in a fantastic learning experience. Experiences like this are superb opportunities to model what your leadership will look like. This is important in roles such as administrators, because others will be directly affected by your leadership. (Student #4)

The UTSA-SAISD Cohort has been a remarkable learning experience. The program and the professors challenge us on current educational trends and issues. I feel that I have learned so much from the dialogue that occurs within the group. The program has enabled me to grow in knowledge and gain new strategies on topics ranging from systems theory, supervision, evaluation, core beliefs, and leadership. (Student #1)

I am very proud to be a member of this cohort as I feel we are getting a much better education than if we had gone the normal route through the University. The "deepness" of our conversations is directly correlated with the fact that we have every class together and that we all work in the same district currently. In future cohorts, the only thing I would change is to start them in the summer so that they can feel this intensity right away and develop the level of trust needed to make each of the other courses as strong in depth. (Student #9)

In general, these comments indicate students feel the cohort model has been a worthwhile and rewarding experience. Collaboration had been a critical variable in the partnership between the university and the school district. Both partners are genuinely committed to the students and their success. This collaborative approach has been essential in helping to facilitate and support students through this process. Students appreciate the opportunity to learn from their professors and one another as well as receiving support and recognition from the school district. Besides losing one student who was enrolled in another UTSA master's degree program and chose not to

continue, the attrition rate is zero. Their persistence can be interpreted as result of the determination of both parties for genuine collaboration. This is important if we are to provide student support from both sides of the partnership.

Conclusions and Implications

Although the USLC is in its infancy, analyzing this partnership from various viewpoints can provide a useful barometer for where this initiative is succeeding as well as areas for development if the partnership is to grow and flourish. We begin by examining the features of successful partnerships that are and are not occurring in this partnership. Next, we explore the evolution of the USLC, using several models. Finally, based on this analysis, we offer some suggestions of ways we might strengthen the partnership.

Characteristics of Successful Partnerships

Several important factors are responsible for this partnership getting off the ground and gaining some momentum:

- The establishment of a clear need to identify and prepare quality school leaders for SAISD schools was a motivating force for both parties (Dodge, 1993; Grobe, 1990).
- The sanction of the collaborative from top-level leaders, our dean and the SAISD superintendent, have demonstrated a sense of importance and visible commitment to this project (Epanchin & Colucci, 2002; Essex, 2001; Grobe, 1990; Osguthorpe, 2000).
- The initial trust between the two organization's leaders was instrumental in getting the program started (Grobe, 1990). In addition, this trust also has grown as a direct result of the involvement of an ELPS faculty member who is a trusted friend and colleague of the SAISD superintendent and the early reports of the program's effects on students (Kennett, 2000).
- The leadership of the project, especially from SAISD, has evolved as the needs of the partnership have changed (Dodge, 1993).
- There has been gradual involvement of additional ELPS faculty members and SAISD personnel (Grobe, 1990).
- Teams of faculty have been involved in program implementation (Clark, 1999; Klein & Dunlap, 1993; Rakow & Robinson, 1997).
- The leadership roles and responsibilities of our department and SAISD were clarified early in the development of the project (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Grobe, 1990; Mullan & Kochan, 2000).

Conversely, there are some factors that have not been attended to that may need our attention if this partnership is to flourish:

- Financial resources have not been committed to the project, especially to offset some of the costs being born by the students; however, the SAISD superintendent has promised to provide partial tuition support and the ELPS faculty are continuing to seek grant funds (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Goodlad, 1991; Grobe, 1990; Walsh, 2000).
- No formal written guidelines have been established for the USLC (Epanchin & Colucci, 2002; Essex, 2001; Greene & Tichener, 1999; Grobe, 1990; Harper & Sadler, 2002; Maxson & Schwartz, 2001; Walsh, 2000).

- The results of the USLC have tended to be shared among those delivering the program, rather than being more broadly disseminating within SAISD or UTSA (Clark, 1999; Dodge, 1993; Epanchin & Colucci, 2002; Essex, 2001; Evans et al., 2000; Goodlad, 1991; Mullan & Kochan, 2000; Osguthorpe, 2000).
- Only UTSA faculty have delivered the program, without any direct involvement of SAISD practitioners (Whitaker & Barnett, 1999).

Evolution of Partnership Development

As previously mentioned, partnerships are not stagnant, but evolve over time. This evolution already is apparent with the USLC due to the transition of SAISD personnel involved in the program. A variety of concepts and models have been used to capture the dynamic nature of partnerships: (a) developmental stages of partnerships, (b) levels of interdependence between partners, and (c) typologies of partnerships. Each of these concepts will be described and used to analyze the current state of the USLC.

Stages of partnerships. One approach for explaining the ebb and flow of partnership development is stage theories. A good example is Trubowitz's (1986) stage model, which is described below.

- Stage 1 ("hostility and skepticism"): Partners are hesitant to become involved due to previous experiences with one another or lack of knowledge.
- Stage 2 ("lack of trust"): Partners begin to develop trust and confidence in each other's expertise and contribution.
- Stage 3 ("period of truce"): Partners begin to engage in joint projects.
- Stage 4 ("mixed approval"): Partners recognize early successes and remove those not contributing to the project.
- Stage 5 ("acceptance"): Partners celebrate mutual benefits being achieved.
- Stage 6 ("regression"): Partners experience instability due to changes in staff, funding, and resource allocation.
- Stage 7 ("renewal"): Partners are transformed with the addition of new people and ideas.
- Stage 8 ("continuing progress"): Partners continue their involvement, realizing the partnership will change.

This developmental stage model tends to mimic Tuckman's (1965) phases of team development: forming, storming, norming, and performing. Forming occurs in Stage 1, storming in Stages 2 and 3, norming in Stages 4-6, and performing in Stages 7 and 8.

Our early discussions with districts about establishing partnerships reflected stages 1 and 2. Because no formal partnerships had been established with our department and these districts, there may have been some hesitancy to commit, as evidenced by two districts deciding not to participate. However, our conversations with SAISD leaders were fueled by the existing high level of trust Dean Blandina Cardenas and faculty member Encarnacion Garza had with the SAISD superintendent, allowing us to rapidly reach stage 3. Furthermore, based on some of the early student reports about the program and the superintendent's positive reactions, we are beginning to experience the "mixed approval" stage and have a clearer sense of who is involved in the project.

Interdependence between partners. Another way to examine how a partnership is developing is by determining how intertwined or interdependent the work of the organizations has become. The

level of partnership interdependence can be reflected on a continuum from cooperation to coordination to collaboration (Intriligator, 1992). Many partnerships begin by engaging in a *cooperative arrangement* where short-term commitments are made, existing budgets are used, and infrequent contact between partners occurs (Intriligator, 1992; Lugg, 1994). In this case, there is little or no interdependence since partners tend to be acting independently from one another. However, if the partnership evolves to the next level of interdependence, *coordination*, then each agrees to give up some of their autonomy for the good of the partnership, investment in projects lasts longer, and a unit or team of individuals from both organizations oversees the project (Intriligator, 1992; Lugg, 1994). Finally, a partnership reaches the highest form of inter-organizational interdependence, *collaboration*, when partners create formal written agreements and policies, believe their counterparts possess strengths they do not have, commit new resources and funds for projects, establish long-term projects, and share equal responsibility and authority for projects (Intriligator, 1992; Lugg, 1994; Swan & Morgan, 1993). In a truly collaborative relationship, there tends to be a blending of the lines of authority and responsibility among the partners than in the previous two stages.

At this point in the evolution of the USLC partnership, it appears we are operating at the cooperative stage with not a great deal of interdependence occurring. For instance, besides using SAISD facilities for the classes, no other resources have been allocated to the project from the university or the district. In addition, each organization used an independent process for reviewing applications. The district recruited and screened candidates who were then subjected to the university's review process. We have yet to create a coordinating body blending UTSA and SAISD personnel to oversee the project (Whitaker & Barnett, 1999). Hord (1985) cautions, however, that not all partnerships need to reach higher levels of interdependence associated with coordination and collaboration, "[d]ifferent situations require different approaches and all parties need to clearly specify their expectations of what is to be accomplished through the [partnership], whether it be collaborative or cooperative" (p. 3).

Types of partnerships. Finally, typologies of partnerships have been established to determine their level of complexity. One example focuses on various types of involvement, structure, and impact that are desired or are currently occurring in the partnership (Center for Human Resources, 1992). Within each of these three areas, different types of partnerships emerge, ranging from relatively simple to quite complex. Another conceptualization of partnership typology has been conceptualized by Barnett and his colleagues (1999). Based on the premise that more sophisticated partnerships reflect greater interdependence, they suggest various models of partnerships, which progress from simple to complex organizational arrangements.

- Independent agency model: No partnership is formed since the existing organization is capable of performing the task.
- Vendor model: An external consultant or group is hired to perform a specific task the hiring organization cannot perform.
- Collaborative model: Based on the agreements between the organizations, a partnership is formed to accomplish mutually beneficial goals.
- Symbiotic partnership model: More ambitious goals are established and the operations of the organizations blend together.
- Spin-off model: A new organization or agency is created separate from the original partner organizations.

Because of its infancy, the USLC partnership has not advanced much beyond the vendor model. To date, only university faculty have delivered the program. While SAISD personnel were

involved in the initial design of the program, their participation has been in the background. Based on the early positive reports from students and the ongoing discussions with the superintendent, we may be poised to move into the collaborative model.

Future Implications

Although the USLC is a new venture, there are clear implications for how our department may choose to work with SAISD and other school districts when forming partnerships. Some of the early lessons we are learning that should continue to shape the USLC include:

- Involving upper-level leaders from the university and SAISD
- Obtaining students' perceptions of what they are experiencing in the program to ensure we are on the right track and to determine areas of development
- Using teams of faculty to design and deliver the program
- Maintaining lines of communication between the ELPS department and SAISD program coordinators

The foregoing assessment of the structures and practices driving the program also where the USLC needs to grow and develop. As noted, our two organizations seem to be operating independently and may benefit by moving toward a more collaborative model of interaction, resulting in greater school-university interdependence. In particular, we are considering the following issues in moving to a deeper level of collaboration with SAISD: (1) revising the admissions process, (2) obtaining financial resources for students, (3) involving SAISD personnel in program delivery, and (4) establishing a formal coordinating body to oversee the partnership.

Admissions. In the future, further integration between SAISD and UTSA for program entry should be considered, resulting in a collaborative selection process. Unlike the current two-stage process, UTSA's regular admissions process is based on a "wait and see" perspective with little to no recruiting and holding students to different requirements than the district (e.g., a 3.0 grade point average in their last 60 hours of undergraduate degree). One option is to combine the selection criteria across the two organizations and have one application submitted to the district and university. This will require the faculty to work with university officials to adjust some of the regulatory policies driving the graduate application process (Barnett et al., 1999).

Financial resources for students. Literature indicates partnerships flourish when there is a financial commitment from the contributing organizations (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Goodlad, 1991; Walsh, 2000). This support can be "in-kind" contributions, such as donating funds for instructional facilities and materials, special events or celebrations, and written communications. Another important contribution, however, is offsetting some of the expenses typically born by students. Some districts have tuition reimbursement policies, allocating funds to students after they have finished individual classes or the entire degree program. In other instances, funds may be obtained prior to the beginning of a program that can be distributed to students each semester to help offset tuition expenses. Because the USLC is a fast-track program, the expenses for students mount more quickly than when their enrollment is spread out over a longer period of time. Therefore, we are very encouraged to learn the SAISD leadership is attempting to provide financial assistance for students. In addition, our faculty, in collaboration with the district, can approach external funding agencies for grants (Whitaker & Barnett, 1999).

Program delivery. Part of the stated rationale for SAISD to create the USLC was to blend theory and practice and involve district teachers and administrators, including the superintendent, in delivering the program. There is tremendous talent and expertise within the SAISD system that we would like to tap. There has not been a conscious attempt to exclude district practitioners from

becoming involved; however, our department is responsible for scheduling and staffing these courses and has not established a formal mechanism for determining practitioners from the district who might be able and willing to contribute. One way to create a more coordinated approach to program delivery is to increase our communication across the district through the formation of a governing body, a topic we now briefly discuss.

Governance and formal agreements. Many partnerships establish a governing body of representatives from the representative organizations to oversee the coordination and communication of the collaborative (Epanchin & Colucci, 2002; Essex, 2001; Greene & Tichener, 1999; Grobe, 1990; Harper & Sadler, 2002; Maxson & Swartz, 2001; Walsh, 2000). Not only might this type of formal body make important decisions about recruitment, selection, and program delivery, they also can ensure the progress of the partnership is communicated throughout their organizations (Whitaker & Barnett, 1999). We have established a good working relationship with some of the important decision makers in SAISD and students are responding quite positively. Given these circumstances, we now may be in a better position to create such a governing council or steering committee to oversee the USLC.

We are very encouraged by our analysis of the early stages of the USLC. Although not all of the ingredients for a successful partnership are in place, the ELPS department and UTSA has begun to establish credibility with district leaders and cohort members. Undoubtedly, the investment of the leaders from SAISD (superintendent, assistant superintendents, director of special programs) and UTSA (dean of education, ELPS department chair) in conceptualizing and designing the program were critical in getting this new venture off the ground. Furthermore, the previous professional relationship and trust between the two top-level leaders of each organization and a member of our ELPS faculty were essential to beginning the USLC. Without their commitment to collaborate, this partnership may never have been conceived. Now that we are gaining experience with the first cohort, we are in a better position to consider the next steps in establishing a more solid collaborative partnership with SAISD. As this experiment proceeds, the ELPS department faculty anticipate that other partnerships will be formed, resulting in alterations of the on-campus master's degree and principal certification program.

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