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COMMENTARY

A Culture of Continuous Improvement for Improved Educational Leadership Development and Training

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In our chapter, "Planning, Changing, and Leading a Community of Professional Practice: Lessons Learned from an Innovative Urban School Leaders Preparation Program in Southern California", we examine the ongoing planning and changing of the Urban School Leaders (USL) program at California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH). Supported by a five-year federal grant from the US Department of Education, the innovative Urban School Leaders program is the result of a partnership with four local districts within Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and California State University Dominguez Hills. The program is intended to prepare, place, and retain leaders for high-needs schools and provide staff development to these leaders with the ultimate outcome resulting in student achievement gains.

We have found that keeping up with the needs of our students, and with the rapidly-changing expectations and demands placed on school sites, have given us an opportunity to reflect on our leadership development and preparation program. The USL program is an evolving quest to change, improve, and adjust while still maintaining rigor within the curriculum. As a collective endeavor of theoretical and clinical expertise, we continue to revisit and dialogue about course content and delivery in relation to standards, research/evidence-based practices, relevant field experiences, and expectations of school leaders. Building and maintaining partnerships with school districts, and implementing programmatic change that reflect leadership and student demands requires extensive time and effort, as well as flexibility and creativity to assure meaningful dialogue among all stakeholders in order to better serve our students needs in the LAUSD region. The making of an effective educational leader is an ongoing learning process and often stimulated through active-learning experiences in schools and guided reflections about these experiences. In turn, the leadership and learning continuously improves the community of professional practice. If we are to be "the change that we seek" and survive in the current plethora of reforms, then it is incumbent upon us to monitor, recognize, embrace, and address program challenges and conflicts and respond accordingly. Keeping with the spirit of staying proactive in connecting the worlds of research and practice will essentially determine the future direction of the USL program. It is our belief that educational leaders will continue to serve a critical role in molding the future of generations of children to come.

The success of the USL program has positive policy implications for the state of California and beyond. A new order of development for leaders is being created as the partnerships between districts and universities continue to grow and evolve. Universities will emerge as on-going places of development, communities and laboratories of practice, integrated hubs and networks for emerging practice and research. The lines of development will change as a result of this new order partnership.

Universities and districts are encouraged to partner on customized plans (e.g., individual pre-service profile) for credentials and on-going professional development. Urban communities will be transformed through the new model. Formerly unstable communities will become stable as a pipeline of teachers to leaders emerges as a result of this model. Research will emerge as an everyday common practice as the models of continuous improvement are fully implemented.

The full study is in Antonia Issa Lahera and Anthony H. Normore (2012), Chapter 3: Planning, Changing, and Leading a Community of Professional Practice: Lessons Learned from an Innovative Urban School Leaders Preparation Program in Southern California, in Karen Sanzo, Steve Myran, Anthony H. Normore (ed.) Successful School Leadership Preparation and Development (Advances in Educational Administration, Volume 17), Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.49-72.

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