

PART OF SYMPOSIUM

**American Culture: Latino Realities**

**Encarnacion Garza and Betty Merchant  
University of Texas San Antonio**

**CCEAM Conference  
Cyprus**

**October 2006**

Contact Information:

Encarnacion Garza:  
Department of Educational Leadership  
And Policy Studies  
College of Education and Human Development  
University of Texas San Antonio  
6900 North Loop 1604 West  
San Antonio, TX 78249-0654  
Phone: 210-458-5421  
Fax: 210-458-5848  
[Encarnacion.Garzat@utsa.edu](mailto:Encarnacion.Garzat@utsa.edu)

Betty Merchant  
Dean  
College of Education  
and Human Development  
  
Phone: 210-458-4370  
Fax: 210-458-4487  
[Betty.Merchant@utsa.edu](mailto:Betty.Merchant@utsa.edu)

## **American Administrator Preparation Programs**

### **Historical Perspective**

From its inception, the position of school administrator was designed to attract individuals who were willing to comply with a view of schooling that validated, rather than challenged, existing norms (Blount, 1998; Callahan, 1962; Nasaw, 1979; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Administrators were appointed as stewards of the communities in which they worked, charged with embodying and reinforcing the values of the power elites who hired them. Superintendents were expected to be responsive to the demands of school trustees, to carry out their requests and to insure that teachers complied with their wishes (Cuban, 1988). As instructional leaders, principals were expected to supervise instruction, manage the curriculum, and assist teachers; as appointees of the school board, they were charged with executing the preferences of school trustees without controversy or dissent (Cuban, 1988).

The creation of formal, university-based administrator preparation programs at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reflected Frederick Taylor's principles of scientific management as well as the increasing influence of the industrial-corporate sector with its emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness. With the rapid growth of cities in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, both the principalship and superintendency became increasingly important mechanisms for imposing order on a large and diverse student population (Nasaw, 1979; Pierce, 1935). The emphasis on principles of scientific management and the emulation of corporate values permeated the small circle of university professors who, through their role in the professional preparation of school administrators, exerted a powerful influence

on the thinking of principals and superintendents in key positions across the country. In an effort to improve the administration of schools, reformers in the Progressive Era were determined to separate the management of schools from the influence of politics, and by the third quarter of the twentieth century, schools were bureaucracies characterized by principals and superintendents as professional managers at the building and district levels and teachers as members of professional unions (Guthrie, 1990).

With a globalized economy by the end of the twentieth century, Americans, fearful of losing their competitive edge, demanded that schools be held more accountable for improving the learning of all students, regardless of ascribed characteristics.

Interest in understanding the nature of school leadership and the preparation of educational administrators has produced a substantial body of literature, descriptive (e.g. Beck & Murphy, 1993, Bolman & Deal, 2002; Daresh, 1997; Hart, 1993; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Murphy, 2002); prescriptive (e.g. National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1994; Wilmore, 2002); and reform-oriented (e.g. Barth, 2001; Blasé & Anderson, 1995; Capper, 1993; Crow, Matthews, & McCleary, 1996; Duke, 1992; Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Jacobson, 1996; Lomotey, 1989; Murphy & Seashore, 1999). Within the past 15 years, numerous groups, including the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, the National Commission for the Principalship, and the Danforth Foundation have advocated for reforms in educational administration preparation programs (Duke, 1992). The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) have also been active participants in the effort to improve the preparation of principals (Daresh, 1997).

Additionally, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) have each played a key role in defining standards for the principalship and superintendency that acknowledge the importance of creating equitable educational environments in which all children can experience success. UCEA, in particular, has supported several important publications on the status of educational administration and the preparation of principals and superintendents (Jackson, 2001; Jacobson, Emilhovich, Helfrich, Petrie & Stevenson, 1998; Murphy, 1993; Wendel, 1992; 1991). Of the seven domains of knowledge in educational administration identified by UCEA, Domain I, identified as social and cultural influences on schooling focuses on preparing administrators to more effectively respond to the needs of diverse student populations (for a critique of Domain I see Lomotey, 1995 and Merchant, 1995).

Because of their historic focus on management, departments of educational administration have not typically been associated with social justice issues, and consequently, most of the research in this area has originated outside of the field of educational administration. This is reflected in the ways in which colleges and schools of education tend to departmentalize their graduate degree programs, locating the professional preparation of school administrators in one department and educational policy studies, history and sociology in one or several other departments (All Star Directories, 2003). When policy studies is incorporated into educational administration departments, social justice advocates and critics of the status quo (e.g., critical race theorists) tend to be identified with other departments, such as cultural studies or

educational foundations. Such divisions may be perpetuated by faculty members who seldom, if ever, interact across these boundaries. In these environments, professors of educational administration may be stereotyped by their colleagues in other departments as stewards of the status quo, focused on preparing school administrators for conventional roles rather than equipping them to think reflectively, critically and creatively about school reform from the perspectives of equity and fairness

In recent years, however, there has been a growing interest in incorporating a strong social justice component into the formal preparation of principals and superintendents at the university level. This is evidenced in the writings of increasing numbers of educational administration scholars (Beck, 1994; Capper, 1993; Donmoyer, Imber & Scheurich, 1995; Gonzalez, Huerta-Macias & Tinajero, 1998; Johnson & Shoho, 2002; Lomotey, 1995; 1989; Lugg, 2002; Marshall & McCarthy, 2002; Marshall & Scribner, 1991; Merchant, 1999a; 1999b; Merchant & Shoho, 2002; Reyes & Scribner, 1995; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999; Rorrer, 2002; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

The past twenty years have witnessed a shift in the hiring and outreach practices of colleges and universities, increasing the number of females and scholars of color who are faculty members (Antonio, 2002; Hargens & Long, 2002; *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2001-2002; Lindholm, Astin, Sax & Kron, 2002; Pounder, 1990; Trower, 2002; Turner, 2000). Many of these new faculty members bring with them a rich set of experiences with diverse populations across a variety of local, state, national, and international contexts. Part of the legacy of these new scholars is their deep commitment to applying the principles of equity and social justice to educational reform, so that public

schools can become places in which all children are provided with the opportunities and resources to succeed academically and socially.

## **Latino Realities**

### ***Current conditions of Latino education***

The educational statistics for Latino students reveal disproportionate academic underachievement in comparison with their Anglo counterparts (Cummins, 1989, 1997; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). The literature has focused consistently on the alleged deficiencies of the Latino child, thus fostering attitudes of racial prejudice among educators. Consequently, educators have assumed that the failure of Mexican American students can be naturally attributed to their racial or cultural inferiority, their language, low SES, parents' low education, and their perceived lack of interest in education (Carter & Segura, 1979). Such research has typically defined the students, their families, and their neighborhoods as "culturally deprived" or "disadvantaged." As a result of these deficit-oriented definitions the public school system has continued to design programs to remediate or compensate for these students' "deficiencies." The administrators running these programs, using a therapeutic discourse, commonly view the children as *pobrecitos* (poor little children) who need to be saved (Garza, Reyes and Trueba, 2002).

The state of Texas reflects one of the highest percentage of Latinos in the United States. Five years ago, the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) conducted a 16 year comprehensive longitudinal statewide study in an effort to more critically review the drop out data (Cárdenas, Robledo, & Supik, 2001). The Texas study spanned a 16-year period, 1986–2001 and the data indicate that during this time, the attrition rates for Latino students increased from 45% to 52%.

A wide array of data (National Education Assessment of Educational Progress, 1999; Texas Education Association [TEA], 2001) indicates that the gap between the school success of Latino and Anglo children continues to be an area of concern. For example, 1994 the passing rate for Latino students in Texas was 41% on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) for all tests taken. Six years later (2000) their passing rate increased to 72%. In contrast, the passing rate for White students in 1994 was 69% and 89% in 2000. In 2003, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exam replaced the TAAS. As predicted, based on the changes made in the test, the passing rates for all students dropped with this new exam. The latest data (TEA, 2005) indicate that the gap between Latino and White students has widened again. The passing rate for Latino students on all tests taken was 53% compared to 77% for Anglo students. Although the gap between the Latino and White students had narrowed from 28 to 17 points from 1994 and 2000, by 2005, the gap had increased to 24 points (TEA, 2005).

### ***Students and Educators: Divergent Demographics***

While the students in U.S. schools are increasingly poor and of color, the majority of their teachers are White, monolingual, middle-class women (Zeichner, 1993). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1996), the number of students majoring in education in that year was 493,606. Of these, 86.5% (426,748) were White, 6.8% (33,436) were African American, and 2.7% (13,533) were Latino. These figures clearly illustrate that a growing percentage of predominantly White student teachers are being prepared to educate a population of public school students who are growing increasingly different from them, racially, ethnically, linguistically, and economically.

That is, whereas approximately 88% of the teaching force in the United States is White, the non-White student population will soon be over 50%.

In Texas, according to the Academic Excellence Indication System (AEIS), the student demographics are consistent with the national trends. Latino students represent 45% of the K-12 public school student population, followed by 38% White and 14% African American. Similar to the national trend, teacher demographics do not reflect those of their students, Seventy percent of the teachers in Texas K-12 public schools are White while only 20% are Latino and 9% are African American (TEA, 2005).

Since the pool of principal candidates comes from the teacher ranks, it is not surprising that the demographic patterns are similar for school principals in Texas. As of 2002, 72% of the principals were White, 18% were Latino, 10% were African American, 0.5% were Native American, and 0.3% were Asian American (TEA, 2002).

These divergent demographics will not be shifting drastically any time soon. In fact, the data show that the Latino student population is growing at a faster pace than expected. In Texas, the Latino population, in general, now represents over 50% of the population; it is the majority (U. S. Census Bureau, 2005).

The increasingly diverse student population in today's public schools, particularly the significant and growing numbers of Latinos in Texas and elsewhere, requires that we take a critical look at the university-level programs that prepare educational administrators to work with these students.

One of the most striking aspects of these programs is the low numbers of Latino professors in departments of educational administration at the university level. In order to understand this phenomenon, it is useful to examine the numbers of Latinos in the

pipeline to the professoriate, The most recent data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2006), indicate that of the total number of doctoral degrees in education (7,088) conferred by degree-granting institutions in academic year 2003-2004, 67 percent (4,747) of the degree recipients were White, whereas 4 percent (307) were Latino. These figures were similar to the 2002-2003 academic year: of the 6,835 doctoral degrees in education that were awarded in that year, 70 percent (4,783) were awarded to White students and 5 percent (336) were awarded to Latino students. While the data on master's degrees were incomplete for the 2003-2004 academic year, the data for 2002-2003 reflect a similar pattern to that of the doctoral degree. That is, although the total number of master's degrees in education is not available for 2002-2003, the number of White students who received this degree in that year was 116,305, in comparison to only 8,802 Latinos.

A second aspect of most university-based programs in educational administration is the lack of books and journal articles in course syllabi that focus on effective educational leadership with diverse populations of students, particularly English language learners. What does exist is written largely by researchers who are members of the groups about which they write (e.g. racial, ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic) or by White scholars whose work focus on issues of social justice and equity.

The research of these individuals provides considerable insight into the characteristics of schools that effectively serve diverse learners. For the purposes of this paper, we focus our attention on the literature that is relevant to improving the academic and social success of Latino students.

## Effective Schools for Latino Students

A review of the research indicates that there are many schools that are effectively serving Latino students. Some of this literature is framed by models of successful practices in the corporate world, such as the recent study by the Center for the Future of Arizona and the Morrison Institute for Public Study at Arizona State University (Waits, Campbell, Gau, Jacobs, Rex, & Hess, 2006), that draws on the business leadership practices articulated in Jim Collins' *Good to Great: Why some companies make the leap and others don't* (1999). This study examined 12 elementary and middle schools that served a high percentage of Latino students in Arizona that "beat the odds." The data indicate that six factors were crucial to the success of these schools: 1) Clear Bottom Line (teachers and administrators held themselves accountable for the achievement and success of every student and no child was allowed to stay behind), 2) Ongoing Assessment (principals and teachers monitored student performance data on a daily, weekly and monthly basis to identify gaps in learning to make adjustments in programs and teaching as needed) 3) A Strong and Steady Principal (the principals maintained a focus on student success and did whatever it took to get things done, while being firm but flexible in their leadership style), 4) Collaborative Solutions (teachers and staff created effective work teams, focused their efforts on school goals and assumed responsibility for improvement), 5) Stick With the Program (teachers selected a proven program and made a long-term commitment to it, making modifications along the way when necessary to improve student performance), and 6) Built to Suit (the emphasis was on surpassing the district's minimal expectations and focusing on individual performance that would

lead to a customized educational program to ensure academic success for each student).

These six factors are essentially common sense practices that are likely to work with most, if not all, students. While these practices are not culturally specific, the Latino students in these schools did well because their principals and teachers refused to let them fail. The schools were efficient and successful; the students performed well on state and national assessments.

While some of the research on successful schools is based on leadership models from the corporate world, our understanding of such schools has been greatly enhanced by educational researchers whose work is informed, in part, by their previous experiences as principals and superintendents. In one such study, Maria Luisa Gonzalez (2002) takes a different approach to exploring the factors that contribute to the school success of Latino children by examining the role of the principal. In so doing, she provides “sketches” of three successful principals of schools in which the majority of the students were Latinos of Mexican descent. The principals in her study focused on changing the pervasive deficit thinking attitudes that created and perpetuated incompatibilities between the school and the lived experiences of the students (Cárdenas & Cárdenas, 1977). These principals were culturally competent educators who valued the students’ cultural and linguistic differences and whom other educators in the community credited for the success of their schools. The findings of the study revealed that the three principals shared several common characteristics/traits:

- Knowledgeable about and committed to instruction and learning.
- Willing to be a trailblazer, i.e. to forge a new path
- Enhanced their knowledge of curriculum through studying research findings and communicating them to the staff
- Viewed the education of Latinos as an integral part of the school’s program

- Evidenced a strong commitment to bilingual and multicultural education
- Were masters of instruction and had ample experience in bilingual and ESL education
- Actively sought external funding through grants
- Spent long hours on the job
- Engaged in ongoing staff development for themselves and their staff
- Supported the effective use of technology
- Were creative and resourceful with the school budget to provide necessary resources

It was evident that the principals' everyday practice was driven by their philosophy of social justice. They honored and dignified the lifestyles, language, and culture of their students, viewed their differences as assets and held high expectations for themselves, the students and teachers. The principals sought the support of the parents, conducted frequent home visits, and were successful in creating an inviting atmosphere that made the parents feel comfortable and valued. The principals practiced a collaborative model of leadership and the teachers felt empowered as participants in the decision making process. According to Gonzalez, "the principal was the major player in this outcome....the main ingredient in their [the Latino students'] school success is the culturally competent principal" (Gonzalez, 2002, p. 26).

A third approach to understanding the factors that contribute to the school success of Latino children involves the study of a number of purposively sampled, high-performing Latino schools by a team of university educators. An example of this is the research that was conducted in the mid 1990s by a team from the University of Texas at Austin led by Pedro Reyes, Jay D. Scribner and Alicia Paredes Scribner. Eight schools in the Rio Grande Valley on the Texas-Mexico border were selected using purposive sampling: 3 elementary, 3 middle school, and 2 high schools. All of these schools were serving Latino students effectively and were outperforming most schools on state

assessment standards. At the time of the study over 95% of the students enrolled in these schools were Latino and over 80% were economically disadvantaged. Based on their findings, the researchers conclude “that there are no excuses for anything other than high-impact schools and high-performing Hispanic students (Reyes, et al., 1999, p. 208).”

The researchers found that all of the participating schools had established learning communities that were committed to creating a shared vision and a successful learning environment for all children. The researchers identified four dimensions of these learning communities as follows: collaborative governance and leadership (learning communities that were strongly collaborative and supported by central administration and the school board), community and family involvement (schools were seen as centers for learning for and by all members of the community and teachers developed meaningful relationships with parents in culturally appropriate and effective ways), culturally responsive pedagogy (teachers were engaged in culturally relevant teaching which acknowledged the lived experiences and knowledge that the children brought from home), and advocacy-oriented assessment (teachers used a variety of assessment data to facilitate the learning of individual students and they believed that their students were able to achieve more critical knowledge because of their unique cultural backgrounds and their bilingualism).

While this study does not specifically address the role of the principal in developing high-performing schools for Latino students the impact of principals’ leadership is evident in the findings, as is true of the research conducted by Watts, Campbell, Gau, Jacobs, Rex & Hess that was described earlier. In contrast, Gonzalez’s study specifically identifies the role of the principal as a critical factor in creating schools that successfully educate Latino students. The majority of today’s school principals,

however, lack specific knowledge and understanding of the educational needs of Latino students. The literature about effective schools has shown that principals play a major role in the academic success or failure of students. Given the critical role of the principal, it is crucial that school leaders be prepared to meet the needs of Latino students (Gonzalez, Huerta-Macias, & Tinajero, 2002).

### **The Urban School Leaders Collaborative An Alternative Model of School Leadership**

In this section, we describe a leadership preparation program that we consider to be an alternative model for preparing school leaders to serve Latino students effectively. It is a different model of preparation in several distinct ways. First, this preparation program is driven by a philosophy of social justice advocacy. The focus of preparation is initially on attitudes and mindsets, and then on skills. Second, this is a truly collaborative partnership; both entities (school district and university) are actively involved in the selection, planning, teaching and evaluation processes. Third, this is a closed cohort model, only for employees of the partnering school district, and leadership; preparation is customized to meet the needs of the children of this school district. Fourth, professors have moved into the field; all classes are held in campuses throughout the school district. And fifth, support continues even after the students graduate and assume leadership positions.

For the purpose of critical discussion, we posit several “tough” question to ourselves. These questions are intended to instigate critical thought about social justice issues in the academy. First, what is our responsibility to our students who are charged with educating everyone’s children (Delpit, 1995) and educating them well? Second, how responsive have we been in addressing the needs of our students who must lead schools

whose student demographics have changed dramatically, becoming increasingly diverse culturally, racially, and linguistically while the demographics of the teacher corps have stayed consistently White and middle class? (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). Third, are we meeting the needs of our students? Fourth, are we teaching them what they need to know and be able to do to successfully lead diverse schools, or do we continue to teach the strategies, methods, and theories that were appropriate and effective in schools ten or even twenty years ago, but which have not proved successful today? And lastly, do we even know first hand the challenges our students are facing and what it will take for them to successfully lead the complex schools of today? These questions imply that we must involve ourselves closely in the real work of schools, side by side with our students. Reading about and discussing school reform research is simply and obviously not enough to prepare aspiring school leaders to improve schools with increasingly diverse student populations. Thus, it is imperative for academics to join their students in the field and become actively engaged in the school improvement process.

The change in student demographics is an extremely important variable that must be taken into consideration by academics as they develop administrator preparation programs. We cannot continue to prepare aspiring school principals in a generic manner; their preparation must be customized to meet the needs of their respective student populations. It has been documented that school leaders have the greatest difficulty developing High-Achievement schools in communities where the majority of the students are of color and from low-income families (Reyes, et al., 1999). If we do not change the way we have traditionally prepared school leaders, this problem will likely continue given the fact that the Latino population continues to grow at a phenomenal rate.

According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2002), the Latino population has grown 13 times faster than the white population increasing to 33 million nationally.

The data from various studies help to validate the criticism that today's schools have failed to develop a critical, pedagogical educational environment that is effective for and relevant to the needs of children of color. Schools have miserably failed children of color (Freire, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). In response, some scholars (Delpit, 1995; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999) have recently raised the issue that the problem lies mainly with the educational system rather than the families, neighborhoods, or students. Those making this latter argument have suggested that public school educators typically operate from a deficit thinking perspective in regards to children of color.

The purpose of this section is to describe a "different" model of leadership preparation that was designed and customized to prepare school leaders to practice in schools where the majority of the students are predominantly Latino. It is a preparation program that is designed to advance interactive collaboration between students, professors and school district administrators. As researchers, we have been involved since the planning and inception of the program. For the purposes of this paper, we rely on the experiences of the members of the first and second cohorts to describe the collaboration between The University of Texas in San Antonio (UTSA) and the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD). This partnership, the Urban School Leaders Collaborative (USLC), was designed to facilitate and enhance the opportunities for practitioners and scholars to work collaboratively in a meaningful and effective manner in the preparation of aspiring school leaders.

## **A Chronological Report**

### **Cohort I**

#### ***Preparation Begins***

Undoubtedly, the investment of the leaders from SAISD (Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, Director of Special Programs) and UTSA (Dean of Education, Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies) in conceptualizing and designing the program were critical in getting this new venture off the ground. Furthermore, the long-time personal and professional relationship between the Dean and the Superintendent and the trust that evolved between them and the Department Chair were essential to the creation of the USLC. Without their commitment to collaborate, this partnership may never have been conceived.

#### ***Spring 2003***

Although the planning began in 2002, it wasn't until spring 2003 that the first 14 students began their program (8 Latino, 3 African American, and 3 White; 12 females and 2 males). They enrolled in two courses that were taught together by Blandina Cardenas (Dean) and I (Betty, Department Chair). From the beginning, it was obvious that developing trust was a major focus to the success of the SAISD Cohort. Students strongly agree that Drs. Cardenas and I facilitated one of the most powerful activities that compelled them to look deeply into their souls. Each member of the group was asked to bring an artifact to share that would describe him/her. Written student reflections validated the impact of this activity.

This assignment was the stepping off point for most cohort members. In the formative stages of an organization or group, it is important for members to examine their strengths and weaknesses... it was important for the professors to

model a trust-building exercise in the formative stage of our cohort. The trust and climate that permeated after that exercise had a positive effect on our commitment, our personal motivation, and most definitely our confidence. The exercise sparked conversation, inquiry, and with time, meaningful relationships. (Pesina, Reed, Schulte, Whited, & Woodberry, 2004)

As each of us had our turn, revealing the inner layers of our life thus far, the ground was soft for trust to form within the group. 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” (Galinzoga, Morado, & Vargas, 2004).

I (Betty) recognized that this activity was obviously an epiphany not only for the students, but also for Dr. Cardenas and I:

Yes, I actually think the first “a-ha” moment, at least for me, was the artifact exercise. And I know that many of the people in the cohort had done this before, but the collective artifact exercise was extremely powerful. And I think what everyone got out of that, including Dean Cardenas and myself, was the fact that everyone of the people in the cohort embodied the passion for social justice. In telling the stories of who they were in this artifact exercise that was to symbolize who each of the individuals felt they had become. In talking about the one object that they brought in, they talked inevitably about social justice and their passion for fairness and equity.

### ***Summer 2003***

Drs. Cardenas and I had set the stage and expectations for the rest of the faculty and the students. As scheduled in their program of study, the cohort enrolled in two classes during the summer. I (Encarnacion Garza) was assigned to teach one of those courses. The class met for three hours, Monday through Thursday, for four intensive weeks. Although the title of the course was Supervision & Evaluation, it was a carefully designed exercise intended to elicit deep reflection and personal growth:

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. (Lynn)

The emphasis on reflection was intentional and systematically facilitated by the instructor. Time for reflection in each class meeting was carefully protected at the beginning and end of all classes even if it meant cutting out other learning activities.

We really got passionate about who we were and tried really to get into that during one of our summer courses with Dr. Garza. It was during that time that I really had an epiphany or a real change in myself. We would have really deep discussions about different social justice issues and it was very exhausting to me. (Stefanie)

Without this supportive, reflective environment and the interactive nature of the courses, the many aspects of social justice, social injustice and social conflict would not have been examined in their depth and breadth in such a meaningful, personal way (Kuyoth, Olvera-Cruz, & Rose, 2004).

The cohort came to a point of transformation and growth through reflection, bonding and trust. Reflection was the avenue we used in order for us to strengthen our core beliefs about social justice and validate each member's unique contributions. In bonding with each other, we learned to expand the four walls in which we work. Each of us benefiting from the roles and experiences that each of us brought to the forefront. None of this could occur without trust; because of this we were able to be honest and open to hearing and sharing differing points of view. One member of the cohort saw the group transform in an empowered circle of energy. Individuals whose voices were barely heard last semester [became] louder. (Galinzoga, et al., 2004)

In addition to reflection, three of the assignments for this class also required students to look deeply inside themselves. First, they were asked to develop a set of core beliefs about children. They had been able to articulate their values and beliefs verbally, but none of them had ever put these in writing.

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

As educational leaders we knew our vision and goals and yet could not pinpoint the experiences that had lead each of us to these non-negotiable beliefs about

education and our role as leaders. Through deep, meaningful discussions we were able to dig, find and reflect on those “educational moments” that defined us as the educators we are. Reflection allowed us to turn inward and evaluate ourselves with questions like, “Who am I?” “What are my core beliefs?” and “What is the baggage that I bring to the table that effects my educational perspective?” (Galinzoga, et al., 2004)

Several of the students observed that this exercise was deceptively difficult. It made them feel more accountable to themselves because it served as a written contract. It was a document that bound them to their commitment to social justice. Second, using their core beliefs, they also wrote a philosophy statement. They were able to explain how they had developed some of their non-negotiables and how their lived experiences had influenced their philosophy. Third, they were asked to write their life story in the form of a self-presentation. As their professor, I (Encarnacion) shared and gave them copies of my set of core beliefs, philosophy statement and life story. My own self-disclosure was a form of modeling and it facilitated the building of a trusting relationship.

Reflection became a key component in the cohort experience in the summer of 2003 under Dr. Garza. Dr. Garza shared with us his core beliefs and educational platform as well as his educational experiences and how it developed him as a leader. Dr. Garza modeled for the cohort the components he expected from us. His sharing as a facilitator helped to guide the cohort in opening up and reflecting on his own core beliefs and educational platform. (Galinzoga, et al., 2004)

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### ***Fall 2003***

In the fall of 2003 Drs. Bruce Barnett and Alan Shoho were the next professors on the schedule for the cohort. They agreed to teach the Research and Pro-Seminar courses as a team. By this time, the students came to expect all professors to integrate reflection in all their courses. One of the major strengths of this department is the collegiality and

collaboration among faculty. We often discussed the progress of the cohort and identified the strengths and concerns. Drs. Barnett and Shoho knew that reflection had to be imbedded in their classes also. The professors continued to facilitate reflective practice. It was during this class that the students experienced another moment of revelation, a catharsis. This was evident when a student speaking on behalf of the group expressed the following:

We kind of came to the conclusion that we knew too much to go back. And that kind of stemmed from the fact that administrators go into the position idealistic and then all of a sudden something happens. We couldn't define it, but we understood that because there were fourteen of us and we are all working in the same district, there was no way that we could actually stray away from our vision or stray away from what's right for kids without somebody calling us on it later on down the line. During reflection and some of the topics that we covered, there was always an opportunity to share what it was we believed in, but there is just no way that we can stray from doing what's right. (Ruben)

Students' work was designed as action research and special attention was given to scholarly, yet practical, meaningful work in the field. Student reflections validated this practice.

Many of the course assignments were relevant to the cohort member's daily work. Some of the most influential assignments included: analyzing a district-wide school improvement effort, concentrate on matters where leadership decisions had significant impact, complete an action research literature review that was of relevance to their particular position, and to shadow their building principal as a way of collecting research to support the leadership domains. These were only a few of the exercises in which the cohort participated. All were relevant to their current work, and all served as learning experiences for future work. The cohort appreciated the efforts of the faculty to create relevant learning experiences as evidenced by these reflections. (Pesina, et al., 2004)

### ***Spring 2004***

By this time, it had been a year since the cohort had started the program. Their personal and professional growth was incredibly evident as demonstrated by their work

and participation. They had come a long way. During the fall, Betty and I met to discuss the possibility of combining the Principalship and the Internship courses. We agreed that Encarnacion would teach both courses. This was important because class assignments and readings were integrated with and relevant to the practical field experiences of the internship. The two classes merged into one seamless course. Class time for the principalship allowed for discussion of readings, presentations and reflection. Reflection focused primarily on the internship experiences in an effort to connect “theory” with practice:

The manner in which the course was conducted was very valuable. Reflection (once again) was incredibly powerful. We were asked to examine what was going on in the course, in our schools, in our internship and quite possibly in our lives and interrelate it to the content.” (Melissa)

“Dr. Garza models the fact that we must know ourselves before we can lead a group of students in a school. One of the major themes that Dr. Garza shares with us is social injustice [justice]. This can be an uncomfortable topic to discuss but Dr. Garza has a way of addressing it in a way that is thought provoking.” (Karen)

The internship was designed to help students understand the roles and responsibilities associated with the principalship. Students spent a minimum of 50 clock hours interacting with a principal/mentor throughout the semester. This interaction was a combination of shadowing/observation, interviewing/discussion, co-leading, assigned projects, and related activities. Student kept a Journal/Fieldnotes as a means of gathering and documenting data. Students prepared a final report using the Texas Test Framework for Principals as a framework for analyzing their data. Data were coded using the state Principal Competencies under each Domain and the Indicators under each Competency. The final report included the results (data analysis), a summary of the findings,

implications, and a conclusion. In addition, students were required to bring their mentor principals to one class meeting to participate in a panel discussion. Student feedback reflected their opinion about their experiences in the internship course.

As in the summer, the reflective part of the class was powerful. Dr. Garza also invited guest speakers to share their careers and real-life experiences. The best part of the internship was the Principal Panel. The members invited their principal [sponsor] to class. We shared the day-to-day life of a principal. (Karen)

If I had to name this course I would call it “Principal Confidence Course” because my confidence soared as a result of this course. (JC)

The greatest benefit I received from the course was in observing my principal and the reflecting on the observations. This past year I have gained new knowledge and information by putting myself in situations where I had little background. (Sandra)

The principal’s panel was so informative. It was great to see leaders that were passionate about their vision and again it mirrored what we were learning in the classroom, doing what is right for kids. The reflection in class of our internship experiences and various perspectives and opinions really helped me a lot. It was taking the experiences of all fourteen-cohort members and learning from them. (Adela)

The panel of principals was a very good learning experience for me. Never have I had the opportunity to listen to a group of experienced qualified people come together to share their experiences and give us advice. (Vivian)

### ***Summer 2004***

The summer of 2004 was a test of perseverance for the members of the cohort. They were determined to finish the program and to walk across the stage in December 2004. This required them to take three courses (9 credit hours) in the summer and six in the fall or vice-versa. They decided for the former, but they wanted to complete their courses by the end of July so that they could have some time off before they returned to

work. We knew that it would be very difficult for them to take three courses in four weeks. This required a non-traditional approach to scheduling. It was decided that they would take one course at a time in two-week intervals beginning in mid-May. After an intensive and grueling six weeks they were done with General Finance and Taxation, Administration and Function of Special Programs and Psychological Basis of Learning.

### ***Fall 2004***

The cohort was in the final semester of their program. Although they were enrolled in only two courses, the intensity had not diminished. Besides their coursework, they had to take and successfully negotiate the required comprehensive exam in order to graduate. In addition, they were preparing to take the state principal certification exam (TExES).

During this last semester, the cohort was enrolled in a special topics class as a culminating activity for their preparation. The main purpose of the course was to have the students reflect on their experiences of the two-year program. To capture and document their stories, the students produced a video documentary that was presented at the annual convention of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) in Kansas City, Missouri. In addition, they also presented four papers titled:

- *Understanding Alternative Viewpoints as a Means for Transformation*
- *Social Justice and the Cohort Experience*
- *Building Leader's Visions and Self-Efficacy*
- *Analysis of Relationships within a Cohort Model for Educational Leaders*

To produce the documentary, the students video taped many hours of interviews of each of their professors, the SAISD superintendent, other SAISD administrators, and other district administrators. Three main themes emerged from their analysis: relationships, transformation and social justice.

The professors closely observed how the students how this semester-long reflection exercise influenced them. The students learned a great deal more about each other, but mostly importantly, more about themselves. Asking and answering critical and thought provoking questions during these interviews resulted in considerable self-disclosure. This is the ultimate degree of reflection.

All Cohort I students completed their program in December 2004, all of them took the state principalship certification exam, all 14 passed. and all were in attendance at their graduation ceremony. Their appointments are diverse and at all three levels; three are high school assistant principals, three are middle school assistant principals, one is an elementary assistant principal and one is a district level special education coordinator. The other six cohort members have not yet decided to apply for administrative positions; two are curriculum coordinators and four are classroom teachers.

Some evidence suggests that cohort experiences extend beyond the graduate program by building professional networks and altering other workplace behaviors (Muth & Barnett, 2001). The university acknowledges that preparation does not end with formal coursework and recognizes the importance of support for students as they begin to assume leadership positions. Although Cohort I students have completed their preparation, their relationship with the university continues. With this in mind, the university has made special efforts to continue a close relationship with Cohort I students.

For example, they have been assigned as mentors to the new cohort students. They have attended class with their mentees and they have participated in several class activities. The Cohort I mentors have served as case studies for the new cohort and we continue to gather post program data on Cohort I.

## **Cohort II**

It was understood without hesitation that we would proceed to identify the next group of students for Cohort II that was to begin the program in the spring 2005. SAISD began to accept nominations early in the fall of 2004 and finalized their selection in October 2004. After the applications were screened, 22 candidates were invited to participate and they were invited to an orientation meeting with UTSA faculty. The program of study was explained and timelines for admission were discussed. The candidates knew that selection did not guarantee admission to the university and that it was their responsibility to submit the necessary documentation for admission. Only 16 of the 22 candidates decided to accept the invitation to the USLC.

One of the things we learned from our Cohort I experience was that it was important to develop a customized program of study to share with the new cohort from the very beginning. The programs of study listed the courses and the faculty course assignments sequentially, by semester.

### ***Spring 2005***

We were assigned to team teach the first two classes for Cohort II. It was immediately obvious that the new group was different from Cohort I in several ways. The most obvious difference was gender representation. In general, Cohort II was younger, and thus, less experienced. Cohort I students had more time in the SAISD system; 8 were

Campus Instructional Coordinators (CICs) and 4 were classroom teachers. In contrast, in Cohort II only 2 were CICs and 14 were classroom teachers. Eight of the cohort members were Latino, 3 were African-American, and three were White (8 females and 6 males).

We integrated our course syllabi and taught the classes as a team. By design, the cohort was not scheduled to take any other courses this semester. One of the main purposes for these combined courses was to introduce and socialize them into the program and our main goal for this semester was to begin to build cohesiveness within the group.

In most traditional preparation programs, once the students graduate, their relationship with the university is minimal at best. However, we believe that preparation does not end with formal coursework; it is important to continue to support students as they begin to assume leadership positions. Cohort I students expected our support beyond their completion of the program and we agreed that it was critical for their development. Our course syllabus was carefully crafted to include activities and projects that kept Cohort I students involved as mentors to the new cohort. This was mutually beneficial to both groups. We attempted to match mentors and mentees based on both similarities and differences. Even though all the students worked at SAISD, most did not know each other. The first activity was to arrange a formal meeting between mentors and mentees. The meeting was held during one of our initial class meetings at the home of one of the Cohort I students.

### ***Summer 2005***

Collaboration between UTSA and SAISD goes beyond program planning and student selection. In this collaborative, SAISD administrators are assigned to teach at least one course. We learned from Cohort I that this was important to begin to establish relationships and networks with central office administrators. The students took a curriculum course with Dr. Peggy Stark and Dr. Jody Westbrook-Youngblood, both central office administrators. Working collaboratively with the field encourages academics to leave the sanctuary of the university to work with practitioners in the naturalistic setting of the school campus. In leaving the comfort zone of the university, one of the easiest things to do is to move physically to the field. Most of the classes are held on school district campuses rather than in university classrooms. While this may seem insignificant, it is important to students. "I really enjoy the classes and especially that they are held on our turf- in the schools." (Stefanie)

The second course the students took during the summer was Contemporary Educational Philosophy with Michael Jennings. Cohort I took this course at the end of their program, but they wished they had taken it at the beginning. We took this as a recommendation and moved the course up to the beginning of the program for Cohort II.

### ***Fall 2005.***

Cohort II enrolled in three courses. Two of these courses were team taught by Alan Shoho and Bruce Barnett (Research Methods and Seminar in Applied Research/Evaluation). The other course was Legal Foundations in Education taught by David Thompson.

## *Spring 2006*

Cohort II is scheduled to complete their program of study in December 2006. However, this time, our completion rate will not be 100%. Four of the 16 students have dropped program, some by their choice, others as a result of our decision.

### **Conclusion**

We learned several lessons with our experiences with Cohort I. The most striking observation was the realization that we had plenty to learn about collaborative preparation programs. We learned that we did not know all the answers with Cohort I and we still do not know all the answers with Cohort II. Our experience with Cohort I was very positive and rewarding. As individuals, members of Cohort I pulled together to negotiate and navigate through the program. This was a highly successful group of students that depended upon each other for support. They established high standards and very high expectations for future cohorts.

These successful experiences with Cohort I led to our first mistake with Cohort II. It was difficult to avoid a comparison between the two groups. Fortunately, as we discussed the differences among ourselves, we realized that it was not fair to Cohort II. We have come to realize that we must consciously force ourselves to avoid this unproductive and unfair comparison. Every individual is different and every combination of individuals makes every group unique. Each cohort has its own strengths and areas of growth. We learned that it is our responsibility as professors to facilitate a process that builds meaningful relationships with our students and among themselves. We learned that group cohesiveness and strength is possible only when the cohort members feel respected as individuals. We learned that comparing Cohort II to Cohort I was not respectful to the

individual student or to the group and that we have a constant and ongoing challenge to mitigate and resolve this unintentional mistake.

We learned some logistical things as well. We learned that it was extremely important to develop a customized program of study for the SAISD cohort. The courses and requirements are the same but the sequence of courses was carefully designed. Also, expert and willing faculty were specifically assigned for the two-year program. Feedback from Cohort I was important and taken very seriously when planning and designing the program for Cohort II. We learned from the first cohort that certain courses were more useful at the beginning whereas others were more useful towards the end.

We have learned that it is never too early to get feedback from students about their progress and experience in the cohort. Students appreciate our feedback on their progress as well. This semester we have met with students individually to discuss their progress. This has been useful because students have been asked to assess themselves individually and as members of the cohort. Although this is done in an informal and non-threatening way, the information is useful because it will help us make changes to improve their experience in the program.

It also became obvious to us that, unless we formally include our former students in our teaching and preparation programs, they will not feel connected to the university beyond the completion of their programs. One student offered the following reflection:

Requiring us to meet and log our experiences was difficult, but necessary. If we weren't forced to do it, the likelihood of our getting together would be minimal. Every time we met, we knew we needed to do it again. Our conversations were layered with rich experiences, revealing attitudes, and knowing laughs. Hearing stories about the personality conflicts they experienced was reassuring. I think this was a key aspect of the success of this class, setting the course for building and maintaining strong and continuous professional working relationships and

personal confidantes. I intend to maintain our friendship for as long as possible and only hope that I in turn can provide to [mentor] something of value in return.

Finally, we have learned that gaining experience is important, but this experience can also get in the way. One year of experience with our partnership with SAISD helped us gain new knowledge about collaboration and program implementation. However, this experience also created some issues because our expectations for the members of the second cohort became barriers rather than tools to develop their unique skills.

It is evident that collaboration has been critically important for both institutions; both the school district and the university manifest a mutual commitment to the students and their success. This partnership approach has helped to facilitate and support students through the program. Students have expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to learn from each other and their professors. Equally important is the support and recognition from the school district. Student persistence and success is the product of the genuine collaboration of the partnership.

Although we are pleased with our analysis of the early stages of the USLC, there is much more work to be done. The principal ingredients of a successful partnership are in place to maintain credibility with district leaders and cohort members. Now that we are gaining experience with the second cohort, we are in a better position to consider the next steps in establishing a more solid partnership with SAISD. As this endeavor proceeds, the ELPS department faculty anticipates that other partnerships will be formed, and resulting modifications made in both the on-campus master's degree and principal certification programs (Barnett, Garza, Merchant & Shoho, 2003).

The knowledge gained from the cohort experience has not only contributed to the individual development of each aspiring school leader, but it has provided us with important insights into the value of reflective practice as a tool for training school leaders to recognize how their racial identity intersects with their position as leaders for social justice. As professors, it is our responsibility to set the stage for critical thought about social justice and to better prepare our graduates to be effective leaders of schools with diverse populations of students, particularly Latinos and English language learners who comprise the majority of students in the public schools in which we work

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