

Innovative Programs in the Charter College of Education

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Abstract

The article examines the innovative project proposals that have been funded by the first Charter College of Education in the nation. Innovative programs does help the College accomplish its mission in providing learner-centered environment and promoting collaboration.

Introduction

Charter schools are public, nonsectarian schools that operate under a written contract from a local school board or other organization (Nathan, 1997). The Charter College of Education (CCOE) at California State University, Los Angeles (CSLA) is the first School of Education in the United States to become an official charter school among higher education institutions (CCOE, 1995). K-12 charter public schools are given autonomy from regulations in exchange for accountability for results to the charter-granting state or local school districts that provide them with public funds for a specified time period (OERI, 1998). In the same way, the California State University System allowed the CCOE to be free from many system and University policies in order to fulfill its charter mission of becoming a more effective school of education (Hafner & Slovacek, 1998).

Charter schools are a way to make public schools more creative, flexible and responsive to the needs of students (Riley, 1996). Charter schools offer professional opportunities to teachers and autonomy of operation by professional educators under shared decision-making (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1994). Charter schools are given autonomy from mandates and regulations to employ appropriate strategies and exploit new ways of accomplishing desired results, including student achievement. The most common innovations found in charter schools are related to instructional strategies, site-based governance, and parental participation (Corwin & Flaherty, 1995). The best part about charter schools is that they encourage innovation (Andrews & Rothman, 2002; Soares et al., 2000). It is this very aspect of charter schools that this article is written about innovative ideas proposed by the faculty in the Charter College of Education.

As a way of accomplishing its mission, the CCOE has set aside an earmarked fund for the Innovative Initiative Awards Program each year since 1997-98. Each year, an ad-hoc committee of faculty and staff reviews the proposals and funds the promising projects and activities that represent innovation or improvement upon educational practices. The committee reviewed projects making contributions to the mission of the Charter College of Education, which includes focus on learner-centered outcomes and elements of collaboration, more favorably. Eleven proposals were funded in 1997-98, six in 1998-99, and eight in 1999-2000. The number of the proposals funded is determined by the level of funding requested from the proposed project members and the amount of the funds allocated for the Innovative Initiative Awards Program, which were augmented by the lottery funds.

The purpose of the chapter is to examine the innovative project proposals that have been funded by the CCOE to determine if they helped the CCOE accomplish its mission. This chapter first briefly describes the innovative initiatives funded by the CCOE during the past three years. Then the chapter examines these funded initiatives to determine how they address the CCOE's priorities (learner-centered and collaboration). The chapter concludes with the result of the

analysis, which would describe how the innovative programs have helped the CCOE move toward accomplishing its mission.

Descriptions of Innovative Initiatives

A total of 25 proposals have been funded by the CCOE during the past three years. Four projects have been funded for multiple years while the rest (13 projects) were funded for one-time only. The multi-year projects, however, had different focus from year to year to be qualified for the “innovative” aspect of the funding. In this section, the one-time funded proposals will be described first, followed by the multi-year funded project proposals.

One-Time Funded Proposals for 1997-98

1. Bridging University and School Practices through Collaboration

This project is proposed by twelve faculty of the Collaborative Teacher Preparation (CTP) cluster, representing all four divisions in the CCOE, and faculty from two other departments in the University to address the needs of a diverse, urban school population. Through the partnership with a local public school, the curriculum of the project integrates content and pedagogy from general education, special education, educational foundations, and the school-based related service disciplines of counseling, speech and language therapy, and adaptive physical education. This local school, designated as Professional Development School serves as a field-site for CSLA students, wherein they will experience a seamless, student-centered and family-centered approach to teaching. On the other hand, the CTP cluster faculty provides ongoing support to the PDS including establishing school-based family counseling services and engaging advanced specialization masters and doctoral students in professional growth activities at the PDS.

2. Collaboration in University Teaching

This project is proposed by five faculty from all four divisions and a technology staff in the CCOE to increase collaborative efforts around university teaching first within the COSE and expand the efforts to the University as well as other CSU campuses. A series of symposia on university teaching is organized for faculty to share their proven effective teaching strategies with others as well as to discuss about the issues related to university teaching. In addition, several groups of faculty teams, ranging from two to four members, are supported with coaching and resources to experiment collaborative teaching strategies in their classrooms, such as team teaching, interdisciplinary teaching, and collaborative teaching with K-12 public schools.

3. Computers in Urban Classrooms: Improvement of Televised Course

This project is proposed by six faculty from Divisions of EFIS and C&I to tailor a required course for the California Professional Teaching Credential to meet the diverse student population by designing specifically for television delivery, supported by multimedia presentations. EDIT 430, Computers in Urban Classrooms, is televised through Los Angeles Unified School District's TV station, KLCS UHF Channel 58, thus providing easier and more flexible access to students. The content of the television course includes lectures, demonstration and interviews with local school educators, and case studies, individual call-in Q&A via phone line, group call-in polling, hotline support.

4. Developing Transition Information Brochures

This project is proposed by nine faculty from the Transition cluster to develop transition information brochures for young adults with disabilities and their families who have limited English proficiency. The project proposes to translate the English-version information brochure, which was developed through the funding from the US Department of Education, into five different languages (Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese) about transition from

school to career. The ultimate goal of the project is to empower minority students with disabilities and their parents to take active roles in transition planning by providing information about their rights and available transition outcomes after leaving school. Brochures will be disseminated through mail to the local school districts and organizations and webpages to the national organizations and professionals.

5. Program Evaluation and Research Collaborative (PERC)

This project is proposed by sixteen faculty from all four divisions to enable the PERC to stabilize its foundation, develop operating procedures, and gain operating funds to be self-supporting. The PERC provides leadership in fulfilling the needs for evaluation and research support for and collaboration among faculty in the CCOE, the University, and the broader community of local, state and federal agencies.

6. Speakers' Series

This project is proposed by seven faculty from the divisions of EFIS, C&I, and SPED to provide monthly forum of Speakers' Series in Education. Noted faculty from other universities would be invited to share their research and teaching experiences with the students and faculty in the CCOE. This innovative project proposes to strengthen graduate education by filling the gaps in the intellectual climate in the areas where the CCOE lacks faculty expertise, such as critical theory, social interaction, language planning and policy, post-colonial studies, pragmatics, and innovative statistical and technological matters.

7. World Wide Web (WWW) Course

This project is proposed by two faculty from the EFIS Division to develop a WWW course for one of the foundation courses in their program, EDIT 430, Introduction to Computers and their Uses in Classrooms, a required course for teaching credential programs. The innovative idea of delivering instruction of EDIT 430 on the WWW has many more benefits than just improved instruction over traditional in-classroom instruction. Not only the Web-based course content has multimedia features including hyperlinks, graphics, and video clips, the course contains a "virtual learning community," created with various Web resources (emails, live chatrooms, bulletin boards, digitized video, etc.) in addition to journal articles and textbooks. The Web-based course offers much more flexibility in meeting the individual needs of students by providing options to the students to (a) selectively review the portions of the course that are relevant to them, (b) go through the course content at their own pace, and (c) take the course without physically getting to the campus. Also the Web-based course frees computer labs to be used for other courses in the CCOE. Eight to ten sections of EDIT 430 each quarter usually tie up 2-3 full computer labs every day of the week.

One-Time Funded Proposals for 1998-99

1. Integrating Graduate Student Experience, New Teacher Induction, and CCOE Faculty Expertise to Improve Literacy Instruction in California Public Schools

This project is proposed by the Literacy Cluster to improve the quality of reading and writing instruction in the elementary schools using a three-prong approach. The project is designed to provide on-site support for new teachers by developing a support provider network that includes graduates students in the Reading/Language Arts Specialist Program, Literacy Cluster faculty, and experienced teachers in the fields. A new teacher is matched with a graduate student who would assist the new teacher through observation, conference, and demonstration of lessons. New teachers are also invited to experienced teachers' classrooms to observe the teaching of reading and writing by Distinguished Teachers. Under the direction of faculty members of the Literacy Cluster, teachers may design lessons and action research studies in their

classrooms. While the focus of the support for the new teachers is on the teaching of literacy, reading, and writing, the project also includes material support for new teachers by providing them with access to currently adopted literacy materials including children's books, textbooks, videos, and computer software.

2. Masters of Arts Degree Program in K-12 School Leadership

This project is proposed by five faculty from all four divisions in the CCOE to develop a MA-degree program to prepare future school leaders to work collaboratively to bring about meaningful changes in the lives of the students. The MA Degree Program in K-12 School Leadership is a collaborative graduate education program where future K-12 school leaders, such as administrators, counselors, curriculum specialists, special education resource specialists, and bilingual education coordinators, would be trained together to prepare themselves to become collaborative school leaders.

One-Time Funded Proposals for 1999-2000

1. CCOE Mathematics Resource Center

This project is proposed by three faculty from C&I to create the CCOE Mathematics Resource Center. The goal of the Center is to train better and more effective mathematics teachers. The Center houses teaching resource materials including manipulatives, computer software, calculators, resource books, journals, video camera, and others. In addition to lending these materials to the students, the Center also provides assistance to the students with developing lesson plans, workshops for professional development, and other pre-service and in-service training.

2. Developing a Professional Development Center for Excellence in Early Childhood

This project is proposed by eight faculty from C&I and SPED divisions to develop a Professional Development Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Education to provide a career development forum, in-service training, and a website. The Center serves to meet both in-service training and career development needs of early childhood educators as well as the recruitment and outreach mission of the early childhood education programs within the CCOE. A career development forum is planned for people who are currently employed in or interested in careers serving young children in the birth-to-eight age range and their families. Planning for the forum includes representatives from several agencies: Head Start, community colleges, LAUSD Children's Centers, school district preschool and early elementary teachers and staff, district career development offices, county childcare agencies, Resource and Referral offices, and early intervention programs. In addition, in-service training is conducted with sessions related to the topics identified by the Career Development Forum participants. Lastly, a website is created to provide CCOE program advisement information related to credential and MA programs, in-service training opportunities offered by the Center, other training opportunities available in the community, and employment opportunities.

3. Development of Alternative Course Delivery Formats for Special Education's Introductory Course to Enrich Course Content and Delivery, Maintain Competitive Course Offerings, and Increase Enrollments

This project is proposed by two faculty from Special Education to develop an alternative distance education version of its introductory course, EDSP 400, Foundations of Special Education. Being a required course for all general and special education teaching credentials in California, this course is in high demand. A TV-format course not only allows the CCOE to remain competitive with other higher education institutions who are offering this course in easy access formats, but also provides opportunities to enrich and enhance delivery of the course

through use of a variety of culturally appropriate media and video-materials. With the collection of course materials, consisted of videotaping clips of each class presentation with a live student audience, purchased commercial items, interviews of experts, and other media/technical materials, a faculty team from Special Education decide the exact design and the specific delivery/content plan for the topics of the distance education course.

4. Preparing Successful Minority Administrators for the Challenges of the New Century

This project is proposed by two faculty from the educational administration program to improve the quality of preparation for minority administrative candidates by investigating requisite skills needed to enhance the success and employability of minority educational leaders. Critical skills and competencies are identified through interviews of successful minority administrators and the literature review on effective minority administration and leadership. The results are used to calibrate the administrative services programs in the CCOE to prepare the minority students for the unique realities of administration, as minority leaders in urban settings.

Multi-Year Funded Proposals

1. Improving Special Education Courses in Low Incidence Disabilities

This project is proposed by two faculty from the Special Education Division to improve three special education courses to increase teacher competence in providing assistive technology support for individuals with physical disabilities and individuals with autism. The project provides (a) special training in curriculum modification and assistive technology utilization; (b) networking with field-based practitioners and families through “hands-on” instruction and ongoing support; and (c) creation of a video library of demonstrated instructional practices with students who have physical disabilities and autism. Collaborative instruction between CSLA faculty and special education teachers from a local school occurs not only at CSLA campus but also at the school site where teacher candidates receive training in equipment usage and programming through demonstration, evaluation of case studies, and personal interactions with children who use augmentative communication.

2. C. Lamar Mayer Learning Center

This project is proposed by five faculty from SPED and A&C Divisions to enhance the C. Lamar Mayer Learning Center’s ability to provide CSLA students with opportunities to develop professional competencies with access to state of art materials and technology. At the Center, special education specialist credential candidates provide individualized programming for 5-16 years olds students from the surrounding community through Saturday sessions. These students range from at risk for school failure to those with severe learning or behavioral challenges. Parents whose children are enrolled in the Center can attend discussion groups led by counseling trainees from the school-based family-counseling program. The Center enhances the CCOE’s ability to offer meaningful outreach services for surrounding community members by providing children and youth with opportunities for individualized educational enrichment and parents to improve their knowledge and skills in managing their children and life stresses. The initiative seeks funds to cover operational expenses and to purchase computer equipment and learning materials

3. Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Center (LAASC)

The LAASC existed for years before the School of Education acquired the charter status. Its work focuses on reorganizing schools around sound organizational practices to make schools more effective. The Center sponsored The Accelerated School (TAS) to obtain its charter status from Los Angeles Unified School District. Since then, the Center successfully acquired funds every year from the CCOE to engage in various innovative projects, including special summer programs for children and teachers at TAS and Professional Development Center at TAS. The

summer programs provided enriched curriculum for children as well as opportunities for student teachers to work with experienced teachers in a more comfortable setting. Professional development centers' activities include educational planning and implementation of educational programs and technology; faculty seminars and courses on site; student teacher supervision; and university coaching.

4. Model Teacher Education Program (MTEP)

This project is implemented through collaboration between five faculty from the C&I Division in the CCOE and eight faculty from other subject departments (English, math, history, political science, biology, chemistry, art, and child development) in the University. The MTEP is developed to prepare future elementary education teachers at the undergraduate level with unique features including (a) integrated content knowledge and pedagogy and (b) early fieldwork experiences. This four-year program leading to a BA degree and a teaching credential in four years represents improvement upon existing practices in many aspects. Each year about 35 entering freshmen move through the program in a cohort group, taking their General Education content classes that are linked with corresponding education methods classes, engaging in fieldwork activities at school sites from the first year of the program. The students also receive other support services, including tutoring, CBEST workshops, "personal" faculty advisor, and upperclassman mentor.

Discussions

The guidelines developed by the Ad-Hoc Innovative Initiative Awards Committee clearly states that the projects proposed must represent innovations or improvement upon educational practices. In addition, proposals making contributions to the top priorities of the CCOE's mission would be rated favorably for funding—(a) focus on learner-centered outcomes and (b) elements of collaboration (CCOE, 1996, 1997, 1998). As carefully reviewed by the members of the Ad-Hoc Innovative Initiative Awards Committee each year, these funded innovative proposals all address the mission of the CCOE.

Learner-Centered Innovation

First, the learner-centered innovations are examined in terms of different learner populations. While all 25 proposals purpose to focus on learner-centered outcomes, there is a wide variation in learners, including students and faculty in the CCOE, students, teachers, and parents in K-12 schools, neighbors in the school communities, and prospective candidates for the CCOE. All proposals but one directly focus on the CCOE students as learners. The Collaboration in University Teaching is the only proposal that does not directly target the CCOE students as the focused learners but proposes to indirectly improve the learning outcomes of the CCOE students by improving teaching abilities of the faculty in the CCOE. The rest of the projects propose to improve the learning outcomes of the CCOE students through a variety of means, such as curriculum modification, meaningful field experience with practitioners, integration with technology, increased level of resources, and performance-oriented teaching strategies. Approximately 50% of the proposals identify learners in K-12 public schools. The projects are designed to benefit students, teachers, and parents in K-12 public schools through tutoring, in-service training sessions, mentoring for new teachers, professional opportunities for experienced teachers, and resources (information and counseling services) available for students and parents. Many of these projects have spillover effects to include other people in the circle of learners. For example, the Collaboration in University Teaching proposes to expand the learners to the faculty in the University as well as the faculty in all 22 CSU campuses. The PERC proposes to provide services to all educational communities in need of research and evaluation

services. The Early Childhood Cluster proposes to include prospective students by providing pre-service workshops as a means to effective recruitment of students to the CCOE.

Another way to examine these learner-centered innovations is the means to achieve improvement of learning environments. About 50% of the proposals state improving learning environments through modifying the curriculum or teaching strategies of existing academic courses. More than 25 existing courses in the CCOE are proposed to have curriculum and its delivery strengthened by integration with technology, increased field experiences, inter-discipline design, and acquisition of additional resources. Two separate groups of faculty proposed to change the delivery system of the same course (EDIT 430) into two different methods—one into a television course and the other into a WWW course. The MTEP proposes to strengthen not only the course in the CCOE but also the courses outside the CCOE, by integrating subject content and pedagogy. For example, a political science course and an educational method course (teaching social science) will be team-taught by both the political science professor and the education professor to provide integrated content-pedagogy to the students in the MTEP.

Collaboration

Collaboration is another top priority emphasized in the CCOE mission (CCOE, 1995). The CCOE is organized into four distinct divisions: Administration and Counseling; Curriculum and Instruction; Special Education; and Educational Foundation and Interdivisional Studies. Prior to being given the charter status, there were almost no interactions between divisions other than serving on the school-level standing committees where representatives from each division would attend. Professional or social interactions among faculty occurred exclusively within their own divisions.

Examinations of these innovative proposals indicate that faculty isolation no longer exists in the CCOE. More than 45 CCOE faculty participated in these innovative proposals in 1996-97, and about 30 in both 1997-98 and 1998-99 academic years. Several faculty members are involved in more than one innovative projects in a given year, therefore, the actual number of faculty listed as participants for all innovative projects is greater than the numbers previously mentioned for each year. The analysis shows that between 40-60% of the CCOE faculty are involved with these innovative projects. Since there is no proposal submitted by a single faculty, every faculty involved in these innovative projects is collaborating with at least another faculty within the CCOE. Only six of the 25 proposals, less than 25%, are submitted by the group of faculty from the same division affiliation. The smallest unit of faculty collaboration is two faculty from the same division and the largest unit includes 16 faculty from all four divisions in the CCOE. While the METP proposal includes only 6 faculty from the CCOE, nine other faculty from various departments in the University are also included.

It seems that collaboration extends from within one division to across divisions in the CCOE and further to other academic departments and service offices in the University. There is only one proposal that involved only two faculty from the same division to work on a research project. There are five more proposals, each of which is submitted by the faculty with the same division affiliation, but all of these include collaboration with K-12 public schools. In addition to faculty collaboration in the CCOE, extraordinary collaborative efforts including the staff deserves a special recognition. In the past, the role of the staff has been limited to managerial or clerical assistance to the faculty. Traditionally, they have not been invited to the meetings where faculty made important decisions over academic programs or school activities. The Collaboration in University Teaching proposal includes a technology staff as an equal partner

while the LAASC proposals include COSE development director and other non-faculty staff for the project activities. Most of the proposals, more than 75% of the funded proposals, include collaboration among faculty across four divisions in the CCOE. The proposals from the CTC cluster and the MTEP include collaboration beyond the CCOE. These proposals include faculty from other academic departments in the University, such as physical education, communication disorders, biology, chemistry, political science, English, math, history, and child development.

The proposal to develop a televised course of EDIT 430 includes collaboration with the office of media services in the University. The Collaboration in University Teaching proposal collaborates with the Center for Effective Teaching and Learning in the University. The PERC proposal includes collaboration among faculty from all four divisions in the CCOE and cooperation with the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs in the University. The Early Childhood Cluster proposes to collaborate with the existing childcare centers at the University.

More than 80% of the proposals include collaboration outside the University. The most common collaboration beyond the University occurs with public schools. The level of collaboration with public schools ranges from a classroom teacher to several districts. Several proposals established professional development schools or centers at local public schools. In most cases, university faculty and school site teachers work together to provide in-service training for teachers, to work with student teachers, and to service students and their families. Many proposals initiated collaboration with wider audience from public school districts or county offices of education through various means, such as forum, conferences, workshops, and advisory councils.

Several proposals include collaboration with special entities. The proposal to develop a televised course of EDIT 430 includes collaboration with a TV station (Channel 58) to broadcast the televised course. The LAASC proposals include collaborative partners, such as CSU Delta Collaborative, Wells Fargo Bank, and Annenberg & Weingart Foundation. The transition cluster proposes to collaborate with the California Diagnostic Center to develop brochures for language-minority students and parents on transition.

Conclusions

The emphasis on innovation and collaboration is clearly evident in the mission statement of the CCOE.

As a Charter School, the School of Education at California State University, Los Angeles is committed to leading educators in their efforts to transform public schools. The School offers a coordinated, multi-disciplinary approach to the education of children and youth. Collaborating within the Charter College of Education and with public schools in the urban Los Angeles area, the faculty prepares professionals to be learner advocates who show competence in subject matter and professional knowledge and skills and who are dedicated to improving the educational environment of all children and youth. (CCOE, 1995).

Twenty-five innovative proposals that have been funded by the CCOE to achieve its mission were examined in this chapter.

All of the proposals do address the top priorities of the CCOE, which are learner-centered innovation and collaboration. The “learners” in these innovative proposals covered a wide range of various populations, including students and faculty in the CCOE, faculty of the University and of other CSU campuses, students, teachers, parents in K-12 public schools, and even neighbors in the school communities. Collaboration is unquestionably evident in all proposals as no proposal was submitted by a single person. Collaboration occurs between faculty within the same division and across the divisions in the CCOE. Collaboration within the CCOE also

includes staff as equal partners in some proposals. Collaboration expands to other academic and services departments within the University. Collaboration with K-12 public schools is most prevalent in many innovative proposals. Other entities, such as foundations, bank, TV station, and State agency are also listed as collaborative partners.

In summary, the innovative proposals that are funded by the CCOE indeed help the CCOE to accomplish its mission of providing learner-centered learning environment and encouraging collaboration. Unlike the claims of Good and Braden (2000) that virtually no exciting new approaches to teaching have occurred in charter schools, the CCOE has at least 25 innovative approaches to creating learner-centered learning environment through collaborative efforts led by its faculty and staff.

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