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Early College and Dual Enrollment Challenges: Inroads and Impediments to Access

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Abstract

In recent years, some school reformers have come to see early college and dual enrollment as mechanisms for increasing the academic engagement and performance of a range of students beyond those exhibiting high academic achievement or ability. Despite purported benefits, research on the dynamics of such programs is limited. This case study adds to the relevant literature by using semistructured interviews with key participants to investigate the cross-institutional dynamics enabling and constraining the early college and dual enrollment arrangements sponsored by a consortium of high schools and colleges in a Midwestern state. Qualitative data analysis surfaced four salient themes explaining patterns of interaction across the partnering institutions: *Organizational Conditions and Motives, Border Crossers, Organizational Power Dynamics, and Personal Attitudes Regarding Early College and Dual Enrollment.*

Keywords

dual enrollment, early college

The practice of permitting high school students to enroll in college early used to be considered a strategy restricted to students exhibiting high academic achievement or ability or those who had (on some authority) already mastered secondary curriculum (e.g., Gross & van Vliet, 2005). As recently as 2005, Gross and van Vliet characterized

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this option as a type of "radical acceleration" (para. 35), and it was often recommended for students with *very* high ability or achievement, such as those with IQs above 160 (Gross, 1992; see also Stanley, 1976). Despite its use in the past as an alternative mostly reserved for students who demonstrate significantly advanced achievement compared with age-peers, some school reformers have come to see early college attendance, structured through dual enrollment or early entry to college, as a possible strategy for supporting the academic engagement and higher levels of academic performance of a wider range of students (e.g., Brewer, Stern, & Ahn, 2007). Some policy makers, moreover, have been supportive of the strategy, citing its benefits for increasing educational rigor and improving human capital development among academically average, but not below-average, students (e.g., Berger et al., 2009; Jobs for the Future, 2008).

To assist educators in considering the benefits and costs of expanding early college and dual enrollment options to a wider range of students, research is needed to demonstrate the opportunities and challenges associated with such arrangements. Two sorts of studies would contribute to deeper understandings of expanded early college and dual enrollment options: (a) *efficacy* studies providing definitive evidence of the benefits of such arrangements and (b) *feasibility* studies describing implementation challenges and promising practices for addressing them.

At this time, however, the research on the *expansion* of early college and dual enrollment options to a wider group of students is comparatively limited. The current study adds to this body of research by addressing the following research question.

> *Research Question 1*: How do educators who are involved with the expansion of dual enrollment and early college initiatives view the aims, implementation (both challenges and affordances), and outcomes of these initiatives?

This question focused particular attention on the perspectives and experiences of educators with an interest in early college and dual enrollment—a group whose views were probably more supportive and hopeful than the views of others at their institutions. Based on analyses of interview transcripts, findings are presented as themes that characterize the perspectives held by this group of early adopters in one such initiative. Discussion of the themes provides other educators with insights germane to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of similar early college and dual enrollment efforts. Our study, th[illegible]dds to the small literature on the *feasibility* of expanding early college and dua[illegible]ollment programs to a relatively broad range of students. Findings from a prior study conducted by one of the team members made us particularly attentive to overlapping institutional boundaries, varying organizational cultures, conflicting organizational missions, and power differentials of individuals within member organizations and across organizational members per se—not to mention the role of government.

Of particular interest to us in addressing the question and formulating the findings, then, were the organizational power dynamics (i.e., the relations of power across

individuals and institutions) inherent in the early college effort. We drafted the research question, the interview questions, and, during the interviews, the "probe" questions, with power dynamics in mind, as we further explain in the "Method" section. Qualitative, semistructured interviews are ideal for such a study, as phenomena such as power dynamics are, according to some researchers, far less accessible to typical structural-functional methods (e.g., Friedkin, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1995; Weiss, 1995).

Related Research

Some U.S. students accelerate their progress through high school by enrolling in college-level courses. This arrangement is called "early college" when students earn college credit only, and "dual enrollment" when students earn *both* high school and college credit for the *same* courses. The strategy differs from Advanced Placement (AP) in two ways.

First, with early college and dual enrollment arrangements, a college faculty member (sometimes separately, sometimes in conjunction with the high school teacher, and sometimes with the high school faculty holding adjunct college faculty status) develops the course syllabus based on the expectations of his or her department. By contrast, with AP, the high school teacher develops the syllabus based on detailed guidelines provided by the College Board.

Second, students earn college credit for early college and dual enrollment courses by completing them successfully. With AP courses, colleges award credit to students who receive sufficiently high scores on the AP examinations.

As noted above, the percentage of students who participate in early college and dual enrollment programs is small, but even a small percentage of U.S. high school students represents a large *number* of students. Citing data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), for example, Wright and Bogotch (2006) reported that, during the 2002-2003 school year, approximately 1.1 million high school students in the United States enrolled in early college courses. Additional NCES data revealed that, of the students taking advantage of this arrangement, approximately 64% were enrolled in academic classes and approximately 36% were enrolled in career or technical classes (NCES, 2003).

Early college and dual enrollment programs differ by state in various ways, including how many courses they allow or expect students to take, the grade levels at which students become eligible to participate, other qualifications required of participating students, and criteria for teachers who are allowed to offer dual enrollment courses (Education Commission of the States [ECS], 2012). Arrangements for course delivery differ across programs, moreover, with some programs offered on college campuses, others at secondary schools with high school teachers serving as adjunct college faculty members, and others via distance education (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2003; Blanco, 2006; Johnstone & Del Genio, 2001; Robertson, Chapman, & Gaskin, 2001).

In addition, the early college and dual enrollment options that some policy makers and education reformers now recommend target students whose characteristics differ

from those of the students for whom such options originally were designed (e.g., Hoffman, 2005; Le & Frankford, 2011). Traditionally, participation of younger students in college courses targeted students who demonstrated very high achievement and ability (Fund for the Advancement of Education, 1957; Gross & van Vliet, 2005; Stanley, 1976). Contemporary early college efforts often target a markedly different group of students: "students with poor attendance, struggling learners, students who are overage and under-credited" (Jobs for the Future, 2008, p. 2). According to Hoffman (2005) and the ECS (2012), states vary in their eligibility requirements for students, but most now open up early college and dual enrollment programs to students with moderate levels of ability or achievement, not just those who exhibit very high academic achievement or ability. As Hoffman noted, moreover, "Several states with large dual enrollment programs do not set a high bar for participation" (p. 8).

Despite policy makers' renewed interest in these programs, only a limited empirical literature considers their dynamics and efficacy.[1] More obliquely, literature on two topics was helpful in situating our study: (a) the history of early college and dual enrollment programs and (b) outcomes associated with students' participation in such programs. Our findings also made sense in light of other research concerning educators' attitudes toward early college and dual enrollment programs as well as toward other approaches to academic acceleration. Rather than reviewing that literature here, however, we mention it briefly in the "Discussion" section in specific reference to our findings.

The History of Early College and Dual Enrollment Programs

Early college and dual enrollment programs are part of a family of long-established educational arrangements whose general purpose has been to promote the intellectually appropriate academic engagement of high school students. In the years prior to 2000, most of these arrangements were designed to provide challenging academic content to students exhibiting high academic achievement or ability. Since the early 2000s, however, early college and dual enrollment options have been made available in many states to a wider range of students, including minority and low-income students and those who would be the first in their families to attend college (e.g., ECS, 2012). In a sense, the tenor of the discourse has shifted from academic excellence to academic equity.

Throughout the 20th century, early entry to college was made possible for academically talented students—those exhibiting elevated academic talent according to various measures and standards—through grade-skipping, AP courses and exams, and various special programs such as those offered through the Center for Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University (Blanco, 2006; A. Howley, Howley, & Pendarvis, 1986; Schneider, 2009; Waits, Setzer, & Lewis, 2006). In the mid-1980s, some states also began to support concurrent high school and college enrollment for students who met certain eligibility requirements (Broughton, 1987). The requirements were not as stringent as those used by talented and gifted (TAG) programs, but many who took

advantage of concurrent enrollment in its early years were TAG students seeking more challenging coursework than that offered by their high schools (C. Howley & Howley, 1987). In most states where such provisions existed, programs nonetheless served a very small proportion of students, primarily 11th and 12th graders (e.g., Broughton, 1987).

In recent years, some advocates have worked to open access to early college options to wider sets of students, largely to promote educational equity. For example, starting in the 1970s, Middle College High Schools (MCHSs) and, then later, Early College High Schools (ECHSs)[2] were designed for students whose high school performance was satisfactory but who might be at risk of losing interest in schooling, for a variety of reasons but notably due to shortcomings in the intellectual cultures of their "regular" schools (e.g., Lieberman, 2004). The ECHS Initiative continues to operate nationwide (ECHS Initiative, 2010), though not all states have ECHSs. Similarly focused efforts are taking place in many states, sometimes with external sponsorship, and sometimes not. In states with charter school legislation, some colleges are hosting secondary schools on their campuses. While these high schools remain distinct from their college hosts, their location on campus permits collaboration between the college and the charter school, making it convenient for high school students to enroll in college courses and to experience the college environment firsthand. With different aims and a somewhat different clientele in view, the federally funded "Tech Prep" program links the curricula at vocational high schools with the curricula at community or technical colleges (Blanco, 2006). Many such programs, indeed, have sought to enroll vocational students in postsecondary career programs *prior* to high school graduation (Lewis & Overman, 2008).

Such changes, moreover, can be understood less charitably as part of the long-standing tradition of credentialism pervading American education. Briefly, credentialism as described by Collins (1979, 2002) is a quest for diplomas unmoored from their substance—a mark of status and a postschooling ticket to coveted employment. The relevant upshot is that the value of a high school diploma has been superseded by a baccalaureate degree, now promoted as essential for everyone by political and educational leaders (e.g., Kirwan, 2009). Under such a system, those with minority or low-income backgrounds would be likeliest to suffer degraded status (as compared with their parents). Hence, it is understandable that many contemporary early college programs (e.g., Blanco & Prescott, 2007) seek to recruit students who could, if properly supported, become the first in their families to secure a college credential. The credential, in short, is the most important outcome of these programs.[3]

Outcomes of Early College Attendance

Studies conducted in the past 20 years have mostly focused on the outcomes of programs in which participating students fit the high-ability profile described previously; far fewer studies have examined the outcomes of such arrangements for the students that recent policies target—students from low-income backgrounds and less academically focused high schools and exhibiting average (but not below average) levels

of academic talent. In addition to a number of hopeful evaluations about ECHSs (e.g., Berger et al., 2009; Le & Frankford, 2011; McKnight & Vargas, 2006; Morrison, 2008) almost no recent studies have systematically examined the outcomes of such programs.

Traditional Efforts' Outcomes. Systematic studies of the academic outcomes of early college for students with high achievement or ability tend to report positive results (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2002). For example, a study of the early entrants to the University of Washington (Janos, Robinson, & Lunneborg, 1989) found that these students demonstrated higher academic performance than average students, but not quite such high performance as equally talented college-aged students. A repeated finding is that most academically advanced students who are also motivated, self-possessed, and self-disciplined achieve academic success in early college and dual enrollment programs (e.g., Noble & Smyth, 1995; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2002; Stanley, 1991). Moreover, as Olszewski-Kubilius (2002) reported in her review of this literature, many students who enroll in such programs go on to pursue graduate study.

Whereas most of the earlier studies of the outcomes of early college for high-ability students focused on academics, later research turned attention to the consequences of such programs for the social and emotional adjustment of participating students. The shift in focus may have been to address commonly raised objections. Most researchers have concluded that participants tend to fare well in terms of self-concept, emotional well-being, and social adjustment (Cornell, Callahan, & Loyd, 1991; Noble & Childers, 2008; Shepherd, Nicpon, & Doobay, 2009). Some of this research also reports that the youngest participants in early college programs benefit from supportive arrangements, such as counseling services and separate residence halls (e.g., Muratori, Colangelo, & Assouline, 2003; Noble & Childers, 2008); some research also suggests that involvement with intellectual peers on a college campus *improves* the social adjustment of high-ability adolescents (e.g., Noble, Childers, & Vaughan, 2008).

Contemporary Efforts' Outcomes. In response to recent efforts to use early college and dual enrollment options to improve the academic climate of secondary schools and to encourage more high school students to enroll in postsecondary programs, researchers have started to study the consequences of early college for students with varying levels of academic ability. Findings from the few studies of such efforts suggest that early college and dual enrollment students are more likely than others to pursue and perform well in their postsecondary programs (Morrison, 2008; Windham, 1996).

Many programs, especially the 230 schools sponsored by the Gates Foundation, have not yet been studied in terms of the college-completion outcomes intended by this large effort. An intermediate outcome closer to the experience of those involved, however, has been assessed in part by one research team (E. Barnett, Philippeaux-Pierre, & Stembridge, 2010). These researchers examined the more proximate goal of "college readiness." Across the various evaluations (e.g., Berger et al., 2009), this outcome receives considerable attention, logical enough in view of the target population.

Readiness, in this case, rests simply on the assessment of college instructors, mainly in terms of direct verbal feedback to the ECHS instructors. E. Barnett, Philippeaux-Pierre, et al. (2010) identified instructional strategies used by ECHS faculty members that were claimed (by faculty and the researchers) to promote college readiness on such terms. Most notable for our purposes, however, is the attention paid by E. Barnett, Philippeaux-Pierre, et al. (2010) to the readiness of "under-prepared students" and the chief relevant findings:

> Students who enter Early College underprepared are generally not treated differently from the rest. Acceleration is important for all students to greater or lesser degrees. However, clearer information on students' strengths and deficiencies could help teachers and schools in preparing students for college. (p. 62)

As with high-ability students, other characteristics besides academic ability—characteristics such as self-discipline, motivation, and independence—influence the extent to which average-ability (including "underprepared") students are able to benefit from these programs. Furthermore, the care with which such programs are developed and operated affects their capacity to meet the needs of the students they intend to serve (Johnston & Kristovich, 1999).

One recent dissertation (Farrell, 2009) used mixed methods to study students' self-perceptions of improvements in their college readiness that resulted from participation in an ECHS program. Although the quantitative results did not show significant associations between self-perceptions and academic outcomes, the qualitative findings indicated that most of the students did attribute improved college readiness—both academic and social—to their participation in the program. According to Farrell (2009), "Students expressed their development of many of the characteristics of academic college readiness such as problem solving, mastery of content rigor, and critical thinking" (p. 128). Another recent dissertation, examining the contribution of "tech prep" participation (i.e., of vocational students) in postsecondary coursework, found no significant difference in outcomes in an experimental design comparing tech-prep participants with a randomly assigned control group (Ray, 2011).

Gaps in the Literature

Although a considerable body of literature demonstrates the benefits of early college and dual enrollment programs for high-ability students, far fewer studies have investigated the impact of such programs (e.g., the Gates-funded 230 ECHSs) on students with demonstrably modest academic talents. Indeed, the use of these approaches to offer access to a coveted credential remains problematic for a variety of reasons. Most fundamentally, the involvement of what participating programs call "underprepared" students presents a substantial challenge because the early college or dual enrollment arrangement must somehow cultivate preparedness for college-level work while requiring "underprepared" students to perform such work adequately. Second, the

efficacy of securing a devalued credential remains dubious (i.e., the baccalaureate degree replacing a high school diploma as the threshold to adequate employment). Third, and most practically, the recently enlisted early college cohorts have not yet completed college in sufficient numbers to permit study. In the meantime, studies of the dynamics of such programs, as well as their efficacy, are needed to inform future efforts to give high school students appropriate access to college-level academic and social experiences.

Study Context

This study investigated the perspectives of educators associated with a loosely organized consortium of high schools and colleges involved in a project with the espoused aim of expanding early college dual enrollment programs for high school students in a rural part of one Midwestern state. The consortium included eight high schools, one of which was a career-technical school, and three institutions of higher education (IHEs)—two community and technical colleges and one 4-year college. At each of these institutions, approximately three educators had been involved with the dual enrollment initiative, which had been in place for just 2 years at the time of our study.

Rural Locale

The early college initiative served a rural region known for small-scale agriculture, natural resource extraction, hilly terrain, and poverty. Despite these challenges, high schools in the region had relative proximity to at least one postsecondary institution and sometimes more than one. The institutions that participated in the study represented the majority of the schools and colleges that were members of a state-funded consortium whose aim was to expand early college and dual enrollment offerings. This consortium was one of several in the state that had received funding.

Although the schools and colleges in the consortium were located within a region that is generally considered rural, they actually varied somewhat in terms of locale. Using the locale codes included in the Common Core of Data (NCES, 2011), we found that four of the nine schools were located in rural-fringe communities, three in rural-distant communities, one in a small city, and one in a large suburban community. Two of the colleges were located in rural communities (one rural-fringe and one rural-distant), and the third college was located in the same community where the one small-city high school was located.

Despite differences in locale, most of the high schools were of average size for the state. The city school enrolled approximately 900 students, the suburban school enrolled approximately 1,200 students, and the rural schools ranged in enrollment from approximately 250 students to approximately 670 students. Poverty rates also varied, with free-and-reduced lunch rates ranging from between about 20% and about 95%. With one exception, 97% of the students enrolled in the high schools were White. The one school with somewhat greater diversity had a White enrollment of

approximately 92% and an African American enrollment of approximately 4%. The remaining students were Asian, American Indian, and multiracial.

Operation of the Consortium

A grant from the state legislature funded the consortium for a period of 2 years as a pilot initiative to guide more extensive dual enrollment efforts anticipated by the state's Governor and its higher education Chancellor. The grant covered some costs of the college courses offered under the banner of the consortium, although this approach did not persist beyond the 2-year pilot phase. In theory, all eight high schools and the three postsecondary institutions constituted the consortium, so that no postsecondary institution was specified as the partner of any particular high school; students could attend any institution they chose. In practice, however, rural terrain and distance yielded de facto "partnering" in the sense that proximity strongly influenced which IHEs high school students chose to attend. The career-technical school "partnered," quite logically, with one of the nearby community colleges with a substantial technical focus; but regular 9-12 high schools also sent some students there.

Teaching arrangements also varied. In some cases, the high school teachers shared students with the college faculty: classes were "team taught" by teachers from both partnering institutions. In some cases, the high school teacher *became* a part-time college faculty member (with adjunct status) and no college faculty members other than this "deputized" teacher worked with the students. In still other cases, the students attended classes on the college campus with college faculty only. With team teaching, the college faculty member assigned grades, but both instructors typically consulted about the students' performance. High school teachers serving as adjunct college faculty assigned grades for the college courses they taught, and when the student took an on-campus course, the college faculty member assigned the grade.

Method

Based on a preliminary reading of relevant literature, the team designed an interview schedule that included eight broad questions to guide semistructured interviews (e.g., Weiss, 1995). The questions were as follows: (a) Would you describe your experiences with the [Midwestern state's] dual enrollment/early college program? (b) What kind of relationships have you developed with your coteacher(s) and any administrators involved in the program? (c) How is the program working for the students? (What kind of students are benefiting? What makes it more likely for a student to benefit? Are there some students who are not benefiting? Why is it that some students are not benefiting?) (d) What issues arise when community colleges offer courses on high school campuses? (e) How does this early college/dual enrollment program fit with your school and its regular operations? (f) What do you see as the potential of this program for meeting educational needs in [Midwestern state]? (g) In your opinion, how well is the program working? (h) What do you think about the Governor's recent

public statements about expanding this early college and dual enrollment program to all qualified high school students?

Although none of our questions asked interviewees directly about organizational power dynamics, we designed the questions to elicit accounts of events, relationships, and issues that participants considered salient. Following recommendations from Weiss (1995), we planned initial questions that experience and related literature suggested would encourage responses pertinent to the study's aims without causing interviewees to shut down. Notably, issues relating to organizational power dynamics are often uncomfortable and sometimes fearful, for anyone, in any organization. Our questions opened up these issues cautiously by asking about (a) relationships with the consortium and (b) the fit between the early college or dual enrollment program and the "regular operations" of each participant's school (or college).

Furthermore, we followed up on responses to our initial questions with probes—additional questions designed to help participants share details about the issues of greatest significance to the study. Probes cannot be specified in advance but, as Weiss (1995) noted, respond to the interviewer's "sense of what will give substance to the eventual report" (p. 41). Because we anticipated that power dynamics would be a salient concern and because initial responses confirmed this conjecture, several of our prompts encouraged participants to disclose additional details about the character of such dynamics. For example, when one of the high school educators expressed concern about limited and confusing communication from one of the colleges, the interviewer sought additional detail about organizational dynamics by asking, "Are there any other kind of issues that arise in addition to the communication ones?" The subsequent discussion allowed the participant to share observations about difficulties resulting from the college's limited commitment to the effort.

Over a 6-month period, three members of the research team conducted a total of 22 interviews with educators who had played some role in the consortium's efforts. Whereas two of the interviewers were experienced faculty researchers, one member of the team was a graduate student. The graduate student, who was completing a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, received coaching on interview methods from a member of the team who had extensive experience as a qualitative researcher. Altogether, one faculty researcher (an expert in the field of gifted education) conducted 8 of the interviews, a second faculty researcher (an expert in the field of higher education) conducted 9 of the interviews, and the graduate student conducted 5 of the interviews.

Although the team had hoped to interview all of the professionals who had been involved ($n = 50$), more than half of these educators ($n = 28$) chose not to participate. Their perspectives may have differed from those of the educators who did agree to be interviewed, and the conclusions from the study are therefore more tentative than they might have been if all consortium members had provided interviews. The interviewees included 12 from high schools—4 principals, 6 teachers, 1 technology coordinator, and 1 guidance counselor—and 10 from colleges—6 faculty members and 4 academic administrators. Of these participants, 12 were men and 10 were women, all were

between the ages of 35 and 60, and 20 were White. Although our sample is purposive, delimited to consortium participants, the decision by half the participants not to participate is a limitation. We would doubtless have learned from additional stories had they been accessible to the study.

With the exception of two interviews each of which included two participants at the same time, all other interviews were with individual participants.[4] Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour; interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed by one of the researchers on the team. That researcher checked with the appropriate interviewer whenever she had questions about what she was hearing on the tapes, and then she shared the transcripts with two of the three interviewers. By the time the transcription had been completed, the graduate student had finished his program of study. He did not remain involved with the latter phases of the research. The data set of verbatim transcripts included 287 single-spaced pages.

Once all interviews had been transcribed, two members of the research team analyzed the data using an approach that Thomas (2006) referred to as the "general inductive approach." According to Thomas, this approach "primarily use[s] detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher" (p. 238). This approach involves successive reviews of the data, first to code them and then to categorize coded data into conceptually relevant categories. At this stage of the process one of the members of the team coded the data and another reviewed the codes and offered suggestions for additions, modifications, and deletions of codes. Altogether the two researchers organized the data with 38 codes that appeared to fit into five categories: (a) threats, (b) change over time, (c) "cream of the cream," (d) ambivalence in confronting the new paradigm, and (e) other (i.e., outlier codes).

Although this preliminary analysis contributed to a deeper understanding of the data, it did not reveal patterns that were sufficiently powerful to account for important dynamics. For this reason, the two researchers who took responsibility for data analysis decided to perform a second analysis of the data, this time using a combination of deductive and inductive codes in a manner similar to the process of axial coding used in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).[5] They began by adding new codes to the original set. These new codes, which came from a review of related literature, contributed theoretically derived concepts to the set of concepts that had been derived inductively. According to Abramson (2011),

> The most common practice in sociology and related disciplines is currently to use a combination of inductive and deductive codes. Deductive codes are generated based on prior understandings of a topic, existing theories, and hypothesized explanations that purport to explain a specific research puzzle. Inductive codes are generated to correspond to the unforeseen patterns and occurrences that present themselves during the course of producing and analyzing qualitative data. (p. 7)

The process of recoding with the more complete set of codes then enabled the researchers to identify thematic categories with the ability to explain the dynamics that the data revealed without either overstating the salience of a theme or missing an important theme (what Abramson, 2011, referred to respectively as Type I and Type II errors in qualitative data). The resulting interpretation included four themes, which all had connections to and made sense of one selective code, "Communication Dynamics."[6]

The research team made an effort to ensure the validity of the interpretation by using two strategies. First, team members compared the salience of themes across participant groups to identify patterns that might be associated with group membership (e.g., high school vs. college) as well as to test the salience of broad themes across the groups (i.e., participant triangulation). Second, the team used outlier analysis to determine the extent to which various perspectives were typical and atypical across participants. The close-knit nature of the consortium kept us from using member checks to test our interpretation. Although we followed careful procedures to protect confidentiality, we were concerned that sharing a draft of the manuscript soon after data were collected might lead participants to try to identify which of their consortium colleagues had shared particular points of view.

Findings

Our findings address the research question by describing the meanings interviewees attached to their views and experiences. As noted previously, a focus of the analysis was to surface information related to the organizational dynamics related to creating and operating an educational experience that spans a significant organizational—indeed *institutional*—boundary (i.e., that between K-12 schooling and higher education). This anticipated focus of the study was borne out by the analysis. In our view, the four themes identified and discussed in this section all offer insights about the dynamics of power, though certainly in different and nuanced ways.

Analysis of the interview data surfaced four distinct but interrelated themes that explained circumstances and associations relating to the selective code, "Communication Dynamics." The salience of the selective code and its constituent themes led the research team to conclude that frequent and conscientious cross-organizational communication was crucial to the success of the various early college arrangements. The constituent themes are *Organizational Conditions and Motives, Border Crossers, Organizational Power Dynamics, and Personal Attitudes Regarding Early College.*

Taken together, the themes reveal a pattern in which various communication enablers and constraints functioned to move the partnerships forward haltingly in face of persistent misgivings. The story is not one of champions forging a new endeavor with optimism but of a few border-crossing educators who played a pivotal role in establishing and sustaining communication efforts that helped their organizations navigate new territory rather unwillingly.

Organizational Conditions and Motives

The first theme, *Organizational Conditions and Motives*, relates to the cultures of the two partnering institutions in a given arrangement, that is, each partnering dyad comprising a high school and college.[7] This theme also relates to the ways that organizational conditions shaped the real and perceived motives of the IHEs in the consortium.

Data analysis showed that organizational conditions and motives, centering around five main concerns, influenced the character of the relationships between high school and college partners: (a) funding, (b) recruitment, (c) improved educational outcomes, (d) community futures, and (e) out-migration. These concerns—and their connection to organizational conditions and motives—were not discrete but tended to overlap and interact. Notably, recruitment motives were closely associated with funding motives, and motives reflecting concerns for community futures and educational outcomes had close linkages to concerns about out-migration. The discussion below illustrates connections among these five concerns.

Funding and Recruitment. State policy governing early college and dual enrollment arrangements made the funding situation facing the high schools and colleges difficult to resolve for the long term because it required districts to pay tuition to colleges for the students enrolled in early college and dual credit programs. Whereas the districts had a vested financial interest in retaining the maximum level of per-pupil support by restricting students' participating in early college and dual credit; each college had an equal interest in enrolling larger numbers of students, including those from high schools. In this sense, "funding" and "recruitment" were closely interwoven. These power dynamics reflected a core economic tension: When an institution enrolled a high school student, that student's school district lost money. The financial consequences alone were enough to discourage high schools from supporting the early college efforts. As one of the college deans noted (group interview, July 22, 2008): "So every student that decides to come here . . . full-time is less funding that they [the school district] receive."

Tensions about funding and recruitment, moreover, eroded trust between college and high school educators, at least to some degree. In the following quote, one of the border crossers (see next theme)—a teacher who worked at one of the high schools and also worked as an adjunct instructor at one of the colleges—described a practice at the college that contributed to such tensions:

> No matter what [the students have] taken at the point in time when they go to enroll . . . they have to take one quarter's worth of coursework at the . . . college beyond their engagement with [early college]. (group interview, June 5, 2008)

According to this interviewee, if early college students chose subsequently not to enroll in that college, they *would lose the credit they had earned there*. Both the

students and their high schools would lose out as a result: The high schools would have paid tuition but the students would not have obtained credit. The college used its power over the valued credential to force the behavior of participating students. It clearly risked resentment and resistance, on this account, however.

Despite this seemingly exploitative practice at one of the colleges, administrators from other institutions were aware of the implicit tensions relating to recruitment and funding, and their awareness prompted them to proceed more cautiously. For example, one college chose a less aggressive approach to recruitment in an effort to be sensitive to the high schools' concerns about losing money. Although the approach resulted in lower enrollment in the short term, its intentional noninvasiveness appears to have been reassuring and, as a result, produced greater benefits over time:

> Our president originally gave us the message that he did not want us to be in a competitive position with our area high schools . . . . I don't know the numbers, but at the very beginning I think there were fewer high school students that came as opposed to maybe some other college that more aggressively pursued that. [But our enrollment] has grown over time. (personal interview, July 25, 2008)

In addition to funding issues relating to per-pupil revenue, several interviewees noted that instability in the mechanisms for funding early college and dual enrollment programs led to uncertainty about salaries and other resources. Participants' uncertainty manifested as self-protectiveness that contributed to bad feelings—a situation that tended to limit full engagement with the program. A college faculty member's comment (personal interview, May 21, 2008) illustrates the sort of distrust to which other participants also alluded: "The grant is written at a certain fraction of our load, [but] the university only pays us as if it's over load . . . which makes a substantial reduction in what we would be paid." Later in the interview, this interviewee commented about the compromises that resulted from having limited resources for technology and equipment, although he was hopeful that additional state support might alter the situation.

Another example of awareness of tensions surrounding funding came from an administrator at a participating college. As the comment demonstrates, this interviewee was sensitive to high schools' concern about keeping per-pupil revenue, but he was also aware that some of the potential solutions might hurt the colleges:

> They need to come up with a system for dual enrollment that does not penalize either the college or the high school. And actually the [new] program, in essence, is going to financially penalize to a certain extent the college because the idea is, after that first grant money is gone, then you have to figure out how to pay for it. Well, the only way really to pay for it is to use [per-pupil] funds and to rebate back a portion of the [per-pupil] funds to the high school district. That's . . . the solution that many schools are looking at around the state, which means that in the long run the . . . colleges are going to receive less. (group interview, July 22, 2008)

This comment, coming from a college administrator, demonstrates how fragile the funding arrangements were for all parties involved.

Educational Outcomes, Community Futures, and Outmigration. An equally important set of organizational conditions and motives reflected concerns about students' futures as well as the future health and prosperity of their communities. Some interviewees saw early college and dual enrollment as pathways to broadened horizons for rural students, as the remarks of one faculty member suggest:

> I grew up in [that same] county. I went to [another school], but I grew up with a lot of kids from . . . schools [there]. Most of my family is from [there]. And I know what their future [typically] is. And so just to go in there and see that . . . these kids have a chance . . . They're going to go to college, and I just think it's awesome. (personal interview, October 1, 2008)

This professor and several other interviewees did not talk explicitly about whether or not the college education provided to rural students through the early college and dual enrollment programs would encourage those students to leave the region, but the possibility is implicit in the expression "these kids have a chance."[8] Other interviewees, however, addressed the issue directly, expressing the view that improved education resulting from early college or dual enrollment options might encourage some students to leave their rural communities for lucrative jobs in urban settings even though it might also bolster community prospects overall. A comment from a high school administrator illustrates this nuanced perspective:

> I do think that it has a lot of merit in a rural setting, more so than in a suburban setting . . . I think the key is for us to help them see that they can be successful with postsecondary curriculum, that we make that transition . . . happen more smoothly for them . . . I think the benefits for them are we have a more educated populace . . . Some of those folks . . . are going to see that the opportunities for them are much greater if they go someplace else. But some of them are going to come back here and are going to bring those credentials with them. (personal interview, May 29, 2009)

Though many interviewees acknowledged the personal and community benefits provided by these programs, some drew attention to the dilemmas that the programs forced students to face, particularly those students with important local commitments who could not afford to forgo the opportunity to acquire "free" college credit. The high school principal whose comment appears above also summarized a common concern:

> I'm thinking of one kid in particular who is a football player and a wrestler and he wants to make sure that he's here when practice starts . . . [and] . . . on game days . . . He doesn't want to miss out on any of those kinds of activities. But he

> is very much interested in the opportunity [provided by early college] because he also understands he comes from a very low-income family. He understands that . . . anything that he can do to get a jump ahead is going to benefit him in the long run. (personal interview, May 29, 2008)

High school sports are significant in the rural education literature as embodying the nonacademic, community purposes of schooling (e.g., DeYoung, 2003, 1995; Peshkin, 1978). The dilemma here is a simultaneous student commitment to local (nonacademic, community) purposes and to academic attainment.[9] This administrator's comments not only point to the financial reasons why rural students might choose to participate in early college and dual enrollment programs but also allude to an important issue facing public education in rural communities, namely, the link between the academic advancement of rural students and those students' tendency to leave the community for lucrative employment elsewhere.

Just a few of the interviewees saw such out-migration from local communities as a *desirable* outcome for rural students. These educators wanted to help students prepare for careers in cities and suburbs that would allow them to escape so-called "generational poverty." And they tended to see families as holding perspectives that were out of synch with their children's "true needs." As one college educator commented, "[it's a] cultural value kind of thing that we're going to take some time to work through" (personal interview, July 22, 2008).

Most interviews revealed that educators from both the high schools and the colleges claimed the "best interests of students" as their main motivation, despite their differing perspectives about what those interests entailed. Interestingly, *both* of the perspectives on "best interests" (i.e., staying-returning vs. leaving) that were discussed above provided a motive for some of the educators we interviewed to become highly invested in the early college and dual enrollment partnerships. As discussion of the next theme shows, the educators most dedicated to the partnerships were "border crossers"—individuals with prior experience in both the high school and the de facto partnering college.

Border Crossers

The second theme, *Border Crossers*, focuses on the critical role of a subset of educators who connected the institutions in each de facto dyad, serving as both a practical and an ideological bridge between the institutions. Interacting with both organizations at once, the border crossers drew on their prior knowledge of and experience with both the high school and the de facto partnering college. These professionals had an understanding of each institution's motives, context, constraints, and assets, and they often facilitated productive communication and program implementation that likely would not have been possible without them. Furthermore, these border crossers were cognizant of the delicate but crucial roles they played in establishing and maintaining the depth and frequency of communications between all stakeholders necessary to

sustain the early college and dual enrollment programs. They were aware of such programs' vulnerability as well as the culture of each organization, and worked to promote positive communications about and favorable attitudes toward the programs with which they were involved.

Our analysis of data revealed that a group of individuals who took on formal roles as liaisons between the high schools and the colleges were more fully connected to the program than others within their institutions. These "border crossers" included 3 college professors, 1 high school teacher, 2 high school principals, and 1 educator who worked both as a high school teacher and a part-time college professor. They all acknowledged the critical contribution of clear communication and careful planning to the effectiveness of the dual enrollment and early college provisions, as a comment from one of them indicates: "It seems like this is all based on communication, which it is. Communication works with students, the faculty, the staff, the different institutions, colleges and high schools . . . . And it has to have a common thread" (personal interview, September 18, 2008).

The border crossers identified several strategies as particularly helpful for improving connections between the high schools and the colleges. First, the border crossers saw value in instructional conversations focusing on issues of *common* concern. They mentioned the importance of discussions in which the focus was collaborative planning of dual enrollment courses for which there already was significant overlap in content between the high school and the college versions of the course. For example, in one partnership "Environmental Science" represented such a course.

In some cases, border crossers organized instructional conversations for the purpose of reviewing syllabi, lesson plans, and textbooks. In other cases, critical conversations involving both border crossers and others in the consortium followed visits that college faculty made to high school classrooms.

Second, border crossers emphasized the need for mutual respect among partnering high school and college educators as the underpinning for honest and responsive communication. A comment from a border crosser, who worked as a faculty member at one of the colleges, characterized her changed perspective toward the high school educators—a change that made her more respectful and appreciative of these colleagues:

> I certainly have a better perspective of what they're teaching in classes. So instead of saying, "Well, they're not teaching at the high school level. I've got to bring them up to college because they didn't get it at high school." That's gone now because *I see that they are putting a lot of effort into teaching these classes and that they do have their students' best interest at heart*. (personal interview, July 21, 2008, italics added)

Third, border crossers were alert to breakdowns in communication, reporting that the dual enrollment programs functioned most effectively when efforts were made to keep educators, potential students, and parents of potential participants well informed.

Because they were aware of communication difficulties, border crossers periodically made suggestions for improvement. One recommended that information about dual enrollment options be sent to families through direct mail; one mentioned that guidance counselors might do more to explain the program and provide support to students who were interested in pursuing it. According to another, misinformation communicated in a recruitment session confused students about the true nature of the benefits that the program could provide. In one way or another, moreover, most of the border crossers saw the bureaucratic character of their institutions and the arbitrariness of some of the rules as impediments to effective communication and, as a result, also to the success of the early college and dual enrollment arrangements.

Finally, the willingness of consortium members to make special accommodations, arrangements that the border crossers facilitated, had a salutary effect on the implementation of the early college and dual enrollment programs. In one school, for instance, the college's dual enrollment liaison—the border crosser at that school—arranged for the principal to serve as a substitute teacher in various classrooms to allow interested teachers to meet to discuss the program. Border crossers also encouraged college faculty and administrators to be open about sharing some of their resources (e.g., online courseware) and to take responsibility for breaking down unproductive power differentials.

Organizational Power Dynamics

One struggle commonly faced by border crossers in the effort to establish solid and frequent interorganizational communication involved *Organizational Power Dynamics* (the third theme) between high schools and partnering higher education institutions. These dynamics affected the character of the collaboration through which each de facto high school–college partnership was developed and sustained. Communication gaps and miscommunication stemming from perceived differences in aims or academic rigor in some cases undermined collaborative efforts and led to breakdowns in the functionality of early college and dual enrollment provisions.

Despite the efforts of border crossers, faculty prerogatives and organizational roadblocks persisted in contributing to power differentials that seemed, perhaps predictably, to disadvantage high school partners. These differentials were most troubling to the high school educators, especially those whose involvement with the partnership was more tangential than that of the border crossers. In fact, a great deal of commentary from the high school participants who were not border crossers focused on power dynamics that limited or strained program implementation and communication effectiveness.

High school interviewees were particularly disturbed when college faculty members failed to communicate with them and when their limited familiarity with the college bureaucracies made it difficult for them adequately to perform their adjunct faculty roles. For example, because some high school teachers did not know when college grades were due, they did not have a chance to use all of the assignments on

the syllabus as the basis for students' final grades. In another case, teachers reported that the lag between the presentation of material in the high school classroom and administration of the final exam by the college faculty member put the dual enrollment students at a disadvantage.

For their part, college faculty expressed concern about the extent to which communications with some of the high school teachers were dominated by discussions of—from their view—trivial matters such as paperwork, deadlines, and scheduling. Several indicated a desire to spend more time talking with their high school counterparts about expectations for student performance, course content, and the development of assessments. In addition, some college faculty expressed the view that communication breakdowns occurred because support for the early college and dual enrollment programs was not strong among school district personnel.

College faculty and administrators also saw some districts' procedures as impediments to successful program implementation. In one district, the teachers union kept the college from offering any dual enrollment or early college classes on the high school campus during the regular school day. Some of the college educators also saw inadequate planning by high school teachers and administrators as a source of confusion, for which the colleges were sometimes, they claimed, unjustly blamed.

The troubling power differential between high school teachers and college faculty was rarely mentioned explicitly by the high school educators but was revealed implicitly in the comments of many of the college faculty. For example, one faculty member described "good communication" as a connection with a high school teacher who was teaching a dual enrollment class and sent her copies of tests to review, "to make suggestions to . . . change some problems" (personal interview, July 23, 2008). Another college faculty member described his role as assuring that the college course delivered at the high school course offered "proper coverage" of college-level material (personal interview, June 4, 2008).

In only one case did we hear an actual complaint about the power dynamics from a high school teacher. She expressed frustration and disappointment about the fact that the college liaison with whom she was working had graded the students' final exams (i.e., the "common" assessment that the high school teachers were required to administer) but had not shared the students' scores with her. When asked about the character of the collaboration, this teacher replied, "I just kind of felt like we were just doing it in name only" (group interview, June 5, 2008).

The college faculty members themselves often reported situations in which they assumed the prerogatives of leadership—and in the process marginalized their high school colleagues. For instance, several faculty members complained that the high school teachers' instruction lacked rigor: "He gave a syllabus that covered about 20 chapters, [but] he covered about 8" (personal interview, May 21, 2008) and "We found that the length of paper and the type of paper that the students were writing was not to our expectations" (personal interview, July 25, 2008).

Others talked about encounters in which their role was to provide guidance to their high school counterparts, rather than to foster collaboration. One faculty member, for

example, described the relationship: "[The high school teacher acted as] a teaching assistant for the course, and I was the instructor" (personal interview, May 14, 2008). Faculty members also felt empowered to observe high school teachers and give feedback about their teaching, although high school teachers did not have a similar opportunity to assume the observer role and comment on the teaching of college instructors. A comment from one faculty member illustrated her role as observer and judge:

> [Teacher A] seemed to know what she was doing. Of course, she's done it before so she had a better idea whereas [Teacher B] had more questions and, you know, was just more interested in what was expected of her [by the college]. (personal interview, July 1, 2008)

College administrators were most explicit in expressing the belief that faculty had the right (in fact, the responsibility) to assume the leadership role in interactions with high school teachers. A quote from an administrator is illustrative:

> [The college faculty members] were more of a mentor. They worked with the high school faculty and made sure that they covered the material in the curriculum. They designed the tests and actually assigned the grades. (personal interview, July 23, 2008)

Overall, unequal power dynamics between college faculty and high school personnel certainly characterized relationships across the consortium but did not seem to undermine the initiatives—an inference supported by the fact that most participants expressed the belief that the early college and dual enrollment arrangements would continue, despite various challenges. Attentive to the demoralizing consequences of unequal power relationships between college and high school partners, however, one perspicacious college administrator reported, "We're working . . . on picking the *right* faculty—inviting the *right* faculty to have the touch with the high school" (personal interview, July 25, 2008, italics added).

Personal Attitudes

The fourth theme, *Personal Attitudes*, focused on what was communicated and how it was communicated—personal outlooks on the appropriateness of dual enrollment and early college programs for high school students. These attitudes affected the willingness of certain members of each partnership to engage deeply with the program.

Through our analysis of interview data, we uncovered a variety of attitudes toward early college and dual enrollment programs. Table 1 presents the frequency counts for the 97 attitude statements that participants shared. As the table shows, most attitude statements related to three broad ideas: perspectives on the benefits and costs of the programs, views about the relevance of such programs to particular types of students, and attitudes about program features and logistics.

Table 1. Attitudes Expressed by Participants.

Attitude	Category	Frequency
Early college is good because it provides students with opportunities.	Benefits and costs	23
Early college is bad because it keeps kids from being kids.	Benefits and costs	14
Early college is good for college-bound students.	Who early college is for	11
Early college is bad because it removes enrollment and therefore funding from the high schools.	Benefits and costs	7
Early college is not for students who are too immature.	Who early college is for	7
Early college is good because it makes senior year more meaningful.	Benefits and costs	6
Outcomes of early college are unknown because this approach is still a work in progress.	Outlier	5
Grade grubbing is bad for the academic engagement required by early college.	Attitudes about logistics	4
Early college poses the danger of elitism.	Benefits and costs	3
Early college deprives students of a rigorous education.	Benefits and costs	2
Not everyone needs to go to college.	Who early college is for	2
Early college is good because it promotes community building.	Benefits and costs	2
School leaders need to be supportive of early college if it is to work.	Attitudes about logistics	2
Early college is good for middle-tier students.	Who early college is for	2
College professors ought to deliver early college classes.	Attitudes about logistics	1
Some high school policies create disincentives for early college.	Attitudes about logistics	1
One danger of early college is that bright students will be shunned.	Benefits and costs	1
Early college works best when the college faculty and high school teachers are willing to put in the effort needed.	Attitudes about logistics	1
Early college has the danger of being treated like a handout.	Benefits and costs	1
Dual enrollment, in contrast to other forms of early college, is good because it keeps the bright students in the high school.	Attitudes about logistics	1
Early college is enriching.	Benefits and costs	1
Poor rural communities do not prepare their children for college.	Outlier	1
Early college programs need to give high school teachers opportunities to take more responsibility.	Attitudes about logistics	1

The attitude most often mentioned was that early college and dual enrollment programs were beneficial because they offered opportunities for college attendance to students who might otherwise not be able to attend. Several interviewees mentioned the fact that such opportunities were particularly important to students from poor, rural communities. For example, some respondents described the opportunities provided by these programs in terms of their financial benefit to students. Others saw the early college experience, particularly when it took place on a college campus, as a way to expand the horizons of students whose rural upbringing kept them isolated:

> I think it's important because the college experience is so much more than the classroom itself. And part of the college experience is meeting people of other ethnicities, of other financial [backgrounds] . . . from different places, with different experiences to share with you . . . You learn so much more that way. (personal interview, July 18, 2008)

At the same time, quite a few participants worried that the early college experience would force students to grow up too quickly, depriving them of opportunities to participate in all of the activities their high schools had to offer. Views about the maturity of high school students seemed to influence attitudes about the advisability of allowing them to attend college classes during their senior year or earlier; so too did views about which institution—the high school or college—would be more likely to provide challenging academic work. In particular, some interviewees saw early college and dual enrollment programs as beneficial because these options offered meaningful learning experiences to students who might otherwise slack off in their senior year. But a few high school teachers described such programs as less academically challenging than high school courses. According to one teacher, for example,

> They're getting this free credit and then they graduate and they don't have the academic background to compete with the other students who have stayed in high school and have taken the Chemistry II and the Anatomy/Physiology and the Physics and the Calculus and the Pre-calculus that we offer here. And they're not getting it. They're getting a full ride, but they're not getting the academics they need. (personal interview, May 22, 2008)

Such perspectives may have reflected rivalries between the high school and college instructors, which perhaps were fueled by the economic motives discussed above. They may also (or alternatively) have been connected to attitudes about the students for whom early college and dual enrollment arrangements might be appropriate. Such perspectives ranged from more to less inclusive, with only a few interviewees suggesting that such arrangements should be reserved for "the cream of the cream" (personal interview, July 25, 2008) or eliminated altogether. Nevertheless, two perspectives were most common: (a) the view that early college and dual enrollment programs were appropriate for college-bound students and (b) the view that these programs were appropriate for average students who might otherwise not consider college attendance.

In terms of frequency, most responses seemed to reflect the ingrained view that early college and dual enrollment programs are suitable primarily for college-bound students. One professor's characterization of the profile of students who would likely benefit from such programs illustrates this perspective:

> They're self-confident. Their math and English skills are usually at a higher level than some high school students. Not that they're on college level on everything . . . And they have a goal. They want to go to college. And they see this [program] as a way to build a transcript, I believe, to move into a college setting. (personal interview, July 21, 2008)

This perspective differed from a somewhat more inclusive one that construed such programs as particularly well suited to "middle-tier" students:

> The middle-tier students, I think it opens more doors for them. The upper tier students, I think they're already intent on going to college full-time. They already have the confidence. They already have . . . the study skills and a lot of the tools that they need to succeed in college. So, not that it is a detriment . . . for the upper tier students. I just think, from my experience, seeing some of those middle-tier students really perk up and realize they are capable of succeeding, maybe that's just a personal gratification I've had out of the project, but I have seen that in several students. (personal interview, May 14, 2008)

Taken together, the attitudes of interviewees suggested that most viewed dual enrollment and early college options as beneficial for some students. Indeed, a comparison of the frequency of positive versus negative comments revealed that interviewees tended to hold slightly more positive than negative views. Nevertheless, even interviewees whose views were mostly positive saw reasons for caution.

Several statements reflecting attitudes toward dual enrollment and early college focused on practices that seemed to make these arrangements more (or less) effective. Practices that seemed to interviewees to contribute to the programs' effectiveness were (a) support from school leaders, (b) involvement of college faculty in delivering coursework to high school students, and (c) the extra effort contributed by both high school teachers and college faculty. Conditions that they viewed as impediments to effectiveness were (a) the inclination of some students to avoid difficult classes because they might not get high grades in those classes and (b) high school policies that created disincentives for early college attendance.

Discussion

The study's findings sometimes correspond to and sometimes contradict findings reported in earlier related research. They also provide some basis for recommendations positioned to help other partnerships design and implement early college and dual enrollment programs. Findings from small qualitative studies such as this one,

however, cannot be viewed as definitive, so the conclusions they support are offered tentatively.

First, educators' attitudes toward these programs were mixed. Their attitudes, however, were sufficiently supportive to dispose almost all participants to express confidence that the early college and dual enrollment programs would continue. Their perspective seemed to differ from the way earlier research characterized educators' attitudes toward acceleration options such as early college and dual enrollment, namely, as negative to the point of threatening the existence of such arrangements even for the most talented students (Bain, Bliss, Choate, & Brown, 2007; Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004; Jones & Southern, 1992; Olszewski-Kubilius, 1998; Rogers & Kimpston, 1992; Wood, Portman, Cigrand, & Colangelo, 2010).

Nevertheless, our analysis also suggested that the range of educators' different and sometimes incompatible attitudes kept them from reaching consensus about what these programs might accomplish. Of particular concern to rural educators would most likely be perspectives that seemed to position early college and dual enrollment programs as ways to help students "learn to leave" (Corbett, 2007) their home communities, in other words, the belief that such programs ought to promote out-migration at the expense of sustaining rural communities (for more information about these prominent themes in rural education literature, see Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; DeYoung, 1995).

Moreover, the combination of financial and educational motives for the programs complicated the process of establishing common understandings about their aims and audience. In particular, the financial costs to participating school districts required advocates of the dual enrollment and early college programs to overlook their districts' financial interests to promote the programs. At the same time, opportunistic policies at some of the colleges kept high school partners from seeing those institutions as operating in good faith. As numerous other studies have shown, effective implementation of new programs depends on the alignment of aims and resources (e.g., Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Spillane, Diamond, Walker, Halverson, & Jita, 2001) as well as on conditions productive of mutual trust between partners (e.g., M. Barnett, Anderson, Houle, Higginbotham, & Gatling, 2010; Dhillon, 2009). Furthermore, as our findings suggest, dual enrollment and early college options can provide efficiencies in poor and rural regions so long as the arrangements are positioned as a synergy (i.e., an alignment of resources) and not as a competition for resources.

Second, our exploration of dynamics within the consortia showed how the contribution of certain enablers—most notably the border crossers—helped high school and college partners negotiate difficult institutional boundaries on behalf of the early college and dual enrollment programs. Our report of how these border crossers functioned in one set of partnerships suggests that other consortia of schools and colleges might also be able to cultivate cadres of cross-institutional educators to sponsor similar initiatives. At the same time, power differentials between high school and college educators represented a source of potential discord. Earlier literature also provides

insights into the damaging consequences of such power differentials in partnership programs between universities and schools as well as other community agencies (e.g., Cary, 2004; Cobb & Rubin, 2006), and some of that literature speaks to the value of explicit practices to guarantee equal and democratic participation (e.g., Theobald, 1991; White, 2010). Nevertheless, college faculty members are not uniformly open to such partnership programs, as a recent opinion piece from a faculty member who opposes dual enrollment programs reveals:

> Dual-credit programs neither address the myriad problems that bedevil secondary education nor do they enhance the rich experience of being a college student. Enrolling more students in such programs isn't easily reconciled with academic integrity, and administrators would be prudent to curtail their unrealistic expectations for their further growth. (Zimmermann, 2012, p. 41)

Even when explicit efforts are made to create equal collaborations across school and college partners, early college and dual enrollment programs, like other school–college partnerships, are more likely to develop and flourish when the partners share perspectives about aims and desired outcomes (e.g., Bosma et al., 2010), cultivate the support of a group of committed educators (e.g., Bosma et al., 2010; McCray et al., 2011), obtain sponsorship from school and college leaders (e.g., McCray et al., 2011), motivate the participation of students and their families (e.g., Morrow & Torrez, 2012), and work to navigate across the quite different cultures of high schools and colleges (e.g., Lefever-Davis, Johnson, & Pearman, 2007).

Coupled with suggestions from earlier research, the study's findings point to several strategies for establishing and sustaining early college and dual enrollment programs: (a) breaking down hierarchical relationships by encouraging shared leadership among participating educators, (b) developing secure and consistent lines of communication prior to program implementation, (c) ensuring that educators use face-to-face communication to establish relationships before relying on email and other less personal modes of interacting, (d) creating an alignment of schedules and resources, (e) engaging in ongoing discussions of impediments and enablers within partnering institutions, (f) establishing policies that foster synergies and discourage competition, (g) using border crossers to help colleagues negotiate the different institutional cultures, (h) expanding family and community awareness of the programs, and (i) developing long-term funding and budgeting plans. Although such strategies cannot assure a program's success, insights from those studied in this research project suggest that these approaches may play a role in ameliorating conditions such as inadequate and unsupportive funding arrangements, sporadic communication, unequal power relations, and distrust among partners.

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Notes

1. The literature about early college and dual enrollment includes additional studies focusing on the prevalence of such programs, policies governing availability and access, and descriptions of particular programs. Some of this literature (e.g., Jobs for the Future, 2008) focuses on the Early College High School (ECHS) Initiative supported in part by the Gates Foundation. That initiative's championship of students for early college participation who *do not* exhibit academic excellence is an influence on state policy (Blanco & Prescott, 2007) and has been influenced by older early college provisions, such as that in Minnesota, which somewhat widened participation as compared with the even earlier emphasis on "brilliance" (e.g., Stanley, 1976).
2. There *are* differences in these two approaches, but both focus resources and effort on minority and low-income students whose college-going capacity would typically be overlooked or even suppressed in the high schools they would otherwise attend.
3. That is, in addition to the implicit (seldom stated) hopes for educational equity.
4. Scheduling conflicts made the use of group interviews necessary. In both cases, the two educators who were interviewed at the same time knew each other well.
5. Two conditions, namely, the limited number of participants and the team's inability to gather additional data from participants as a way to test theoretical claims, convinced the researchers that the methodology did not fully meet the criteria of grounded theory. Nevertheless, they found the process of axial coding to be extremely helpful for surfacing themes.
6. This term is somewhat misleading. In grounded theory, a selective code is actually a "master code" or single organizing principle. All themes in a qualitative interpretation ought to be able to be subsumed under one selective code, organizing principle, or "story line."
7. As noted above, these dyads did not represent planned partnerships between one high school and one institution of higher education but rather resulted from the impact of geographic proximity on the decisions of students and consortium participants.
8. Such comments often encode a favorable view of an opportunity to abandon an impoverished region (Corbett, 2007; DeYoung, 1995).
9. See Burnell (2003), Hektner (1995), and C. Howley, Harmon, and Leopold (1996) for focused empirical studies of the dilemma of attachment to rural community and aspirations for academic attainment.

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