How does a community-involved educational organization actually get its program moving? What does it take to close the gap between school and university? An educator with experience in both areas concerns himself with old problems in new ways, using the Urban Education Center in Louisville, Kentucky, as an example.

the Louisville urban center: an experiment in facilitation

By Herbert K. Heger
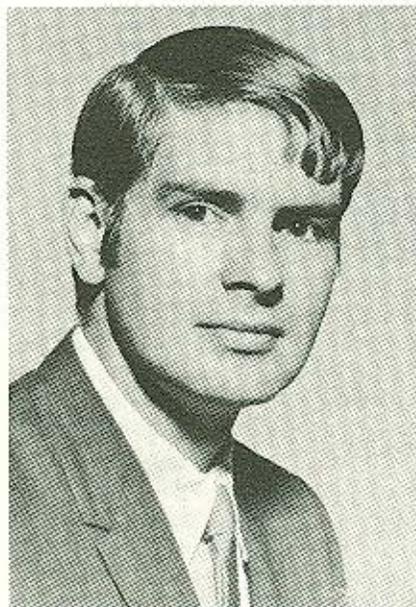
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According to the standard measures, Louisville is a typical urban situation. Within the city, poverty is high and school achievement is down. But, Louisville's response to its problems is not typical; Louisville is attempting massive educational change. While not everyone in Louisville is agreed on matters of strategy, the community, school board, and professional staff are united in the common desire to move forward. The Louisville effort has been documented in general terms as an example of a school district with renewed faith in people and what they can accomplish.[1] This article reports on one aspect of the Louisville effort, a story of experimentation in inter-institutional cooperation, facilitation, and mutual support through the Louisville Urban Education Center.

The Louisville Urban Education Center is a type of consortium. It was created to answer the need for pooling resources from universities and public schools in order to expedite educational development. The Center is a broad purpose consortium, linking institutions with apparent diverse missions: The Louisville Public Schools, the College of Education, University of Kentucky, and the School of Education, University of Louisville. The Louisville community is directly represented on the Center's Executive Board.

Unlike many consortia, the Center was not created to operate, maintain, or control specific programs. Rather, it has been given a more subtle mission: the facilitation of educational development through the pooling of the resources and talents of the community and three sponsoring educational institutions. The basic assumption behind the Center is that professors, school administrators, teachers, and parents sincerely desire to work together on the problems of urban education but are too often hindered by institutional barriers, demands of job assignments, even geographical distance (the University of Kentucky is seventy-five miles from Louisville). Therefore, the Center has adopted a philosophy of unobtrusive facilitation to help others carry out their missions, not to build its own empire. In the rare cases where the Center independently starts a project, the strategy is to involve the people to whom the project will belong and to release the project and credit to its natural environment.

Center Functions

The Center is a quasi-independent institution which functions among its three sponsoring institutions to achieve a pooling of resources to help create change in the three

institutions. It is hoped that change will occur as a direct result of the cooperative pooling of resources. The universities desire field sites for professional preparation programs while the school district needs assistance in its staff development program. The district needs research and planning assistance with its very real problems, while professors need access to field sites for their research efforts. Both university and public school staffs need to test their ideas in the crucible of public opinion, while the members of the community need a greater sense of control over their own destinies.

The Center's search is for cooperative approaches to educational development which meet the various needs of its clientele.[2] A professor desiring to pursue research in the schools may be able to solve an immediate public school problem with his study; a service need of a neighborhood school board may provide a valuable field experience for a student teacher or graduate student.

The Center staff attempts to locate resources which can be linked, via facilitation and mediation, in order to arrive at mutually beneficial solutions. Three basic strategies may be used to accomplish these ends.

Facilitation

In many cases, solutions can result from simple facilitation of communication between people. Should a university desire to implement an experimental training program, the Center staff facilitates the installation of the project. Should a school need assistance from a reading expert, the Center staff facilitates the contact.

Project Support

Often, cooperative projects need logistical or manpower support. Manpower to conduct surveys or to analyze data might be necessary to assist a project. In such cases, the Center attempts to provide the support necessary to get a project moving. The Center often provides evaluative, monitoring, or consulting services as a form of support.

Strategic Planning

In the previous two categories the Center assists others and the major portion of the project remains in the hands of others. Strategic planning usually involves involves Center-conducted efforts, including background research and the development of planning alternatives in a manner not unlike the now famous "think tanks." Even in this area the Center strives to involve concerned parties on a continuing basis and, in the words of Center Director Roy Forbes, "minimize its ego involvement."

Center Structure

The Center's structure is capped by an executive board including the superintendent of schools, the two deans of education, and representatives from the Louisville community. The staff includes associate directors from the three sponsoring institutions and a director.

Key to the success of the Center is the staff of graduate interns[3] as well as the secretarial staff. This is the group of staff members which provides the manpower to support projects, to conduct research or to simply provide liaison as it is required. The staff has discovered that the availability of interns can extend the resources of the clientele to establish cooperative projects which otherwise would not have been feasible.

Center Development

The scenario for Center evolution is quite different from a typical consortium. Typical consortia create a bond between institutions with common missions,[4] connoting the eventual emergence of a super institution. The Louisville experiment, however, links diverse institutions with separate missions. It would be unreasonable to expect a super institution to emerge.

The focus of the Louisville effort is on the people within the institutions with the aim that involved people will freely cross institutional boundaries to join in common projects. The ultimate result would be twofold. First, the institutions would change as a result of the cross-institutional and community experience gained by members of the sponsoring institutions. Second, if one assumes absolute personnel stability within the three institutions, the Center would work itself out of existence—eventually all involved personnel would be actively cooperating and could continue cooperating independently.

With the above scenario in mind, it is possible to identify four specific stages of development for the Center:

Stage 1 Planning and establishing the Center.

Stage 2 Building a record of accomplishment and establishing a positive expectation of success on the part of the various clientele.

Stage 3 Planning, implementing, and modifying activities in order to reach all aspects of the Center mission.

Stage 4 Accomplishing stage 3 so well that Center existence is no longer needed.

The assumption of staff stability in order to reach stage 4 is obviously idealistic. Staff turnover and the ever changing nature of educational problems are likely to create new needs as rapidly as prior needs are resolved, but stage 3 is a practical aspiration.

Initial conferences in early 1971 led to the first Center operations in the fall of 1971. The plan, as developed by August, 1971, covered organizational and initial financial factors as well as a broadly defined list of purposes and objectives. The Center began to operate in September without a director but with seven interns.

The fall months were spent developing projects without a very clear notion of priorities on the basis of the need to build a record of accomplishment.[5] This is not to suggest that Center goals were violated; rather, the goals were broad enough to make nearly any urban education need seem valid. The absence of a director created an immediate need to function at low profile to avoid restricting the role of the director when he arrived.

The Center director arrived in January, 1972, and the staff immediately focused upon planning for 1972-73. It was determined that the efforts underway did, in fact, fit Center

goals and were establishing a record of achievement and providing experience and data that could be helpful in determining service needs. Therefore, these projects were completed.

The fall of 1972 saw the development of the first prioritized Center operations. Each involvement was selected carefully; however, it was not possible to develop activities which completely balanced Center efforts according to the overall Center goals. The Center was solidly in stage 2 of the scenario discussed above and activities were no longer taken on merely to build a track record.

Examples of Center efforts include facilitating a pre-student teaching experimental field experience program with the University of Kentucky, providing monitoring and evaluation services for the Child Development Services System, assisting the local Urban Rural Project, facilitating the school district's evaluation task force, operating the Louisville Cooperative Urban Teacher Education (CUTE) project, and assisting local efforts in diagnostic prescriptive instruction.[6]

As discussed earlier, most Center efforts are invested in projects in which ownership is vested elsewhere. Few projects are exclusively Center projects. It is occasionally necessary to take on a project on a pilot basis. The CUTE program is such an example. The intention is to release such programs to other settings as they mature. It is expected that other such projects may occur in the future. Perhaps one of the major unanswered questions at this point in the evaluation of the Center is whether such programs can be successfully "released."

A major thrust for 1973-74 will be to extend Center efforts and to further balance priorities. One route to success in this area may be through the acquisition of grant funds for the Center's overall operation. Currently, the Center is funded by its three sponsoring institutions. The school district's share of funding comes from a portion of a grant from the J. Graham Brown Foundation. These funds do not carry restrictions. Other funds are received for specific purposes and do carry restrictions. An example is a small grant under the USOE Teacher Center effort. Thus far, these funds obligate the Center to activities it wishes to pursue regardless of funding sources. The funds are earmarked for the planning of a local Teacher Center, an activity which falls under the general concerns of the Center.[7] However, funding from federal programs with appropriate guidelines is not altogether certain. Therefore, there is an effort to develop other sources of funding.

Accomplishments and Prognosis

The quality of Center efforts will be difficult to judge. Few efforts of the Center will result in technological breakthroughs; rather, Center efforts focus on development and application of proved methods to real situations. Real world resources are too limited for radical innovations. Judging the quality of Center efforts will also be hampered by the basic philosophy of the Center. With an intentional low profile and non-ownership of projects and with careful involvement of various clientele groups, there will seldom emerge a purely "Center" product.

Center achievements will have to be measured by indirect methods, such as increasing cooperation between the personnel of the sponsoring institutions and by the changing operations of the institutions.

The outlook for Center work is good. It would be hard to find a school system in the country more open to progress than the Louisville Independent School District. While the universities involved in the Center effort have problems of their own, not unlike all universities, their dedication has been established. Cooperation and support seems assured.

The major task facing the Center staff is involved in moving from stage 2 to stage 3; organizing priorities to assure a goal-related balance of activities and efforts.

According to Newman Walker, superintendent of the Louisville Public Schools, "The experience gained in providing services to university, school, and community personnel provides a strong basis for optimism for the success of the Center."

Implications for Others

Establishing a Center such as the Louisville experiment requires only a few elements. Modest funding is an obvious requirement. The other elements are more complex. A spirit of openness is an absolute must. Personnel in a school district and a reasonably close college must have a certain awareness of the potential resources of the other institutions and must be willing to give it a genuine try. Where these conditions exist, cooperative ventures are possible with the right kind of leadership.

Leadership requirements include, above all, the ability to see common elements in the mission of a school district and higher education. Training is an example. Can universities and school districts continue to go their separate ways in training? The Center staff is convinced that cooperation is imperative in this area.

Leadership requirements include the ability to see beyond questions of authority and accountability. School and university people cannot afford to get hung-up on their unique roles as defined by boards of education and trustees. They must look at the larger picture. As professionals in state agencies, they must see the overall responsibility to their state and the people it represents.

The Center staff would recommend a low profile strategy as less threatening than other approaches and as effective in building cooperation among the people who count—the professionals in the sponsoring agencies. Any other strategy will merely build a new institution to stand between the sponsors and complicate relationships.

This author would further recommend beginning a cooperative venture of this sort with a plan of action for a period of about two years. This plan might be broad purposed, like the Louisville Urban Education Center. In this case, a small, initial territory in a geographical sense is recommended with a plan to grow in territorial size by stages until an entire school district is involved.

Alternatively, an operation could start cooperation on a single conceptual point, with a plan to add conceptual territory. In either case, care should be taken to avoid a large, permanent staff with its tendency to become a new in-

stitution. Graduate interns make ideal staff members in this respect since they do not remain on permanent assignment with the operation.

Care needs to be taken to talk out, in advanced planning, differences in perception between the members of the sponsoring institutions. Does in-service training, for example, mean the same to members of each sponsoring group?

Special care needs to be exercised in defining the power of the representative from each institution in his home setting. This internal matter in each institution may be overlooked in the press of other organizational questions. To whom does this representative report? How does he keep up with internal developments back home? Above all, how does he recognize the contributions of his colleagues to the new project?

Finally, attention needs to be given to the problem of long- or short-term thinking. Schools need assistance. Is there a danger of aborting an otherwise successful project due to expectation differences on the speed and amount of impact of the experiment?

If the experience in Louisville is any guide, the gap between school and university is not as large as it may sometimes seem.

FOOTNOTES

1. Terry Boston, "Reform Without Politics in Louisville," *Saturday Review*, February 5, 1972, pp. 51-55; Story Moorefield, "How Louisville Put It All Together," *American Education*, December 1971.

2. The Center's clientele falls into four groups: university personnel, central school administrative personnel, school site personnel, and community personnel.

3. Interns are recruited from many specialities. Most are in graduate education programs at the sponsoring universities but others are accepted where their skills meet current priorities.

4. Paul Ruben, "Consortium of the Seminaries," *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, June 1972, pp. 21-23.

This article provides an interesting report on a conventional consortium. The implied scenario for this type of consortium would be to create a bond of inter-institutional unity since participating institutions share common missions.

5. Projects begun were largely short-term projects involving needs assessment services and investigative services.

6. Part of the Center's staff, the graduate interns, could be considered a project in themselves since they receive training while on the job.

7. The Teacher Center is planned to operate independently of USOE's Teacher Center of Educational Renewal Effort.

"In changing times, unchanging schools are anomalous. Competency-based education promises the thrust necessary for adaptation to meet the challenge of a changed and changing society. Such change must be planned in systemic terms, dealing simultaneously with all of the elements that comprise the total system—teacher-education institutions, prospective and inservice teachers, the schools, certification agencies, professional education organizations, community groups, and the public. The emphasis in competency-based teacher education on objectives, accountability, and personalization implies specific criteria, careful evaluation, change based on feedback, and relevant programs for a modern era."

—Robert B. Howsam and W. Robert Houston
Competency-Based Teacher Education: Progress, Problems, and Prospects, p. 1
(Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1972)