

It is essential that strong and on-going linkages exist between those who prepare teachers and the field-based practitioners who are intimately acquainted with student needs.

School/University Partnerships— A Time to Disenthrall Ourselves

by **Stuart B. Ervay**
Emporia State University
and **Daniel Lumley**
Emporia Unified School District

In his Second Annual Message to Congress, Abraham Lincoln said that Americans fighting the Civil War must disenthral themselves in order to save the country. By that he meant that citizens of both North and South should seek to escape the intellectual and emotional biases to which they were being held captive, because "the dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present."

Within public education there is a "dogma of the quiet past" which for too long has separated universities and public schools; the dogma holds that because public schools are most responsible for meeting the varied expectations of a sometimes fickle society, they are fundamentally different than universities which serve academic interests above all else. Public school educators are held captive by legislative and board directives and are almost daily asked to expand their roles to meet such emergencies as substance abuse, racism, fragmented families, and sexually-transmitted diseases—to name only a few. On the other hand, universities are insulated so well from the vicissitudes of governmental decision makers that they are often held captive by a form of lethargic scholasticism. Those differences become painfully obvious when attempts are made to create partnerships between universities and public schools.

How, then, do we disenthral ourselves? How do we overcome the fundamental differences in perspective and function that impede our growth toward real partnership? It is particularly important for those who work in university colleges of education to find answers to those questions, because the teaching profession demands reasonable solu-

Dr. Stuart B. Ervay is Professor of Education and Assistant Dean, The Teachers College at Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas, and Mr. Dan Lumley is Director of Secondary Instruction at Emporia Unified School District, Emporia, Kansas.

tions more than ever before. It is essential that strong and ongoing linkages exist between those who prepare teachers and the field-based practitioners who are intimately acquainted with student needs.

Institutionalizing Partnerships

Much has been written about partnerships between public schools and colleges of education, but most concepts and practices seem to have little long-term impact on improving relationships. Based on our experiences and research, we conclude that the most significant cause for failure is inadequate attention to institutionalizing partnership programs—that those who initiate joint projects do not give sufficient attention to governance systems and to nurturing the personal relationships that evolve within those systems. Both of those aspects in their developmental stages require patient leadership and a willingness to spend years of commitment fulfilling well-conceived goals. Finally, the governance system must be designed in such a way that a dynamic agenda can be perpetuated after the key players who functioned within the initial stages are no longer present.

Many collaborative activities between universities and public schools violate the principles that assure institutionalization. A typical scenario involves a nontenured assistant professor who must lend credibility to an upcoming article that is being readied for submission to a refereed journal. A flurry of activity results in the creation of a short-term project that generates enough data to cause the article to be accepted. The article is complete, the assistant professor becomes interested in a new project, and the initiative is terminated. Another example might involve a field experiences director who wishes to use classroom teachers as special seminar presenters for the student teaching program, but attempts to operate the project on an ad hoc basis in whatever spare time the field experiences office staff has available. The experiment ends after one semester. In both examples, there is no long-term leadership commitment to the project. Because of that condition, no governance system is established nor is there any real effort to nurture personal relationships among the participants. Goals may have been self-serving or poorly conceived, and participants were not excited about the project's agenda of activities. No one gave either project enough attention to detail, nor did anyone seem to care about the long-term consequences of the collaboration. Failure is certain whenever a partnership is based on selfish needs or a concept that begins with this statement: "that's a great idea so let's give it a try." Giving something a try is ordinarily an insufficient reason for opening opportunities for cooperation.

Leadership Commitment

Geraldine Clifford and James Guthrie have written a new book titled *ED SCHOOL: A BRIEF FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION*. Excerpts from that book were included in a recent *Education Week* "Commentary" which points out that colleges of education "have become ensnared improvidently in the academic and political cultures of their institutions and have neglected their professional allegiances." That condition is not news to assistant professors seeking promotion and tenure; their academic careers depend on scholastic productivity, highly visible (albeit inconsequential) service activities, and campus-based teaching. Energetic, bright and capable assistant professors had better be committed to the university's goals first and foremost.

Since public school practitioners are not likely to initiate collaborative activities (as they rarely see obvious ad-

vantages to such relationships), it is important that someone from the university take the lead. If those at the university who were most recently employed by public schools cannot be disenthralled from the university's priority system, then no leadership commitment can exist.

Commitments are most possible when those university administrators responsible for making tenure and promotion decisions play active roles in leading highly visible projects. A good example of that process has occurred in Lubbock, Texas, where Texas Tech's College of Education Dean Richard Ishler and the Lubbock Schools Superintendent E.C. Leslie initiated an "Adopt a Classroom Project" that involves 141 Tech professors, including the University's president. That kind of initiative can certainly inspire younger faculty toward the building and leadership of subordinate or similar programs. University faculty members can also receive encouragement by hearing chief administrators indicate that working with public schools is near the top of their priority lists; two university presidents who regularly do that are the University of Missouri's Peter McGrath and Emporia State's Robert Glennen.

Establishing Appropriate Goals

Goal-setting in most of today's collaborative enterprises is usually a function of the university. A professor senses a need, organizes a project scenario and proposal, and presents the concept to those public school personnel that could and should be involved. Though goals are established at the university, possible outcomes include those in which the schools might have an interest. Such outcomes might be in the realm of staff or program improvement or the increased visibility of projects the school sponsors. Whatever the trade-off, school personnel are nevertheless asked to accept the university's priorities to become part of the activity. Unfortunately, that process leads to a senior partner/junior partner syndrome, in which the schools seem to become laboratories for "good ideas" coming from higher education.

Though public schools occasionally initiate collaboration, that condition is rather uncommon. Most often they look for a university service . . . something they can obtain inexpensively or for nothing, such as workshops, student testing, consultant services, and media exchanges. Since most grant programs encourage collaboration, districts and universities will work together in setting goals for a project that requires that kind of cooperation; if such a grant program is funded, then the impetus to work together may be such that mutually supportive activities will continue after the funding period.

In the Kansas community of Emporia, the schools and university began working closely as a result of informal dialogue among educators who took advantage of the limited number of liaison opportunities that existed in the early 1970s, and who created new mediums for communication since then. Superintendent Harold Hosey can be credited for opening opportunities through these actions:

1. interacting with university administrators and faculty members through affiliation with Phi Delta Kappa, service clubs, and other less formal organizations;
2. reorganizing the district and charging district and building-level administrators with responsibility for working as closely as appropriate with the university;
3. establishing the overriding philosophy that close ties with a university cause tangible benefits for school districts; and
4. hiring district office personnel who are assigned responsibility for working with university administra-

tors to coordinate field placements of university students and other functions initiated by those external to the district.

Because of that climate of openness, university and public school personnel became more than educators stationed at similar but different institutions. Many close associations developed, creating the kind of collegiality that nurtures development of common goals. Teamwork of that sort built solid programs in which both institutions are interested and created a condition that stimulates development of nationally-recognized innovations.

Information about other existing and developing partnerships and how their goals were developed can be obtained from the Association of Teacher Educators and the new publication edited by Sirotnik and Goodlad, *SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION: CONCEPTS, CASES, AND CONCERNS*.

Governance Systems

We are continually amazed that so many American institutions overlook an obvious means of stabilizing the governance of existing and evolving organizations. The Constitution of the United States sets forth a model of governance that features the principles of governance by law and governance by the people. Those involved in collaborative enterprises must not ignore those fundamental ideas . . . that institutionalization will occur only when the organization's participants are part of the decision-making process, and when a formal governance procedure is developed and followed.

There is a tendency for many educational leaders in public schools and universities to depend on "good old boy" networks, administrative decision-making prerogatives, and personal expectations that are based on pedagogical habit. Those leaders are simply not ready to accept boundaries or to discipline themselves to function in a more democratic atmosphere. No true collaboration can occur if one significant leader in either the university or school district feels compelled to short-circuit the democratic process by forcefully asserting his or her own prerogatives.

As previously mentioned, in Emporia the superintendent created a kind of "glosnost" that allowed and even encouraged the development of new goals and formal substructures; personnel in The Teachers College at Emporia State and district leaders were then able to form two governance bodies: the Emporia Education Council (EEC) and the Emporia Teacher Council (ETC). EEC members are district and university administrators appointed by the superintendent and education dean who meet as needed to discuss issues and evolving concepts, and to create procedures to resolve problems and promote innovations. ETC members are primarily classroom teachers and those university faculty members who direct and/or supervise within the teacher education program; some are appointed and others are elected. The ETC receives a budget that pays for programs it sponsors . . . Flint Hills Multi-Institutional Teacher Education Center (FHMITEC) seminars for student teachers, analyses of problems associated with observation/student teaching assignments, cooperating teacher training programs, and presentations at state/regional/national conferences. The ETC also designs and monitors the FHMITEC seminars, and employs and supervises a part-time FHMITEC director.

The governance model established in Emporia provided direction to The Teachers College when it created a statewide network of student teaching centers. That network is called "Connections," a function that was classified

a "Distinguished Program in Teacher Education" in 1985 by the Association of Teacher Educators. More information about "Connections" can be obtained by contacting Dr. Michael Morehead at Emporia State.

All Emporia State collaborative initiatives are now based on the principles that evolved in the 1970s . . . governance by law (formal policies) and governance by the people (participants involved in the process). We strongly believe that the recommendations in the reform publications of the 1980s will not work if serious attention is not given to administrative climate, the nuts-and-bolts of governance, and a dedication to participatory decision making.

Personal Relationships

One of the most difficult aspects of collaboration is the joining of university/public school perspectives on educational issues and functions. The two dimensions spend considerable time discussing educational practice and often involve others in vigorous deliberations. Through this process we better understand our differences in perspective, the experiences that cause those differences, and how we can find points of compromise. ETC members often spend meetings doing much the same thing but emerge as better friends and professional co-workers.

Research conducted in 1984 with regard to university/field perspectives on student teaching revealed this information:

- University supervisors emphasize subject matter and professional knowledge while cooperating teachers consider personal characteristics, classroom management, and planning skills as being more important.
- Cooperating teachers believe public school practitioners should teach methods classes and that the field experience is the most essential aspect of teacher education, opinions obviously not shared by college supervisors.
- While university personnel view student teaching as being only part of a teacher preparation continuum, cooperating teachers view it as on-the-job training for those who have already mastered basic skills.
- Wide differences occur with regard to the minimum number of visits by a university supervisor (cooperating teachers want many more) and the type of training university supervisors should receive (cooperating teachers recommend training and considerable experience in and continuing involvement with public schools).

Bringing those differing outlooks closer together can be done in only one way—via a forum in which vigorous discussion is possible. Such a forum can be a university classroom, but we believe that deliberations should occur outside formal courses on neutral ground and among educators who view themselves as professional equals.

Much can be learned from those who use friendship and trust to build a better profession. Adam Urbanski and Peter McWalters, union leader and school superintendent in Rochester, New York, have proven its effectiveness. Surely if a union leader and manager can join forces to improve an organization through friendship, trust, and understanding, university/public school educators should be able to use the same principles to improve the profession.

Maintaining a Dynamic Agenda

Keeping the "collaboration agenda" alive and vigorous is a major challenge. Leadership commitment, goals, thorough attention to governance matters, and close personal

relationships help—but cooperative enterprises die without something to do. There is nothing worse than a meeting without an agenda, unless the agenda is artificial and meaningless make-work. Though agenda-building should be as collaborative as possible, one or two participants—perhaps the leaders—should periodically infuse it with a new notion, wild idea, innovative proposal, or anything that is a little crazy, inspiring and feasible.

Agendas should not only serve the organization, they should also serve its individual participants. In Emporia, university and district personnel attend conferences together, co-author articles, conduct research, and take joint responsibility for preparing the teachers of tomorrow. We make the agenda as full, rich, meaningful, and innovative as possible.

Conclusion

In this article we suggest that it is time for us to disenthrall ourselves from the biases unique to university and public schools, as partnerships require new perspectives and broader visions. Partnerships do not work if they are not institutionalized through leadership commitment, clearly established goals, workable governance systems, good personal relationships, and a dynamic and on-going agenda. The improvement of our profession requires that we expend the time and energy necessary to make cooperative enterprises endure.

References

- Clifford, G. and Guthrie, J. (1988). "Strategies for reforming schools of education." *Education Week*. June 8, 1988, Vol. VII, 37, 23 and 32.
- Ervay, S. (1985). "Campus-field compatibility in student teaching." *Action in Teacher Education*. Fall, 1985, Vol. VI, 3, 37-41.
- Ervay, S. (1979). "Professional autonomy and teacher education." *Journal of Teacher Education*. January-February, 1979, Vol. XXX, 1, 59-62.
- Ervay, S., Lumley, D. and Tague, K. (1983). "The bicameral teacher center." *The Teacher Educator*. Summer, 1983, Vol. XIX, 1, 7-13.
- Ishler, R. and Leslie, E. (1987). "Bridging the gap between a public school system and a university." *Phi Delta Kappan*. April, 1987, Vol. LXVII, 8, 615-616.
- Hawkes, R. (1988). "A model of school/university cooperation that works." *Phi Delta Kappan*. April, 1988, Vol. LXIX, 8, 614-615.
- Lasley, T. (Ed.). (1985). "Teacher education in the university culture" (thematic issue). *Journal of Teacher Education*. July-August, 1985, Vol. XXVI, 4.
- Morehead, M., et al. (1985). *Connections—A Model for Collaborative Preservice Teacher Education*. A Distinguished Program in Teacher Education in 1985 (Association of Teacher Educators). Emporia: Office of Professional Education Services, The Teachers College, Emporia State University.
- Rodman, B., (1987). "Friendship and trust: Unusual keys to radical pact." *Education Week*. September 30, 1987, Vol. VII, 4, 1, 20, 21.
- Sirotnik, K. and Goodlad, J. (1988). *School-University Partnerships in Action: Concepts, Cases, and Concerns*. New York: The Teachers College Press.
- Yount, R. (Ed.). (1985). *Partnership for Excellence*. Proceedings of the 1985 Summer Institute—Council of Chief State School Officers. Delavan, Wisconsin.