Understanding what it takes to grow a Great School-University Partnership

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School-University Partnerships

My journey to understanding partnerships began when I became an assistant principal and later

principal. The need for extra resources for my schools drew me to search outside the school. At that

time I didn't think in terms of creating partners, I thought in terms of filling needs for students. Located

in the middle of a neighborhood that had several colleges, businesses, and residences, the school was in

a perfect location for accessing perspective partners. I was young and inexperienced, I did not think

about partnerships only of finding outside support. The scenario went something like this. I needed

help with a new student who had Aspergers Syndrome and who was exhibiting some odd behaviors that

my teachers and I who were unfamiliar with the syndrome did not how to handle. I contacted

Children's Hospital and found someone there who could come and talk to my staff and me about the

child and what to do about him. I needed an outlet for my middle schoolers to do community service so

I walked across the street to a housing project that had a daycare center within it and asked if my

students could be of service to them. I also approached La Alianza, a nearby community service

organization. Soon we had interested seventh graders visiting two times a week to read to while others

collected Christmas gifts for little ones whose parents were incarcerated. A young girl diagnosed with a

rare brain tumor and was in need of her mother to help care for her. Her mother was in China and

because of immigration laws, was unable to get into the country. I simply called Senator Kennedy's

office and they assisted the family in getting the mother passage to Boston and to her child. The school

had no playing field because we were in temporary housing for two years so I made a deal with a

principal of a nearby school and started an intramural sports program. I built a strong bond with my

parents who in turn helped me to transform our cafeteria into a theater, complete with an elevated

stage. They also helped turn that same tired cafeteria into a gymnasium when we needed gym space.

For me these "agreements" were not about forming   partnership, but only about having our needs met.

These small connections took a great deal of time and planning but answered our needs.

The next year when I was asked to turn around a poor underperforming high school, I found myself again searching my community for resources to fill our needs. By then the stakes were much higher and the needs were greater. I needed help to with the staff and to deal with the social-emotional needs of the students. I needed jobs for the students and a way to make peace with the surrounding neighborhood so students could walk through without incident. I searched and found social service agencies, community agencies and consultants and the mayor's community advisors to help me.

When two universities approached me about partnering, I was thrilled to make agreements with them to increase our resources. The nature of the two relationships taught me further what was good and not so good about partnering. University A brought much needed grant dollars. Teachers had to write a fairly simple concept paper, get it approved and they would receive $2,000 for use in the classroom. The thinking behind this was that this would foster innovation in the classroom. There were two meetings, one in the fall and the other in the spring. There was no real input required of me and I did not insist on any. I was not asked if the teacher's innovations fit into our whole school improvement plan or did I insist upon it that year. I did not create a framework for these innovation grants and they were all over the place. The University A coordinator, it seems, was simply happy to have the school respond and I was glad to be able to help teachers get some extra supplies.

On the other hand, University B was a different experience and where my partnership awareness began to grow. The partnership entailed placing graduate student teachers, a student teacher leader, a graduate social worker, and a principal intern in my school. This cohort was well managed by the university. They had regular meetings that I was expected to attend. Our meetings were designed to insure that communication flowed among us and to work to improve the program. I was able to select the people who would work in my school cohort but I did not give enough thought to how I might really use these graduate students in the discussions about school improvement. I put the

teacher leader to work disaggregating our data. We discussed what she found, but I did not include the students in the discussions with the teachers about that data. Principal interns were much more included but the deep conversations about change that we had were mainly had in my office. The student interns worked with their cooperating teachers and the university supervisor.   I modeled through my interns and through cohort meetings but did not create enough opportunities for teachers and those graduate interns to dialog beyond the seminar classes. Considering the roles of the members of the cohort, I now realize I missed an opportunity to take advantage of the rich theoretical base the university provided and a chance to broaden the experience for the students.

I was lucky to get another bonus from University B. I received a superintendent intern for a semester. This is where I began to realize the benefit of university partners in helping to drive instruction. She asked me probing questions about the school, my vision and about the data. She decided to help me with one of my worst problems which was improving math scores. Teacher discussions only lead to the blaming the students and my frustrations were at an all-time high. This amazing intern helped me to move my recalcitrant math teachers by visiting their classrooms, modeling good math instruction. (She had once been a math teacher.) She gained their trust and then urged them to look at data and to improve math MCAS scores. She offered them reading and asked a lot of questions and she listened to them. They wrote the math section of the school improvement plan that year and for the first time ever, my school had 14% of its tenth grade students in the advanced category in math. What a feat! It was through this teamwork that I became aware that a university might really be used beyond student teachers to help with school improvement.

Could I have done that same thing with those math teachers? In time, perhaps yes. But because she was grounded in the content and worked to help them with their pedagogy, the affect was much

richer. She brought the latest research to the table and was a helpful partner. This was indeed a great learning experience for me.

All in all these "partnerships" were considered to be successful. I got what I wanted, to some degree and the two universities met their needs but I now know that I could have improved my school in a different way. As school leader I missed an opportunity.

Now my job is all about university school partnerships. It involves five universities with ten underperforming public schools. My job is to make sure that these partnerships are successful. Working with school leaders has been frustrating. With enormous time and accountability constraints on them they do not invest time and effort and thought into the partnerships. They ask for money or if the universities can pay for positions, which is not possible. In them I saw my old self.   The requests principals made of the universities were request without understanding the whole picture and those that actually understand their schools and have a vision did not understand the work of partnering. This experience has made me realize that I need to understand as much as I can about school-university partnerships in order to better serve my principals in this collaboration. The overarching question is:

What do I need to find out in order to build on my experience as a principal to help other principals create or work with university-school partnerships to really achieve the goal of supporting school improvement?

My goals is simple: 1) I need to be able to articulate why this is important and 2) gain a better research base for understanding school-university partnerships 3) and use what I learn when mentoring principals in this collaboration. It suddenly became apparent that this was much more about me than about the principals' reticence. This was more about me than about them, after all. I needed to broaden my knowledge base in order to be of service to them.

One just has to look around and know that the relationship of schools and their external environments have changed in the past years. Everyone realizes what high stakes educating the youth has become. The nature of the partnerships with schools has taken on different dimensions in the past years. In the 90's, former first lady Hilary Clinton borrowed from an African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," when she wrote her book with that same title to describe how there are many individuals and groups that have influences on a child's well being. Her book advocated for a society that would come to the aid of its children and meet all the needs of its children. Fast forward to today and Geoffrey Canada with his Harlem Children's Zone in New York. He provides a village of supports for the children in his schools. This is the nature of urban public education. The academic, social-emotional and societal problems that confront the children in our schools require as many hands on deck as possible. Carol Ascher writes in an article entitled Urban *School-Community Alliances: Trends and Issues* that "in fact, in urban areas where poverty, unemployment, torn families, homelessness, drug abuse, racial prejudice, and other forms of social dysfunction further complicates education, public schools have assumed ever increasing burdens. Educators are often forced to reach out to other institutions for help." (Ascher & ERIC Clearinghouse on, 1988) Schools relationships with their communities has changed and expanded and to meet the needs of our children and their families it involves forming much more complicated and involved relationships with the external world.

As I researched more I learned that there is a theoretical rational for school partnerships. Accordingly schools are organizations and as organizations are influenced by their environments and also dependent upon them. They are in a sense, open systems. (Hoy & Miskel, 2004) Schools cannot be exempt from the internal and external forces around them and thus schools are open. They take resources such as labor, students and money from the environment and subject these to an educational process in order to produce literate and educated students and graduates. (Hoy & Miskel, 2004) systems. Every principal feels the pull of various social, political and economic issues in the community.

They cannot ignore them. "They are influenced by their environment, but also dependent on them."(Hoy & Miskel, 2004) Through this theory, school partnerships are therefore a necessity for survival. This open system theory seemed like common sense. Look at it this way. Businesses need an educated workforce; health and social service agencies need access to their clientele; cultural institutions want to broaden their audiences and attract funding; and universities and colleges need to make to be assured that the students that graduate from our schools graduate with appropriate skills and a solid knowledge base that will help them to tackle higher education. There is a symbiotic like relationship between schools and their communities.

As far as school university partnerships, there is a very natural and practical reason schools and universities should work together. Their overall goals are tied up with each other. Pedro Noguera, (1998) described it as "an interdependence of schools and universities." He explained that it is because both prepare young people for the future; and because public schools feed the university consumers that keep them in business; and also because universities influence public education by directing the standards for how students should be prepared. (Noguera, 1998) If schools are needed to serve universities then universities must serve schools and principals need to understand how best to frame these relationships so as to get maximum use for students and teachers. This really tied in with what I had learned from University B. If we have this kind of symbiotic relationship then I needed to be clear about the potential of school university partnerships in order to guide the schools into quality partnerships that transform their schools.

In a study, funded by the Bell Foundation, of three California schools and their university partnership with San Diego State, Frey and Pumpian (2006) found four guiding principles for the successful transformation of a school through school-university partnerships:

- **Inquiry:** partners seek to learn about one another

- **Engagement:** partners identify common goals for collaboration

- **Partnership**: each partner uses their expertise and resources to achieve agreed upon goals

- **Transformation**: the partners share learning with others."(Frey & Pumpian, 2006)

This four step guide might be useful in understanding what stage the various collaborations that I work with are in. I realize that the final step of transformation is a long way. The various school university partnerships are basically at the getting to know each other stage. They just need to figure out what things what their common goals are then begin the work of engagement. The implications for me here are clear. I need to be sure that they are asking the right questions of each other, spelling out in clear terms what it is they want to have happen and with what results. In recognizing this I see I must be more patient.

Professional Development Schools

As I searched for more examples of university-school partnerships my research led me to a type of partnership that was unique, the professional development school. Local models that I had seen were the Teacher Training Course at Shady Hill School in Cambridge and in Boston's Fenway School and Boston Art's Academy. Both were exemplary models of professional development school, albeit each different from the other. As I mentor principals I hope to be able to help them understand the goals and components and benefits of professional development schools so that they may incorporate some part or all the pieces into their thinking about how to develop their faculty in a way that helps drive instructional improvement. If opportunity arises to create a professional development school partnership it would be beneficial to understand the main purpose of them.

Professional development schools was a movement begun in the late 1980"s as an outcry against alternative certification programs and against the growing dissatisfaction with traditional

teacher education programs. Within the last twenty or so years PDS have grown from being very few to hundreds of schools. They are innovative schools formed through partnerships between teacher education programs and K-12 schools. Patterned after teaching hospitals in the medical field, PDS offer an embedded clinical and professional teacher preparation experience, enhanced learning opportunities for K-12 students and continual professional development for experienced teachers. School and university faculty share responsibility, commitment, and accountability for students and teacher interns alike. They keep children's learning at the core of their work and using a method of inquiry and implementation they try to enhance a child's learning experience. (L. Teitel, 2008) There is a shared vision that crosses both school and university boundaries but "every good design has a focal point and collaborative partnerships are no exceptions. (Frey & Pumpian, 2006) Regardless of the wide range of experiences in PDS schools but there are also four major underpinnings that bind these schools:

- The improvement of student learning;

- The preparation of educators;

- The professional development of educators;

- The use of research and inquiry to improve practice. (L. Teitel, 2004)

In 2000 at the Professional Development School National Conference participants began to put together the key thing they felt made up the professional development school experience. Finally during the 2007 session of the Executive Board, a representative number of attendees released the nine essentials that they believed to be evident in order for a school-university partnership to be called a professional development school. They are as follows:

1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education professions and its responsibility to advance equity within the schools and the community.

2. A school-university culture, committed to the active engagement of and preparation of future educators.

3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development guided by need.

4. A shared commitment to innovation and reflective practice.

5. Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective partners.

6. A clearly articulated agreement that outline roles and responsibilities of all involved.

7. A structure that allows for reflection, collaboration and governance.

8. Work by university and school faculty in both institutional settings.

9. Dedicated and shared resources and structures for formal rewards and recognition. (Brinley, Lessen, & Field, 2008)

In this era of accountability if principals were to consider a professional development school, they must know that professional development schools require a different way to think about staffing patterns. These incorporate university faculty and teacher candidates into instructional teams for unique learning opportunities and require release time for both school and university faculty to work as teacher educators that observe, mentor and assist new teachers. University faculty also support staff professional development and share the latest research with the teams. (Teitel, 2008) (*Professional*

development schools - the creation of professional development schools, the impact of professional development schools, issues trends and controversies.)

The professional development school partnership is not a simple or inexpensive model of reform to implement due to its overarching belief that any change or reform in education should take place at both the K-12 school and university level. (L. Teitel, 2008) It is, however, a unique opportunity to raise the level of professionalism among our teachers, to bridge a gap in the continuum of elementary, secondary and higher education and at the same time to raise achievement levels of students.

With the increased demand for highly qualified teachers it is apparent that principals should be concerned about improving the quality of teachers who are in front of the children and in insuring that the pipeline of teachers coming from the universities delivers teachers who can be successful in our inner city schools. Jon Goodlad (1993) wrote that "direct interaction between university faculty members and today's public school teachers and students may be exactly what is needed to reform teacher education in the United States." (51   Whether improving teacher content knowledge or looking at the latest brain research on how children learn to read, university-school partnerships that involve their faculty, can be a rich background for teacher discussions. For principals, this is approaching a problem at its root and impacting teacher reform. Improving the skill level of one's staff and at the same time creating a pipeline for new talent who have been tried and tested in our schools, is a win-win situation.

In order to help principals improve their schools the partnerships should also help teachers think and ask questions about their work. They should create opportunities for teachers to look at student work and at data and to reflect on their own teaching leads to improvement. "Adding university faculty to teacher study groups allows practitioners to study relevant research and teaching strategies for

making decisions on how to impact student achievement and school culture. It also helps prioritize

student needs and important goals."(Mullen & Hutinger, 2008)

This is not an easy partnership to effect due to the cost and time involved. I am very aware that

PDS is the way to go if we are given the opportunity. Others share my thinking. I learned that,

"Education researchers have become aligned in the view that professional learning of teachers not only

promotes school-wide change, but also student leaning and achievement."(Mullen & Hutinger, 2008) If

only I can help create what I like to think of as call thinking schools or schools that use "inquiry as a part

of professional development and as part of the definition of teaching." (Schaefer, 1967) we might show

some real gains in the collaboration. Providing the opportunity for dialog and the examination of data

along with information about the latest research can transform the culture of a school to one that is

more clinical in nature. The improved practice of thinking or "inquiry" cannot help but have a positive

effect on schools and their students. As Goodlad said in 1993, "partner schools undergo a renewal

process when school and university personnel are joined."

What I Want to Pass on to Principals

I interviewed two principals of successful school-university partnerships which have professional

development school components in each and using their advice and the advice of research I want to

attempt to capture the things a principal must know and do in order to build a successful and effective

school-university or any other kind of collaboration.

- These partnerships take time. Give it your time or assign someone to manage the partnerships
  because only deep commitment and engagement will make it work.

- Do a needs assessment, environmental scan and resource mapping in order to be assured that
  the partnership is right and that you know what to ask for.(Hoy & Miskel, 2004)

- Be sure the right people are at the table. Partners should have aligned objectives and there should be a clear sense of resources and expectations. "True school-university partnerships are not casual entities. Rather they require a great deal of effort, communication, and understanding of the different roles and responsibilities that each participant brings to the table." (L. Teitel, 2008)

- It takes time to grow a partnership. Trust is key. Teachers and faculty should be involved in the planning and decision process. Principals should be sure to understand the skills of collaboration in order to model it correctly for all. There must be reciprocity in order for the partnership to sustain itself.

- Give the partner space in your buildings if needed.

- Be guided by formative, summative and incidental data. Ask questions and hold each other accountable. Continue to lean and reflect what works and what doesn't.(Bradshaw, 2000)

- Communicate, communicate, and communicate.(L. Teitel, 2008)

I have come full circle in my journey to figure out why I was frustrated with my job and the school university partnerships. I thought that my frustrations source was with principals and their annoying negligence of the university partners. That was true but as another level I realize that although the collaborations are producing a lot of services and supports, we have yet to develop the relationships where they impact students or teachers. I now know that I must help principals see the full potential of this initiative. In working with schools principals I must get them to recognize that schools cannot do it alone, that innovative leaders must search for intentional ways to focus on aligning school work and student needs with non school supports that reinforce children's learning and development. The key element for me is that these partnerships are not mere transactions but are transformational. (L. Teitel,

2008   The other important point I must make in our conversations is that they must understand is that they, the principals, are the essential ingredient to good partnering.) They are responsible for creating a receptive environment for them and to that end must be aware of the skills they need in order to create successful and meaning partnerships. If they are lacking in skills or knowledge they should see me as a mentor to help them.   It is important that they involve the right mix of people and work to shape a collaboration that is characterized by shared vision and mission.   It is important that we establish trust.

It occurred to me that as mentor I want to act as that superintendent intern did for me that year early in my principalship.   I want to ask the right questions and model the correct way to partner.   I hope to listen better and build their trust. I hope to continue to learn about exemplary university–school partnerships and share it with them.   I want to show them how to attain these partnerships but know also how once to keep oversight of them in order to insure that children are well served.   I hope to change the nature of the conversations in these partnerships to conversations about the children and teaching and learning.   I want to help them see the importance of using partnership to help solve problems. I also want to make principals understand that it is through this teamwork that a university might really be used for more than student teachers.   This will not be easy work but with a clearer focus backed up by understanding and research I should be a better resource.

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