

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

K-16 Educational Partnerships

K-16 education is an integrated system of education stretching from early childhood on through a four year college degree. The concept of K-16 education emphasizes the continuity of student learning by focusing on alignment across sectors, not isolation within sectors (Van de Water, 2002). Ideally a K-16 partnership signifies a long-term, reciprocal relationship forged between K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions, and often interested others such as local business or community groups (Carriuolo, 1996). K-16 partnerships can take many forms, engage several or sometimes several hundred interested partners, around one or many different objectives using any number of methods or mechanisms. Wilbert and Lambert (1991) offer a four-part framework that reflects the range of K-16 needs and classifies resulting activities. Included in this framework are (1) programs and services for educators; (2) programs and services for students; (3) coordination, development and assessment of curriculum and instruction; and (4) programs to mobilize, direct and promote sharing of educational resources.

The terminology used in the educational literature to describe the concept of collaborations between K-12 schools and higher education are numerous and varied. Authors speak of school-college partnerships, K-16 education, collaborations, consortiums, networks, clusters, inter-organizational agreements (IOAs), seamless education, collectives, and cooperatives, frequently without definition and often without distinguishing their chosen descriptor from other possible terms. Not only authors, but grassroots participants, practitioners and educators engaged in collaboration use the terms interchangeably. Clark (1988) explains that a partnership must be considered “in terms of its operating concepts and practices, not its title” (p. 41). At its heart, whatever the title, K-16 partnerships are about using collaboration to increase opportunities for *all* children to be successful in life.

Collaboration is understood in this context as a process in which organizations exchange information, alter activities, share resources, and enhance each others’ capacity to address problems too complex and too protracted to be resolved by a single partner (McGrath & Gray, 1989, Himmelman, 1996). Inter-institutional collaborations generate a complex array of programs, initiatives and activities across systems and sectors. Collaboration occurs on a continuum. At the minimum level, collaboration would involve two individuals or two units or

organizations communicating together for a specific undertaking. Further along the continuum, two or more units or organizations may agree to establish a process or structure to enable joint decision-making. Even further into the collaborative mode would be an ongoing working partnership with two or more parties having a formal, legal contractual agreement with responsibilities specified and, in essence, with the partnership taking on a life and purpose of its own (Russell & Flynn, 2000b). Progress is reflected by increased commitment, the ability to overcome obstacles and conflicts and the willingness to learn by participants. According to Melaville (1993) a true partnership occurs when professionals and community residents form a cohesive body by practicing guiding principles that support collaboration. These principles include the willingness to change, respect for differences, equal representation in decision-making, a shared vision, clear goals and expectations.

Historical Background on K-16 Educational Partnerships

Most authors trace the earliest example of K-16 educational partnership work to a conference in the 1880's convened by Charles Eliot, then President of Harvard University which brought together teachers of Cambridge Elementary schools and college faculty from its Teacher's College in order to create a more effective student teacher program (Monbouquette, 1972, Clark, 1988, Carriuolo, 1996). In 1885, the New England Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools, the oldest of the regional accrediting agencies, came into being as a result of this conference. The association was formed to foster "continuous rather than irregular cooperation" between schools and colleges. (Monbouquette, 1972, p. 30). In 1896, John Dewey started the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago with the help of parents, teachers, and other educators. He was concerned with the social aspects of schooling, the school's relationship with the growth of individual children, and how in his view "the isolation of schools constituted a vast waste in education" (Dewey, 1959).

In the 1930's, the Progressive Education Association convened a commission on the relationship between colleges and schools. "The focus of the commission's discussions related largely to curricula and preparation of students for a college course of study. The commission, later following an eight-year research study encouraged schools and colleges to coordinate their efforts. These efforts dissolved with the onset of World War II," (Clark, 1988, pp.43-44). Later the post war boom increased the need for cooperation in training new teachers for a growing

student population. Also, with the success of Sputnik and a perceived communist threat, schools and colleges collaborated in an effort to develop more advanced science and mathematics curricula (Di Sibio, 1997).

In the 1960's, the Carnegie Foundation made recommendations concerning partnerships for teacher preparation, and the connections between high school and postsecondary education. In the mid-1970's, only several hundred K-16 partnerships existed and they focused either on teacher training programs or on innovative incentive programs for helping primarily disadvantaged students (Carriuolo, 1996). In 1983, the report, *A Nation At Risk*, commissioned by the National Commission on Excellence in Education instilled a new sense of urgency in the nation regarding the need for educational reform. With this renewed interest in school reform came many new opportunities for educational partnerships.

In 1988, a large-scale study of K-16 partnerships concluded that 80% of the school-college collaborations surveyed began after 1980 (Ascher, 1988). During the 1980's a wide range of programs for students and faculty were developed, and working with schools was no longer the exclusive domain of a college's education department. The National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE) was formed in 1988 as a merger between the National School Volunteer Program and the National Symposium on Partnerships in Education, an annual meeting organized in 1984 to highlight exemplary collaborative efforts that focus on systemic change in schools and their communities (Carriuolo, 1996).

K-16 Education Goals

K-16 education has two fundamental goals, the need to raise the achievement levels of all learners and to close the achievement gap between groups of learners. To achieve these goals Van de Water (2002) states that a system of K-16 education must stress the following factors: (1) the use of research to guide decisions about when and how children learn; (2) a clearly articulated set of high expectations; (3) improvement of teaching quality; and (4) use of data to measure progress. Achieving these goals means grappling with a host of complex issues: standards, testing, teacher education, college admissions policies, governance, funding streams, and institutional turf issues to name a few. K-16 education provides a framework for addressing these issues in a systematic way while keeping the focus on learners (Van de Water, 2002).

McGrath and Van Buskirk (1997) argue that K-16 educational partnerships are particularly well suited to respond to the multi-layered nature of the American educational system. In a situation of diffuse authority, unclear boundaries, multiple decision-makers, and arbitrary transition points, the process of collaboration promotes numerous formal and informal ties among partners (McGrath & Van Buskirk, 1997; Russell & Flynn, 2000). In the American educational system both decision-making processes and the boundaries of authority are unclear, and there are few mechanisms to build consensus or resolve disputes. Within our multi-layered and decentralized system there is no single entity in a community responsible for the educational success of students. The pattern of ties characteristic of collaboration produce a complex set of cross-cutting relationships. These relationships facilitate the flow of information among institutions and across sectors, promote consensus, and provide the conditions to resolve disputes (McGrath & Van Buskirk, 1997).

Education Reform Issues

K-16 educational partnerships are a powerful strategy to effect educational reform in a collaborative manner that promotes integrated, cohesive efforts to create systemic change. McGrath & Van Buskirk (1997) identified several factors that contribute to the incredible complexity of educational reform in the United States, including the ambiguity of decision-making processes and boundaries of authority, arbitrary transitions from one educational level to another, the need to address all aspects of the education system simultaneously, the difficulties in institutionalizing or bringing to scale successful reform efforts and the tendencies of each education segment to see itself as separate. Further contributing to these difficulties, educational reform measures have typically tried to impose change through legislative mandates and top-down hierarchical policies which are usually resisted by school personnel (Slama, ?). To produce meaningful change, educational reform needs to modify the culture of schools and the conditions for teaching and learning (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Kirschner, et al, 1996; Kellett & Goldstein, 1999). Rather than trying to impose change from the outside, which is characteristically resisted by schools, collaborative interaction builds support from the faculty and staff of partner institutions as they are drawn into common efforts (McGrath & Van Buskirk, 1997). In Roadmap to Restructuring, David Conley (1994) contends that change in education has often reflected a project mentality, in which schools are buffeted by a steady stream of

episodic innovations. As a result, these programs have tended to come and go without leaving a mark.

Barriers to Effective Collaboration

K-16 education is not without its critics. Some view K-16 educational partnerships as no more than a passing fad; while others assert that it fails to address the complex problems facing K-12 and higher education (Clinton, 2000; Van de Water, 2002; Bullough, Jr. et al, 1999). Turf or money issues may explain some of this opposition, but a lack of information about the strengths and challenges of a K-16 system also contributes to skepticism surrounding the issue (Van de Water, 2002). Barriers that first partnerships may face include lack of incentives, authority and turf issues, domination by universities, lack of trust, sustainable funding and a lack of long-term commitment (Di Sibio & Gamble, 1997; Corrigan, 2000; Kellett & Goldstein, 1999). Educators involved in collaborative work need the skills and planning to deal with funding uncertainties, lack of coordination, changes in leadership and differences in institutional cultures.

Funding uncertainties are a fact of life for many educational partnerships that often depend heavily on “soft” money (grants, temporary allocations, etc) for the bulk of their funding (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996). Funders will only fund a project for a limited number of years, consequently partnerships are eventually faced with either seeking new funding or assuming the costs of the partnership internally. In difficult economic times, when soft money disappears, hard decisions have to be made by the member institutions. Sometimes programs are cut, but other times entire partnerships disappear (Carriuolo, 1996).

Often community members and participant schools encounter a lack of coordination when among multiple programs, partnership personnel and the involvement of several different institutions of postsecondary educations. Large universities commonly sponsor over 100 K-16 partnership programs, yet sometimes the persons heading these separate initiatives know little of each other’s efforts (Carriuolo, 1996). Furthermore, separate higher education institutions in the same region sometimes work with the same school, but are unaware of each others efforts. Urban schools, in particular, are often approached by a number of colleges that may not be working together. The results are well-intentioned but chaotic.

Changes in leadership can be another barrier to sustaining partnerships over the long term (Corrigan, 2000). Carriuolo (1996) was that when partnerships are led by a few charismatic, passionate leaders whose leadership is clearly tied to the partnership's success, changes in leadership can be disruptive and sometimes fatal for partnerships. Successful, long standing partnerships must continually nurture new leadership from within the organization (Carriuolo, 1996). A partnership's success should never be so tied to one individual or small group of individuals, such that the loss of one leader leaves the organization paralyzed and unable to continue.

Gomez (1994) notes, "The cultures of higher education and public schools are different in almost every way – sources of institutional support are different, so are decision-making processes and modes of professional conduct. (p. 42). These unacknowledged differences can lead to misunderstandings and resentment. For example, differences in governance are apparent with higher education faculty whom are accustomed to governing through a faculty senate or academic council. In contrast to teachers who are often relatively unaccustomed to making decisions on issues such as curriculum, budgets, and institutional management. Teachers also have much less freedom to return telephone calls or attend meetings outside their institutions. Consequently, they may appear to their higher education counterparts to as unresponsive (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, Gomez, 1994). Furthermore, different uses of the same terminology can make initial conversations difficult. For example if a 5th grade student is *retained* the connotation of the term is negative; the child has failed. In contrast, college educators speak of retention at the college level in a positive way; the student is being retained to the point of graduation (Carriuolo, 1996).

Strengths of Collaborative K-16 Education Partnerships

Strengths of K-16 educational partnerships include inclusiveness when everyone is expected to meet rigorous learning standards, the alignment of standards, curricula, expectations, and assessments, support for all learners as they strive to meet competency standards, removal of artificial barriers especially those surrounding the transition from high school to college and a reduction in level of remediation (Van de Water, 2002). High expectations, clear standards, and strong support services are leading to better prepared students able to meet postsecondary expectations upon.

Russell (2000) states that the reasons for collaborating are many, including “a sense of responsibility to address the issues and problems confronting society, creating links between action and inquiry, opportunities to interact with and provide support to a long-ignored population or community, development of common solutions to multiple problems, assuring readiness by teachers for the demands of the coming century, and interprofessional preparation is a more effective approach for professional preparation” (pp.198-199). Collaboration provides intrinsic opportunities for postsecondary institutions to put into action the institutional mission, be responsive to external pressures, and put into practice practices and programs that are of benefit to the college, school or department’s students and faculty.

An improved school-to-college pipeline that delivers a culturally diverse group of first year students who are better prepared academically, socially, and psychologically is only one of the many benefits to higher education. College faculty gain the opportunity to learn from K-12 educators, especially regarding pedagogy and secondary school teachers can serve as advisors on revision of introductory level college curriculum. Collaboration offers expanded research opportunities and integration of teaching, research and service roles. Students are able to engage in hands-on learning in which they apply their knowledge by working with professional practitioners, community leaders and children. Faculty, staff and students report feelings of reward and satisfaction as they become involved in the community (Melaville, 1993). Improved community relations and positive press coverage is gained. These benefits are the rewards of K-16 collaboration.

Benefits to schools include assistance in providing social services for students, supportive allies within the community, professional development opportunities for teachers, special programs that help students prepare for college, access to specialize equipment that belongs to colleges and businesses, and access to technical advice not usually available (Carriuolo, 1996). Secondary schools have the opportunity to determine what colleges and employers expect of high school graduates. Businesses, industry and community groups benefit through opportunities to influence the preparation of students who may later apply for jobs in the community. Business and industry personnel may benefit from employee training programs that higher education faculty can offer, such as refresher courses in writing or mathematics. K-16 partnerships that involve business and community groups create a balanced approach to addressing the many challenges facing the education system in America.

Ultimately, K-16 partnerships provide a collaborative advantage for all participants through the achievement of outcomes that could not have been accomplished except through collaboration (Huxham, 1996, McGrath & Van Buskirk, ?). Collaboration results in the elimination of duplicated services, conservation of resources, the elimination of territorial barriers and mutual interaction that results in interdependency (Alliance, 2003). McGrath & Van Buskirk (?) states that K-16 partnerships develop the critical connections needed to overcome fragmentation in three ways. First partnerships provide a context for joint planning between members who would otherwise be isolated by the institutional frameworks in which they work. Secondly, they facilitate new institutional relationships. Finally, they create social capital for education providing connections, working relationships and respect that extends beyond the boundaries of any given project. Social capital is made up of the features of social life such as networks, norms, and trust that enable people to act together to pursue common objectives (Putham, 1993).

Creative new programs infuse participants with a new sense of possibility. Understanding the goals and constraints of others encourages partners to seek “win-win” solutions to bureaucratic conflict. Measurable success infuses members with pride and hope, as a greater involvement in the lives of students provides a concrete sense of making a difference. Finally, seeing the “big picture” in one’s city and identifying one’s role in a larger effort overcomes a sense of isolation and discouragement (McGrath & Van Buskirk, 1997). Partnerships help promote a larger systemic vision in a number of ways. Collaboration is an emergent process, and the simple fact of convening diverse institutional representatives together begins to create the capacity for common understanding and action. As universities, community colleges, school districts, corporations, parent groups and community-based organizations talk together, often for the first time; they can examine the experience of students along the entire K-16 pipeline. This process provides the potential to develop a broad, comprehensive analysis of problems, as well as building a diverse and substantial capacity to respond. Long standing impasses can be overcome, since participation in collaboration enhances the joint acceptance of solutions and ensures that the cross-cutting interests of stakeholders will be considered. As partners engage in collaborative discussion they begin to move from their narrow institutional self-understandings toward a broader, shared vision of the educational challenges of the community. This promotes the likelihood of developing novel and more effective solutions.

Essential Elements of Effective Partnerships

A cross-analysis of forty-four research studies and articles about K-16 educational partnerships from 1984 to 2002 found a strikingly similar set of principles advocated by various authors as essential elements of successful K-16 partnerships (Appendix ___). This cross-analysis combined with the input and experiences of the participating partnerships and policy board members resulted in a comprehensive list of the essential elements of effective K-16 education partnerships. These principles include,

1. Shared vision and goals among the participating educational entities
2. Effective communication among the partners
3. Appreciation of and respect for differences between the partners
4. Continuous evaluation and constant use of data to improve effectiveness
5. Adequate resources to implement partnership activities
6. Continuous processes to stay relevant as circumstances change
7. An appropriate organizational model which includes all important local parties
8. Committed responsible members who lead and implement partnership activities

There is general consensus in the research literature with regards to the above principles as vital components of a successful partnership. In spite of the wide diversity of educational partnerships and education reform efforts these principles are considered to be universal to all education partnerships. For example, Galligani (1990) found in his two comprehensive qualitative evaluations of the curriculum enhancement projects participating in the California Academic Partnership Program from 1984 to 1987 and 1987 to 1990 a similar set of characteristics which contribute to effective partnerships: (1) clear establishment of goals; (2) mutual trust and respect; (3) sufficient time to develop and strengthen relationships; (4) quality and commitment of individuals involved; (5) continued and constant interaction between top management and involved staff and faculty; (6) willingness to recognize and understand different cycles and languages of various educational segments; (7) periodic formative evaluation; (8) shared responsibility and accountability; (9) crisp lines of communication and (10) recognition of the evolutionary process of change. Russell and Flynn (2000) in their article, *Commonalities*

Across Effective Collaboratives found over 26 factors common to effective partnerships, of these six factors were found to be essential. These six factors are: (1) willingness to listen to other partners; (2) mutual respect; (3) long-term commitment; (4) frequent communication; (5) flexibility in ways of working together; and (6) careful initial selection of partners.

Successful inter-institutional collaboration is a complex relationship or process. The ingredients for success are the same as those for a healthy personal relationship: careful selection of partners, mutual respect, willingness to listen, commitment, an equal power base, frequent communication, and flexibility. “It should not be entered into lightly. Working with others in different sectors automatically puts one in a position of having to deal with different norms, values and operating styles – all of which are the breeding ground of potential conflict as well as potential growth and enlightenment,” (Russell & Flynn, 2000, p. 203). By incorporating these principles into their operating policies and procedures and organizational culture partnerships will enhance their effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

***See Bibliography for reference citations.**