



9-1-1988

School of Education and the Evolving Nature of Partnerships

Edward L. Meyen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/edconsiderations>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Meyen, Edward L. (1988) "School of Education and the Evolving Nature of Partnerships," *Educational Considerations*: Vol. 15: No. 3. <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.1638>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Educational Considerations by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Collaboration between the public schools and universities usually results in associations which are enlarged as a natural consequence of the collaboration.

Schools of Education and the Evolving Nature of Partnerships

by Edward L. Meyen
University of Kansas

Like other professional schools, opportunities for partnerships virtually surround Schools of Education. School districts have needs requiring the academic resources of universities, and Schools of Education are dependent on the school districts for clinical experiences, research settings, and curriculum input; yet, in spite of this mutual symbiosis, mature partnerships in education are rare. Where they do exist, they typically center on the provision of field experiences for training programs.

Without question, these are essential; but they are also the easiest to achieve—existing largely because professional conscience dictates that personnel preparation programs and the public schools collaborate in bridging theory and practice through intense applied experiences. Even in the context of historical precedent and logic, as well as mutual professional commitment, considerable variability exists in the quality of experiences derived from these partnerships. While their design and the problems they encounter are fairly predictable, these applied experiences are resilient and survive. Their durability is probably due as much to mutual professional commitment as to the shared benefits they produce.

Certainly examples of creative and effective partnerships involving professional schools of education and the public schools exist, but given the number of professional education schools in this country and the array of situations potentially benefitting from partnership efforts, one would anticipate that every professional school would be systematically engaged in close associations. Under those circumstances, professional education would assume the characteristics of a limited partnership with many investors. This is not the case, however, but the situation is changing. Spurred by encouragement from numerous reform reports calling for closer alliances between teacher education and the public schools, professional schools of education have begun to reexamine the merits of partner-

ships. The recommendation by the Holmes Group that schools of education form linkages that develop the concept of professional development schools is attracting considerable attention, and should, if Holmes Group institutions follow through with their commitments, become a popular model.

The professional development school concept, while not fully described, proposes the following relationships:

Joint appointments for university and selected public school faculty. Personnel preparation programs could be taught by public school faculty and instructional programs by university faculty.

Cooperative curriculum planning of instructional programs for school age students and university level personnel preparation programs.

Shared decision making on research questions, design, implementation, and reporting of results.

The involvement of student teachers, practica students, and interns in cooperatively planned roles and experiences which complement the instructional programs and organizational needs of the participating school(s).

Financial participation of the public schools and professional schools of education in budgeting for projects of mutual benefit.

Formal agreements setting forth governance policies, decision making, benefits, and levels of participation.

A progressive approach to maintaining and developing the relationships.

As professional development schools evolve, they will undoubtedly assume a variety of designs. Some will be comprehensive in the range of cooperative activities characterizing the model; others will be more targeted. Each, however, should reflect responses to individual circumstances which may include situations where the model builds on a history of extensive partnership arrangements. In other situations, the circumstance may be more typical with a history of joint efforts in providing student teaching and practica experiences as the base of operation. Moreover, the individual successful project that provides the impetus for creating a professional development school may be included.

Whatever the circumstance, it would seem that readiness becomes an important consideration toward achieving the necessary associations for establishing and sustaining a professional development school. Partnerships must be based on mutual trust, respect, and a full understanding of the energy and resource costs involved. The programmatic and professional benefits are far more obvious during the conceptual stages than the human and fiscal costs or the bureaucratic obstacles. Clearly, those who elect to pursue the model must be prepared to make a major investment in creating the necessary conditions for building such a partnership.

As a Holmes Group institution, the School of Education at the University of Kansas has actively participated in conferences and discussions focusing on the professional development school model. As a sound concept, the university would be well served, and area schools would benefit considerably. One of our own limitations, however, is the

Dr. Edward L. Meyen is Dean of the School of Education at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

lack of extensive experience in partnerships with area school districts. This is not to suggest we have no history of cooperative relationships. Area districts, for example, were directly involved with designing the five-year teacher education program. But that represents one experience, and the professional development school model requires considerable sophistication in partnership relations to succeed and will not thrive on commitment alone.

We are convinced that partnerships with area public schools as well as other educational agencies are central to fulfilling our mission in the future. Two years ago we began to renew our efforts to build partnerships where mutual needs existed and where we had the capability to sustain our responsibility to the association. We were particularly sensitive to not overreaching our capabilities. The School of Education began with visits to area districts to gain exposure to their needs; faculty discussions ensued regarding our mission with particular attention to consciousness-raising concerning ties to the profession; colleagues from area schools were involved in Holmes Group activities; superintendents met on campus; and responsiveness to opportunities for contribution to inservice experiences were increased in the area.

From these initiatives have evolved several positive partnerships. Largely, they emerged from needs expressed by area districts and in all cases involve several districts. Rather than a conscious design, it simply developed and happened. We will obviously engage in partnerships with individual districts in the future, but those developed to date are with groups of districts. This may well reflect collaborative preferences of districts to unite and address mutual needs. In no case did a partnership relationship result from a specific proposal generated from the School of Education. Rather each association resulted from a cooperative initiative based on an area need. No systematic needs assessment occurred. Nevertheless, districts welcomed our participation in their continuing efforts to meet the individual and collective inservice, planning, and instructional needs. As we became more responsive, opportunities emerged and encouragement prevailed.

The following are descriptions of partnerships in which the School of Education at the University of Kansas is currently engaged. These are representative of those that have evolved during the last two years and are still developing. Their formality of organization, purpose, level of participation, and their durability for the future vary. None has been highly publicized, nor has the focus centered on nurturing associations with an emphasis on attracting attention. Rather, the intent has focused on allowing them to evolve as long as they are responsive to needs. The purpose in each case is functional, not based on the need for a partnership per se, and all are operational.

Instructional Leadership Graduate Program: This is probably the most formal of the partnerships. It also has the fewest participating districts by design, and it has the longest planning history. The program is in response to the proposed lead teacher model contained in *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, the 1986 report of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, and the professional teacher level in the career ladder model proposed in *Tomorrow's Teachers*, the 1986 report of the Holmes Group. During the summer of 1986 following the release of these reports, discussions regarding the implications of these models for our graduate training programs were initiated in the School of Education. The first class of fifth year students had just completed the School's redesigned teacher education program. With five years of experience in teacher education reform, it seemed reasonable to build on this ex-

perience and explore the need for an advanced program that would focus on instructional leadership and in addition, respond to new models emerging from the reform movement.

A brief position paper was shared among colleagues in the area public schools during the fall of 1986. Discussions continued among faculty members in the School, and by the winter of 1987 there was an expressed interest on the part of four districts and the Learning Exchange (a major not-for-profit educational organization in Kansas City, Missouri) to pursue serious discussions about the design of a graduate level training program to equip individuals with instructional leadership skills. A meeting involving the superintendents of three districts and the dean proved pivotal when the superintendents took the initiative and proposed we move ahead. In addition, expectations regarding participation of the superintendents in the design of the program emerged.

While preliminary planning began immediately, the primary planning vehicle became a two-week planning institute held in July of 1987. A representative of each district (Kansas City, Kansas; Lawrence, Kansas; Shawnee Mission, Kansas; and Topeka, Kansas), two representatives from the Learning Exchange, two faculty members from the School of Education, one faculty member from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, a graduate student in Curriculum and Instruction, and the associate dean for graduate studies comprised the planning group. The dean served as chair for the planning institute sessions.

The following guidelines emerged:

Defining the role of an instructional leader.

Attributes of individuals who would most likely be successful in the role.

Curriculum specifications for the training program.

Admission and selection criteria.

Design features for the graduate program.

Instructional talent needed to offer the program.

Shared responsibilities between participants and the School of Education.

Following the institute, a program document was drafted and shared with institute participants, superintendents of participating districts, and members of the School of Education faculty. The guidelines were refined and subcommittees on curriculum and admissions appointed. The following five basic principles have governed implementation of the program:

- (1) The number of students admitted to the program would be limited.
- (2) Each district and the Learning Exchange would be allowed to nominate candidates and be assured of at least four spots in the program. All nominees would need to meet both the admission and academic requirements of the School for doctoral level studies.
- (3) Students would progress through the program as a cohort with no additional students added to the group.
- (4) The summer session and academic year program offerings would be highly structured and students would be continuously enrolled. They would not be allowed to set their own schedule determining the timeline for program requirements.

- (5) Consultants and *ad hoc* faculty would be used to supplement the School of Education faculty when necessary to ensure appropriate coverage of the content.

The cooperative planning initiative culminated with 21 students beginning the program in June of 1988. They include 10 males and 11 females with an average of 15 years teaching and related educational experience. Nineteen students were selected from nominees by the partner districts and the Learning Exchange, with two being selected from the applicant pool for the program.

This partnership has allowed for significant participation of external constituencies to share in curriculum and program decisions that have traditionally been made by the School with limited input. Districts will benefit from the program and will have the staff resources to move forward in implementing the lead teacher model if they elect to do so, or to use the newly acquired skills and expertise acquired by the colleagues in other approaches to school improvement. The School will benefit from the experience of working collaboratively with the profession on designing a total curriculum program in addition to the professional development experienced by the participating faculty. The groundwork is now laid for cooperative planning to institutionalize the program or to perhaps explore other graduate program initiatives where practicing professionals can assume leadership roles in curriculum planning and program design for innovative graduate programs.

Administrator Assessment Center: Although a successful assessment center operates at Wichita State University, area districts were interested in having access to an assessment center in closer proximity. Moreover, if a center were closer, the chances of influencing the direction of the Center would be increased. Discussions were held with area superintendents early in the fall of 1986. Interest was high among 15 superintendents, and a planning session was held in Kansas City, Kansas, which included a representative of the National Association of Secondary School Principals and three representatives of the School of Education. That session spawned a commitment and the germination of a formal agreement. The consensus was that districts shared in the costs and select participants. In addition, the School of Education appoints a director and provides release time for coordination, arranging the assessment sessions, serving as a liaison with NASSP, and chairing the Center policy committee (comprised of superintendents from participating districts and the dean of the School of Education). To date, three assessor training sessions have been held and approximately 36 assistant principals or other major staff people have taken advantage of the opportunity to have their administrative skills assessed. During the summer of 1988, the training program "Springfield" was offered in response to requests from superintendents. As the Center moves into training, the possibility of designing instructional resources for inservice and preservice training becomes a possibility. All districts and the School share the costs incurred. To date, two training sessions for both assessors and assessees have been conducted.

Annual School Improvement Institute: Two years ago a faculty member engaged in working with school improvement institutes in other states expressed enthusiasm for exploring the interests and needs of area school districts. Rather than the School of Education unilaterally designing and promoting the institute as an instructional offering, the decision was to collaborate with the Kaw Valley Consortium—a group comprised of 18 school districts with the mission of providing staff development and cooperative

purchasing. Representatives of the consortium and the School of Education coalesced and organized an institute planning committee responsible for planning all details of the institute including curriculum, structure, presenter identification, and policy formulation to ensure maximum benefit from the institute.

One-hundred-seventy participants, 13 school districts, and 36 buildings were represented in the first institute held in the summer of 1987, and participation increased to 205 participants in the second institute. Planning for subsequent years is accomplished during the year through regular meetings of the committee. The responsiveness of the planning committee, coupled with the willingness of districts to not only identify areas of need but also be willing to invest the necessary human resources, are central to the institute's success. The School has participated collaboratively as co-partners with Consortium members throughout the process. In addition, the School encourages members of the faculty to participate in the planning and teaching as well as in follow-up activities. Moreover, the School gains the benefits of collaborative planning with a diverse external group. The fee established by the committee is paid by participating districts, while the School of Education provides the funds for the salary of selected professors and staff support. Further, the fees cover the costs of consultants and related conference expenses. Credit is optional and most elect the non-credit choice. Clearly, the institute possesses the potential for self-sufficiency. Plans are underway for the third annual institute to be held during the summer of 1989.

The Society for School Executives: Rather than a partnership in the traditional sense, the Society evolved from similar conditions that provided the fertile ground for the partnerships previously discussed. It was evident during discussions with the superintendents that a forum was needed to allow for interaction and for selected professional growth. From the discussions on campus, the seed for an organization developed. Subsequently the Society was formed, bylaws approved, and became established as an independent organization. A faculty member from the School of Education serves as the executive secretary and the dean sits on the Board of Trustees. Moreover, the School maintains a supportive but nonpartisan posture toward the Society's activities. This symbiotic relationship with the Society is one of the mutually beneficial outcomes of the association. Meetings provide an excellent forum for exploring individual programs, gaining input on new initiatives, understanding the challenges facing area districts, and facilitating communications about individual and collective strategies.

Summary

Each of these partnerships, while unique, shares in participatory decision making. If a school of education is not willing to risk shared decision-making, the probability for sustaining partnerships with the public schools is low. These experiences in building partnerships have helped season us for the process of developing more extensive associations. Without question, they are providing the cumulative experience necessary to achieve readiness for serious consideration of the professional development school model. We have learned a great deal including how much more we need to learn. The results of the initial efforts follow:

1. School districts are willing to invest in planning if there is evidence that the goals can be addressed through cooperative efforts.

2. Colleagues in the public schools may not initially understand the cumbersome decision-making processes of universities, but they are willing to learn and be tolerant when the system becomes mired in bureaucracy.
3. Where costs can be associated with necessary expenditures, a willingness to share costs exists.
4. While institutional admission requirements or quality control measures regarding experiences resulting in credit may at times appear to be excessively rigid, the requirements are appreciated and accepted when they apply in a partnership.
5. Openness to discuss problems depends on the history of cooperation in planning already achieved. At the outset, it may be necessary to aim toward identifying emerging problems to resolve them, as well as to prevent their escalation.
6. Communication is the key to sustaining a partnership, and personal involvement is required. The challenge is to achieve the appropriate level of involvement between public school and university administrators.
7. Faculty members vary in their enthusiasm for and ability to assume active roles in partnership arrange-

ments with school districts. The talent of faculty members needs to match the requirements of the task.

8. It is important that a designated individual monitor the partnership and coordinate the planning activities.

The School of Education at the University of Kansas is encouraged by its experience in partnerships with area school districts. In each case, the initial purpose of the associations has enlarged as a natural consequence of the relationship. With each new partnership initiative, the professional development school model becomes a more achievable goal. We believe this formative approach will assist us in reaching the level of readiness essential for any serious consideration of the professional school model.

References

- Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. (1986). **A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century**. New York: Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy.
- Holmes Group, Inc. (1986). **Tomorrow's Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group**. East Lansing, MI: author.