University/School Collaboration Guide and Checklist

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Abstract

This paper describes the elements of university/school collaboration centered on several field experiences that university students have in area schools in connection with education classes that are often taught in those schools. These elements can serve as a guide to determine university/school readiness for collaboration and identify potential barriers to success. These elements are trust/responsibility, time/commitment, accountability, mutuality/reciprocity, choice/ownership/meaningfulness, shared vision/beliefs, flexibility/adaptability, challenge/openness to growth, respect and communication/sensitivity.

Both schools, colleges and departments of education (SCDEs) and K-12 schools are in need of improvement. SCDEs and K-12 schools have much to offer each other and can serve as vehicles for mutual improvement. School improvement efforts generally generate controversy and conflict, which if not handled well can greatly limit effectiveness (Hatch, 1998). Carrying out such improvements when it involves collaboration between university and public school personnel is particularly challenging. Differences in activities, cultures, reward systems, schedules and goals are among the many possible sources of conflict. Differences of action, especially when different partners and institutions are involved, are considered another source of conflict (Hatch, 1998).

Ne in the business of preparing teachers for K-12 schools, and K-12 schools are in the business of preparing responsible citizens for society. Both are often based more on traditional practices than on science. Learner centered psychological principles (McCombs and Whisler, 1997) suggest that collaboration and cooperation can help all of their students better grow, develop and learn. Teacher education students will be better prepared for the real world of teaching, and K-12 students will get more assistance to prepare for the real world of living.
SCDE's and K-12 schools requires a holistic focus of schools as learning organizations (Senge, 1994; Goodlad, 1990) that are continually enhanced to create success for all students (O'Neill, 1995) through renewal of individual and collective competencies (Goodlad, 1990). Education reform is based on an equal partnership between schools and universities allowing practicing teachers to work with preservice teachers on a consistent and ongoing basis. Reform efforts fail for lack of these collaborative opportunities for new learning to occur and sustained support for experimentation and reflection (1, 1990).

Trust is conceptually based on a learning organization model of collaborative personnel preparation that describes the elements of university/school collaboration. The main focus of this reform effort has centered on several field experiences that university students have in area schools. These experiences helped prepare teacher education students apply what they are learning in the University to the real world of practice and to help area youth in their learning. These experiences with K-12 students, classrooms, and schools help preservice teachers better understand teaching and effectively in teacher education spend time as part of their methods courses in K-12 classrooms assisting teachers and children with school work, observing and participating in the teaching learning and classroom management, and the part culture plays in education. New knowledge is integrated into teacher preparation and professional development through the process of ongoing renewal of individual and collective competencies (Goodlad, 1990). Education reform efforts fail for lack of these collaborative opportunities for new learning to occur and sustained support for experimentation and reflection.

Collaboration Facilitation Guide and Checklist

The process of developing and maintaining collaborative relationships between and within school and university communities is complex. Some elements of collaborative communities are listed below. These elements can be used as a guide and checklist to determine university/school readiness for collaboration. They can identify potential barriers to success and questions that might be useful in facilitating collaborative relationships. These elements were intuitively applied in the collaborative process between Northern Michigan University Department of Education and K-12 Elementary School of the Marquette Area Public Schools. The school with whom NMU has had the closest relationship. The closer the relationship the more important the collaborative elements became. In addition, they seem to have been the key components. All were needed to a minimal degree. Some were more apparent at the beginning of the collaboration and become more important as the level of collaboration increased. Most of them are intimately related to others and can only be properly understood as elements of a whole. Some may seem contradictory, like the need for unity and diversity, but finding the proper balance among them is part of the process.

Collaboration depends on leaders to communicate vision, build trust, manage conflicts, balance interests and facilitate group interactions. They must demonstrate, encourage and create healthy system. Unity in diversity in shared expertise, knowledge and vision can create a dynamic for growth. Trust, communications, respect, choice and the other elements are all part of creating and maintaining unity. The members are united, but bring different abilities, interests and responsibilities. This positive interdependence enriches everyone. Collaboration and communication are vital to advancing that process. It works best when it creates a win/win relationship.

School/school collaboration can be compared to a marriage: there should be compatibility, attraction, respect and love. An arranged marriage can work except it. There may be a honeymoon period, but there will be problems that will have to be overcome mutually. As in a marriage, often those problems are money, time, resources, feelings, perceptions and what is best for the children. The more enduring and serious the relationship, the more likely the benefits.

Beliefs, understandings and interpretations of these characteristics are generally based on previous experiences. A balance between unity and diversity is maintained. Both are important to a healthy collaboration. If they are not found in sufficient quantity in a collaborative relationship, then that relationship will suffer from too much divisiveness or from lack of the elements needed to make a healthy system. Unity in diversity in shared expertise, knowledge and vision can create a dynamic for growth. Trust, communications, respect, choice and the other elements are all part of creating and maintaining unity. The members are united, but bring different abilities, interests and responsibilities. This positive interdependence enriches everyone.

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Responsibility is a level of trust, responsibility and trustworthiness is necessary if a productive relationship is to be established and maintained. This takes time and is built partly through mutual sharing of resources, ideas and concerns. How individuals respond to difficult situations demonstrates responsibility and trust. Past actions influence present conditions and future expectations. When ties of trust and friendship have been established and invested in, the development and maintenance of collaborative relationships can be achieved.
Can the parties easily adjust to changes? What evidence exists that the parties are flexible and adaptable?

Commitment

me to create and maintain a relationship. Finding time is often a major challenge. Time may be needed to build common goals and perceptions. for the parties to become clear about their ideas and beliefs. Difficulties can be expected if the details of the collaboration are not handled efficient is related to trust and responsibility. Commitments need to be honored as much as possible. Perseverance is also related to commitment, as ill need to work through the challenging, difficult times. If commitment is low, then the likelihood to remain engaged or be successful is also low. Commitment is related to all of the conditions, both drawing on them and contributing to them.

Do you have the time needed to develop a successful collaboration? Do you want to take the time? Will you? How committed are the parties? What evidence exists do you have? Do the parties do what they say they will do?

Ability

countable for actions and agreements is an aspect of commitment, trust and responsibility. Based on trust and respect, individual members hold accountable for their actions. Some ways of monitoring growth and concerns are needed. This is most effective when the standards of accountability are set and maintained by the individuals involved, as this leads to self-directed and self-monitored participants. If things are not going well, individual members monitor the problems and their thinking about it. Keeping positive and being proactive is important. Feedback should be sought and responded to by all parties so they can better evaluate the effectiveness of their actions. A systematic, methodical plan should be developed. This may need to be frequently adjusted, but it gives a structure which can be communicated to all parties and a foundation from which to work. An accountability plan identifies roles, responsibilities and resources, and allows for monitoring and evaluation.

Do you know what the other parties value and believe? About the collaboration? Are they close enough to yours to be compatible?

Mutuality/Reciprocity

ily should see and realize some benefit from the partnership. Though different, the mission and goals of each party are furthered because of the collaboration. The collaboration should respond to the institutional and individual needs so that all parties win. In university/school collaboration, it is essential that all students benefit. As this sense of mutuality develops, each party becomes more responsible to the others for accomplishment. The university faculty and students be working to help the school teachers' students succeed? How will the school teachers be working to help their students succeed? Is it a win/win arrangement? What will we and they get out of this collaboration?

Ownership/meaningfulness

professionally irresponsible to not collaborate on some level with fellow professionals, but ideally all parties should have a choice in what happens and activities are their choice. This includes some ownership for the goals, students, accountability and responsibilities. Leaders can collaborate, and if necessary, require it, but voluntary participation is clearly preferable. If team members do not feel some sense of ownership over the team to be adversely affected. Choice and ownership depend on the meaningfulness of the goals and objectives. When parties are personally relevant goals and tasks, they feel some personal control, have positive affect, are more likely to persevere and are more motivated to succeed. Are the goals and tasks personally relevant?

Time/Commitment

Finding time is often a major challenge. Time may be needed to build common goals and perceptions. Time is critical for the parties to become clear about their ideas and beliefs. Discussions sharing the participants' visions and beliefs are essential, recognizing the importance of meeting and getting to know one another. Some way of meeting and getting to know one another is needed. But these conversations should be open to viewing situations differently from traditional or commonly accepted practice, they should generate flexible and new ways of seeing and doing things. Are the goals and tasks personally relevant?

Adaptability

bers must be flexible as adjustments will need to be made. Changes in structures, schedules, curricula and relationships are to be expected, especially when a better way becomes apparent. Flexibility is not impulsivity, which should be restrained, especially as impulses are bound to conflict. Not only should be open to viewing situations differently from traditional or commonly accepted practice, they should generate flexible and new ways of seeing things that the parties are flexible and adaptable?
Openness to Growth

Openness can aid the parties to function closer to their optimal level. If the parties are not open to challenge, then the invention, growth, flexibility an
required will be hampered. New learnings that challenge old ideas can be expected. Humility, volition and a propensity for action to push the limi
g and ability are needed. Change is the only thing of which we can be certain. Some people are more open to it than others and some are better
large of the change process. Expectations for success will influence willingness to be open to challenge. As knowledge and abilities increase, so
fidence, courage and perseverance. Individuals and institutions should be able to see and consider other points of view.

bors should respect one another, even when they differ or disagree. The parties, though differing in expertise and experience, respect the con
. Parties are treated equitably, not as superiors and inferiors. This respect should also be manifested in relations with students, parents and other
and institutional interests, values and goals are also to be respected, and as needed, accommodated. Negative affect, beliefs and expectations wil
with collaboration, especially if they are intense and unjustified. Team members can take a position when the situation warrants it, but do it resp
an open mind. Respecting each person's unique talents, personalities and potential is valuable.

cipants treated fairly and with respect? Do you respect the other parties?

ication/Sensitivity

ing appropriately to others' feelings and thinking communicates respect. This requires the ability to adequately assess what others are thinking ar
and then communicating appropriately. We should be sensitive to others and find ways to respond so that the chances for a successful outcome at
. Interpersonal communications must reflect the conditions necessary for collaboration: equitable, open, useful, accurate, honest, clear. Lan
vey information in a way understood by others, recognizing different organizational and individual realities. Collaboration and learning are fac
tunities to positively interact. Listening to and understanding others before having to speak and be understood is essential. Negotiation, cooper
ion, consensus and compromise are important skills. Leaders should seek and respond appropriately to feedback.

avorators listen to you? Do you listen to them? Do you seem to understand each other? Have you felt that you could be open and frank with
ors without hurting their feelings or being misunderstood?

Conclusion

ng of Konecki (1998) concerning the beliefs needed by PDS Professor/Coordinators in university/school collaboration support and extend the q
MU's collaborative relationships. The university liaison in a university/school collaboration appears to play a key role. The beliefs and qualitie
fessor/collaborator are the same needed by all collaborators. Konecki identifies the following core beliefs important to collaboration: commit
rough, communication, consistency, everyone is of worth, flexibility, humility, involvement, patience, persistence/perseverance, positive/hopeful
pect, risk-taking, self-efficacy, trust, and understanding. Based on these core beliefs, professor/coordinators in collaborative relationships sho
icate effectively, demonstrate commitment, be willing to follow through, have a positive/hopeful attitude, be flexible, want to get involved, be p
, be trustworthy, show respect, and demonstrate humility (Konecki, 1998).

belief that if the participants do not have these qualities to a minimal degree, than collaboration will be of limited productivity. These are not qua
pretended or easily adopted. If the participants do not possess them in adequate degree before the collaborative relationship, it is unlikely that
ation will be able to engender them. My advice to those considering a university/school collaboration is to find partners who possess these traits:
Knowledge, skills and resource are more easily acquired than these more fundamental character traits.

interested in training teachers for collaboration we may need to pay more attention to helping potential collaborators understand and develop
am development and barrier removal strategies are recommended. This might be accomplished through more emphasis on communication, orga
ations and personal development skills. This is a difficult task. It is easier to select preservice and inservice teachers who already possess these
ns.

(1998) analyzed the same critical incidents as part of the same research project as Konecki (Simmons, Konecki, Crowell, and Gates-Duffield, 19
: university coordinators studied to be: cautious in another culture, visionary, action-oriented, open, listeners, accepting of others' points of view, able to handle stress, helpful, hard workers and non-ego oriented. These dispositions "all appear to be important in doing this boundary crossing
es dispositions seem to be characteristic in people who are secure in themselves and are mature. Ego-centered, selfish and insecure people nee
Both Crowell and Konecki's findings are supported in our collaboration with area schools. Their beliefs and dispositions are similar to the ones identified by us. (1997) states: "The ideas of difference, tensions, and dialogue are central to the work of our PDS [Professional Development School]. Put simply, significant learning seems to emerge out of our dialogic efforts to surface and explore the tensions related to our differences (p. 9)." These ideas were central to our collaborative efforts, thought to a less extent as tensions were minimized because of the apparent value of the collaboration to the participants. These ideas were seen as a positive value. Our most significant learning was the benefit to our preservice teachers in developing sound professional understanding and practice.

The value of the collaboration for our teacher education program has been immense. It has infused a spirit of excellence and service into our program and increased the quality of preparation that our preservice teachers receive. Students and teachers in both institutions are benefitting from the increased professionalism. They have become allies to reform and renew education, and are redefining the ways that K-12 schools and SCDEs interact with one another for their respective students.

References


