Lee Teitel

Metropolitan universities usually have various linkages to the public schools in their communities that range from short-term, one-to-one personal connections to complex undertakings that involve entire schools or large segments of the university faculty. Often these relationships develop with little overall coordination. This paper explores why a university might want to use a more systematic approach. It outlines the advantages and disadvantages of several models for doing so and concludes with the "Ten-percent Solution," a practical proposal that can improve coordination, quality, and connection to mission and requires little or no additional funding.

University Infrastructure For Effective Work With Schools

Metropolitan universities are inextricably linked to the public schools. The traditional relationships, where public schools send their students to the university and the university prepares many of the public school teachers, have dramatically expanded to include a host of other activities and connections. The current environment encourages school-university collaborations, especially in urban areas. Organizations as varied as the Holmes Group, the American Federation of Teachers, and the American Association for Higher Education, to name but a few, are helping to lay the ideological groundwork for collaboration and to support the efforts that have begun. They, along with an increasing numbers of funders, see that the problems and issues facing schools, urban areas, and metropolitan universities are interwoven and that the solutions must be broad-based, comprehensive, and collaborative. Granting agencies quite often require collaboration as a condition for providing funds either to universities or to public schools. This encouragement of school/university partnerships contributes to an abundance of linkages that are diverse in what they set out to do and in how they are organized and supported at the university and the school.

At the University of Massachusetts at Boston, for example, where I teach, children and adolescents along with their teachers and their parents can participate in over seventy-five university-linked activities that have nothing to do with traditional coursework. Talented Hispanic middle and high school students are eligible for enrichment or supplemental summer and after-school programs. Other high school students are matched with mentors at U-Mass,

or get special programs through Upward Bound, or participate in an Admissions Guaranteed Program. Students in grade five and up can do hands-on science aboard the university's oceanographic research vessel; their teachers can come for special institutes over the summer. Thousands of parents receive information and services through a university parent coordinator assigned to the local district. Teachers in local schools provide in-depth hands-on training to U-Mass pre-service teachers in professional development schools; they meet periodically to help give input into the shaping of the university's teacher preparation programs. Middle school science faculty work with university faculty on a rain forest project. For the last 15 years, more than 3000 area teachers have participated in the Boston Writing Project; some have turned around and are now teaching writing at the university.

This partial list gives a flavor of what linkages might take place between a university and the urban schools around it. The collaborations involving U-Mass/ Boston or any other metropolitan university range from short-term one-to-one personal connections to complex undertakings that involve entire schools or large segments of the university faculty. In some, university faculty work directly with children, supplementing and enriching their instruction; in others, they work with the teachers, administrators, or parents to improve their skills or in some way improve the delivery of services to children. Some collaborations are guided by a belief in the mutual benefits of such endeavors and a respect for what the wisdom of practice and practitioners can bring to the university; others have a more traditional top- down approach where the university is seen as coming in to "fix" the schools. Some are oriented to research and publication; others solely to providing services. Some are located in colleges of education, but many are linked with arts and sciences or business departments as well.

The unifying theme in all these school/university collaborations is that there often is no unifying theme. All share the broad overarching goal of improving some aspect of education in the metropolitan area, but beyond that, even within a particular university, there is often no common planning, no coherent evaluation, and no unified vision of what it means to collaborate with schools. At some universities, programs exist side by side with no consideration given to duplication or to the possible interconnections that might exist among them. At other universities, more of an effort to coordinate activities with schools is made; this paper will explore several models of how this is done. Before considering models for an infrastructure, however, it makes sense to address the more fundamental question of why one should bother.

Why an Infrastructure?

Given an environment that allows for a multitude of collaborative service deliveries and that seems to be allowing metropolitan universities to work with schools in diverse and interesting ways, why try to bring structure to the situation? Several reasons come to mind to consider developing an infrastructure at a university to promote coordination of these collaborative ventures:

- **Many of these projects are short lived.** Good ideas may only last until their founders' initial energy and/or grant monies run out, without ever getting institutionalized.
- **There is no quality control on program start-ups.** Without coordination, it is relatively easy to start a project. Often there is no process for legitimating or sanctioning collaborative efforts, so a tiny project started by a sole professor with one schoolteacher can appear as much an "official" project of XYZ University as

the most carefully planned, widespread initiative. This can be important since programs that fail to meet their promises or treat school-people disrespectfully may negatively impact a school's willingness to work with the university in the future.

• **There is usually little or no accountability**. Many projects have no evaluation unless required by the grantor; since they exist outside of both school and university, they may be subject to evaluation and review at neither.

• **There are often duplications of efforts.** In times of scarce resources, it can be wasteful for schools and colleges to be doing essentially the same things under different names with different programs. Moreover, opportunities to combine complementary programs may be missed: for instance a program that prepares high school students to tutor younger children may exist along side of, but unconnected to, a program that provides high school students with mentors at the university. The benefits that might have been gained by placing those high school students at the center of multiple mentoring webs are lost if there is no coordination.

• **Collaborative programs often remain peripheral at both schools and universities**. This works both ways: without a coordinated approach to partnerships, metropolitan universities cannot systematically use these important collaborative efforts to further their urban missions. On the other hand, when collaborations are not seen as central to the university's mission, faculty and staff find that their efforts are not appreciated or rewarded in terms of promotion and tenure.

• **Most collaborations are one sided**. It is a rare school- university collaboration that is truly reciprocal. Most so-called "partnerships" are thinly veiled attempts for the university to "fix" the school and it is unusual for the university to change or improve its programs as a result. Unless truly reciprocal endeavors are undertaken, partnerships will not last, nor will they lead to significant change at either institution.

What Do Infrastructures Look Like?

Universities use a wide range of models for their collaborative work with schools. At one end of the spectrum there is no real infrastructure — work with schools is decentralized and uncoordinated. At the other end is a sole contract or exclusive-agency model where, at least in theory, everything that goes on with schools is funnelled through a particular unit. A brief summary of six possible variations of models follows, accompanied by a review of the advantages and disadvantages of each. In the first category, programs are decentralized, arising out of the various schools and departments within the university. The four models in this category vary in the amounts of information gathered and shared and the degree of decision-making and control exerted. The second category represents some centralized, campus-wide models, some of which may be combined of the first category.

Category 1: Decentralized programs

1. Decentralized programs with no coordination

This approach is characterized by a variety of projects, both large and small, that are going on between the constituent units of a university and an assortment of schools. Little or no information is shared about the projects. Most grow out of the many organic relationships that exist between schools and universities; there are no attempts to coordinate, oversee, or even keep track of them. This has the advantages of promoting a variety of diverse ideas which can very quickly and easily get started.

Projects can be small, require no bureaucracy, and will appeal to many faculty members who like the autonomy. Projects can be readily customized to meet the needs of a particular institution or school. On the other hand, in addition to the disadvantages mentioned above, the lack of cordination may cause competition for funding that can exist, not only between universities but within them, between departments and other internal units. Projects can be redundant, with different programs "re-inventing the wheel." Many are short lived and although they may solve immediate problems, they lack the global view that allows the university and its school collaborators to deal with root causes. The lack of coordination can make it difficult for people in schools or other community agencies to gain access to working with other parts of the university.

2. Decentralized programs with coordinated information exchange

This has all the features of the model above, but there is a systematic collection and dissemination of information about collaborative projects. Often a booklet or some sort of database is produced which describes all the programs in which the university is involved. This information can be (but is not necessarily) the basis for internal coordination. This approach has the advantages of allowing all parties to see what is happening and where. It provides the potential for forming of interconnections or sharing of ideas while maintaining the advantages of the first model: flexibility, easy start-up, etc. Compiling the data can look impressive, and make the university "look good." Disadvantages include all those noted for the first model except for a decrease in the chances of duplication and an increase in the chance programs will build on each others' ideas.

3. Decentralized programs with incentives for coordination

In this approach, although the start-up and locus of the programs are still spread throughout the university, coordination is actively encouraged. This is an extension of the information-gathering above, with a difference in that some body (a task force or a university-wide council) encourages programs to avoid duplication and maximize the complementary possibilities in different projects. The coordination council's work could be shaped by the university's mission and a sense of how individual projects might fit into it. It could use positive reinforcement to influence program development in certain directions, offering additional recognition or resources for programs that coordinate with others and enhance the mission of the university. This approach has most of the advantages of the earlier ones — creativity, flexibility, easy start-up — but begins to reduce the disadvantages of competition and lack of focus. It retains, however, the disadvantage that decentralized approaches have of not providing a clear entry or access point for schools wishing to work with the university.

4. Decentralized programs with centralized decision-making

This approach increases the centralization of control, by giving a centralized body authority to grant or deny permission for the start-up or continuation of any projects with schools. A centralized decision-making body could help plot a clear course and strategy, could eliminate duplication, could provide a clear point of contact for outsiders wishing to work with the university. On the other hand, the

coordination costs may be high in terms of time and energy, the priorities may not meet the needs of the schools, and creative ideas may be squelched.

Category 2: Campus-wide models

5. The Field Services Approach

In this approach, a unit is created to be the contact point for working with schools, and is charged with developing programs to meet requests and often for seeking external funding for these activities. The field services unit may hire its own staff or may work with existing faculty, or may hire outside, part-time specialists or consultants. This approach has the advantage of providing a clear path for outsiders who wish access, and it can generate quality specialized programming, conducted by people for whom it is a priority. Because all contact is through one point, competition and duplication can be eliminated and program decisions can be made with a "big picture" perspective.

On the other hand, field services units have the potential to isolate the faculty from what is going on in schools. If there is no conscious effort to make extensive use of faculty members, they may come to see work in schools as the responsibility of the field services unit exclusively. The use of field service units raise several boundary issues in the universities and their work with schools. Schools and universities have seemingly different cultures, workstyles, and time standards. They often don't value the same things. Field service units may find themselves brokering between those two worlds. The extent to which they come closer to schools also pulls them further away from the rest of the university counterparts. In some institutions, field service programs have been accused of "pandering" to meet the needs of schools, and programs have been challenged on their lack of "intellectual integrity." On the other hand, entrepreneurial, quick-response field service units may despair at the slow pace of university structures and may even be reluctant to use university faculty in their programs.

These disadvantages only apply if the field services unit is seen as the exclusive connection to schools. Field service units can also co-exist with each of the decentralized programs listed above.

6. The brokerage approach

Another approach that could be combined with a variety of other possibilities is the use of a broker, or ombudsman, or referral service that could streamline the access to the university for outsiders. This could work with all options outlined above, except the extremes: it would not work for the totally uncoordinated approach, since the information would not be available, and it would not be needed for a sole-contact field services model.

Discussion

Any consideration of selecting among, or combining, these approaches to establish or alter an infrastructure for working with schools must be tailored to the needs, mission, and current state of affairs at the university in question. What follows is a personal set of recommendations, and a specific proposal for implementation, targeted at the many institutions that have little or no coordination.

The recommendations are guided by the following beliefs:

- Any university infrastructure should be able to respond to schools in a timely way with creative quality programs that draw on a broad and diverse spectrum of faculty and other resources.
- Programs should be organized, funded, reviewed, evaluated, and continued based on how well they are meeting the needs of the students, teachers, and schools, as well as the mission of the university.
- Programs should be designed in ways that best draw on the resources of the school, university, and community.
- How a program is delivered (i.e. whether it is offered directly to students, or offered as professional development for the educators and others working with the students) should be determined by what makes most sense in the context.
- All ventures should be equal partnerships so that the university learns as much from the interactions as the school.
- The work of the collaboration should be seen as sufficiently central to both the school and the university so that the activities of people involved in it are rewarded.
- The system should be understandable and easy to access for outsiders.

Recommendations

Those in universities with little or no coordination, who share the goals outlined above, may wish to consider the decentralized program with incentives for coordination. As one moves across the spectrum, this approach has the highest level of information sharing and coordinated decision-making without losing the widespread involvement of faculty members. The loss of faculty involvement is critical for two reasons: it decreases the input and range of possible creative ideas, and reduces the likelihood that ideas and approaches developed in collaborations with schools will influence the core teaching and research of the university.

The coordination-incentives approach would work best if it were accompanied by a referral or brokerage service to facilitate the access of outsiders. The group that provides the coordination incentives could serve as the conduit for linking outsiders with university personnel and programs. In addition, the trade-offs between the spontaneity of easy start-up and the rigor of having a program evaluated on its effectiveness and its ties to an overall mission could be best accommodated by a process that makes pilots easy, but continuations subject to more rigorous process. So, for instance, if a program wanted to get a continuation of its incentive money, it would need to complete an appropriate evaluation and make its case before the incentives committee, but it would face no such challenge in its first year.

If a field services unit is set up, it should co-exist with decentralized offerings; it should be seen as a bridge between schools and the rest of the university's faculty, not as a barrier or the sole provider of services. Mutuality needs to be encouraged in all university school interactions. This is more than just a particular mind-set and attitude; it requires mechanisms to promote it: exchange of teachers (e.g., between public school and field services unit and/or between field services unit and regular faculty), use of professional development school partnerships, having school-people involved in advisory councils on "regular" as well as collaborative programs. Other roles that can be played in systematic ways: university people can serve on school councils or teachers on advisory committees; each can be judges at each other's events and exhibitions, can serve as guest speakers for one another, and in general explore interactive ways that people can get involved with each other.

Finally, and this goes beyond any one approach, reward structures need to be established that recognize the importance of work in schools as scholarly activity that is central to the mission of metropolitan universities.

The Ten-percent Solution:

A practical proposal for improving coordination, quality, and connection to mission

For universities with relatively uncoordinated collaborative programs (with or without a field services unit) the following proposal moves toward creation of what may be the best balance point: the decentralized approach with incentives for coordination. The proposal is a relatively simple one, that works on the margins of existing monies. It uses individual schools or school districts as the focal point of coordination. This, however, is just one example; other mechanisms could be used to focus the coordination.

The university would begin with an inventory of all of its projects with schools. It would then invite all interested units, departments, and faculty members to form a steering committee to identify schools that would like to expand their involvement with the university. The solicitation/selection could be done in a variety of ways, but should be guided by the importance of mutuality and the belief that involvement with schools is a two-way street. It may make sense to focus particularly on schools with several university connections already in place — those that are professional development schools and placement sites for student teachers, or those that have been involved in substantial curriculum or instruction projects with faculty, etc. Once schools are identified, their representatives would join the steering committee (in some cases augmented by district or central office administrators, and possibly union representatives). Thus formulated, this committee would be the coordinating body for incentives for school-university collaborative efforts.

The university units that wished to participate would agree to draw 10% of the students or teachers they will take into their existing, funded programs from the designated partner schools and/or to ensure that 10% of the schools they will work with are designated partner schools. The university would agree to support the work of this steering committee and offer financial incentives and other support to participating units, by earmarking 10% of the money it has for discretionary purposes. These funds may come from those designated for supporting faculty initiatives, or for mission enhancement, or simply the discretionary funds available to a president or chancellor. In addition, schools or districts may "buy in" with 10% of their discretionary professional development or school improvement monies.

The synergistic benefits of this proposal can be impressive. The university, without laying out any additional cash, redirects its funds to support coordination which, by intensifying and focusing scattered efforts, can have substantially greater impacts on urban schools. By involving school people in the decision-making roles, this approach gives more than lip-service to the mutuality and parity of these efforts. The departments and university units running the decentralized programs are encouraged to collaborate by the inducement of additional incentive money and by the increased impact they will have when the unit of impact becomes a school, not just a group of teachers. Focusing efforts in school university collaboration would create an intensification that would give a boost to improving schools and providing better opportunities for students and teachers, and at the same time develop a network of partner schools that could help the university improve the way it teaches and prepares prospective teachers.

Conclusion

A final concern is in the very framing of the question. Is it sufficient to discuss a university's response to schools or does it make more sense to look at the university, the community, and the schools as an organic whole? The latter frames the question, as well as the solutions, quite differently and, ultimately, more powerfully. The movement toward seeing urban school-university issues as a part of a whole is gaining some momentum in the current attention to K-16 councils. The notion of building "suprastructures" rather than "infrastructures" is an important symbolic shift in thinking that takes the thinking outlined here to its next logical step. It remains, however, for all practical purposes, a distant goal, one which can be approached through the steps and approaches outlined above.

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