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ABSTRACT

A collaborative effort between an elementary school (P.S.86) and Lehman College, both located in New York City, is described in this paper. The project was designed with the objective of avoiding the usual "top-down" process and instead concentrating on cooperative and collaborative planning. The participants included one college faculty member, a research assistant, three volunteer fifth-grade teachers, and their classes. The focus of the program was integration of writing, reading, and study skills emphasizing the development of research skills. The physical environment and a lack of financial resources presented obstacles to implementation. Also, teachers had to be willing to try an interdisciplinary approach to the curriculum. The students' lack of experience at independent research became a difficulty that had to be overcome. Individual self-instructional learning modules were developed. A core group of children was trained to be peer teachers. The outcomes reported include positive growth in collegiality among the teachers, development of a sense of community by the children, and an expansion of the concept of collaboration by the Lehman participants. References are appended. (LMS)

COLLABORATIVE QUEST FOR QUALITY

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Introduction

The structure of our educational system places responsibility for development of basic academic skills with the elementary school. Consequently, when pupils fail to achieve expected competence in academic areas, the elementary school has been the logical target for criticism from the junior and senior high schools and colleges. By contrast, the precollegiate levels fault the colleges and universities for producing poorly educated and incompetent teachers. This nonproductive buck-passing and fingerpointing have persisted for many years. It has been demonstrated, however, that collaborative partnerships between these educational entitities can result in effective techniques and procedures which can improve the quality of teacher training and raise the level of pupil achievement (Maeroff, 1983). These types of collaborations can develop skillful teaching strategies which combine the latest research, knowledge, and skills from the university and the day to day practical, hands-on experiences from noncollegiate classrooms. Interestingly, collaboration has been identified as a key element in school improvement (Synder, Kreiger, and McCormick, 1983; Hurling, Richardson, and Hord, 1983; Maeroff, 1983). A study by the Carnegie Foundation, School and College: Partnerships in Education (1983) describes successful collaborations, however, most of these associations have been with junior and senior high schools. A recent New York Times article (Hechinger, 1986) discusses this "new movement of collaboration" involving mostly high schools and colleges. To be more accurate, this concept and these rela-

tionships are not new and have previously existed involving all grade levels.

School and college collaboration can be traced back to teacher training in normal schools and their use of campus or laboratory schools to provide practical teaching experience for their students. When teacher education became a part of colleges and university programs these relationships continued to thrive and grow. By virtue of their involvement with the training of teachers, departments and schools of education have maintained a variety of associations with public schools and have had the primary connection to precollegiate education. Schools and departments of education have developed teacher education programs based on their own philosophical tenets and incorporated state certification requirements as needed. The focus and content of these programs, however, reflect little or no input from the public schools for whom they are preparing teachers, except where consortiums of community, schools and colleges were formed. These schools have also served as the training grounds and provided the internship placements for perspective teachers and have been the data base and source for research projects initiated by college faculty. Usually the college/public school relationships, with the exception of student teaching, were undertaken by individual professorial initiative without formal sanction or funds from the university.

The renewed interest in collaborative programs between public schools and universities emphasizes the need for revamping revitalizing and formalizing college/school relationships and creating liasons where formally none have existed. They need to include stronger committments including shared responsibility for pupil achievement, resources and expenses, and the development of a sense of collegiality between college and school faculties and the realization of the mutual benefits which can be derived from the collaboration. The traditional peking order" associated with university/school relations and the "top-down" process in which the college tells the school what and how to teach should be replaced with cooperative needs assessment and programs whose goals and objectives are collaboatively planned. When this occurs previous associations in which the college provided courses, workshops and temporary assistance based on a current research project are succeeded by meaningful, on-going programs which meet the needs of both institutions. Add to this a focus on action and not the problems which cause inertia and give the deserved recognition and appreciation to the participants for their contributions, and an effective school/college collaboration can result (Maeroff, 1983).

The terms collaboration and partnership are frequently interchanged when describing joint efforts by schools and colleges to work with one another and these programs vary widely in their

organization, purpose, objectives and participants. The collaborative program described here, unlike many described in the literature, was developed between an elementary school and college. From its inception, the focus has been on cooperative collaborative planning. The purpose and objectives were agreed upon after a series of meetings and extensive discussion. These occurred during the Spring of 1985 following a visit to Boston, Massachusetts to learn about their college/school collaborative programs. Although somewhat different from most because they are the result of an integration mandate and in part financed by the state, the Boston schools provided excellent examples of how colleges and schools jointly agreed to use available funds to structure their collaborative relationships at the primary and elementary school levels. Stressed repeatedly in our conversation during that visit, by both school and college personnel, was the need to involve all participants at every stage of planning and development, to ensure that the project is a reflection of the composite needs of the participants.

Program Implemtation

The Lehman/P.S.86 Collaborative Program began in the fall of 1985. The participants included one college faculty member with 6 hours released time, a research assistant (an elementary school reading teacher on sabbatical leave), three volunteer fifth grade teachers and their respective classes. During the preliminary meetings in the Spring we had discussed ou concerns and interests and decided the focus of the program would be the integration of writing, reading and study skills emphasizing the development of research skills. The purpose of the program was to provide on-site assistance to the teachers in developing those skills by utilizing alternate, effective teaching strategies and classroom organizational techniques. Every effort was made to avoid a top-down process in which the college imposed its ideas on the elementary school.

Of immediate concern to the teachers was the physical environment. Due to severe overcrowding in the school, the teachers' willingness to work together and to be challenged, as well as the presence of Lehman College Staff to assist them, they were assigned to a gymnasium on the fifth floor. This area was to be the location of the Lehman College/P.S.86 Collaborative Program. The gym was divided into four areas by bookcases, shelves closets and chalkboards. Three areas were classrooms and the

fourth became a resource area. This was a totally new kind of learning environment requiring different organizational and teaching techniques. Some of the questions raised were: How can traditional classroom teaching techniques be used in a large high-ceilinged area occupied by more than 100 children? How can desks and chairs be situated? How can distractability be minimized? Other problems included storage, grouping of children, minimizing noise and the development of effective interpersonal relationships among teachers as well as children.

Another concern was the implementation of the revised social studies curriculum included in the Regents Action Plan which uses a concept approach and includes systematic skill development and evaluation. It focuses on getting, organizing, using and presenting information. Interdisciplenary planning is needed to integrate language arts curricula (reading and writing) with content areas (history, geography, economics) and study skills. In addition, emphasis is placed on self (personal) and intergroup relationships. The simililarity of focus between the collaborative program and the curriculum meant that one need not preclude the other.

Although we had collaboratively decided on the purpose, goals and objectives of the program, details of implementation had not been worked out. This was part of the developmental process of collaboration and the reason we needed regularly

scheduled planning time. Terminology such as team teaching, small group instruction, "town meetings" and research projects needed to be clarified. Ongoing discussion of long and short term projects, materials and lessons were essential. Collaboration requires that teachers have the opportunity to exchange ideas and determine cooperatively how teaching will be done. Clearly, planning is a critical element in this type of program.

In our enthusiasm to successfully work collaboratively, we compromised and underestimated our planning needs. The common preparation periods assigned to the teachers were on days when the Lehman faculty could not be present. Therefore, the only time during which planning could take place was during the teachers' lunchtime. One lunch period each week was regularly scheduled for this purpose. The teachers, however, willingly met whenever we were present during a lunch or preparation period provided there were no urgent clerical or other matters needing their attention. Consequently, a great deal of planning was done by telephone between individuals rather than as a group.

The first few months of the collaborative program were spent sorting out and defining the various components of the program. Discussing routines for sharing space and developing effective interpersonal relations took precedence over curricula planning. With these in place we began to sort out and define the program components and the Lehman/P.S.86 Resource Area began

to take shape from the fourth area of the gym.

It became the center of the program's activities and planning. Town meetings, small group and individualized work, demonstrations and fundraising were located there. All three classes took responsibility for maintaining the area. Since no funds were available to purchase materials, its development was severely limited. Research materials were in very bad condition and outdated. Personal and library copies, and information packets were borrowed and shared and from time to time teachers and children brought in other relevant books and periodicals. Since the school library was not in use, a few books and a set of encyclopedia were borrowed for an extended period of time. Not the worst of situations, but certainly not one conducive to encouraging independent research and study skills development. In addition, unfortunately, since there were no shades or other means of darkening the gym, and attempts to block out light with posters and charts were ineffective, we were rarely able to utilize supplemental audiovisual materials.

Lack of adequate desks, chairs, and bookshelves were a problem. The desks were mismatched in size and most of the chairs were too small for the desks.

Every effort was made to make this area one toward which the children would gravitate and in which they could experience new ways of learning and working together. In spite of its

unattractiveness and scarcity of materials, the children enjoyed having an alternate working space and the together the staff minimized the logistical problems and focused on successful implementation of the program goals.

When Lehman staff were on site, we planned together and with the teachers; offered suggestions for implementation and evaluation; listened and encouraged and were the extra set of hands to provide assistance and/or supervision. Materials were collected and prepared; demonstration lessons given; the resource room organized; and we worked with small groups on peer tutoring, research projects and learning modules to develop independent work study skills.

Since one of the goals was to develop reading, writing and study skills within the context of research, we proceeded to guide the children in the selection of topics. This first attempt at independent research immediately revealed the extent to which they lacked knowledge and experience in this area. With the use of very limited assignments and demonstration lessons we modeled the research process for the children incorporating teaching behaviors and attitudes which lead to successful independent learning. A semantic mapping procedure was introduced as a technique for taking notes and graphically organizing them. Children were guided step by step through the process, organizing ideas around a central topic and listing

related subideas. These eventually became the details of written paragraphs. With this rudimentary idea of collecting and sorting information, the pupils began individual projects using this mapping diagram as the basis for thinking about what they wanted to know, gathering and organizing it for writing. The teachers observed the lessons in order to continue developing the projects with the children as they worked individually.

Usually the teacher provided whole class instruction. The high ceilings and large open area allowed many distracting elements to interfere with children's attentiveness and learning. At first unreceptive and unresponsive to the notion of small group work, except for basal reading, it became apparent that one method of reducing noise levels and increasing time on task was to work individually and in small groups. The individualized research projects partially fulfilled this need, however, other alternatives were needed. For this purpose individual, self instructional learning modules were developed. These included a series of activities organized around a specific topic such as map skills or folk tales. A core group of children, peer teachers, were initially taught how to use the materials. These pupils, then, instructed small groups of their classmates in their use and assisted when there were

Although the teachers volunteered to participate in the project and were excited about the collaborative concept, our presence and assistance, the program components were viewed as additional activities to be done if time allowed. With the realization that the skills and knowledge being acquired were part of the "regular curriculum", but merely used different strategies, the teachers were more responsive to them.

The process of changing tried and tested teaching procedures was slow and needed time. This is true of change especially if the change is to be longlasting. Howell (1986) states, " Change, if and when it occurs, is slowly painful and painfully slow." To assist in the process of change, we modeled lessons to demonstrate the effectiveness of the suggested strategies thereby by teaching by example in a noncritical and nonjudgemental manner. Slowly teaching procedures were modified to include collaboratively planned team teaching and town meetings in which three classes came together for a commmon lesson or purpose. Class time also included more independent learning using the self instructional module concept and individualized research. These methods required the children to develop new kinds of skills and attitudes, also, and to trust in their ability to work without direct supervision. Over time the children became more proficient in working independently and with small groups to complete tasks. The

independent and small group activities were increasingly treated as part of the day's activities and not as extracurricula.

Generally, teachers are accustomed to working in a self-contained classroom with minimal interaction with their colleagues. To do otherwise is viewed with suspicion. Seldom are teaching ideas and practices discussed and shared for fear of negative exposure or in order to surpass colleagues (Barth, 1984). This lack of interaction and communication results in feelings of isolation, both personal and professional (Goodlad, 1984). This is especially true in large, inner city schools where pupil populations can surpass 1500 and include a staff of 75. Planned collaboration begins to bring isolated teachers in contact with colleagues and enables them to interact professionally enhancing their ability to share effective teaching strategies and techniques for improving interpersonal relationships among themselves and with children and parents.

Although this was a very new and difficult experience, these three teachers have expressed feelings of closeness and sharing. As a result of participating in the program, they exchange ideas and materials and their discussions and meetings have helped to reduce the feeling of isolation. One of the teachers sa "Being in a regular classroom -- one gets a locked in feeling -- the openness of our classroom areas and the availability

of the Lehman/P.S.86 Resource Area to work in, as a group or to use independently, created a warm feeling." Another expressed similar feelings when she said, "The experience has been a unique and enjoyable one for me because the situation involved the exchanging and sharing of ideas, materials and space. Being part of the Lehman/P.S.86 team was an opportunity to grow and enhance interpersonal skills."

The teachers express collegiality toward each other and the Lehman staff and appreciation for the new type of professional relationship with the college. To quote one of the teachers, "The Lehman Program made for a cohesive feeling between the teachers and played an important part in making the gym program successful." The teachers want to share their experiences with other teachers and help them to develop collegial relationships with others.

The children developed a sense of community. They interacted and responded to all of the adults in the program and not to merely their own teacher. They formed friendships and related to children in all of the classes and developed a sense of working toward a common goal. Especially enjoyable for them was the freedom of movement in a larger, less, confined area, the responsibility of individual assignments and a "place" to work on their own.

Conclusions

The nature of collaboration requires that participants develop a firm base of trust in order to openly discuss concerns and share responsibility for the teaching/learning process. It entails the ability to share materials and ideas and participants need to be sensitive to the differences and similarities in how goals and objectives are understood and interpreted. In addition, this particular physical set-up made it necessary to adjust to a different living/teaching space. Furthermore, it was important that the college not be perceived as imposing particular structures and teaching techniques on the participants or as having all the answers.

These kinds of working, trusting relationships require time to grow and great strides were made in these areas. Collaboration is a process, however, and it continues to unfold as the participants become even more involved with one another.

Success of the Lehman/P.S.86X Collaborative Program was due in part to the elimination of some of the difficulties, which have in the past, interferred with a program's effectiveness. For example, participation was voluntary and college faculty was given released time. Specific goals and purposes were established at the outset. The traditional "peking order" was replaced with mutual respect and cooperative

and collaborative planning and decision making. In addition, the reading teacher on sabbatical leave was an innovative use of special skills and knowledge. With more flexibility of time than college faculty since she did not teach classes or have other college committments, she also served as a liason between the school and college bridging any gaps and trouble-shooting.

Negatively affecting the program, however, was lack of financial support to allow us to acquire the barest of research resources or to provide the teachers with sufficient planning time In addition, faculty contributions were not viewed in the same light as publications which continually created stress.

These areas have previously been identified as problems needing resolution if college/school collaboration is to be successful (LaValle, 1985; Maeroff, 1984). However, we are more knowledgeable about what makes these joint ventures work and we are convinced of their value. Therefore, with each attempt there is slightly more committment and we move closer to maximizing the the knowledge and talents of the educational community to successfully collaborate in our quest for quality education.

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