

“Remember, It’s a Pilot”: Exploring the Experiences of Teachers/Staff at a University-Assisted Community School

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Abstract

With roots in community development and the work of Dewey, a compelling case has been made for universities to be involved in urban school reform. Further, with increasing demands placed on universities to become responsive to community needs, university partnerships with K–12 schools are one means by which institutions of higher education have become involved in local educational issues. One particular type of community–school–university involvement approach is a University-Assisted Community School (UACS). Much of the research related to such school–university partnerships has focused on describing what a UACS “looks like,” with little attention given to the day-to-day experiences of those that work within a UACS. In this paper, we present findings from a qualitative study examining the experiences of teachers and staff who have participated in the development of and/or taught at a UACS afterschool program. Findings highlighted (1) the challenges and transitions associated with being a pilot effort; (2) the felt differences between universities and schools as they relate to on-the-ground implementation; and (3) the potential of the UACS model as a collaborative vehicle for accomplishing tasks that neither institution can accomplish alone. We point to implications related to school–university partnerships and directions for future research.

Key Words: university-assisted community school, partnerships, collaboration, implementation, teachers, after-school program staff, afterschool, urban

Introduction

With increasing economic and social changes, more demands are being placed on K–12 schools and universities to become responsive to community needs and demands (Stanton, 2008). Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett (2007) have made a compelling case for universities to be involved in urban school reform, with roots in community development and the work of John Dewey (1902, 1910). Drawing on previous work, Benson and Harkavy (1991) called for institutions of higher education to act as anchors or “community-rooted” institutions. Such institutions, they argued, “simultaneously: (a) have firm bases in, attachments to, identifications with particular geographic communities; (b) regard themselves as ‘citizens of the world;’ (c) aspire to practice and help achieve universal humane values, contribute to the ‘relief of man’s estate’ [and] the betterment of humanity” (p. 12). Boyer (1990) challenged faculty in higher education to remain relevant to society at large and to seriously attend to the very meaning of being a “scholar.” He maintained that academics have a role to play in using their knowledge to solve social problems; further, he cautioned that the focus on research-just-for-the-sake-of-research serves to limit the academy’s relevance within the larger community. He called, then, for a radical reorientation in higher education; one in which the needs of the local community are placed at the forefront.

University partnerships with K–12 schools are one means by which institutions of higher education have become involved in local educational issues. One particular type of community–school–university involvement approach is a University-Assisted Community School (UACS; Benson & Harkavy, 1994; Harkavy, 1998), an approach in which schools are seen as the focal points for community life and are believed to “function as environment-changing institutions if they become centers of broad-based partnerships involving a variety of community organizations and institutions” (Harkavy, 1998, p. 36). The UACS model not only focuses on assisting schools in meeting needs outside of their traditional scope, but also on reorienting the university toward community-based problem solving. This approach comes with a commitment to advocacy-based scholarship and serves to push the university outside of its potentially isolating ivory tower.

While there has been much writing on what a UACS looks like, far less research has systematically examined the experiences of those who participate in a UACS. In this paper, we present findings from a qualitative study examining the everyday, lived experiences of administrators, teachers, and staff members who participated in the development of and/or taught at a UACS extended day program (i.e., afterschool program). We were particularly interested in

examining both the challenges and successes inherent to developing an after-school UACS, recognizing that whether described in the literature or not, both challenges and successes do exist. We begin first with a brief discussion of the relevant literature, highlighting primarily seminal work.

Literature Review

As early as 1902, educational philosopher John Dewey lectured on “the feeling that the school is not doing all that it should do in simply giving instruction during the day” and suggested “that it shall assume a wider scope of activities having an educative effect upon the adult members of the community” (p. 76). Following in his tradition, Jane Addams put into practice the idea of “school as social center” by developing her Hull House model. One of Dewey’s students, Elsie Clapp (1971), also studied examples of such schools. Until the 1970s, this perspective on schooling was not widely popular. Yet by virtue of various policy directives at the state and national level, schools were increasingly expected to have guidance counselors and nurses on staff in hopes of meeting noncurricular barriers to learning (Tyack, 1992). In 1994, Joy Dryfoos identified several schools that were meeting the nontraditional needs of students and their families. Her concept of “full service community schools” played into the larger national movement related to schools meeting the needs of families, children, and communities.

For the last 20 years, scholars have studied the community school movement’s impact, beginning with an early 1990s evaluation of the national Communities in Schools model (Dryfoos, 2000; Keith, 1996; Kronick, 2005; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997). From local communities to federal policy to the funding priorities of foundations, advocacy activity has grown around community schools (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003; Hoyer, 2011; Khadduri, Schwartz, & Turnham, 2008). At the same time, another line of research has focused on the capacity of universities in the context of being more responsive to local educational problems, while also revitalizing the civic mission of universities (Benson & Harkavy, 1991; Benson et al., 2007; Johnson, Finn, & Lewis, 2005; Stanton, 2008).

A manifestation of Dewey’s community school and Harkavy’s focus on university involvement in public school reform can be seen in the writings of Goodlad (1993), the father of “school–university partnerships as a strategy for school improvement” (p. 25). Goodlad and a myriad of other researchers, including the Holmes Group (Holmes Group, 1986), contributed to creating, sustaining, and critiquing the Professional Development Schools (PDS) movement (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1994). The Holmes Group

(1986) is “a consortium of education deans and chief academic officers from the major research universities in each of the fifty states” (p. 3), with a primary aim of improving the quality of teacher education programs. Goodlad (1993) identified several key issues that create boundaries between schools and universities, stating that the

concept of universities and schools joining symbiotically in the simultaneous renewal of partner schools and the education of our future teachers in them presents daunting challenges. Nonetheless, it is possible to squeeze out of them a potentially useful implication: innocence regarding what we do and how to do it is widely shared on both sides. (p. 30)

The above quote highlights that both parties, universities and schools, hold an important key to improving schools. Neither universities nor schools hold the monopoly on effective school reform strategies, and bringing them together is worth the challenges inherent to the partnership. Goodlad’s contribution to the school–university partnership literature is centered on his examination of how two very distinct institutions (i.e., K–12 schools and universities) go about working together. Harkavy and Hartley (2009) examined what is needed to sustain those community–school–university partnerships founded on democratic principles, postulating that there are three important components to such an orientation to school–university partnerships:

1. Purpose: Democratic and civic purposes must drive higher education partnerships that are in the “public good.”
2. Process: Community-driven—as opposed to top-down/hierarchical/intensely bureaucratic—decision-making processes must be in place in order to create meaningful relationships, yielding true change for democratic and civic purposes.
3. Product: Generally, improving the quality of life for those in the community should be the product of democratic partnerships for public good.

These tenets of democratic partnerships are rooted in an aspiration to reform the academy, resulting in more community-engaged scholarship and real-world, contextualized problem solving. Yet, such partnerships often result in felt tensions, as these two unique institutions may run in opposition to one another. Eckel and Hartley (2008) also explored interorganizational relationships between universities and private and public sector partners, concluding that the relational aspects (e.g., trust, mutual interest) of these partnerships are the most critical components.

Lindhal (2006) examined how organizational cultures impact school improvement, calling for school leaders to align their school culture with the desired changes. Deal and Kennedy (1982) highlighted organizational

challenges faced by schools, low morale, fragmentation, inconsistency, emotional outbursts, and subculture values that supersede shared organizational values. Such challenges can sometimes stand in the way of organizational improvement. Halpin and Croft (1963) and Moos (1980) developed some of the first scales around school and classroom climate that were later studied by Kronick (1972, 2005). They maintained that the organizational culture of schools and classrooms can contribute to the academic success of children. Partnerships between schools and universities could have implications, then, for changing classroom and school environments.

While historically universities have connected with schools, little is known about the experiences of those on the “ground”; that is, those people working in the midst of such partnerships. Much of the writing around the UACS model and other community–school–university partnerships has been presented in a “show and tell” format (Grim & Officer, 2010; Taylor & McGlynn, 2010), most often with only the successes being shared. Far less exploration has occurred around the process by which schools and universities go about collaborating and the school improvement results achieved when they form collaborative structures. In this paper, we report findings from a study exploring the everyday experiences of staff, teachers, and administrators involved in a UACS project in the southeast region of the U.S.

Theoretical Framework

Within this study, we were informed by Kronick’s (2005) description of how to go about creating and sustaining university-assisted community schools. His framework includes a focus on (1) prevention, (2) collaboration, and (3) systems change. He suggested that (successful) university-assisted community schools focus on prevention efforts such as keeping children and families out of the criminal justice or mental health systems of care. Further, it is only through collaboration resulting from input from the community, the day school staff, and other outside partners that partnerships are established and maintained. Finally, drawing upon Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, Kronick’s framework points to the ways in which children deal with a variety of overlapping social forces that impact their ability to learn within and outside of the school building. Thus, within this framework, there is a focus on systems change. The interconnection of health, education, and wellness undergird this framework and call for the system of schooling to change to account for the variety of systems that impact a child’s learning. As we analyzed the data, we explicitly looked for evidence of actions that worked to “prevent” failure, while pursuing collaboration and systems change.

Method

Within this qualitative study, we attended closely to what this particular UACS sought to address in light of what the key stakeholders identified as the overarching goals of the program and the everyday challenges and successes. We aimed to maintain a reflexive stance (Pillow, 2003) and assumed that our presuppositions, biases, and cultural and political commitments shaped the way that we made sense of the data. We begin by briefly presenting our roles and presuppositions, acknowledging that who we are influenced the way we collected and interpreted the data set (Noblit, 1999).

Research Roles

Throughout this research study, we remained cognizant of the ways in which our own participation and beliefs about a UACS in general shaped how we collected data and engaged with the data set. The first author's involvement with this particular UACS afterschool program included his ongoing participation as a volunteer during the course of one year. The second author's involvement included working as a teacher and teaching assistant during the course of one year. The third author was the primary university faculty member who began the school–university partnership. His work around community schools began well over a decade ago, and even today he remains the primary university member involved in this ongoing work.

During the course of this study, each of the authors spent many of their afternoons and evenings at the afterschool program, interacting with the children, their parents, and the school staff. The third author also spent a great deal of time at the school site during the regular school day, working to develop services that spanned across the regular school day and afterschool program. We thus positioned ourselves as quite involved participant–observers, recognizing that we carried with us contextual understandings that we would not have acquired apart from the extensive time we spent at the research/school site. Furthermore, across the research study, we each presumed that the UACS had the potential to provide systemwide services that were responsive to the needs identified by the students, families, and community at large. However, throughout our work, we also assumed that such collaborations require time and patience. As we approached the research process, we recognized that our interpretation was partial and positional (Noblit, 1999), and we invited others to question and critique the interpretations we proffered.

Participant and Site Description

The population for this study included the coordinator of the UACS afterschool program, the principal of the elementary school, the assistant principal

of the elementary school, three elementary school teachers, and thirteen afterschool staff teachers. This particular UACS afterschool program started after a local businessman provided three years of funding to a university education faculty member (Kronick) for an afterschool program. Initially, funding allowed for 55 students to participate in the afterschool program. However, additional funding was secured, resulting in 75 children now participating in the afterschool program.

The faculty member, who had been working with principals and local elementary schools for well over 10 years, collaborated with one elementary school principal who wanted to expand the services her school was offering by developing an afterschool program embedded within a community school model. Together, they hired an afterschool coordinator, while also coordinating the involvement of various university departments (e.g., art, philosophy, educational psychology and counseling, and recreation and sports) and community agencies (e.g., local nature center, Boys and Girls Club, adult literacy center, counseling center) and more than 50 university students and community member volunteers. A national search was conducted to hire the afterschool coordinator with five finalists selected. Previous education background and work experience were considered when selecting the finalists. The coordinator was unanimously hired by a committee, which included the school principal, assistant principal, a university faculty member, and three central office staff members. Throughout the first year of the UACS afterschool program (and the time that has since followed), professional development was provided to the UACS staff, including workshops about therapeutic approaches to discipline and lesson planning.

This particular UACS afterschool program grew out of the ongoing work of Kronick, an education professor who has been collaborating with Title I elementary schools across the southeast region of the United States since 1998. The selected Title I school included grades K–5, with a total of 320 students. At the time of this study, the school had a 34% mobility rate, and 90% of its students received free or reduced-fee lunch. Across the student population, 23 different countries and 19 languages were represented. The school employed 30 full-time teachers.

Prior to beginning the UACS afterschool program, the school and university had collaborated extensively, with services such as counseling and mentoring provided to students throughout the regular school hours. University pre-med and nursing students had also worked to convert a school closet to a health clinic, providing basic health services during the regular school hours. The principal at this school desired to extend the services provided and the hours during which they were available. Thus, she sought to collaborate further

with the university in developing an afterschool program that included additional services (e.g., counseling for families, laundry service access, dinner for families, GED classes for adults, ESL courses). At the time of this study, the afterschool program was operating five nights a week until 7 p.m. each evening during the regular school year and five days a week until 2:30 p.m. during the summer months.

Data Collection

For the purposes of this study, the elementary school principal and the afterschool program coordinator invited their staff members (i.e., elementary teachers and afterschool staff) to participate in this study. The potential participants were given contact information and encouraged to contact us if they were interested in participating in an individual interview or a focus group. While we invited all of the elementary school teachers, only three day teachers agreed to participate. We invited all 18 members of the afterschool staff to participate, and 13 agreed to participate. The three administrators (principal, assistant principal, and afterschool program coordinator) also agreed to participate. While parent involvement was a key focus of the development of the UACS afterschool program, for the purposes of this study, we focused on the everyday experiences of the school and afterschool staff members. Nonetheless, since the completion of this study, the perspectives of participating parents and students were collected and will be reported in a future study.

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board approval, two of the researchers conducted six individual interviews with the participating administrators and teachers, and four focus groups with the participating afterschool staff. During the interviews and focus groups, we followed a semi-structured interview/focus group protocol. All of the interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and stored on a password-protected computer prior to the transcription process. The individual interviews lasted from 20 to 60 minutes each, and the focus groups lasted from one to two hours.

Data Analysis

Over the course of the data collection and analysis process, the research team met regularly (face-to-face and via Skype™) to share our own experiences working and volunteering at the UACS afterschool program and to collaborate throughout the data analysis process. We utilized an interpretive and emergent approach to thematically analyze the data (Saldana, 2009). We used Atlas.-Ti™ to organize the data set and systematically go about the analysis process, annotating with memos and applying the coding features. More specifically, we carried out six broad phases of data analysis, with several subphases/steps

included within each phase: (1) transcription of data; (2) repeated reading and initial theoretical and analytical memos; (3) selection, organization, and further analysis of key patterns (codes) across the data set; (4) multiple iterations of line-by-line coding of the data set; (5) generation of overarching themes; (6) reflexive and transparent sharing of findings.

After two of the researchers completed the transcription process and sanitized the data (i.e., pseudonyms were applied throughout and used within this article as well), we each individually added analytical and theoretical memos to the data set, then met to share and review the initial memos. Each researcher maintained a list of these initial codes. We next organized our initial memos into categories, moving to the level of coding. We applied both in-vivo and sociologically constructed codes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Upon developing a coding scheme based on our initial memos and theoretical framework, we individually coded the data line-by-line. Next, we organized the data into categories and subcategories, noting relationships within and across the data set. Drawing upon our initial and subsequent levels of coding, we eventually developed abstract themes. With a joint commitment to engaging in social science as “an activity done in public for the public” which acts “to clarify, sometimes to intervene, sometimes to generate new perspectives” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 166), in this study we shared our interpretations with the participants as a means of opening up communication and deepening understanding. Thus, all of the participants were given copies of our emergent themes, as well as the final description of the findings. We asked the participants to review the findings and incorporated their feedback into the final iteration of this work. Finally, we aimed to reflexively report our findings and reflect upon the ways in which our assumptions shaped the analysis process.

Findings

One of the major findings of this study centered on the challenges and transitions associated with being a pilot effort. Some of the participants expressed the importance of learning to become comfortable and patient with the program’s development as it was launched. Participants discussed in detail the differences between universities and schools as they relate to on-the-ground implementation issues. Our findings suggest that universities and schools often approach issues differently, from behavior management philosophies to the handling of timesheets. These differences often created frustration among participants, while also holding promise for using resources within the university to more comprehensively address social issues. Finally, participants illustrated the potential of the UACS model as a collaborative vehicle for accomplishing

tasks that neither institution can accomplish alone. As participants discussed the need to build collaborative structures that could make working together easier, the promise of collaboration for improving schools was highlighted.

Theme One: This is a Pilot Program—Progress and Growth

The first theme, *This is a Pilot Program—Progress and Growth*, reflected how the participants viewed the afterschool program as being an open system full of changes and new developments, particularly as the “bumps” in the road were worked out. *Progress* and *growth* were oriented as simply being part of developing this new partnership/program. As one afterschool staff member noted, “Since October, we’ve been through a lot of transitions.” While curricular and staff changes were experienced often, many of the participants expressed *not* being surprised by the ongoing alterations, viewing them as necessary. The lack of surprise was frequently coupled with the description of the afterschool program as a “pilot.” This notion of a “pilot” was illustrated well with the words of Kelly, the principal of the elementary school:

I don’t think [anything has surprised me] because we knew it was a pilot and everything was gonna be, um, a work in progress. I mean, I’ve done pilots before, and they’re never like they look on paper. I mean you always lay out a plan, and it’s a lot of changes. I mean, you know, we started off with a game plan, and immediately things changed and evolved, and I think, a lot of times people that haven’t worked in the pilot program don’t realize how in flux it’s gonna stay...you’ve gotta work out all the kinks that are gonna come up.

Kelly’s words were similar to what the majority of the participants viewed as inherent to the afterschool program—change. In the above quote, Kelly emphasized that “a lot of times people...don’t realize” the degree of “flux” within a pilot program. This acknowledgement of being “in flux” also pointed to one of the initial challenges—retaining staff members unfamiliar and/or uncomfortable with the “in flux” nature of pilot programs. Larissa, an afterschool staff member, described the felt consequences of inconsistent staffing, stating:

I guess the first couple months we worked, it felt like there were different staff people with the kids every day of the week, and the kids didn’t have relationships with the people. And so it depended on who the staff was that day as to whether you’d get anything done in your class...and whether the kids had any relationship or any respect for them. I think the staff that’s here now, and has been for the last several months, has just been really great. People are here very consistently, and kids clearly have relationships with them, and they’re effective.

In the above quote, Larissa made evident the challenge of having inconsistent staffing, while also pointing to the changes that occurred with time, as now “people are here very consistently.” The participants, particularly those who had worked in the afterschool program since its beginnings, talked about the importance of consistent staffing. One of the noted shifts in the program was the hiring of staff that could be present every day, allowing for the students, parents, and day school teachers to become familiar with them. This particular change was often described as adding the “consistency” that the children “needed.”

All of the participants we interviewed (five of whom had been working at the afterschool program since its beginnings) described the program, like Kelly, as a “work in progress” that required “tweaks and adjustments.” Acquiring a more consistent program, however, did not happen overnight. As Joseph (the director of the afterschool program) noted, a well run and consistent afterschool program was ultimately achieved through a “trial and error” process. Joseph stated:

I think, just because we were the pilot program and there’s trial and error, we dealt with a lot of, uh, chaos, and honestly, there was some dysfunction early on and getting things in place and getting things on board and communication. I think we’ve been the entity to experience the good and the bad, and we now have ironed it out.

Joseph’s description of the early “chaos” points to the initial challenges, yet his words also highlight that the “trial and error” nature of the program was eventually “ironed out.” Further, the “dysfunction” and “unpredictability” of the program were frequently coupled with the initial weeks and months, as Sue, one of the afterschool staff members, noted:

We really did hit the ground running with like, “Okay, we have this idea, let’s go with it,” and not really a lot of plans beforehand... I think at first everybody was like, “Why are we doing this?” The kids especially, they were like—they had no idea. They saw it as just daycare. Where, like myself and Matthew [another afterschool staff member], we took a course at [the university] telling us about community schools and what it should be. And then we got there and thought, “Okay, this isn’t quite what we thought it was gonna be, but we can get there.” And so that’s kind of what I’ve been telling myself since October, “Okay, this is a process, and we’re gonna get there—to where we need to be.”

The process of “getting there” was described by many of the afterschool staff as requiring leadership that listened to their concerns, understood their interest in engaging parents, and supported their efforts.

While the majority of the participants talked about the need for further growth and progress, many of the participants centered their discussion of “further growth” on discipline and parent involvement. Day staff, afterschool staff, and administrators alike emphasized the early challenges around discipline, noting that the approaches to classroom management and dealing with behavioral concerns were inconsistent and changed depending upon who was working on a given day. Even after the program became more consistent, discipline practices were positioned as being something that required further refinement. The participants also expressed a desire to see more families involved in the afterschool program. Yet, at the same time, parent and community involvement was also noted as an area in which progress and growth had been experienced. Stephen, an afterschool staff member, stated:

I think another big success is that the program has diversified in terms of, GED program...um, the ESL...the laundry thing, getting parents to come for meals, coordination with International Night. There’s a great fluidity between the regular school...like with the International Night... and with our program. It’s a fluid connection. That’s a big success to find other ways of involving the community of parents.

Much about Stephen’s description highlights the progress of the program (“diversified”) and the ways in which connectedness to the community at large was essential in order to move from the initial “chaos” and “dysfunction” to being “fluid.” The school principal and afterschool coordinator, in particular, also described the growth and development of the program as resulting in changes in the students’ attitudes, behaviors, and performance in the classroom.

Theme Two: School–University Cultural Differences

The second theme, *school–university cultural differences*, represented how the participants oriented to the cultures of the university and the elementary school as divergent, even contentious at times. Across the data, we noted that the afterschool staff employed by the university and the day school staff employed by the local education agency (LEA) held different perspectives. As Kelly, the principal, noted:

The hardest thing, I think, is getting everybody from the university and the school district on the same page, to come together with certain agreements....I mean, you’ve got two completely different organizations working together.

Kelly’s words highlighted the challenge of “getting everybody...together,” as the two institutional contexts often had different agendas and approaches. At some point in the data collection process, each participant noted the challenge

of working for two different organizations, both aiming to have a successful project delivery. When we invited the participants to talk about these challenges, we noted points of difference in relation to disciplinary approaches (e.g., different classroom management approaches used by day teachers and afterschool staff), logistical items (e.g., paperwork across two contexts), and perceptions of the university's role. We discuss these differences in detail below. Reminiscent of Goodlad's (1993) account of school–university partnerships, these challenges are to be expected when bringing them together; as he noted, “universities and schools are not cut from the same cloth” (p. 31).

Discipline Plan

The participants spoke of disagreements, lively discussions, and vivid memories about the discipline and behavior plan used within the elementary school and afterschool program. Many of the participants described initial uncertainty about what counted as “appropriate” discipline, with the elementary school's discipline plan being perceived as different from the approach used within the afterschool program. Even day school teachers not a part of the everyday afterschool program delivery spoke of these disagreements, as illustrated by the following quote from Katherine:

I think some of the challenges at first were, [that the volunteers and instructors] weren't really sure how to...do, have good behavior management. I know that they did have a meeting, and they were given a sheet, and, you know, points and that sort of thing. And then that's when I sat in on the two classes and just kind of helped them, you know...and so now they're, it's just like second nature to them now. It's so much better.

Katherine's words highlight the initial challenges that surrounded discipline, while also pointing to the growth of the program (e.g., “It's so much better.”). Many of the participants spoke at length about the different philosophical positions that surrounded “appropriate” discipline. The elementary school employed a point system to reinforce desired behaviors. Many of the afterschool staff members expressed being uncomfortable with this more behaviorally oriented approach, preferring to use what they viewed as a more humanistic approach (Maslow, 1968).

With the afterschool program located at the school, there was an increased sensitivity to aligning with school policies. Yet, the afterschool staff and program directors sought to provide something different than what was provided during the school day, requiring administrators from the university and elementary school to work to find a “happy medium.” Joseph described the desire and challenge of finding a middle ground as follows:

You want it to be in line in some ways with the regular school day, with the school district, with what's expected of the kids behavior-wise...and with the point system, and how they give rewards and consequences, and how they handle discipline.... We're the university. We're providing this program to supplement the students and the staff and the schools, but still, we're the university. We need to do things a little differently, because if the kids are in the program because of discipline [issues], because of the attendance, because of the grades...something's, something needs to be altered a little bit. Obviously. Because it wasn't working, or they wouldn't be chosen to be in the program to begin with.

These felt tensions were eventually worked out through transparent communication and collaborative in-services with the LEA's behavior specialists and university professors who study therapeutic methods of behavioral management. Even though some afterschool staff still felt that the school system was "coming down on them" for using the "wrong discipline strategy," ongoing meetings and more open conversations around "helpful" and "unhelpful" discipline approaches provided support as the participants struggled to work through the "bumps." All parties involved eventually recognized that the discipline approaches would likely look different. The issues surrounding discipline, however, remained a point of difference that required ongoing discussion.

Logistical Items and the University's Role

Many of the afterschool staff expressed being unsure of how to "get things done" while working between the two institutions. Both organizations were described as being large "bureaucracies" and "difficult" to navigate. Some of the cited challenges included figuring out how to "file paperwork," "purchase materials," and "get permission to carry out activities." Judy, one of the afterschool staff members, illustrated these logistical challenges, stating:

In the beginning, it was hard to get coordinated with how I was going to get my timesheet [to the university] every week to get paid because they needed the hard copy, but I couldn't bring it down to them because I was coming here afterschool. And I didn't have time to take it to them down there. And then, initially, just taking the application or whatever, my driver's license. Number one, the directions that they gave me were incorrect, and I got a parking ticket.

On a deeper level, though, sometimes the afterschool staff felt torn because they wanted to give the students particular resources and programming opportunities, yet working between two institutions seemed to make this more difficult. Bonnie, an afterschool staff member, described this difficulty:

The university wants this program to be at a certain level, but I feel like it's hard for us as teachers to get it to the level where the university wants it to be, because I don't have the materials, I don't have any resources.... We don't have like, you know, when the school district's ladies don't pull books for us, I don't have any books to help my kids read right now, because I don't know, I don't know where to get the books from....I mean, if I want to do an art activity, there's no materials available. You know, unless I go purchase it myself, which is fine. I appreciate all the cooperation between the school district and everything, and everyone's volunteered...but it is a little bit difficult at times, I feel like, for us to give the kids what they need, because we're not given enough resources.

Like Bonnie, the majority of the afterschool staff spoke about the difficulties of working between a university and a school in relation to sharing classroom space, purchasing materials, making copies, and carrying out other small tasks associated with running a full-fledged program.

Day school staff members generally reported that having the university—a resource-rich institution with a good reputation—working on their behalf was a good thing. They described how sometimes the university could make things happen for their students that would be nearly impossible for them to make happen during the regular school day. For example, when discussing the budget, Angela, the elementary school assistant principal, commented, “I actually feel as if it's a lot easier to go through the university hoops to get things done than [the school district].” Other participants also recalled how the availability of university-trained counseling professionals was an asset not previously available to the elementary students. In some ways, because the university functioned outside of the school system, a certain degree of freedom was felt within the afterschool program. The university was described as being capable of raising money and getting student volunteers at a quicker pace than the K–12 school district. Angela illustrated the differences in the “timeline” and process well, stating:

We still have to go through the school district to get certain thing approved for legality purposes or confidentiality purposes. And so it gets hard, too, because you just want to say, “Yes” to these wonderful people from the university, like, “Alright! We want to do that!” and then it's like, “Uh oh!” Step back, there might be something in [the] school district we need to know about before we move forward with the project....It makes the timeline much longer because you're trying to coordinate all these efforts.

While the day school staff perceived the university as helpful, generous, and well positioned to provide resources to students, the afterschool staff seemed

to question the capabilities and true investment of the university when it came to running the community school project. Some of the staff members, because they felt underresourced, questioned whether or not the university was truly invested in the project. Other staff members went further by positioning the coordinating faculty member as being separate from the university—the “rogue” faculty member and “an exception to the rule”—with the university as a whole described as rarely expecting faculty members to be involved in the community.

In contrast to this more skeptical orientation to the university’s involvement, one afterschool staff member oriented to the university in a positive light. When asked about what surprised her about her experience thus far, she stated:

I have to say what surprises me about the university coming in to do this, is the relationships that they have with the community! That was completely surprising, that they could find somebody to fund it for three years, and that they could, because the effort is, when you sit back and think about it, it’s a pretty grand effort. It’s not like writing a 100-page thesis to get your Master’s degree and whatnot. It’s nothing like that. It’s meaningful. So that’s surprising. I know that sounds a little bad (laughed). I didn’t mean it that way. But that the university would be useful is nice.

The fact that a local university would get involved in a project embedded in the community seemed to be out-of-sync with her traditional notion of universities. This afterschool staff member seemed to be pleasantly surprised with the university’s community-engaged work. Embedded in this commentary is the idea that there are conflicting missions of the university (Alpert, 1985) and the various higher education stakeholders (Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008).

Certainly, when groups as different as university-employed afterschool staff and LEA day school teachers and administrators commit to working together, the differences between institutions become evident. Yet, through collaboration, the differing perspectives were brought together to produce something useful for the students and community at large.

Theme 3: Creating Switzerland With Collaborative Structures

The third theme, *creating Switzerland with collaborative structures*, reflected what the participants identified as essential: collaboration. The place of collaboration across institutions and the community at large was positioned as critical, often being referenced in relation to the “in flux” nature of the program (Theme 1) and the institutional cultural differences (Theme 2). This collaborative framework, positioned as foundational to the partnership, allowed the

school to offer activities that were typically beyond the scope of their program delivery. Further, it was collaboration that allowed for the university and elementary school to work through their differences, refining the afterschool program and establishing consistency.

A UACS intentionally brings together two institutions in order to provide resources, services, and programming that neither institution could provide on its own, something that all of the day school staff members noted. Schools offer a certain set of activities and expertise. Similarly, universities bring particular skills and resources. Many elementary schools offer academic instruction in highly structured environments and have protocols for how to deliver content and assess student learning. Universities have the potential to bring inquiry, research, and flexibility to the table. The participants described how these differences eventually resulted in meeting the needs of the students and community in a more comprehensive way. Angela, the assistant principal, captured this idea well, sharing:

The university is also able to go beyond just the academics and only the [state standards]....I mean, we do have part of the program that focuses on that, but...the university is able to, uh, really provide a lot of culture to the students, and many of them have never been out of [this] area. They're getting to see and do and experience things that they never have before.

In this way, working *together*, the institutions collaborated to provide children who were already learning in school with opportunities for cultural and social enrichment that neither institution could have provided alone.

The day school staff overwhelmingly stated that their capacities were limited. Tracy, an elementary school teacher, stated:

Children come to school with lots of needs...we have children who come in, and they may have an abscess tooth, and nothing's been done about it. And having somebody to talk to, um, even helps that child to feel better—that they have somebody that they can communicate that to...I don't think the teachers in any school can provide everything that children come to school needing. And this [school–university partnership] helps.

While differences between the institutions were viewed as evident and consequential, some of the participants were surprised at the degree to which the school leaders welcomed creative interventions. Douglas, one of the afterschool staff teachers, noted:

I'm surprised at how great the administrative team from the school is. I felt, you know, I've been in some situations in some magnet schools

where I've worked in the past, where people have given me a lot of latitude....But whenever I've worked in straight-on schools, this, this is a straight-on school. This isn't a magnet school. This is a local elementary school. I really am pleasantly surprised with the principal and the assistant principal and with the staff in general. They're not provincial. They're not trying to perfect, protect their territory. They don't feel threatened by our presence; by and large, they're supportive.

The afterschool staff generally viewed their role as not only providing opportunities for cultural and social enrichment, but also as a way to support students with their academic work by providing more individualized attention. For example, the afterschool staff members discussed being willing to complement the academic work undertaken by day school staff, with one stating:

One thing I would really like to see happen that really, really, really needs to happen is communication between the Kindergarten teachers of our students...it's essential, crucial, that we need communication with the second grade teachers, and the third grade teachers.

When asked, "So you're thinking [you want] more intentional connections between day school teachers and you all, based on the kids that you have of theirs?", the participant continued:

Yeah, it doesn't have to be anything really...because I know sometimes we're like, the kids read their book, and they drew a picture of what they read, and then they wrote a sentence about what they read, and I don't necessarily know that that relates any way at all to what they were doing in the classroom. You know, so for like the first grade teacher that came up, and said, "Hey, here are these spelling words, there are these Word Wall words, and this is what we're working on. If you all could at some point during the week, help us out, you know."

The above quote highlights the general sentiment that collaboration was seen as essential for supporting the growth of the students. This collaboration demanded transparent conversations and a willingness to "give and take." Joseph, the afterschool coordinator, built upon this notion of "give and take," highlighting the importance of appeasing both "sides" (university and school).

Nah, just trying to appease both. You know, you kinda gotta be a, you got to be Switzerland, almost. You gotta be neutral on things being said and done because you've got a lot of different beliefs of what's best for the kids, and you get some people who, who get upset if things aren't going the way they want. I mean, you gotta try to be very neutral to both sides.

In this way, collaboration meant keeping partners "happy" while seeking to more fully meet the needs of the students attending the UACS. Collaborative

structures took time to build, but once in place, the community afterschool project was able to work alongside the public school in order to provide students with opportunities beyond those which each individual institution could provide alone. Creating collaborative structures was described as time intensive and uncomfortable at times but ultimately viewed as worth the struggle.

Implications/Discussion

Lewin (1951) stated that the best way to understand something is to try to change it; theory plus action equals education. A UACS project follows in this tradition as it attempts to simultaneously partner with schools, communities, and the university. We suggest, then, that this study holds important implications for scholars and practitioners alike who undertake similar tasks in public education.

Time Is Necessary to Build and Maintain Partnerships

Collaboration is important in the development of a UACS (Dryfoos, 1994; Kronick, 2000). Trust is a key element within any collaboration and, indeed, takes time to develop. At the beginning of the project, since most staff members were new to the school, time was needed to build trust between school and university officials. Both the afterschool coordinator and the principal credit each other's ability to work together as important for the success of the program. As trust was developed, staff were more apt to share thoughts and perspectives about changes needed in the UACS afterschool program. Interactions between the school and university staff helped to move the program forward.

Time to Develop an Infrastructure

Lawson (2010) described the UACS model as a "complex intervention" (p. 8) and provided a theory of change model for both schools and universities. Participants in our study referred to the "in flux" nature of the program and the patience needed when dealing with a pilot program. While it is always preferable to practice what one is about to do, especially when you are introducing a new program, in the case of the UACS of focus, this did not occur, as the principal noted the quick turnaround associated with the program's launch. The contingency of funding required start up after only a short period of time. Eighteen months later, with the addition of new funding streams, the infrastructure is still developing.

Time to Develop a Philosophy

The major philosophical difference talked about by the participants, especially at the outset, was that university staff liked discussing issues, while school staff preferred finding a solution more quickly. School and university

staff experienced tension that was eventually “ironed out” after having time to adjust to a new way of doing things, with compromise required across the two institutions. As discussed previously, discipline was a major source of difference between the university and school staff. The day school adhered to a point system that carried over into the next day. The extended day program started a child off with a clean slate each day. These varied approaches were often in conflict. There is no question that a uniform discipline policy would make matters easier. Yet, there is something to be said for healthy disagreement and taking the time needed to develop a shared philosophy.

The UACS Permeating the School Culture

Does the UACS philosophy (really) permeate the entire school? No, yet progress toward a seamless organization is being made. More importantly, the participating school staff viewed the UACS project as an asset that helped them to accomplish academic goals and objectives with particular students being served by the UACS afterschool program. Further, the project, at the time of this study, had only been able to serve 50 students; thus, it was likely difficult for the staff to orient to the project as more than a targeted intervention for a few students. Additionally, comprehensive school improvement was not indicated as a clear goal from the beginning, so it is not surprising that this goal was not achieved by the UACS project and therefore not mentioned by participants. As much potential as the UACS model may have for comprehensive school improvement, such a goal cannot be realized without school and university partners making it an explicit shared target. One teacher’s comment highlighted this phenomenon well: “I don’t know much about the UACS project because I don’t have any students in the program.” As such, there must be sustained, intentional discussions with school and university-based staff regarding how the UACS project supports the school’s improvement goals.

Impacts on the University

Community–school–university partnerships hold promise for transforming higher education, but institutional leaders must be at the table when planning the effort. There was discussion among afterschool staff about whether or not the university was truly invested in the partnership or if it was just the university “being nice” for a period of time. We suggest, then, that a “partnership infrastructure” should be created not only for the on-the-ground operational issues at the school, but also for the university’s leadership, beginning with the College of Education. Our findings suggested that the university was not fully integrated across the project, apart from the faculty member who was willing to take a “risk,” as one participant said, on this project. In one afterschool

staff member's words, "But I don't see the evidence that the university as an institution is willing to take risk to push the ideas." As a result, the university appeared not to experience organizational learning. Because the UACS intervention is a complex one (Lawson, 2010) and its theories of change can be broadly applicable to schools/universities/communities, a particular infrastructure should be created in order to take the lessons learned from the real-world model and apply them to the university's scholarship and teaching.

Conclusions and Future Research

Universities have a choice to assist and support schools in improving or to sit on the sidelines. From our findings, we highlight the ways in which universities and schools can function together, as they embark on the challenging and lengthy process of working through "chaos" and philosophical differences. This study, however, does not chart impacts on individual students, families, or community members. Future research should seek to examine the extent to which the UACS model can impact these important stakeholders because, at the end of the day, the UACS model will be assessed on its ability to engage students, improve and support student learning, and support the neighborhood and community in which it is situated. Research is also needed to understand the extent to which the UACS model does in fact result in systemic changes that result in a coordinated human service delivery system. In particular, future research might examine the extent to which the university has the capacity to convene diverse stakeholders in communities to address the "wicked" problems associated with inner-city distress (Rittel & Webber, 1973). The university could hold a key and be a supportive player in such a neocollaborative framework, working alongside communities to address neighborhood concerns and participate in school improvement (Taylor, 2010). In the words of former University at Buffalo president William Greiner, "The great universities of the 21st century will be judged by their ability to solve the city's most urgent problems" (as cited in Taylor, 1992, p. 21).

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