Impact of Adopt-A-Classroom Partnerships Between K–12 and University Faculty

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Abstract

There is often a disconnect between K–12 schools and postsecondary institutions. While this gap has grown consistently, the need for collaboration between systems is greater than ever. The Adopt-A-Classroom program was created to address the need for greater university faculty involvement in public schools by providing opportunities for collaboration between K–12 and higher education faculty. A qualitative research study was designed and conducted using an electronic survey. Both K–12 and university participant responses reflected an overall positive impact on students and teaching. Responses implied that K–12 teachers viewed this program as an opportunity to grow professionally, while university participants saw Adopt-A-Classroom as an opportunity to provide service to the community. In some cases, the K–12 teachers did gain a greater depth of content knowledge, which was one of the original goals of the program. Additionally, the program provided K–12 students with greater opportunities to learn about going to college and visit the college campus. University faculty also gained appreciation for the challenges of being a K–12 educator. Adopt-A-Classroom might be considered by other colleges and universities striving to develop deeper connections between their faculty from all academic backgrounds and nearby K–12 educators and their students.

Key Words: school–university partnerships, Adopt-A-Classroom program, collaboration, postsecondary faculty, teachers, schools, students, content, Arkansas

Introduction

Historically, K–12 schools and higher education have operated independently of each other (Kirst, 2005; Thelin, 2011). American high schools were first designed to educate students for life skills, not prepare them for college. As high schools grew and the number of students attending increased following World War II, two tracks developed: one for students who would attend college and one for those who would not. Because college preparation was not the primary focus of high schools, the gap between K–12 and higher education has consistently widened, making the need for collaboration between systems greater than ever (Kirst, 2005). Given a recent nationwide push for implementing college and career readiness standards for K–12 schools, schools are looking to colleges and universities to augment teacher content knowledge. University faculty and staff can provide expertise in their focus areas as well as access to tangible resources through school–university partnerships.

History of the Program

In 2005, Education Renewal Zones were established in the state of Arkansas to promote collaboration between higher education and public schools. The Arkansas Department of Education currently funds six Education Renewal Zones throughout the state through a model that is unique to Arkansas. Education Renewal Zone directors are employees of their respective institutions who also work alongside the Arkansas Department of Education. Programs are created to provide the institution of higher education's resources to and address the needs of partner K–12 schools, as assessed through both formal and informal means (Arkansas Department of Education, n.d.).

The University of Arkansas Education Renewal Zone was awarded funds to begin an Education Renewal Zone in Summer 2012. Schools were nominated to participate in the Education Renewal Zone by school superintendents. Immediately upon the creation of the office, the newly hired Education Renewal Zone director conducted interviews with partner school superintendents and principals to assess needs and began brainstorming along with a 40-member advisory board about how the University of Arkansas might support the stated needs of school partners.

Upon coding the responses from these administrator interviews, a common theme emerged: the desire to have University of Arkansas faculty present in partner schools. Superintendents and principals asked the Education Renewal Zone to facilitate greater faculty involvement in their schools for a few stated reasons. First, they wanted to connect K–12 faculty to the content expertise of postsecondary faculty. A 2012 study found that knowledge about

the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) was growing rapidly among educators while teachers simultaneously expressed concern over not having deep enough content knowledge to implement the standards (ASCD, 2012). Anecdotes from interviews with Education Renewal Zone partner school principals and superintendents supported this finding. While CCSS requires teachers to teach less material for deeper student understanding, partner administrators indicated that educators could benefit from a more profound grasp of the content by collaborating with university faculty (Riddile, 2012).

Another reason for the desired partnership with postsecondary faculty was to influence students' perceptions toward college faculty and higher education in general. Partner school administrators hoped that providing a connection between their students and university faculty would contribute to greater college matriculation for students graduating from their districts. Additionally, partner school administrators expected that deeper connections between K–12 teachers and postsecondary faculty would result in collegiate educators having a greater appreciation for the challenges of being a K–12 teacher. Adopt-A-Classroom (AAC) was created by the Education Renewal Zone to address these purposes.

Literature Review

There is scant literature discussing partnerships between K–12 and higher education faculty, thus finding the appropriate body of literature with which to frame this project has proven to be a challenge. Most of the existing literature regarding successful school–university partnership revolves around teacher preparation in terms of creating professional development schools and utilizing public schools as teacher training sites. The AAC's focus is not centered on teacher preparation and training but intends to promote partnerships beyond colleges of education. Therefore, the literature on professional development schools and teacher training programs is not directly aligned with this study.

John Dewey is credited with founding the first laboratory school in an effort to close the gap between theory and practice in education (Greene & Tichenor, 1999; Mayhew & Edwards, 1965). In the late 1980s, the Holmes Group brought professional development schools to the forefront as a prevalent type of school–university partnership for teacher preparation (Callahan & Martin, 2007). John Goodlad established the concept of school–university partnerships as opportunities for simultaneous renewal, creating the prospect of a mutually beneficial relationship (Goodlad, 1998). While these giants in the field of school–university partnerships provide excellent guidance on partnerships in the context of teacher education, little work has been done in considering partnerships between K–12 teachers and university faculty outside of teacher education programs.

Throughout the United States, K–12 and postsecondary institutions largely exist and operate independently of each other. School–university relationships often promote a "one-way street" mindset in which only one side of the partnership actually benefits, creating an unfortunate divide between universities and K–12 teachers (Parker, Templin, & Setiawan, 2012, p. 32). The division between K–12 and higher education has proven to be problematic for all students, especially those that are underrepresented in higher education. This barrier may create a lack of knowledge about the preparation required for college success as well as a lack of understanding at the collegiate level about the challenges faced by K–12 educators. Ultimately, the weak connection between K–12 and postsecondary education contributes to the epidemic of students who are not prepared for the colleges in which they enroll, a substantial factor in the low numbers of college graduates (Kirst, 2005). One symptom of the rift between K–12 and higher education is that faculty from the two distinct systems may not have opportunities to interact on a consistent basis, especially outside of teacher education faculty partnerships.

Domina and Ruzek (2010) engaged in a longitudinal study considering the impact of school–university partnership programs. Their study showed that comprehensive partnership programs improved high school completion rates and college access for underrepresented students. Magiera and Geraci (2014) conducted a study based on a 22-year rural school–university partnership that served students with disabilities and at-risk students. The researchers analyzed participant responses in regard to benefits for stakeholders and why they believed the program had such longevity. Themes that emerged from participant responses included "increased academic benefits for students and teacher candidates" and "interpersonal benefits for all stakeholders" (Magiera & Geraci, 2014, p. 14). In addition, Parker et al. (2012) contended that both K–12 and university participants can benefit from a collaborative partnership. In their study, not only did K–12 teachers and teacher candidates gain real-world experiences to apply to learning and teaching, but university faculty also took advantage of opportunities for producing scholarly works through the process (Parker et al., 2012). The Greater Milwaukee Catholic Education Consortium (GMCEC) was created to foster relationships between higher education institutions and Catholic elementary and secondary schools to support the growth and sustainability of Catholic education (Henk, Maney, Baxter, & Montejano, 2013). Three key benefits came from analysis of the impact GMCEC had on the school–university partnerships: greater resources and opportunities for professional development, a stronger mission and identity, and increased organizational effectiveness (Henk et al., 2013). The discussed advantages

of school–university partnerships were attributed to several factors revolving around true cooperation and sincere desires for improvement.

Ferreira (2007) indicates that partnerships between K–12 teachers and university professors can assist in creating a sense of community among partners. In this case, university professors included real-world application for the K–12 students through hands-on science and math activities. Additionally, Ferreira found that such academic partnerships introduced K–12 students to the possibility of attending postsecondary institutions when it previously did not seem attainable. Parker et al. (2012) noted, "Like any relationship, cooperation is the key as people come together for a shared purpose" (p. 32). Fostering relationships between K–12 educators and university faculty can provide mutually beneficial opportunities for growth and sustainment of quality education. Programs similar to these partnerships are the key to developing vibrant modes of instruction, professional development, scholarship, and integrated educational initiatives.

Adopt-A-Classroom Program Overview

The AAC program was created in response to feedback from partner schools and was designed to provide opportunities for collaboration between K–12 and higher education faculty. Adopt-A-Classroom exists to:

- Build collaborative relationships between K–12 and higher education;
- Provide opportunities for University of Arkansas faculty/staff to offer up-to-date content knowledge and share information about resources in their respective fields;
- Provide opportunities for K–12 teachers to offer insight into current school practices; and
- Provide opportunities for K–12 students to learn more about higher education and, ultimately, have greater access to postsecondary options.

The program is designed to evolve throughout six stages: recruitment, matching, training, classroom visits, concluding event, and yearly evaluation. Each year, university faculty and K–12 teachers from Education Renewal Zone partner schools (both suburban and rural) are invited through e-mail to participate in the AAC program. Although most of the participants in the program were university faculty, several participants were staff members in academic positions such as research librarians, research associates, and research lab supervisors. Figure 1 illustrates the key components of the program.

Adopt-A-Classroom Program Key Components	
Recruitment	University faculty and staff members and K–12 teachers are recruited through media outreach and departmental and school presentations.
Matching	University faculty and staff members are matched with K–12 teachers based on requested content areas and age group (elementary, middle, or high school).
Training	University faculty and staff members complete half-day training to learn about the program components, current practices in education, and resources available. K–12 teachers later attend a two-hour training alongside faculty/staff to learn about program components and plan for their partnership.
Classroom Visits	During a full year of implementation, university faculty and staff are asked to visit partner classrooms at least six times over a seven-month period (October–April). [During the one semester pilot program, university faculty and staff were asked to visit K–12 classrooms once a month over a three-month period (February–April).]
Concluding Event	In April, university faculty and staff, K–12 teachers, and the supervisors of all participants are invited to attend a Celebration Reception. At this event, selected participants share about their experiences, and all participants are honored.
Yearly Evaluation	One week following the Celebration Reception, a digital survey consisting of 16 questions (both ordinal and open-response) is sent to all participants.

Figure 1. Summary of the key elements in the AAC program.

The Education Renewal Zone staff pairs university faculty and K–12 volunteers according to subject area or interest. University faculty must commit to teaching in their K–12 partner teacher's classroom once per month throughout the course of one academic year. This time commitment may vary from 1–2 hours to all day depending on the grade level and needs of the adopted classroom. At the training (following recruitment and matching), participants discuss the expectations of the program, possible challenges, and the overall purpose of AAC. Additionally, the professors learn about the Common Core State Standards and hear more about the current climate in public schools from University of Arkansas education faculty who are former K–12 teachers. The university faculty are encouraged to plan a lesson with the K–12 partner teacher once a month to expand upon content already being taught within the K–12 curriculum and that align with the university faculty's area of expertise. Additionally, university faculty are asked to bring K–12 students to visit the

university campus and engage in special projects. Furthermore, university faculty may choose to involve their undergraduate and/or graduate students in their partnership.

Following the training for university faculty, the Education Renewal Zone hosts all participants at the Welcome Reception. This event provides an opportunity for the participants to meet for the first time and plan for the remainder of the school year. After the Welcome Reception, the partners are released to collaborate through the University of Arkansas faculty member's monthly visits to the partner school classroom. Once a semester, the university faculty participants and Education Renewal Zone Director meet to discuss the program's progress and brainstorm solutions to any issues that may have arisen. A Celebration Reception is held at the end of the year. At this event, participants speak about the impact of the program on their teaching practice and their students' perceptions of the program. The Education Renewal Zone invites partner school and university administrators so they can learn about the impact of the program. All participants are recognized and thanked for their participation at this event, and it marks the conclusion of the formal AAC partnerships for the year. University faculty participants are encouraged to renew their commitment to the program for the following year. The final piece to the program cycle each year is an evaluation sent to all participants and subsequent data analysis to improve the program for the next year.

Throughout the one-semester pilot program and first full year of implementation, 34 university faculty and staff members partnered with 33 K–12 teachers, a total of 67 participants (one pair of university participants worked together with a single teacher). As shown in Table 1, more than three-fourths of the university participants were from the College of Education and Health Professions (although not necessarily from teacher education programs) and the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences. These two colleges represent the largest on campus. The positions and rank of participating faculty and staff varied greatly from tenured full professors to graduate students.

K–12 teacher participants volunteered from an assortment of schools within 50 miles of the university campus. More than 72% of the K–12 teachers taught at small, rural schools. Nineteen of the 34 teacher participants (55.8%) taught secondary students, while the remainder taught in elementary schools. Secondary teacher participants represented a variety of subject areas, as shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Academic Colleges of Faculty/Staff Adopt-A-Classroom Participants

College	Number of Participants	Percent
Agriculture, Food, and Life Sciences		5.9
Faculty	1	
Academic Staff	0	
Graduate Teaching Assistants	1	
Arts and Sciences		29.4
Faculty	7	
Academic Staff	1	
Graduate Teaching Assistants	2	
Business		5.9
Faculty	1	
Academic Staff	0	
Graduate Teaching Assistants	1	
Education and Health Professions		44.1
Faculty	7	
Academic Staff	6	
Graduate Teaching Assistants	2	
Engineering		5.9
Faculty	1	
Academic Staff	0	
Graduate Teaching Assistants	1	
Other		8.8
Diversity Affairs Administration	1	
University Libraries Administration	2	

Table 2. Academic Content Area of Secondary Teacher Participants

Content Area	Number of Secondary Teacher Participants
English	4
Math	3
Science	3
Social Studies	3
Other (electives)	6

Research Questions

The researchers designed and conducted a qualitative study involving open response survey data in an effort to better understand the following three research questions:

1. What impact did participation in AAC have on K–12 students?
2. What impact did participation in AAC have on the teaching practice of K–12 and university faculty?
3. What impact did participation in AAC have on research practices of university faculty?

Methods

This study was designed and conducted using select open response items from an emailed program questionnaire. Participants were sent an initial email with the link to a survey and then a reminder email to encourage more to complete the evaluation. The overall questionnaire included open response and Likert-scale response items designed to elicit information about participant experience.

Participants

All 67 participants (33 K–12 teachers and 34 university faculty/staff members) were sent the evaluation survey. There were 33 total respondents to the survey (49% of the total participant pool) regarding the opinions, benefits, and challenges of participating in the AAC program. These respondents included 19 K–12 public school teachers (57.6%) and 14 university faculty and staff members (42.4%). The only identifying information collected about the survey completers was their status as either a K–12 teacher or university faculty/staff member. Additional demographic data was not collected in order to protect the anonymity of respondents.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred over two periods in May 2013 and May 2014 at the conclusion of the one-semester pilot program and the first full year of implementation, respectively. A questionnaire was sent electronically to all program participants with a final response rate of 49%. The responses from the questionnaire were collected and recorded anonymously using an Excel spreadsheet. This researcher-created survey was a combination of ordinal and open-ended response items. The questions were created to evaluate program effectiveness based on the goals of AAC for future program improvement. The original survey consisted of 16 questions, but only four were open-ended response questions. The four open-ended survey questions pertaining to the impact of the AAC program were chosen to be analyzed in this study:

1. For K–12 teachers: What impact, if any, did your participation in AAC have on your students?
2. For K–12 teachers: What impact, if any, did your participation in AAC have on your teaching?
3. For university faculty/staff: What impact, if any, did your participation in AAC have on your students?
4. For university faculty/staff: What impact, if any, did your participation in AAC have on your teaching and/or research?

Data Analysis

Marshall and Rossman (2010) report that when a researcher employs a survey as the primary means of data collection, beliefs and attitudes of individuals or groups may be precisely collected and quantified through self-reporting. The research team for this study consisted of the director of the Education Renewal Zone and three education professors that have participated in the AAC program. While the survey questions were intended to measure program impact, the researchers acknowledge that the self-reported data instead identified the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of participants.

Data from each of the four selected questions were analyzed inductively through a process that began with a collaborative component for open coding or the process in which data is coded for its major categories of information (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). To follow Lincoln and Guba (1985), peer debriefing was used in order to positively influence credibility and assure the subsequent findings were grounded within the data. For open coding, each peer read through the open-ended questionnaire responses and noted potential understandings of that central data source using *in vivo* codes (Creswell, 2007). Following this process and a discussion of initial understandings, the researchers returned to the entirety of the data set (questionnaire items 1–4) and noted 62 open codes (see Table 3) as they emerged and were confirmed with data excerpts. The examples in Table 3 were chosen to illustrate the researchers' process of data analysis.

Once finished with the open coding process, researchers collaborated to determine themes as they read through each open code, independently grouped them into categories, and then compared their understandings of them. This process allowed the researchers to take 62 open codes and reduce them into 14 themes, constructs of the open codes that contributed to an understanding of them. This process was completed separately for each of the four open response questions.

Table 3. Data Analysis Coding Examples

Question	Theme	Open Code	Participant Response
K–12 teachers: What impact, if any, did your participation in AAC have on your students?	College Access	Realistic college opportunities	It helped my students realize that a 4-year university…is a realistic opportunity for them.
		Opened the door to college	It opened the door for conversations about them going to college!
K–12 teachers: What impact, if any, did your participation in AAC have on your teaching?	Innovation	New ways to challenge students	I learned many new activities and new ways to challenge my students.
		New ideas	I hadn't thought about doing lessons like she did in our classroom.
University faculty/ staff: What impact, if any, did your participation in AAC have on your students?	Student Development	Nuances of students	My students felt very differently about themselves and their university after taking part in the program. Other professors may not have engaged their own classroom the way I did, but it was important to me because I think it has mutual benefits.
		University students' past experiences	It made me think much more often about what they have potentially already experienced in a language classroom.
University faculty/ staff: What impact, if any, did your participation in AAC have on your teaching and/ or research?	Improved Teaching	Awareness and sensitivity to students' backgrounds	That awareness makes me more sensitive to the varied backgrounds in language classes that my students may have had.
		Coming up with ideas	I did like coming up with ideas and then gathering resources...these activities had me interacting with other people in the department….

Findings

Tables 4–7 present the open codes and themes as they emerged from the dataset. Survey question 1 addressed the first research question. The survey question asked K–12 teachers to discuss the impact that participation in AAC had on their students. The researchers identified six themes: *real-world view, new experiences, college access, enjoyment, connections,* and *challenging students* (see Table 4).

Table 4. Survey Question 1, for K–12 teachers: What impact, if any, did your participation in AAC have on your students?

Theme	Open Code
Real-World View	• Real-world application • Broader world view • Real face/scientist • Real life • Career focus
New Experiences	• Unique/new experiences • Different teaching approaches • Application of new ideas • Exposing external resources
College Access	• College major—agent of change • Recruitment • Realistic college opportunities • College and career preparation • College insight • College interest—science • Able to see themselves as college students • Opportunity for students to visit a college campus • Opened the door to college
Enjoyment	• Class loved the guest teacher • Class enjoyed the lessons • Change of pace • Class enjoyed the visits • Students are focused and excited
Connections	• Working with adult professionals • Personal connections
Challenging Students	• Challenged to make predictions and problem solve • Forced to make predictions and problem solve

College access, derived from nine open codes, was the theme occurring most frequently. Participants reported that AAC impacted their students in a positive way, including "several students changed their planned major," attending a university became a "realistic opportunity," and "more students are interested in college." *Real-world view* and *enjoyment* emerged as secondary themes, each from five open codes. Examples of participant responses related to the theme *real-world view* included discoveries that students "learned about real-world jobs and applications," experienced a "broader world view beyond what we typically discuss," and were provided with "a 'real face' to what 'scientist' means in real life." Additionally, the theme *enjoyment* developed from participant responses that included "they really enjoyed learning the things [the guest instructor] was teaching to us," and "I think the students enjoyed the change of pace."

Survey questions 2 and 3 (see Tables 5 and 6) provide data to address the second research question: What impact did participation in AAC have on the teaching practice of K–12 and university faculty?

Table 5. Survey Question 2, for K–12 teachers: What impact, if any, did your participation in AAC have on your teaching?

Theme	Open Code
Rethinking Teaching	• Useful lessons and topics • More open to release control • Impacted teaching • Fantastic activities and lesson plans • Students loved activities • Relatable lessons/discussions • Adjusted lessons • Will incorporate demonstrations and comparisons • Restructuring projects
Innovation	• Learned new things • New information to share with students • New activities • New ways to challenge students
Collaboration	• Resources • Ideas for lessons • Ideas from partner • Learned from partner • Future collaboration with university faculty
Real-World Connections	• Real-world examples • Brought culture into history lessons • Preparing students for college

Survey question 2 asked K–12 teachers to discuss the impact that participation in AAC had on their teaching practice. The researchers identified four themes: *re-thinking teaching, innovation, collaboration,* and *real-world connections* (see Table 5). The theme *re-thinking teaching* emerged from nine open codes and was the theme with the highest frequency. The K–12 teachers identified that AAC caused them to *re-think teaching* by providing opportunities to "restructure projects," to be "more open to release control," and more "willing to incorporate demonstrations and comparisons." The theme *collaboration* developed from five open codes. Examples of participant responses related to *collaboration* included learning about "resources," "new ideas for lessons," and planning for "future collaboration with university faculty."

Table 6. Survey Question 3, for university faculty/staff: What impact, if any, did your participation in AAC have on your students?

Theme	Open Code
Increased Exposure	• Exposure for grad students • Exposure to K–12 classroom • Students felt differently about themselves and university
Student Development	• Insight into student development • Nuances of students • Relating to university students' past experiences

The university faculty and staff that participated in the AAC program answered survey question 3. This question asked what impact their participation had upon their university students. Two themes were identified: *increased exposure* and *student development*, with three open codes contributing to each theme (see Table 6).

Some participants reported directly involving their university students in their AAC projects within the public schools. The *increased exposure* these university students received allowed them to feel "very differently about themselves and their university" and provided "mutual benefits" to the schools, faculty members, and university students. University faculty and staff participation in AAC gave them access to "examples for classes" they teach and provided graduate students with exposure to real classrooms.

Participants mentioned that their understanding of *student development* increased due to their participation in AAC. The benefit participants cited in regard to this emerging theme was that it will "make me a bit more tolerant of some of the nuances that students bring to the classroom." The partnership allowed university faculty, who may be somewhat removed from K–12 students,

to gain a fresh perspective on student development in the years immediately preceding entrance to college. This knowledge may have an impact both on university faculty and university students.

Survey question 4 (see Table 7) provides data to address the third research question: What impact did participation in AAC have on research practices of university faculty?

Table 7. Survey Question 4, for university faculty/staff: What impact, if any, did your participation in AAC have on your teaching and/or research?

Theme	Open Code
Improved Teaching	• Innovation • Teaching examples • Coming up with ideas • Gathering resources • Made me a better teacher • Awareness and sensitivity to students' backgrounds
Research	• Methods • Protocol

Survey question 4 was also addressed to the university faculty and staff participants. They were asked to discuss the impact of their participation on their teaching and/or research. The themes that emerged from the data set were grouped into two areas: *improved teaching* and *research* (see Table 7). Six open codes combined to form the theme *improved teaching*, and two open codes made up the theme *research*.

Several participants mentioned that work in the K–12 schools made a positive impact upon their university teaching. Individual responses included "examples in classes" they teach, forming collaborative relationships "with other people in the department," and becoming a "more sensitive" instructor. Another participant responded that the project led him/her to "appreciate" his/her job more, "which probably made me a better teacher day-to-day." Gathering resources to use in the K–12 schools was also mentioned as a positive experience associated with the AAC project.

Two participants mentioned research in their response to survey question 4. Both of these individuals used their work with AAC to develop and hone a research question leading to a larger project. One participant referred to this idea of using the AAC project in research as "innovative." Additionally, two other participants spoke about not pursuing research with this partnership because they do not typically conduct research in K–12 education.

Discussion

The process of teaching and learning is cyclical with research being the vehicle that fuels and strengthens this process (Gredler, 2009). The AAC program seeks to weave all three of these components into a partnership involving K–12 public schools and university faculty and staff so that the benefits received are mutual (Goodlad, 1998). However, the K–12 participants and the university participants in this study had differing points of view on the impact of participation in the program. K–12 teachers' responses implied that they viewed the AAC program as an opportunity to grow professionally. They focused on positive impacts the program had on their students as well as influential outcomes on their teaching practices. The minimal responses to Survey Question 4 from university faculty and staff illustrates that there was some connection to teaching improvement and research. Anecdotal evidence from the before and after meetings, as well as the researchers' participation in the program lead this team to believe the lack of responses may indicate that the university faculty and staff view their participation in the program with a service mindset rather than a change mindset.

Overall, K–12 teachers indicated that their participation provided greater access to real-world connections and application for them and their students, a finding echoing Ferreira (2007). Teachers appreciated the opportunity to rethink their instructional strategies and how they could influence their students' future educational choices. Additionally, K–12 teachers pointed out that the AAC program enhanced motivation and engagement in the classroom. Several teachers discussed students' enjoyment of this collaborative experience.

University faculty and staff responses also indicated a positive impact on their students and teaching. Faculty and staff noted that the program helped them better understand university students' development and experiences, which improved teaching practices. Graduate students who participated benefited from exposure to K–12 classrooms. Some participants also reported that the AAC program influenced their research or caused them to consider research opportunities in K–12 education.

One area within the AAC program that could be strengthened would be more explicit communication about the mutual benefit goals of the program to all participants. Goodlad's (1998) idea of simultaneous renewal should be clearly communicated. While it appears to be an expectation of the K–12 teachers that they will witness innovative teaching approaches, gain access to additional resources through the university faculty and staff, and see an increased motivation in their students to work toward a future in college, the university faculty and staff need to understand that there are benefits beyond service to

the community in their participation. It is the hope of the AAC program that university faculty and staff will come away with a newfound appreciation for their K–12 partners and public schools. University faculty and staff will also benefit by witnessing innovative teaching strategies that could strengthen their university teaching. Additionally, university faculty and staff could structure the partnership experience as a research project that would benefit their career and contribute to the body of literature available in their disciplines. K–12 schools are focusing their attention on accelerating achievement and getting students ready to enter college and career fields (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012). It makes sense to structure the AAC program in a manner that would provide a seamless transition between K–12 and higher education.

Limitations

This study was not without limitations which may have influenced results and outcomes. The sample size was small due to the inaugural nature of the program, which included 33 respondents. An increased number of participants would allow for further transferability to other populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, this limitation may be offset by the diverse sample of participants which represented a wide array of content areas within K–12 schools and university faculty and the overall response rate of 49%. This study included data from the first year and a half of the program. In the future, annual evaluations will be collected and analyzed to add to the body of knowledge surrounding K–12 school–university partnerships. Another limitation is that participants self-reported responses on a researcher-created survey which was designed to gather input from participants for future improvement of the AAC program. In contrast, the process of peer-debriefing during the analysis phase of the study enhanced credibility of outcomes and themes that emerged from the raw data responses.

Conclusion

The AAC program provides opportunities for collaboration between K–12 teachers and university faculty. In some cases, the K–12 teachers did gain a greater depth of content knowledge, which was one of the original program purposes as expressed by school administrators. Additionally, it provided K–12 students with greater opportunities to learn about going to college and visit the college campus. University faculty also gained appreciation for the challenges of being a K–12 educator. As the program grows, success stories from K–12 and university participants will assist in recruiting and expanding the number of participants. Additionally, the university has shown its support for

the program by including it as a recurring budget item. AAC might be considered by other colleges and universities seeking to develop deeper connections between their faculty from all academic backgrounds and nearby K–12 educators and their students.

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