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ABSTRACT

Colleges of education are at a point in time when important decisions should be made about the nature and extent of their relationships with public schools on issues relating to teacher education. Presently, and for many years, colleges of education have seen the public schools as little more than places for student teachers to practice newly learned skills. University-public school relationships must be assessed and improved so that the two are equal partners in the business of preparing educators and renewing schools. Reforms proposed by the recent education reports for either the public schools or for teacher education programs will be of limited value and effect without fundamental change in public school-university relationships. The program at Brigham Young University to improve the relationship of its college of education with the public school is briefly described. (CB)

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PUBLIC SCHOOL - UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

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PUBLIC SCHOOL - UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

Observations of a Dean

Ralph B. Smith

Colleges of education are at a point in time when important decisions should be made about the nature and extent of their relationships with schools on issues relating to teacher education. Presently, and for too many years, colleges of education have seen the public schools as little more than places for student teachers to practice newly learned skills. Beyond this limited involvement there is little to suggest an ongoing relationship in which the public schools benefit or have a role of any significance in teacher education. For their part, the schools accept student teachers out of some sense of service to the profession, wanting to cooperate with colleges believing that they may have some role in the preparation of teachers. But there is little which suggests any role for the schools and little in the way of their participation in teacher education issues which affect them. It is no longer appropriate for colleges to continue their attitude of indifference which has, for too long, characterized relations with schools.

There should be little doubt that colleges of education need the public schools. As a matter of fact, colleges of education need the schools a good deal more than they need the colleges. We can no longer continue to relegate the schools to a passive position in the relationships which do exist. We need to assess the present arrangements with schools and come together as full

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and equal partners in the business of preparing educators and renewing schools. Nor can colleges of education continue to maintain that the problems of the schools are not their concern. We prepare teachers, principals, and counselors, we have worked on the school curriculum, served as consultants, conducted workshops, undertaken research and evaluation projects, and our graduates take what we have taught them into the schools. Their problems are our problems and colleges of education must assume some of the responsibility for what has happened in the schools.

We are part of the problems which public schools face, a fact which we must accept if we're to be part of the solution.

The national movement for reform has focused largely on public education and the problems of the schools. Attention is now on reform in teacher education. Presently, there are several efforts to reform teacher education but one must wonder about the effectiveness of such efforts. The proposed reforms of AACTE, the "redesign" standards of NCATE, the recommendations of the Holmes group, as well as the efforts of state legislatures and departments of education, while focusing on relevant issues in teacher education will be of limited value and effect without fundamental changes in school-university relationships. Such recommendations for reform fail to address the basic issue of collaboration between the schools and colleges. Reform will only occur when colleges of education and the public schools come together, closing the rather substantial distance between them,

thus providing opportunities to address needed reforms in both institutions.

Gene Maeroff, education editor of the New York Times in a report to the Carnegie Foundation (1983) points out that "teacher preparation...should be the most important connection between the nation's colleges and schools." It is not. If we are to make it so, colleges of education must involve the public schools in the full range of teacher education issues and problems - from admission to programs, to curriculum review, through the follow-up of graduates into the early years of teaching. We do none of this. Goodlad in an address to the chief state school officers, notes "the disaffection and sometimes outright hostility" of the schools toward colleges of education because colleges have failed to include the schools in any meaningful way. Goodlad calls for collaboration, a "partnership" if you will, between colleges of education and schools, if we are to effectively "restructure schooling and the education of educators."

The entry of Brigham Young University into a partnership with the public schools came with relative ease. This due in large part to the support of the University administration with the president and vice presidents supporting a new role for the college in the public schools. The college deans and department chairmen also supported the idea of the partnership as did members of the faculty - many of whom had come to the college the public schools where they had service as teachers and principals.

In addition, the frequent and numerous contacts between faculty and cooperating teachers which were necessary because of the size of our program - BYU is the largest teacher education institution in Utah, graduating over half of all teachers prepared in the state - also aided the new relationship. Further, there were those faculty members with research projects which took them into the schools. It was this kind of support and contact which made our participation in the partnership come easily. While participation would come easy for many colleges, it may be a problem for research-intensive institutions whose interests lie, as Harry Judge noted in his study of graduate schools of education, in "studying teachers rather than in preparing them."

Participation in the partnership was a new experience for both the dean and the superintendents. There were apprehensions and concerns since there were few guidelines, directions or experiences for the kind of partnership contemplated. Initial apprehensions and concerns came about because we were uncertain of where the partnership would lead. Now, two years later the partnership is alive and well. Most apprehensions are gone due to our confidence in one another, in the partnership itself, and in our success to date. But there are some lingering concerns which the superintendents and the dean have. For his part, the dean's concerns stem from faculty participation in the activities of the partnership, while others relate to the partnership organization itself. With reference to the former, concerns stem

mainly from faculty relationships with public school people, in our being sensitive and listening to their problems, faculty "with an axe to grind", of those wanting to "take charge" in the schools. Other concerns relate to faculty getting carried away, "taking the ball and running" in the name of the partnership, and of those plunging into partnership activities at the expense of college responsibilities.

With reference to the partnership organization, I wonder about the informality of the organization, its structure, and of the need for financial support. I worry also that much of the business of the partnership originates with the College, of maintaining a proper balance between the College and the schools, remembering that we are equals in the partnership. I also worry about the College keeping faith with the schools, of "holding up our end", and of fulfilling our responsibility to the partnership.

In spite of these concerns and problems, the potential of the partnership is such that these problems are of little significance and will no doubt be resolved as we gain experience through collaboration. The partnership offers too much to both the College and the schools for it to be preoccupied with such concerns for very long.

The College has benefitted substantially in the formative years of the partnership. Others here have noted that the college has undertaken a review of all of preparation programs

by both college faculty and public school people. Together, we have, or are examining preparation programs for elementary and secondary teachers, administrators, counselors, and special education teachers. There is collaboration in assessing the need for new foreign language offerings and new approaches to teaching mathematics in secondary schools, and also, collaboration in support of programs for gifted and talented children. More recently, we have effected a liaison between the research directors in the school districts and the director of the college research center.

While all this is very positive for the College, some "old wounds" have surfaced, and there are those in the schools who remain suspicious of our motives, while others are waiting to see if the college is serious about listening to what they have to say. In our first efforts at collaboration we came to understand for the first time something of the distance which separated us from public school people. We have some hurdles to get over, and we do not expect miracles overnight, for healing takes time and trust and confidence come slowly. This is the first time that the college of education has indicated its willingness to collaborate openly and freely, and to accept public school people as full partners in the business of education. But change will come, not only in the relationships between college and public school people, but in the relationships between the college and the schools as well.

Finally, there is the matter of commitment. The partnership cannot be a sometime arrangement, with colleges and public schools coming together on those occasions that suit the needs of one or the other. The school-university partnership talked about here will require a long-term commitment on the part of both groups - a commitment to the idea, a commitment of personnel and financial resources, and of time, attention, and spirit. Without such a commitment the partnership will not work.

The schools and the college have matters of their own which each must attend to, while the partnership requires the attention of both. But, we need each other if the partnership is to be effective, since the nature of the problems facing us requires the efforts of both. We are long past the time when anything of significance can be accomplished independently of each other. We can do better together what neither can do very well alone.

If not a partnership, are there other alternatives? Yes, of course. We can continue the present arrangements between the schools and the colleges. Though this is not satisfactory from the point of view of the schools, it is convenient to the college. But the schools are restive and one must wonder how long they will be content, in view of the pressures upon them, with the "role" we have assigned them. A second alternative is that some other organization, - such as that proposed by Philip Schlecty at the University of Louisville - which will involve schools, professional organizations and the university, will do

what we are not doing well at present. A final alternative is to get out of the business of preparing teachers. We have not offered convincing evidence that we make a meaningful contribution. We seem unable to articulate the case for teacher education, to persuade others that what we do makes a difference in the preparation of teachers and, ultimately, in the education of children. But our brief experience tells us that the partnership offers the best alternative.

Colleges of education may be facing a "last chance" to demonstrate the necessity and importance of what they do, that their contributions to education can and do make a difference. But it will have to be done soon. The one best chance to do what must be done can best be accomplished through a full school-university partnership. As I have had reason to think about the partnership, I am reminded of a quote by President Donald Kennedy of Stanford that "only if the best institutions care about the schools will the public care about them". Colleges of education can help themselves and the schools through collaboration. Clearly, we must care more about the schools than we do presently.