

Learning through Partnership: Four Narratives

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The partnership between Best Elementary School and Texas Tech University's College of Education has been in place over fifteen years. During this time field based methods classes have been taught at Best, graduate and undergraduate students have been involved in tutoring programs, and activities such as field trips

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have been conducted in partnership between the two institutions. Best Elementary is a Title 1 school with a student population that is primarily minority (77.8% African American, 18.4% Hispanic) and economically disadvantaged (86.2%). It is also high achieving, receiving an Exemplary rating, the highest possible academic ranking for a school in the state of Texas.

In this article we explore the partnership with multiple narratives: two professors, one graduate student, and one first grade teacher. We also draw on previous publications in which Best students through their writing communicate with Tech students and other future teachers. Multiple narratives are important, because to understand a process as complex as teaching, it is necessary to view the phenomenon with multiple lenses. The example that comes to mind is the story of recognizing the elephant in the dark—only possible if

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participants have their hands on different parts of the elephant and if all are given equal opportunity to speak and be heard.

The four authors of this article understand the importance of strong relationships that allow the sharing of diverse knowledge. Having known one another for years, we are comfortable communicating with one another—asking questions, offering resources and suggestions. It also helps that we share a single context (Best Elementary) about which we all care deeply. Our grounded relationships allow us to freely communicate, avoiding the consensus trap Trimbur (1997) warns of. In his words:

the use of consensus...is an inherently dangerous and potentially totalitarian practice that stifles individual voice and creativity, suppresses differences, and enforces conformity. (p. 439)

Trimbur's concern is with the over-emphasis of consensus in collaborative learning, but his ideas are also applicable to assumptions of consensus in educational partnerships. Such an emphasis on consensus in educational partnerships can have the effect of silencing dissent and preventing opinions and knowledge to the contrary from ever being expressed. We agree with Trimbur that "knowledge and its means of production are distributed in an unequal, exclusionary social order and embedded in hierarchical relations of power." (p. 440) In order to reach our educational ideals we must first make such hierarchical relations overt, and then invent ways to listen across the hierarchy.

In addition to learning how to listen across difference we must also distinguish between spurious and genuine consensus. Drawing from Habermas (1975), Trimbur defines genuine consensus,

not as something that actually happens but instead as the counterfactual anticipation that agreement can be reached without coercion or systematic distortion. Consensus, for Habermas, is not, as it is for social constructionists like Brufee, an empirical account of how discourse communities operate but a critical and normative representation of the conditions necessary for fully realized communication to occur. (p. 451)

Equality of voice and sharing of power are two components especially important to this process. We must understand that all participants have something to teach and something to learn. This is important, not only to the specific partnership, but also to the field of education as a whole. College and K-12 teachers and students each have a unique perspective that must be understood if we are going to successfully reach the goals of public schooling in democracy. Through these perspectives we gain the inspiration, insight, and knowledge necessary to prepare students to create a future we've only dreamed of. We also gain the opportunity to model and teach how to embrace diversity and listen to those whose perspectives differ from our own.

These views on consensus offer insight into what could be done to improve school improvement processes. We must study the actual relationships that exist and that have existed in American schooling. We must try to reduce the "instrumental"

nature of communication between schools and other entities, and equalize power distribution among those in educational relationships. In so doing we may identify our silent partners and gain enough trust for these silent partners to become our adversaries, informants, and advisors.

We now turn to four narratives describing the Texas Tech-Best partnership. All narratives are written independently to preserve each individual's voice and perspective.

Barbara

I began teaching Language Arts methods at Best ten years ago. In the first year I partnered with L. G. Butler, who had been at the school more than five years. He was experienced at teaching field-based methods courses, and had close relationships with the school principal as well as with teachers and students. Walking down the hall with him, I saw students wave and greet him, and I watched him interact with Best teachers to educate the college and elementary students. After his retirement I began teaching a post-bac Language Arts methods course at Best, and have continued to the present time. I am now also teaching a methods course at a middle school that many Best students attend, and am frequently greeted by students there who I have known since kindergarten.

At times we in academia argue that there is a conflict between service, teaching, and research. Field based partnerships allow these areas to overlap in a meaningful way. Tutoring elementary students and participating in activities such as judging poetry contests or field trips allows me to contribute to the success of Best students while keeping me involved with contexts and skills necessary to be a successful teacher, thus informing my teaching in higher education. Recently my course was designated as a Service Learning course in which my students helped plan and accompany Best fifth graders on a field trip to Albuquerque. My students commented on how much they had learned from the experience, and the Best students enjoyed participating with college students.

In the past my students planned a field trip for the Best students to Texas Tech. I told my students to present it this way: "You Best students have shown us your school. Now it's our turn to show you ours." Tech students showed the Best students a college dormitory, the student union and recreation center, and encouraged Best students to think about their future as college students. The Tech students and I were surprised at the Best students' perceptions of higher education. Several said they thought Tech was a gated community that they and their families could only enter for special events like football games. We told the students that although they might need special permission to park at Tech, they and their families were welcome to use the library, tour the botanical gardens and other places at Tech. I knew we had experienced success when I began hearing Best students say such things as, "When I come to Tech I'm going to live here."

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Teaching at Best has contributed to, not interfered with my research. Working with other Tech faculty we provided an opportunity for Best students to write directly to future teachers (Morgan-Fleming, et al., 2005; Morgan-Fleming, et al., 2008). The Best students' advice and insights were amazing, and provided a window into the wisdom available if we create opportunities for elementary students' voices to be heard.

When asked how teacher educators could help people become good teachers, the students offered the following advice. It is advice that I still find useful in preparing my methods courses.

How should teacher educators help people become good teachers?

- Show how to keep their cool and not get mad. Take time to listen. Respect their boss and show respect. (Marcos)
- The teacher educators should let the student teacher learn before they start teaching, and to make them patient, you have to be a role model so they can be like you. (Rachael)
- Teacher educators can help others by tuffing them up and teaching them the math, science, reading and social studies. We can also send them to other schools to see how to do that certain kind of thing. To teach a teacher to be patient, you got to be patient yourself. (Chadsidi)
- Teach others not to judge people by the way they look or act by asking teachers that are nonprejudiced how not to be prejudiced. When you are mad before you come to work you should not take it out on others like your students. Not to tell others you do not want to work with them because they will feel bad. (Anjelica)
- Learn more to teach more, and to be a strong and caring teacher so you can do and know more about the child and NOT be prejudiced. Smile and make them feel better. Help them with their anger against others. If you are talking to the child, ask if they dream of anything and if they are having problems. (Alexa)
- I think they should experience college success, fun, knowledge, happy, victory, patience, responsible, smile, kindness, athletic, against prejudice, algebra, mathematics, understanding science, passion, calm attitude, available, dependable. (Ashtyn)
- To become a leader you have to be a follower. Lead them to education and success, because it is the key to victory. Teachers have to know how to spell. Kids need to know knowledge. Teachers cannot be prejudiced to one either. Maybe have some experience with the life they are going through. Try to have some friends and teach them with respect and with love not hatred. Show and tell about your life and how it got better. Have history of all the people we know. (Kody)
- Stay on them. Teach them not to be mean. Show them not to be prejudiced. Tell them it's okay to have fun. Teach them to do the right thing. Tell them why it is good to work with one another. Give them some homework. Teach them not to pick on one student because others are. To help, teach them how to be nice. (Anthony)

- By teaching them not to be prejudiced, to be kind to students and treat others like you want to be treated. (Tobi)
- You teach them. You tell them to stand up for myself. You do what you have to do. You have to model what they need to do to slow your rode with the students. (Raykeisha)

Children's perspectives are often missing from the worlds of research and teacher preparation. I find that seeking out such voices invigorates and provides purpose and meaning for my academic pursuits.

Doug

The opportunity to volunteer at Best Elementary arose when I casually mentioned in a graduate university class that I wanted to work as a volunteer in a local elementary school. A student in my curriculum theory course, a second grade teacher, spontaneously said, "You can come to my school. We'd love to have you." Later, I learned more about the school where she taught, visited the school, and talked with the school principal. The principal and I talked about a range of possibilities and mutual interests. Still later, the principal talked with several staff members about my interests. Afterwards, I also talked with staff members identifying ways that I could best assist them in their work. My involvement as a school volunteer progressed beautifully thereafter. Soon I became involved in a partnership that is now in its eighth year.

When I became engaged in volunteer activities, I was clear about some of my objectives but others emerged in the process of volunteering. For example, I was clear that I wanted to assist—as a volunteer—in the school as it pursued its priorities. My priority was to take up the priorities of the principal and the teachers with whom I worked. The principal saw opportunities for me to work in a variety of capacities. Thus, we explored ideas and potential projects and activities together. We talked—separately and jointly—with staff members at appropriate points in the development of our plans and involvement. The necessary parental permissions were obtained as plans materialized.

Since I was not interested in doing formal research, supervising student teachers, initiating a new program, offering staff development workshops, my induction into the school may have been easier than if I had traditional kinds of expectations. Additionally, I may have been seen as an oddity. That is to say, I suspect that there are many more professors engaged in doing research, offering workshops, supervising future teachers, experimenting with pedagogical interventions, or some combination of the aforementioned than there are professors who volunteer to help in whatever capacities staff may wish. Indeed, why would an otherwise fully engaged professor want to volunteer in a school? Yes, indeed, why would a professor want to volunteer in a school?

Since my interests were open to the school's interests, my integration into the

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school was relatively smooth but not necessarily as productive as may have been desired. That is, working with an experienced administration and staff was unproblematic, but I may not have always been contributing as much as I was gaining. Or, to amend the thought, my contributions to Best Elementary were fewer than they could have been and were to become even though I think the gains were and have remained greater on my side of the ledger than on the school's side. This was fine, of course, but the principal and staff were both astute and imaginative. As they learned more about me, their ideas evolved and crystallized. Thus, we discussed newly recognized needs as they emerged or were recognized. Occasionally, that meant helping to write a grant proposal, seeking equipment for a science class, securing materials for a topic of interest for a teacher, acquiring relevant literature for a several students, or assigning a university practicum student to the school. Consistently, it involved securing funds for a fifth grade trip each spring. The purposes of the trip involved multiple educational aims and educative experiences, e.g., introducing students to a larger and more diverse metropolitan area, taking the class to a museum, zoo, and historic site. Often trips were combined with a visit to and, time and again, lunch on a university campus in an effort to reduce the perceived distance between some students and universities and to stimulate students' interest in attending a higher education institution.

When I first became a volunteer, my involvements were oriented around individual teachers and their students. Frequently, I engaged in reading sessions with an entire class. Later, I became involved in small group instruction in reading and mathematics, and still later I started tutoring individual students. Regularly, the volunteer work was designed to tutor every student in a class and, episodically, strengthen and enhance the work of the teacher. Soon, the tutoring changed from working with an entire class to two or three students, frequently in more than one class. Hence, the teaching and tutoring shifted from all students or sub-groups of students in a particular class to a few students in one or more classes. Typically, the two or the three students that I worked with were having adjustment challenges in one or more areas.¹ As my responsibilities evolved, then, they fell more but not exclusively in the realm of attending to relationship and social adjustment needs than in the areas of academic instruction. Indeed, the majority of the students that I have interacted with have been academically above average, a number of whom were gifted. But having students read books that are relevant to their social and academic needs has been an important feature of my volunteer time. This hidden curriculum of addressing developmental, situational, and academic needs of students took me deeper in the field of children's and early adolescent literature. This journey has been an invaluable one. In addition, students and I read about historical situations or personalities and examined ethical dimensions of the stories, elements that were embedded in these readings. Geography is a subject that was easily and readily integrated into many of the reading sessions and casual conversations.

Earlier I noted that I was probably unlike many professors who partner with

P-12 schools, e.g., professors who do research, offer workshops, supervisor future teachers, experiment with pedagogical interventions, or some combination of the aforementioned variables. I entered and remained a volunteer focused on the needs and interests of the school administration and staff and, thereby, on those of students. On the other hand, I had other interests that were secondary to and compatible with this primary motive for volunteering. An obvious interest was in doing something deemed worthwhile by both a school community and myself. As well, I was interested in activating in a more personal way part of the educational theory of John Dewey. In this realm, I had two relatively clear motives: (a) to update and extend my experiential understanding of schools (personnel, students, programs, resources) and, thereby, (b) to refresh my educational and curriculum theorizing through involvement with P-12 practitioners and students. My several motives or goals overlapped, of course: Being interested in the needs of the administration and staff allowed me to update my understanding of schools and strengthen my educational theorizing.

The theoretical background for my motives goes back to, among others, John Dewey's (1929) claim in *The Sources of a Science of Education*. In this work, he noted both the neglect and the importance of what reflective, experienced educators know. This dynamic teacher knowledge, as we label it today, Dewey deemed essential to a living, rich, and full educational theory. Thus, if educational and curriculum theory is to be alive, fresh, relevant, and comprehensive, it needs input from many sources, including psychologists, sociologists, neuroscientists, philosophers, biologists, historians, anthropologists, and, of course, educationists. But is this all the input we need? Dewey argued that we dare not neglect what well-educated, reflective practitioners learn in schools. He emphasized in other works, such as *The Child and the Curriculum* and *The School and Society*, the necessity of studying children, their interests, needs, thinking, and dispositions. While there are many invaluable complimentary scholarly studies of schools and students, there remains, as far as Dewey could tell, no substitute for original studies of teachers' experiential knowledge and students' perceptions and understandings.

What have been the benefits of my volunteer years? This question can be only partially answered for several reasons, but especially because students, parents, teachers, professional partners, and other volunteers have perspectives that are more comprehensive and detailed than mine. My answer to this question is that many of the benefits fall into three major realms: (1) the influence on social development, (2) the influence on geographical exploration, and (3) the influence on experiential understanding.

First, let us look at the influence on the social development of an imaginary student.² Envision a student who is depressed, passive, and withdrawn. She almost never smiles, laughs, frowns, or misbehaves.³ Her reading engagement lacks enthusiasm or excitement regardless of the story or topic. Playing chess is pursued indifferently. Discussions are painfully slow and apparently unproductive as far as

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I could tell. The hours, days, and weeks turned into months with rare and uncertain signs of progress. In time, the signs of emotional growth and social development emerged and feelings were guardedly released. Grins, grimaces, questions, and comments become more habitual if not routine. The signs of social development were apparent and came to characterize the student. Of course, she could not have developed as nicely as she did without the help of alert and sensitive staff members, including the principal, her teachers, and a counselor. The future of the child is open but more hopeful and, ideally, healthy than it was two or three years ago.⁴ Correspondingly, the practice of curriculum theorizing has become more humanized as actual and imaginary children and educators are considered along with the traditional fare of ideologies, ideals, and controversies. With the ongoing growth of students and the volunteer, not to mention school staff, long-term and powerful changes will continue to occur in the lives of an expanding group of people, including classmates and university students who study curriculum theory.

Second, let us examine the influence of geographical exploration. Imagine another student who has been largely if not completely restricted to the environment in which he was born. Resources for necessities are typically or, at least, episodically available, but the means to travel across town or visit the city mall are another matter. Travel that is possible is within an apartment complex, a neighborhood athletic facility, a local church, and a school. In some cases, an annual trip to Memphis or El Paso to see relatives is possible. He lives with his mother, father, and three siblings. His older sister is on a full scholarship in a pre-medicine program at Georgetown University. Even though our imaginary student is above average academically and does relatively well in school, he has social and behavioral challenges that will reduce his life chances and options if he does not begin addressing them in the near future. But there is no significant other in his life that is moving him toward a constructive life as he prepares to enter middle school. That is, there is no significant other in his life outside of his school experience as far as is known by school staff and volunteers.

Collectively, this student's principal, counselor, and teachers focus on a plethora of responsibilities that are stimulated by the pressures of high stakes testing, school instruction, and management concerns. Occasionally, he interacts with me and we read books, talk about Memphis, Georgetown University, the District of Columbia, and the stories we read together. We move back and forth between our reading, a library globe, and a rug that contains a world map. I hope that his collective life world will offer him the kinds of experiences and dreams that will enable him to create and follow his own vision of where he wants to go. The fifth grade trip is mentioned, discussed briefly, and traced on a map. For a student who visits for the first time a children's science museum with interactive exhibits, a zoo with a menagerie of African animals, an exquisite 100 acre botanical garden of international flowers and plants, an ethnic heritage center with a historical focus, and a reasonably accessible public university campus, the fifth grade trip can be a

persuasive experience that enlivens many ideas studied in school and creates glimpses of possibilities that may become realities. Aside from the clearly educative dimensions of the trip, there are the unexpected exclamations that are heard and read as our imaginary student and his peers talk and write about the bus, its driver, the flat tire, the McDonald's breakfast, and the mountains rising along the highway.

Third, let us illustrate one of the affects of experiential understanding. Experiential understanding, as already noted, is an integral element in a comprehensive effort to listen to the voices of theory, research, and practice. In schools and universities, these three voices are diminished or elevated depending on several variables, including the missions and rewards of institutions. While a simplistic egalitarian epistemology was not being suggested by Dewey for inter-institutional dialogues, he did claim that the profession has far too long ignored, slighted, or undervalued the knowledge that is gained by educators as they engage in the improvement of the art and science of education, including both leading and teaching in a school. The unearthing and utilization of the understandings of principals and teachers is invaluable. Imagine a professor that learns from school staff members (and students!) what a workable educational or curriculum theory is or involves: an evolving theory that is informed by the challenges of meeting the diverse physical, material, emotional, social, and academic needs of students as well as the findings of numerous scholars. Imagine learning from a nine-year-old student some of the key ethical dimensions in classroom and school management. Imagine a teacher explaining the perceived needs of a particular student that far outstrips the comparably sterile descriptions of academic literature. Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of my learning is connected with working with professional educators who are knowledgeable, devoted, enthusiastic, and successful throughout their careers—or at least eight years of them—as they work with many underserved and, sometimes, neglected and abused children. Seeing their consummate professionalism and caring involvements with their students is, indeed, rewarding. That reward is only increased by being a minor figure in the resiliency and growth of underserved children.

Kristi

Having taught at Best Elementary for more than twenty years, I find myself in continual pursuit of methods, strategies, and initiatives that promote success for students living within the culture of poverty. In their writings, Rossi and Stringfield (1995) indicate the importance of community in the success of at-risk students. These authors created an analogy between fabric and relationships that I find in alignment with the bond created among stakeholders through the partnership created between Texas Tech University and Best Elementary School. "Soundly woven, this fabric permits a shared frame of reference and supports mutual expectations" (p. 74). Through the innovation of campus administration and Texas Tech College of Education professors, a tapestry of learning has been interwoven between these

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two entities. Collaboration made possible through the school-university partnership has produced a win-win situation for all involved participants. Reciprocal gains are evident among both adults and children. These gains are measured through tangibles such as student performance, but additionally through intangibles, such as the value of relationships, role models, and mentors.

As a classroom teacher, I began participating in the school-university partnership approximately six years ago during the 2003-2004 academic year. My role in this partnership has been as a facilitator and mentor to Texas Tech University post-baccalaureate education students, as they observe as well as gain field experience in my classroom. Numerous benefits have resulted from the school-university alliance. In particular, students in my classroom have benefitted from interaction with university students, from establishing relationships with Texas Tech professors and students, and from the diversity of the student population within the post-baccalaureate education students.

Struggling learners in our classroom have benefitted academically from one-to-one instruction and small-group interaction with university students. Through observation, assessments, and analysis of student work, I have been able to target student weaknesses in core content areas. Once parameters for learning objectives have been established, I discuss activities to promote student mastery for which the university student can assist an individual student or small group of students. Over the course of the semester, the Tech students are afforded opportunities to provide one on one, small group, and whole class instruction. University partnership students benefit from practical teaching experience, under the supervision of a highly-qualified teacher. Classroom learners benefit from targeted experiences that scaffold their learning until a level of independence is obtained.

Another benefit of the partnership between Texas Tech University and my campus is the establishment of relationships among Best stakeholders and Texas Tech University College of Education stakeholders. Looking beyond the obvious benefits to knowledge and experience levels of elementary and university students, this partnership has provided opportunities to create networks of relationships that might not otherwise exist. For our students, it has been exciting to have actual college students meeting on our campus. The Best students tend to admire the Tech students and look to them as role models. Dr. Morgan-Fleming has been a dynamic force on our school campus as she positively impacts students and adults. Examining this collaborative relationship from the perspectives of staff, and teachers, it has served as an impetus for adults on our campus to further their own learning. For example, I recently completed coursework for a Master's degree in School Administration. My future plans include pursuing a doctorate, which has a purpose that is two-fold. First, I can continue to pursue lifelong learning and betterment of myself as a professional educator. Second, such a degree would enable me to teach at the university level. As a member of a family in which many members are devoted to the field of education, the pursuit of knowledge and excellence has been

a constant in my life for as long as I can remember. I have spent the past twenty years teaching in a high-poverty neighborhood, where I truly believe I am making an impact upon young minds. Ultimately, it is my desire to teach at the university level, where knowledge and years of experience will yield credibility and sound practices to my teaching.

A final benefit of this school-university partnership is the diversity of students enrolled in the post-baccalaureate program for the College of Education. For many growing up within the culture of poverty, college seems to be an unobtainable goal. However, as a campus we strive to implant the dream of not only attending, but actually graduating from college. On a weekly basis, students have the opportunity to see a diverse group of Tech students who are preparing to become teachers. I value the importance of this because it enables my students to see that people who look like them can go to college and can choose any profession. One particular African-American student who stands out in my mind from the current class is a Texas Tech football player. He has become a role model for many of our students simply because he is an athlete. However, I think the implications for him to be a positive role model stretch far beyond his athleticism. Many of our students dream of a career in professional sports. It is vital for them to realize that even students involved in collegiate athletics need the safety net of a viable degree geared towards a specific profession. As I will discuss at length later, the diversity of the students involved in this partnership has been an added benefit for our students.

As I reflect upon this partnership from my perspective, there have been benefits as well as contributions. It has been beneficial to have an additional one to two teachers in our classroom on a weekly basis. Some of the university students come early to work with my students. A few have even come to the school for additional days. What teacher does not welcome an extra set of hands? My goal as an active participant in this partnership is to contribute to the development of future teachers. I attribute my success as a classroom teacher to modeling and shaping by mentors including fellow teachers and principals. By assisting and mentoring pre-service teachers, I hope to help them establish a firm foundation upon which a successful teaching career can be built. As a result of this partnership, pre-service teachers have the opportunity to observe classroom teachers and interact with students in the regular classroom setting. It is vital for future teachers to have adequate time as well as practical experience in an actual classroom setting. In addition to observation and experience, pre-service teachers also benefit from conversations with practicing teachers. Relationships established as a result of the university-school partnership allow pre-service teachers to dialogue with professionals regarding current trends and practices in the classroom. Ultimately, this type of interfacing improves pedagogy. As a leader on my campus, I am fueled by both my desire to be a life-long learner and my commitment to teaching Title I students. I have such an excitement for knowledge and learning and consider it my mission to pass on that enthusiasm to students. Hopefully, pre-service teachers who are assigned to my

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classroom will capture that same enthusiasm upon entering their own classrooms. Due to the high attrition rate for new teachers, it is imperative that we as professional educators employ every means possible to ensure a successful first year of teaching for beginning educators. The networks established through our university-school partnership extend far beyond the semester of coursework. Some former members of Dr. Morgan-Fleming's site-based course have requested to student teach on our campus, as a result of time spent at Best Elementary. At least one of these student teachers was eventually hired to teach on our campus. Former Texas Tech pre-service teachers continue to contact me for advice and assistance following field experience within my classroom. As a professional educator, it is rewarding to me that I am impacting future teachers and ultimately the education of many learners whom I may never have the opportunity to meet. As Christa McAuliffe so eloquently stated, "I touch the future. I teach." It is my belief that the association between Texas Tech and Best Elementary will continue to positively impact the tenure of teachers new to the profession.

Further implications of the combined efforts of Texas Tech University and Best Elementary include connections to both practice and scholarship. In regard to the practice of teaching, the partnership allows currently practicing educators the opportunity to model for and involve pre-service teachers in current best practices for instruction. A great portion of teacher education involves receiving information about teaching practices via listening or reading. The university-school partnership moves pre-service teachers from an often non-participatory learning role into a hands-on, pragmatic one. We know that the best learning takes place as a result of doing rather than observing. The field experience component of this partnership allows pre-service teachers to put into practice the methods and strategies learned about in basic pedagogy classes. As a classroom teacher, I must strive to model instruction that is sound and best suited to the styles of learners within my classroom. Pre-service teachers also have a great deal to offer, as their knowledge level should be based on current educational trends. From my viewpoint, this partnership keeps both the classroom teacher and the pre-service teacher on their toes in regard to incorporating best practices in the elementary classroom.

The university-school alliance is not only linked to practice, but also to scholarship. I see strong connections between this partnership and Eric Jensen's research on *Enriching the Brains of Poverty*. In his S-H-A-R-E model, Jensen emphasizes the significance of relationships to the successful learning of students within the culture of poverty. For a significant number of our students, positive relationships are not found at home. It is up to us as educators to build and maintain a supportive relationship with our students at school. Jensen indicates that a relationship with an adult will not only lower stress, but also cultivate student learning. Throughout my teaching career, I have valued the importance of relationships to student success. Over the years, I have looked to the school nurse, parent volunteers, and even student mentors from upper grade level classes. The existing university-school partnership

has expanded opportunities for positive adult-student relationships by increasing the number of adults available for interaction with students. As much as I would like to, there are often days when I do not have available time for extended one-to-one interaction with my first grade students. With the addition of one or more pre-service teachers into my classroom each Tuesday, the likelihood of positive one-to-one interaction increases. Students crave this sort of individualized attention and I welcome additional help in providing this type of interaction. We often use a portion of our time with pre-service teachers for first grade students to read to or with a Texas Tech student, showcase student work, or receive extra tutelage with a specific assignment or subject area. It is exciting and motivating for young learners to have this special time with one of our Tech students! Students who are motivated and excited about learning tend to perform better in class. Educators cannot underestimate the value of relationships as a supportive underpinning for student success in the classroom.

In conclusion, I believe the university-school partnership established between Texas Tech University and Best Elementary has been successful on several fronts. All involved parties have benefitted from this association. Learners from both the elementary and university levels have increased their knowledge and experience levels as a result of relationships established through this partnership. Elementary students benefit from positive learning experiences. Pre-service teachers emerge from this course better prepared for the classroom as a result of pragmatic, hands-on experience. I highly recommend this type of partnership to any campus. The benefits to learners are considerable. If a university-school partnership does not currently exist in your district or on your campus, explore your options. Become proactive in establishing a collaborative community effort to set all students on the path to academic success. It will be time well spent.

Billy

As a researcher, I have participated in the Best Elementary tutoring sessions for several terms. Many of the Best students come from diverse and challenging backgrounds; however, most of the Best students are resilient and have the opportunity to overcome many of these challenges. The structure of the tutoring sessions has students grouped together in the library. My research consisted of working with students individually and assisting them with their reading assignments. This afforded me the chance to get to know particular students more intimately. Consequently, over the many tutoring sessions I was able to watch these students develop, not only their thinking and reading abilities, but also their social skills.

As seven and eight year olds, many students are unaware, or unable, to recognize the importance of developing social skills. Working in groups, interacting with peers, and understanding roles is essential to a child's awareness of social norms and moirés. While many Best students learn these social skills, some students have

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more difficulty because of their home environs. Namely, home challenges present an especially difficult challenge for children learning to navigate through the social moirés. For example, in a reading session one student informed me that his mother's new boyfriend was arrested. The student was aware of what an arrest was, what the infraction entailed, and what the consequences of an arrest meant. Even though this student was aware of the breadth of an arrest, he would still be impatient and oppressive towards some of his classmates. He would indicate that he would just get angry and would not know how to control his anger; and many times, he would seem to regret some of his decisions, but felt unable to make other choices.

Another student was keenly interested in science. He checked books out of the library and we discussed them in our tutoring sessions. The enthusiasm and interest he held for science was intoxicating; he knew the various types of clouds—cirrus, cumulus, etc. This student also enjoyed reading about volcanoes and dinosaurs. However, he would fight when he was teased, made fun of, or pushed or agitated. His family's poverty impeded his ability to navigate the social morés of the school. His inability to traverse through the social moirés of the school overshadowed his academic acumen. Low-income students need more than programs that focus on academic success; many students require programs that will help them develop the social skills necessary to coexist with their fellow classmates, teachers, and manage the myriad of challenges they face at home.

Faced with these challenges, many low-income students are less equipped to handle the multitude of challenges they face in developing adequate social skills. Programs like the tutoring sessions only address one aspect of the challenges they face. While some of these students are in need of academic remediation, many of the challenges facing these students are environmental, and not academic. As such, it is important to identify the needs of all students. Providing students with the needed support will guide and direct them towards developing the skills they need to succeed in the social environment of the school and the classroom. The principal at Best is keenly aware of the needs of her students. The ability to know each of your students, and their needs, is tantamount to being able to provide the support they need. The principal at Best was able to identify the needs of these students and seek out the necessary support to help them develop in those areas. For example, the Best principal was able to identify the student's needs and garner support from teachers, counselors, parents, and even volunteers. Consequently, the student with the intense science interest went on to win a regional science competition! The dedication of the teachers, counselors, and school community to support the needs of the students, by helping them navigate through the culture of the school, and develop the requisite social skills to overcome their challenges is a critical component to student's success.

Identifying a student's needs is the critical first step to selecting interventions to help them reach their potential. How does a teacher or an administrator know what their students need? How does one decide on an intervention? These are some

of the questions educators face when working with students from low-income backgrounds. The answers to these questions are not static, nor are they the same for all students. Further complicating the issue is that these answers are learned through experience, and generally, not the type of knowledge gained in a course or classroom. Identification of a student's needs may be taught in a classroom; however, selecting an appropriate intervention for each student is something that a course may not be able to teach. Since each student may respond differently to different interventions, understanding the type of student, the intervention's focus, and the social stigma attached to each intervention may determine the student's response to the intervention. Namely, attending counseling may have a social stigma attached to it, so being able to package the intervention in such a way that students are not further socially isolated is important to selecting an appropriate intervention. Therefore, selecting interventions carefully is vital to meeting students' needs especially when students with similar needs may require different interventions.

While identifying student's needs is the first step towards finding an appropriate intervention, cultural concerns may influence these decisions. Indeed, Bruner (1996) stated, "learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting and always dependent upon the utilization of cultural resources" (p. 4). The careful line that the principal of Best walks is one of "firm but fair" caring for her students. Being an African American woman, this principal is able to have high expectations of her teachers and students, which facilitates the firm approach supplanted in caring. Particularly, this style "is anchored in caring, commitment, cultural competence, and an understanding that school performance takes place within a complex sociocultural ecology and is filtered through cultural screens both students and teachers bring to the classroom." (Gay, 2000, p. 70). The ability to walk the line from being too rigid or intractable and being too malleable influence the relationships, the culture, and the school's identity. The vision of the principal is filtered through the cultural screens to teachers and students, which shape the relationships between teachers and students, and the school and the community.

From a researcher's perspective, the interplay of the many programs, the interventions, and the community support were the key reasons that students developed the necessary social understanding to overcome many of their challenges. The sociocultural interactions of the students and teachers directly impacted students in the tutoring program, but many of the other interventions were just as important, if not more important, to helping students learn of cultural and social norms in the school environment. "Cooperation, collaboration, and community are prominent themes, techniques, and goals in educating marginalized" students (Gay, 2000, p. 158). The importance that cooperation plays in the learning styles of students of color is central successful interventions. The community volunteer that would help the teacher on the playground was a needed intervention; the counselor that would listen to the student's concerns about their living situations; and, the after school technology program was instrumental in helping students learn the cultural norms of the school.

Learning through Partnership

Students in low-income schools need help learning to navigate and develop the requisite social skills to become a part of the school community. Low-income students face challenges unique to their income status which can derail their social development and isolate them from the learning community. Interventions designed to build community and collaboration that are integrated across the school curriculum and culture can go a long way to getting students engaged in the learning process. The Best Elementary programs work towards building the social, intellectual, and psychological well being of their students, which is probably why their students begin to develop the requisite social skills necessary for success in the school culture.

Conclusions and Suggestions

The established relationships between educators at Best Elementary and Texas Tech has provided opportunities, challenges, and resources to all participants. We all gain from shared perspectives arising from conversations across our diverse roles in the partnership. The primary gain is the realization that we are all learners and teachers, and that learning is an on-going, interactive experience.

Implicit in the previous narratives are a number of obvious if not simple conclusions and suggestions. We will now surface a few of these basic assumptions and suggestions. To begin, we recommend that more professors serve as long-term—not short-term—school partners. While the motivation for such partnerships may be diverse, a major benefit of being a long-term school volunteer is that of establishing a rapport with practitioners and students that is otherwise nearly impossible. The cumulative knowledge and credibility gained by such experiences far outweighs the sustained time involved in such endeavors.

Second, conducting formal research projects after a few years of involvement in a partnership are worthwhile, especially if the projects are designed around questions that interest the school staff. These research opportunities may also allow us to mine the minds of some of our greatest educational practitioners, pursuing questions that teachers and administrators want to answer.

Third, we encourage partnerships between universities and challenging schools, where success is not just an academic undertaking, but also a personal accomplishment against great odds, and where it is an act of social and economic justice. We recommend that professors entice students, colleagues and friends to become school volunteers. Every privileged person—including professors, university students, and our neighbors—is advantaged far beyond what he or she allows himself or herself to think. If anyone thinks otherwise, become a school volunteer.

We hope our narratives have made clear that, in addition to learning from one another, we also learn from students at Best and Texas Tech. Such learning allows us to challenge current practices in pedagogy, curriculum, educational policy, and the use and availability of resources. While we cannot always implement our desired changes immediately, the challenge causes us to look for opportunities to

improve the educational situations in elementary schools and higher education. The partnership provides the multiple perspectives necessary for growth and change. It's also challenging, meaningful, and fun. We look forward to continuing our interactive, learning partnership, and encourage others to look for opportunities to do the same.

Notes

¹ My interactions with students in the area of personal adjustment were influenced by a number of factors, including my prior studies and involvement in the field of school psychology. On the other hand, my interaction with students has never been as a school psychologist.

² This imaginary student is in actuality a composite creation of several students in order to assure that their identities are protected. All imaginary students mentioned hereinafter are also composite creations.

³ I would say that she *never* manifested these feelings or emotions, but I did not observe and interact with our imaginary student except approximately forty minutes or so once a week over a couple of years.

⁴ At the time of this writing, the student who provides the nucleus characteristics for the imaginary student moved with her family to another state.

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