

Cooperative Myths and Realities

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IN THE recently advocated national renewal effort of the U.S. Office of Education,¹ as well as from other quarters concerned with the preparation of educational personnel,² there emanate wistful calls for cooperative ventures involving multiple agencies which are now largely separate, or sequential, participants in such training efforts. Beclouding the complex issue of appropriate and effective preparation is a confusion concerning just what cooperation is. A frequently heard definition makes mutuality, reciprocity, and parity among the various sponsoring agencies the criteria for cooperation.

Mutuality is defined here as a situation where participants seek, give, and receive simultaneously. *Reciprocity* exists where participants seek, give, and receive alternately. *Parity* is found where participants possess like status, number, power, resources, and are evenly balanced. While the desire for equality among participants is understandable, this longing is not invariably and demonstrably accompanied by participant

parity in several recent and widely applauded joint professional training projects.³ That equality should be a criterion of American inter-institutional efforts in professional preparation is hardly surprising, even if unsupported by systematic inquiry into actual training programs.

It may be useful to illustrate the definitional issues with a few examples. When the second grade pupil is asked to cooperate with Mrs. Jones, he is either being asked to do what Mrs. Jones has unilaterally decreed, or to help in carrying out his share of a mutually agreed-upon activity—the latter being a rarer event than the first.

Similarly, when Montville Public Schools ask Northtown University, or vice versa, to cooperate with supplying adequately prepared personnel for teaching English as a second language, they can be giving lip service to participant equality and at the same time demanding compliance with their own institutional priorities. As with the case of Mrs. Jones and her students, the likelihood and frequency of a genuinely shared

¹ "Background Statement on Educational Renewal." Conference of State Educational Renewal Coordinators held by the U.S. Office of Education, Washington, D.C., December 12-14, 1971.

² E. Brooks Smith *et al.*, editors. *Partnership in Teacher Education*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Subcommittee on School-College Relationships in Teacher-Education of the Committee on Studies, 1966.

³ "Excellence in Teacher Education." Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1968; and Helen T. Suchara. *Cooperative School-College Relations in Developing School Personnel*. Washington, D.C.: ERIC Clearinghouse for Teacher Education, May 1969.

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establishment of mutual goals which then logically lead to individual, or institutional, participation are not overwhelming.

It is customary to use "we cooperate with Mrs. Jones" or "we cooperate with Northtown University," which means helping in the accomplishment of Mrs. Jones' or the University's, or Montville Public Schools' goals—not participation in arriving at those goals. There appears to be an often-stated, or implied, confusion with respect to cooperation, between the act of helping, which includes those in need of help and those giving help on the one hand, and equal participation in determining the goals or activities themselves on the other.

Alternatively, it is also possible to speak in the following fashion: "we cooperate in putting away blocks" or "we cooperate in the development of in-service programs"—a far more limited commitment to cooperation in consequence of specifying the task(s) needing assistance, with implications for mutuality and reciprocity, but still no logical requirement of parity. While the desire for institutional equality is clearly apparent in shared ventures, the single in-depth empirical investigation to be reported here does not support its operational existence. The findings call into question the currently popular and frequently articulated parity requirement for inter-institutional cooperation.

In the absence of a theory of cooperation, such an *a priori* requirement deserves to be investigated in a variety of institutional settings before it is accepted as a necessary condition for cooperative functioning. It might be that, in the current sociopolitical context in which educators, and educational agencies, find themselves, the thrust for extension of democratic rights and privileges by individuals and groups hitherto denied full participating membership in this society has been inappropriately applied as a precondition of cooperation. This is to suggest

that educators, like others in our society, are subject to major societal trends, such as the drive for human equality, which in turn determine the course of seemingly unrelated, smaller scale purposive social action.

It is also possible that the parity requirement for cooperative organizational action is derived from a definition of cooperation as a means for gaining trading advantages for the benefit of members, as in an agricultural cooperative. It is conceivable that the parity requirement is an attempt to ensure the same "trading" advantages for the currently involved, and any new, participants in professional training. While parity is sometimes represented as a redressing of institutional imbalances in professional activities, as a way of assuring greater say and control to hitherto minority representatives, it will be interesting to observe whether renewal centers, or any other new collaborative designs, will serve to reorder existing patterns of priorities and privileges, or will serve to maintain the status quo.

A Five-Year Program

Precisely because of the present popularity of collaborative endeavors, and the variety of functions they might serve, it becomes important to supplement the self-reported exhortations of cooperative enthusiasts with systematic empirical findings derived from established rather than new projects. A recent, professionally approved urban teacher preparation program, which was developed and begun jointly in 1965 by a large metropolitan school system and a major urban university, may offer suggestive empirical findings in this regard.

This venture, referred to as the Teacher Education Center for Urban Schools (TECUS), located in Great City, U.S.A., a major Northern metropolitan area, has lasted for more than five years. The study sought to describe

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Model	Program Emphasis	Participants*	Source of Fiscal Support	Number of Sites	College Enrollment	Trend in College Enrollment	Collegiate Control	Date of Initiation
T	elementary curriculum pre- and in-service	single S and single C	local, state, federal	1	4,000	+	public	1965
A	pre- and in-service	single S and multiple C	private foundation	1	5,000	+	public	1964
B	pre- and in-service	single C and multiple S	local	14	8,000	+	public	1966
C	elementary curriculum pre- and in-service	multiple C and multiple S	local, state, federal	6	n.a.	+	public and private	1968

S = School C = College

* While these models appear to have logical, generic characteristics, they are found in actuality in the TECUS, Project Mission, University of Maryland Teacher Education Center, and the West Virginia Multi-institutional Teacher Education Center plans.

Figure 1. Alternate Organizational Models of School-College (or University) Cooperation

the development and characteristics of this collaborative effort with a view toward identifying structural features associated with lasting cooperation. A descriptive case study was seen as a necessary first step prior to any larger scale and more definitive hypotheses testing studies.⁴

The investigation utilized field observation during the fifth year of project operation, retrospective interviews, documents covering its entire existence, and tape recorded discussions produced in the early years of the project. In keeping with the study's socio-historical emphasis, status and time were the two major analytical categories employed. The interest in institutionalization led to generating formal, external, Weberian organizational indicators and to differentiating inner, organizational perspectives accessible through content analysis and other literary approaches.

Contrary to frequent professional prescriptions for parity, mutuality, and reciprocity in cooperative arrangements, this study found an initially and overtly college-domi-

nated structure with close working relationships among several levels of two institutional segments. However, this early phase was succeeded by more distant, parallel functioning of two systems still operating in one elementary school site linked together via the co-director role.

Additional and related findings include: (a) great strain upon and related withdrawal especially by middle level administrators, that is, assistant principals, in the early close working situation; (b) evidence of hierarchically related cooperative consensus presentation; (c) increasing cosmopolitanization of school segment, declining specialization of college segment, and general increase in personalization; (d) extraordinarily high personnel requirements; (e) the development of an integrative organizational myth; (f) relative rule-lessness coupled with an emphasis on enactment of professional roles; (g) variable bureaucratization related to insider and outsider leadership succession; and (h) concentrated impact upon the program of the school serving as the cooperative site coupled with minimal, if any, influence on collegiate patterns.

A disturbing finding has been that cooperation and the sizable presence and involvement of a variety of college and school staff members, who were able to implement considerable informalized instruction and

⁴ Judith P. Ruchkin. "The Development and Characteristics of a Single Collaborative Linkage System in Urban Teacher Education Viewed Through Several Analytical Prisms." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1972. The author expresses appreciation for the support and counsel given by Professor Margaret Lindsey during this study.

operation, have not yet positively affected the conventional academic indices of an increasingly representative inner city pupil population. But it is encouraging that, despite the total cessation of external funding, the exploratory approach of the two faculties continues, and there is direct search for improvements and alternatives to effect individualization and acceptable achievement scores.

The study suggests that dual institutional cooperation can be decreed and hierarchically legitimized by two bureaucracies. Furthermore, there can be inconsistency between the hierarchical initiation process and the community and grassroots involvement goal. It should be noted that inter-institutional cooperation was a professionally rather than popularly conceived solution to problems becoming identified within the educational establishment in the early 1960's.

At a time when the joining of several formal organizations in a cooperative effort is advocated, this study is suggestive both practically and theoretically. It raises doubt about the likelihood of multi-institutional parity in all phases and stages of cooperation. It concludes, furthermore, that externally decreed shared undertakings can proceed from a pattern of close collaboration to more distant parallel functioning even when occupying the same physical site. That is, primary professional affiliation and socialization exert a powerful pull on collaborators wherever they may temporarily sink their roots. In the absence of a grand theory of collaboration, the study is seen as offering part of a necessary empirical base for constructing a middle range theory of cooperation.

It is, furthermore, possible to discern some patterns among other currently known different types of school-university centers, including the previously described dual institutional cooperation. (See Figure 1.)

Several areas seem to invite fruitful future investigation and practical application subsumed by size as an institutional variable. Size of the collaborating institutions, by itself, bears scrutiny in facilitating continuing cooperative efforts. The association between

increase in membership size of either partner and enduring collaboration deserves attention. The relationship between size of collegiate segment and the durability of the cooperative effort needs exploration. The relationship between numbers and levels of linkages and cooperative endurance and productivity measured in terms of graduates employed by the cooperating school system needs to be pursued on a larger institutional sample.

In addition, it is also worth puzzling about the advent of this particular design in professional preparation at this specific point in time. It would be well to inquire into the latent as well as manifest function of relatively small units, created by sizable institutions at a time of increasing enrollment. Might the latent function of such centers, or projects, be the creation of manageable professional communities in an era of increased specialization and overall growth? Might these arrangements really be a means for maintaining a smaller scale human component in the face of mass multiversities, or for countering anonymity, isolation, and lack of contact? Could centers be a 1960's and 1970's substitute for the more informal, personalized, and mutually aware relationships that used to prevail between college of education personnel and the schools to which until relatively recently students went for training for employment? A follow-up study will attempt to characterize preservice candidates who elect to receive their training in such sites, to see whether they appear to have higher needs for nurturance, and differ in other respects from those students who choose training situations with less personalized attention and extensive support available.

Similarly, it would be useful to know whether school systems and colleges (or universities) linked together through such units are better informed about each other's priorities and purposes than similar size and type of institutions lacking such arrangements; and, ultimately, whether such support systems and improved communications have measurable, positive influence on pupil outcomes. □

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