

Teachers, parents, and professors of education are bound together by a common concern and interest, the quality of education that children receive in schools. Historically, however, these groups have had little substantive communication with each other.

Parents have been unhappy over the inaccessibility of schools and their lack of responsiveness to the communities they serve. Teachers complain about the irrelevance of their professional training. Professors are critical of the resistance to curriculum change on the part of school personnel. Members of each group attack and counterattack each other, blaming the "failure" of schools on each other.

In recent years, however, partly due to societal changes, the hostility among these groups has begun to change as teachers, professors, and parents have begun to work together toward common goals. In many cases, federal courts, federal and state legislation, and state education departments have established guidelines that mandate collaboration among representatives of these three groups.

During a two-year federally funded Teacher Corps project that focused on school change, I served as a participant/observer of just such a collaboration of parents, professors, and teachers. Throughout the project, I was able to note how group members' views, perceptions, and attitudes were modified over time. And at the end of the project I interviewed sev-

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eral parents, professors, and teachers to find out their attitudes toward each other during the initial phases of the project. A number of recurring themes surfaced from these discussions. They illustrate some of the major differences and similarities among the groups that created tension and led to progress as individuals traveled across cultures and learned to relate to each other in new collaborative modes.

Roadblocks to Cooperation

Theme 1: We Are Frustrated, Dissatisfied, and Distrustful. As the school was the focal point for change, teachers felt particularly vulnerable and assaulted on all sides. With the awarding of a large federal grant, some suspected that the college people would take the money and spend it as they saw fit. Professors, through newly developed inservice training programs, would be telling them how to teach.

The teachers were also ambivalent about the role of parents in the school. For some, the place of parents was in the home. Although they could be helpful in school, the tasks that parents were able to perform could be done by high school or college students. Their role, the teachers believed, was to concentrate more on being good parents. Some teachers viewed the school as their turf, not to be invaded by an active group of well-meaning parents who might seize control. Years of professional training and experience had enfranchised them with the right to make educational policy: curricular decisions should not be shared with laypersons. These perceptions were reflected in this comment made by a teacher as the project began.

Parents are nosy. They want to tell teachers what to do. Give them an inch and they will take a mile. . . . They don't know when to quit. I feel that they are going to take over. I see an awful lot of "we will do what we please." They don't have the right to tell you what they think you should be doing.

Teachers also felt vulnerable to the internal politics of the school system. Could they afford to make the curriculum changes that others were demanding at the risk of offending school administrators who sent mixed messages? Administrators have ways of retaliating and harassing teachers they perceive as being uncooperative. A local teacher association representative expressed a lack of mutual trust and respect between teachers and administrators:

Teachers are accustomed to authority. They're always being told to do something by somebody. You have very little control over what you do. . . . They accept a lot from administrators. You have to put it the other way. The administrators think of themselves as being up there and talk down to us. That's the complaint that the teachers have against some of them. . . . when, in fact, many of the teachers have more degrees of achievement, and they feel they are out there on the frontlines. . . .

Dissatisfaction with inadequate instructional support systems, poor school facilities, scheduling that fragmented the school day, and unmotivated, hard-to-manage children created additional frustrations for the teachers.

Parents were often unsure of their roles and responsibilities in the school. Should the nature of their participation be limited to bake sales or could they really be included in

The author thanks those members of the Daniels School community in Malden, Massachusetts, and Wheelock College who consented to interviews.

COLLABORATION OF SCHOOL, COLLEGE, AND COMMUNITY: A BRIDGE TO PROGRESS

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making significant decisions? Insecurity with respect to their parenting skills, feelings of inferiority stemming from their own failures in the very schools their children attended, and conflicting thoughts as to their proper place in relation to the school created anxiety and frustration. The lack of adequate communication between home and school, which would have permitted them to share their feelings, exacerbated existing tensions and dissatisfaction.¹

Of the three groups, the college faculty had greater prestige and a sense of confidence so they were not usually consumed by feelings of helplessness. They too, however, sensed frustration when they could not manipulate the college to make changes that would have enabled them to collaborate more effectively. They also felt less effective when they failed to influence school teachers to their way of thinking or lost ground with school administrators in a power struggle over how project dollars would be spent.

Professors also had to cope with frustration as they familiarized themselves with a foreign environment, the public school; defined the nature of their relationships with its inhabitants; and explored the dynamics of a new role.

Theme 2: We Know What's Best for Children. "We at the college are confident about what it is to teach young children." In this case, college faculty perceived themselves as valuing the "whole child." Although they considered basic skills essential, they stressed the affective domain. A curriculum tailored to individual children which encourages creativity, they believed, is superior.

The college faculty felt the school

teachers placed inordinate emphasis on skillbuilding. They noted that concepts were presented to whole groups in an environment that was punitive and disrespectful of children. Conformity was encouraged while creativity was squelched.

Teachers, on the other hand, believed that children needed to learn to follow rules and regulations and learn basic skills so they could cope with society as it is. In their views, college professors, with their play orientation to learning, did not have a realistic view of today's children or of contemporary demands being made on teachers. Professors saw schools as they were when they were teaching, years ago. Times have changed; children and schools are drastically different. The teacher's role has been redefined in light of numerous developments—the publication of test scores, requirements to follow curriculum guides, the inclusion of special needs children into regular classrooms, programs of racial integration, and the fragmentation of the school day to accommodate specialists in a multitude of areas. These developments have greatly affected the school curriculum: what teachers are teaching, as well as why and how they were doing it.

Parents wanted their children to receive a quality education. Although "quality" has different meanings for each parent, most of those interviewed wanted their children to be happy in a school with competent teachers who would provide their children with an education that would enable them to do better, to get "further ahead" than they had.

The parents were somewhat uncertain as to their qualifications to voice opinions about school pro-

grams and unsure of new curriculum innovations. Their observations led them to "common sense" conclusions that a "lack of discipline" in the school, the absence of a school library, a leaky roof, or poor building maintenance by custodians were bad for their children.

Theme 3: They Are a Totally Different Breed. Middle-class teachers and professors had little appreciation or understanding of the political, social, and economic pressures of the daily life of welfare families who lived in public housing projects surrounding the school. In this particular setting, more than 50 percent of the pupils lived in subsidized housing and close to 40 percent came from single-parent families.²

Some teachers indicated that parents with little formal education placed little value on education for their children. They believed that parents did not know the proper way to conduct themselves in a school environment. Parents appeared to have little confidence in themselves; they expressed themselves in unrefined ways and dressed inappropriately. They believed that parents might eliminate procedural steps in the usual decision-making process or would not respect the sanctity of what was overheard in the teachers' room by gossiping in school neighborhoods.

Parents tended to feel inferior to teachers whom they placed "on a pedestal," and expressed uneasiness during the superficial encounters they had with teachers. A mother described how she perceived teachers before she became actively involved with the collaborative:

They feel they are better, more educated than the parent who walks through the

Teachers, professors, and parents mistrust one another at first, but can learn to work together.

door. A lot of teachers come across this way. They think they are higher. I was intimidated by this. Maybe it's me because of my own perception of myself.

Parents viewed teachers in much the same way that teachers perceived professors. A teacher shared her perceptions:

College professors have a very strong patronizing attitude. There is an air about them. They have a stake in academia. Deep down inside, they are regular people, but there is a mystique about them that they have to perpetuate.

Teachers noted that professors often talked about esoteric research studies. They used jargon the way lawyers and doctors do so that no one could understand them. Some teachers viewed professors as theorists. They were perceived to be intelligent and highly philosophical, but not "street smart" enough to deal with the challenges of everyday teaching. They appeared to be closed, unyielding, and elitist; unwilling to recognize the expertise of other groups or the possible value of the contributions that other group members could make to the aims of education.

College people appeared to behave differently socially as well. One teacher suggested that professors had a strong need to have a deep human encounter every time they met someone. Much time was spent introducing one another, meeting in "process" groups where members were always seated in a circle so they could be "face to face," creating an atmosphere of intimacy that some teachers found threatening.

Professors claimed that teachers were rigid and unwilling to compromise. They wondered if teachers possessed a different cognitive style that fostered quick action and reaction to a problem, prohibiting them from slowly thinking through an issue. Teachers appeared to lack real intellectual curiosity; a commitment to lifelong learning. Professors attributed the narrowness of teachers to their parochial backgrounds which

typically included a traditional public or private school education and a college experience at the local state institution, followed by teaching in the neighborhood they grew up in.

Theme 4: It's Always Been Done This Way. Membership in the complex, interdependent organization of the collaborative required changes in the individuals and organizations participating and this often met with resistance. Representatives of each group had their own ideas as to how certain tasks should be accomplished. The interplay of ideas among members sometimes resulted in a format that was new to one or all members.

For example, the method of hiring employees of the collaborative varied from the usual. The lengthy screening and interviewing process of candidates by all representatives of the collaborative was perceived to be cumbersome and inefficient by those in the school system who were comfortable using existing "patronage" channels.

Teachers, who did not have much experience in systematically analyzing schoolwide problems with their colleagues, discovered that such an approach required more of their free periods and afterschool time. A teacher described a behavioral expectation that had become a norm in her school system:

Well, for one thing, the teachers here are not accustomed to having to work beyond the school day, as opposed to teachers in other school systems. You know, for example, that if you are going to teach in Town X, your school day is going to be a long day. You're going to be there. You have a lot of preparation and team work and all that stuff. Here, that has not been the case. I mean, everybody leaves and that's the customary way to do things. . . .

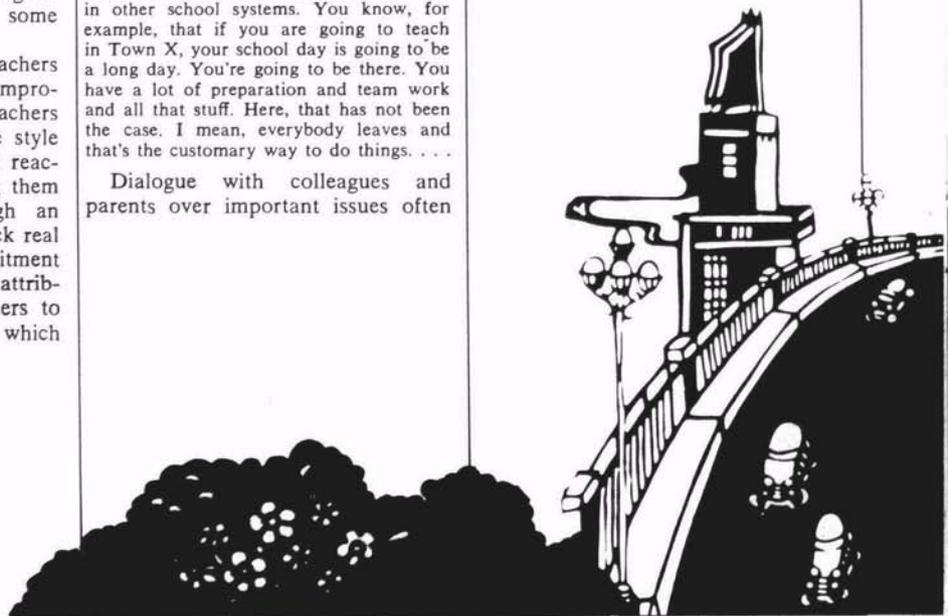
Dialogue with colleagues and parents over important issues often

led to associations with others outside of school. It also led to questioning authorities more openly and relating to colleagues (special education teachers) who were considered off limits. These are examples of institutional codes of behavior that were violated.

The college was asked to redefine work-load formulas to enable faculty members to work on site. Course formats and existing structures for awarding credit were challenged. The roles and responsibilities of professors working in the collaborative were subject to sharp redefinition and routine methods of operating constantly came under challenge.

Collaboration also required that parents and other community members alter their perceptions of themselves and their roles and relationships with the schools. Learning to use political power effectively, relating to teachers and professors in new situations, taking courses in parent education or curriculum for the first time, and arranging their family responsibilities so they could participate in collaborative activities were some of the demands and challenges on parents that required variations from usual behaviors and routines.

In each case, the forces for change met with opposition as individuals



and institutions preferred to cling to the comfort and security that come with habitual ways of operating.

These four themes illustrate the stereotypical perceptions that parents, professors, and school teachers had of each other. As members of these groups interacted in various ways over time within a collaborative framework to solve problems of mutual interest, these stereotypes began to slowly break down. Attitudes and opinions of others were reassessed and reshaped, fostering a real partnership.

Building Bridges: Dismantling Stereotypes

There are a number of factors that support and enhance collaboration and nurture an environment that promotes greater understanding among group members. These factors include: communication, leadership, mutual trust and respect, reciprocity, rewards and incentives, influence and

responsibility, and ongoing evaluation.³ Through the activities that group members design to achieve their common goals, which embrace the above factors, collaborators begin to understand each other's point of view.

One such activity in this project was the transformation of an unused classroom into a school library. Parent volunteers participated in a library science module taught by the college librarian to learn how to catalog and process books. They constructed shelves, made furniture, and painted the room with the support of learning environment specialists. The school principal and teachers assisted in these tasks as well. Through a joint planning committee, a policy for the library's operation was established. All three of the major groups—parents, teachers, and professors—contributed to its success.

The development of a corps of parent classroom aides is another illustration of this successful partnership. Teachers presented ideas as to how parent tutors might be used in classrooms and showed their concerns as to the competencies and qualities that the parents should pos-

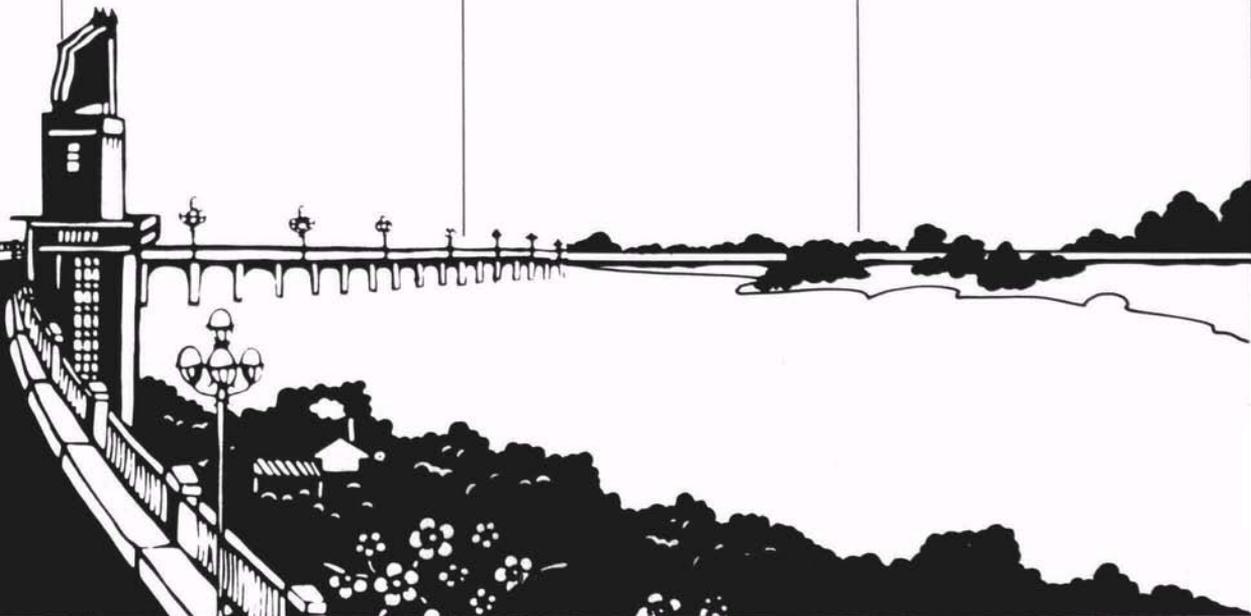
sess. As a result, parents enrolled in a training program provided by college personnel to familiarize them with new curriculum, methods and materials and to prepare them to work with children. Sixty parents now serve as volunteer tutors in a program which teachers believe is indispensable.

A third example of collaboration at work was the design of a field-based master's degree program offered by the college. School administrators and teacher representatives assisted in developing a new graduate program to enable educators to earn an advanced degree in the context of their school community. Their input was invaluable in the formulation of a strategy for teachers to integrate the development of new skills and interests with their daily responsibilities as practitioners.

In each of these instances, members of the collaborative used their differences, providing a rich array of resources toward accomplishing their mutual goals.

Avenues Toward Cooperation

During the final year of the Project, I noted considerable changes in group members' perceptions of each other and the degree of confidence they had in themselves. Through these changes, we now have four positive themes that represent resolution of the initial themes.



Theme 1: We Can Solve Our Problems Together. The Collaborative provided a forum through which its members could vent their frustrations, air their disagreements, and express their hopes. Complaints, unrealistic expectations, and dependence on omnipotent consultants faded as members began to realize their potential strengths. They took ownership, accepting responsibility for the direction of their own program. They developed increasing trust and respect for each other.

Teachers recognized that there was a place for professors of education in their school. Professors helped to stimulate growth and renewal in teachers by working directly in classrooms. They offered workshops and courses on-site, assisting in school problem solving. Professors worked with parents and shared the college's resources, providing a network for the exchange of human and material resources among the school and college and other school systems.

By working directly with teachers on their problems, professors gained new insights into the teaching role and brought this understanding to students in training at the college along with successful methods and approaches to teaching and learning that they themselves had tested in the field.

Professors and teachers recognized the meaningful roles that parents could play in the school as well. Parents served as teacher's aides, worked as tutors and library assistants, served on committees, and sponsored and organized ancillary programs. Teachers and professors learned from parents. One parent commented:

They have a respect for parents in a different way. If you are more aware of the daily problems, things that happen, how parents feel, you can relate to them better and actually relate to kids better. . . .

Parents have used their political power in cooperation with teachers and other community representatives to get things done. Just recently, almost one year after the termination of this project, the school committee in the community voted to reduce their teaching force at the school, which was the focal point of the collaborative. Teachers, fearing reprisals, were reluctant to take action. Parents voluntarily made a presenta-

tion before the school committee, organized a demonstration, and disseminated information to the media. As a result of their efforts, the decision was overturned.

Theme 2: Our Goals Are Similar. Those seemingly wide philosophical gaps dividing representatives of community, college, and school system narrowed.

A parent described what she hopes the school system will offer her child: "I want my child to receive a good quality education. I hope that he will gain a confidence in himself and his ability to do the work. I also want him to relate to teachers as human beings." Which teachers and professors can quarrel with those goals?

Although parents, professors, and teachers continue to hold strong opinions as to what is best for children, they have gained greater appreciation, tolerance, and understanding of each other's views. They see the value in what each has to offer: they are more flexible and willing to listen to and test out each other's ideas.

A teacher suggested that although there are differences of opinion as to how philosophies should be implemented, there really are great similarities in teachers' and professors' points of view. "Maybe we don't use the same vocabulary, but we mean the same; that children are unique individuals and should be treated as such."

During the last year, teachers, parents, and professors have made joint presentations to educational collaboratives, associations of teacher educators, and to teacher associations throughout New England. Those presentations, which exuded an obvious spirit of cooperation, indicate that members of these three groups have agreed upon some common goals.

Theme 3: They Are Just Regular People. The process of collaboration provides opportunities for individuals to informally socialize with each other at dinners and weekend retreats, confront and negotiate with each other at board meetings, and share group successes at conferences. Members of the project began to recognize each other as individuals, seeing through roles, titles, and positions. A parent commented:

In our generation, we were always

taught that teachers were superior. . . . Now I can see teachers as human beings. I can relate to their side and my own. . . .

You see another side of teachers. You don't feel that they are in a different group. They are some of the same type of people that I am. You see the social side of teachers. It helps to come into school and call a teacher by her first name. It helps the child too. My kids love to see me in school. Being here shows interest in what they are doing. They want to achieve more.

A teacher described the changes in her perceptions of professors:

I saw college people as closed. They let you know that they felt superior. They seemed unappreciative of what other people had to offer. . . . Now, I don't see them in one lump. I got to know some who were different, who listened and offered suggestions and who didn't talk down to people. It's more of a partnership.

Theme 4: Change Can Be Valuable.

Although members resisted change, for change creates pain and discomfort, they eventually recognized that change is positive and growth-producing. The continuation of activities such as a child-study group for exploring options for dealing with hard to manage children, the parents as tutors program, the parent operation of the school library, and a teachers' advisor committee which initiates steps toward solving school-wide problems are all examples of changes that were adopted because they were seen as valuable and essential elements to the school's functioning.

Parents who were perceived to be inarticulate and who had low images of themselves now serve as guest speakers and consultants on school-community relations to other projects. They are models as to how collaboration can bring about changes in individuals, fostering personal growth and development. Finally, the realization that the other is not unintelligent, indifferent, selfish, or hungry for power, but really cares about children and their education is another benefit of cooperation in educational decision making. ■

¹ Wheelock-Malden Teacher Corps, *Developing a School-Community Partnership* (Boston: Wheelock-Malden Teacher Corps, 1979), p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³ Edgar Klugman and Joseph J. Caruso, "Collaboration in Education: An Alternative Future," *New England Teacher Corps Exchange*, vol. 11 (Portsmouth, N.H.: New England Teacher Corps, 1979), p. 8.

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