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Abstract

A formal partnership was established between Idaho State University, College of Education and Fort Hall Elementary School on the Fort Hall Shoshone-Bannock Reservation. Through a collaborative model, a learning environment has evolved in which trust, respect, ownership and growth has occurred for all of the participants in the university and public school, which includes university faculty and students and the public school administration, faculty and students. There has also been an increase of parental involvement and a sense of pride established in the community. Advancements in student test scores in reading and math have been reported with the teachers claiming that the assistance from university students has help to make the increase in student achievement possible. The general elements of the model could be used by any partnership. Included are suggestions concerning how to adapt this model to other collaborative public school/university partnerships.

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Model for Successful Collaboration: Working with an American Indian Reservation School

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ABSTRACT

A formal partnership was established between Idaho State University, College of Education and Fort Hall Elementary School on the Fort Hall Shoshone-Bannock Reservation. Through a collaborative model, a learning environment has evolved in which trust, respect, ownership and growth has occurred for all of the participants in the university and public school, which includes university faculty and students and the public school administration, faculty and students. There has also been an increase of parental involvement and a sense of pride established in the community. Advancements in student test scores in reading and math have been reported with the teachers claiming that the assistance from university students has help to make the increase in student achievement possible. The general elements of the model could be used by any partnership. Included are suggestions concerning how to adapt this model to other collaborative public school/university partnerships.

FORT HALL ELEMENTARY

BACKGROUND

Fort Hall Elementary School is located on the Shoshone-Bannock Indian Reservation at Fort Hall, Idaho. The school is part of the Blackfoot School District #55, Blackfoot, Idaho and is the only public school situated on the reservation itself. It originally opened as a small day school for Native children in 1920, as an alternative to sending children to the Indian boarding schools in the district. The school currently serves 167 students in grades K-5, with a growing number of students attending the Kindergarten and 1st grades during this past year. Students who live on the reservation may also transfer to schools in Pocatello or Blackfoot, Idaho depending on their proximity to those schools. Consequently,

the population of the school may fluctuate as students transfer to other schools throughout the school year or at the beginning of new school years. Ninety-eight percent of the students are American Indian, primarily enrolled in the Shoshone-Bannock tribal nation. Many students are from dual heritage families, and range from those who are being raised traditionally or biculturally to those who have no understanding of their ethnic heritage(s). There are several students who came as immigrants to the United States from Central America, as well as a few children of European heritage.

Due to cultural conflicts of the past and present concerning the emphasis of the educational institution on Native American assimilation to the dominant European culture, there has been a great deal of mistrust of "White man's" educa-

tion during the history of the school's existence. Indeed, except for recognition of "Indian Days" during the last week of September each year, there has been little acknowledgement of native traditions in the school prior to its becoming part of the Partnership School network at Idaho State University in the College of Education.

PARTNERSHIP BACKGROUND

During AY 2000-2001 a formal partnership was established between Idaho State University, College of Education and Fort Hall Elementary School in Blackfoot School District #55 located on the Fort Hall Indian reservation. Of the nine schools that had been approached to work with Idaho State University over a three year period, only Fort Hall Elementary School offered experiences of working with primarily American Indian students. Approximately 97% of the 167 children attending the school, one-fourth of the faculty and all but one of the teacher aides are enrolled members of the tribal Nations (Klug & Hall, 2002). In contrast, the university's student body and faculty are primarily Euro-American. The driving force behind the partnership with Fort Hall Elementary can best be expressed by Vold and Pattnaik (2002), who expressed the need to offer diverse field experiences which would give preservice teachers the "opportunity to be immersed in schools and communities with which they were not always familiar with or comfortable in" (p. 121).

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARTNERSHIP SCHOOL MODEL

The Partnership Model was created through the collaborative work with the university and the public school over a three year period. Participants from the university included the Dean, Associate Dean, Director of Field Experiences and the university liaison. Participants from Fort Hall Elementary included the school prin-

cipal, and several members of the faculty. The result was the development of the Partnership School model for Fort Hall Elementary. (See Figure 1.)

University Agreement

During the early stages of developing a partnership with Fort Hall Elementary, it was realized that there needed to be a formalized agreement with the university. This agreement needed not only to establish the parameters of the joint working relationship, but also to protect the culture of the students, determine the school's goals for school improvement and develop respect and trust among the participants in the school and university.

The working relationship provided by the partnership was built on the needs of the elementary students, the university students, and the faculty and administration of both. The parameters of the working relationship were developed through lengthy discussions with public school administration and faculty. The formalized agreement (Professional Development School Partnership Agreement, 2000) states that the purpose is to establish a partnership to create a professional development school (PDS). This partnership will be dedicated to improving the quality of preservice and inservice teaching with the goal of improving student learning through the adoption and implementation of the principles of professional development schools and action research....The school district and the university will combine resources and provide leadership for the development of these schools. It is the intent of this partnership to create a dynamic learning community. This will honor cultural diversity and individual differences, encourage growth, and provide opportunities to learn and explore through collaborative efforts (p. 1).

There are two governing bodies of the partnership. First, the administrative board is composed of the Dean of the College of Education,

the Director of Field Experiences, the Director of Teacher Education, the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of School District #55, and the principal of Fort Hall Elementary. The main charge of this board is to oversee the partnership, make policy decisions and ensure the collaboration is meeting the purposes outlined by the agreement.

Second is the PDS Liaison Council, which is composed of a representative from each of the PDS sites and a University faculty member assigned to each school. This council meets monthly to coordinate and facilitate the policies which govern the partnerships. It acts as an advisory board to the Administrative Board who makes final decisions for the partnership. The formalized agreement concludes with the declaration that a yearly evaluation of all of the Partnership Schools will be prepared by the Liaison Council. This evaluation is intended to guide the work for the following year.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

After the partnership agreement was formalized and signed by administrators at the university and the school district, the work of building relationships among all entities to accomplish the identified goals began. This school had been under attack numerous times within the district because of its low levels of academic achievement. There were misperceptions within the educational community that Native students couldn't or wouldn't learn, and that only the least deserving teachers would be assigned to teach at the school. False perceptions included that parents and extended family members and the community did not care about the school and would not encourage students' academic success. These observations were voiced along with other biases and negative stereotypes characterizing Native people as lacking ambition, engaging in drunkenness and violence, and enjoying lives that exhibited moral depravity. These stereotypes abounded in communities bordering the reservation, and insinuatingly

made their way into the consciousness of those aligned with the elementary school.

Because the university liaison assigned to Fort Hall had visited the school many times and had her university students placed for practicum experiences in the school, she was known to the community but did not have a formal role in the school that allowed her to share any insights concerning educational needs of American Indian students. With the partnership, she now had a legitimate role and responsibility in the life of the school. By the same token, she had to be sure that she would not try to dictate, take over, or try to actively change the pedagogical practices of the teachers in the school. Instead, she worked by quietly offering her insights, complimenting teachers and staff on what they were doing that was culturally appropriate, and trying to build the concept of teamwork within the school community.

TRUST AND RESPECT

For the model to work, all parties needed to develop trust and respect. The first area that needed to be addressed at the school from the perceptions of members of the Native American community concerned the negative stereotypes and prejudices that they felt teachers and administrators held concerning their children. Mistrust between community members and teachers resulted from a long history of mistreatment of American Indians, dating back to colonization and the invasions of Europeans into the Americas.

Introduction to American Indian Cultures

In schools today, the emphasis has been on adapting to the ways of the dominant culture to the detriment of Native peoples. As such, on-going resistance to "White man's education" is seen and experienced across many reservations and in schools that serve predominantly American

Indian populations (Klug & Whitfield, 2003).

Knowledge Shared Opens Doors

In order to understand attitudes toward the dominant culture in Native communities today, non-native teachers must be able to acknowledge the abuses experienced by American Indians at the hands of Europeans and the federal government. Many people will resist this information, saying that, "I wasn't a part of that. Why can't they (Native people) just forget and get over it?" What they do not understand is that the meta-narrative of colonial superiority has different connotations for those who experienced the oppressions at the hands of the "superior" colonizing forces. Just as many whose ancestors came to the American shores for freedom have felt they have a "right" to live here without question, they do not understand they have been shielded from the real facts regarding how the land was "won" from Indian Nations. By identifying themselves with the conquering forces of those efforts, they have unknowingly bought into a false meta-narrative concerning the first peoples on the continent and their treatment at the hands of the victors.

Understanding this and being able to provide needed information to teachers at the school in a way that was honest yet sensitive to both sides was the first challenge experienced by the university liaison. Because the goals of the partnership included raising test scores, the liaison was given a reason to be able to open this dialogue. Without the knowledge of what had happened in the past, the non-Native teachers could not understand the resentments of families and community members to their presence on the reservation.

Introduction to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The university liaison was able to present this information in the first session of a class offered on culturally relevant pedagogy for American

Indian students, which the partnership with the university had enabled. While the non-Native teachers and aides were shocked by much of the information they were given to correct their previous perceptions, Native teachers and aides were surprised that the information would be brought forth candidly and silently acknowledged the truths of their history.

The sessions of the class given during the rest of the semester focused on understanding cultural practices and correcting misperceptions, such as the importance of not giving teachers eye contact as a sign of students' respect for elders. In addition, non-Native teachers were able to understand that they, too, had a culture that was invisible to themselves, but visible to the Native community. Through sharing of cultural symbols and practices, the two groups began to understand and appreciate each other's culturally appropriate ways of relating to the world around them. Half-way through this class, teachers asked if they could have a class on the Shoshoni language that would teach them about the language and how to say some Shoshoni words. A tribal member was teaching a beginning course on the language at the university in the anthropology department with another professor. The university liaison was able to fulfill this request and have the class delivered on-site to the faculty and staff of the school. Several times, members of the community came to join in the class. In this way, they were confirming for themselves what they had been hearing in the community about the efforts to make the school a better place for their children to learn.

The class on culturally relevant pedagogy was the beginning of an on-going dialogue that is still taking place four years later as the trust levels between the two groups have continued to develop. It can also be seen in the physical seating of the two groups in faculty meetings and school assemblies. For years, each group sat on its own side of the room where meetings were held, with a neutral zone in the middle. The same was true of gathering for assemblies. Now, the two groups intermingle with ease, reflecting their comfort levels with each other. In the past year, one White teacher has asked a very traditional

Native teacher how to make moccasins. This teacher has assisted her every step of the way with her project, something that would have been inconceivable four years ago.

Preservice Teacher's Involvement in the Partnership School

For the majority of students attending the university, the idea of prejudices and inequalities in educational experiences for underrepresented populations is not at issue. These students have lived in isolated areas for the majority of their lives, and the university itself is situated in an area of the country that has a representation of less than 10% of ethnically diverse populations as a whole. Many preservice teachers are sure that the children and their families are to blame for their failures in the education system. Ukpokodu (2003) summarizes this attitude in the following:

Many White preservice teachers come to teacher education programs unaware of the issues of societal injustice and educational inequities. They are usually unaware of how the school culture, socialized knowledge, and their own behaviors and views of others may reinforce social and racial inequities. (p. 17)

Sugrue (1996) found that preservice teachers ideas about the characteristics needed to become good teachers reflect our cultural icons of "teachers" as kind, caring, good disciplinarians, capable of managing the classroom, and being nice to their students. They do not perceive that understanding the cultural identities of their students is an important part of the equation for successful teaching (Nieto, 2002). In addition, there is resistance on the part of many preservice teachers of the dominant culture towards information regarding other ethnicities and their values, belief systems, and cultures (Klug, Whitfield, Luckey, & Wilkins, 2004).

One of the aspects of partnership schools is to have a place for university students who are pursuing teacher education majors to have prac-

tica experiences enhancing their understandings of the relationship between theory and practice. In the case of the elementary school at Fort Hall, education students from several different teacher preparation institutions had spent periods of time observing in the school. Many of the elementary teachers had negative experiences with potential teachers who spoke disparagingly of the children and the school. The feeling was that the university students were incapable of forming positive impressions of the school and its students based on their limited knowledge of and exposure to Native American cultures. As a result, it was agreed that the students from the university liaison's language arts methods class would be the ones allowed to complete their practica experiences at the school. In this way, the professor would be able to prepare them prior to their actual placements, giving them the necessary information that they needed in order to avoid cultural miscommunications. In this way, faculty and staff could be assured that the university students would be sensitive to the children and their needs. A Fort Hall teacher reported, "Some of the university students seemed a little overwhelmed when they first entered the classroom, however within a short time they bonded with the children."

Throughout the placement semester, the preservice teachers keep journals regarding their experiences at the school. It is through their journals that questions can be raised concerning what they observed at the school, or difficulties they may be having. The professor answers questions, makes comments, and decides if there are issues that need to be raised with the entire class. Because this process is on-going, the issues surrounding education for American Indian students can be addressed continuously. Dependent upon the nature of the particular group of students, questions can be raised concerning the children's and families' attitudes toward schooling; management issues; or if children are not coming to school "bathed and dressed in clean clothes," how this might be a reflection of poverty and not of lack of respect towards their teachers, which seems to be a common misperception.

As a result of this constant dialogue, the pro-

fessor can reinforce the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy throughout the semester. Focus can be spent on the successes of the university students when working with whole classes or small groups of children, and their excitement when a lesson goes well or their children “catch on” to an activity. The students share stories within the class setting about children showing them affection, and how this makes them feel wanted in the classroom. They also speak about the enthusiasm with which the children greet them when they come to the school. This is important, as the preservice teachers pass through the stages of concern as identified by Fuller (1970): (1) concern about themselves; (2) concern about themselves as teachers; and (3) concern about their students. For preservice teachers, the concern about their students does not come until they are far into their evolution toward becoming full-fledged teachers. Through experiencing successful interaction with American Indian children, these future teachers are able to break through the prejudices and stereotypes previously held and question what they have learned or heard others say regarding the Native community. One of these former university students has recently been hired to teach at Fort Hall. She commented that her experience in having her practicum at Fort Hall helped her to prepare for her first teaching assignment. She explained how her university professor had, “told us that cultural and socioeconomic status affect how our Native American children learn...I now teach at [the school] and I still keep these pieces of information in mind. For example, I use a longer wait time when asking the students questions, and I do not expect them to always look at me when I am speaking.”

The Model Embraces Working Together As Communities of Learners

Throughout the four years of the partnership relationship with the school, a true learning community has evolved and continues to do so. The university liaison is treated as a member of the Fort Hall faculty, and is responsive to concerns

raised by the teachers about their children or about the preservice teachers. She makes an effort to visit with all the teachers as often as possible to determine what their needs may be and if assistance can be provided in any form. She also works personally with the fourth and fifth grade classes on dramatic and movement activities that grounds them in Native American poetry and legends, especially that of the Shoshone people. The fifth grade has performed several legends for the other students in the school for the last two years, and the fourth grade had its first presentation last year. This year, the fourth and fifth grade will give their presentations jointly to the student body. Not only is the professor renewed through her direct interactions with children, but she also models activities for teachers that can be used to enhance their students’ literacy levels.

The teachers at the school have become true partners and feel they have a voice in providing their expertise to this new generation of teachers. They expect the university students to work hard to teach their children, and are there to answer questions and provide guidance to them concerning planning and teaching lessons for the children. The teachers feel they have a stake in the preparation of the university students, and this in turn validates their importance in the partnership relationship. Teachers have also made presentations to the students within the university classroom setting, again reinforcing their importance in the program.

The physical look of the school itself has changed over the years. Instead of reflecting a dominant culture only, there is more emphasis on Native American culture in the books present in the library, the art on the walls of classrooms and in the hallways, the display cases in the building, and in the projects completed by classes. Teachers include much more information that relates to Native cultures in their lessons. In other words, the atmosphere is much more reflective of the children who attend the school and conducive to their learning. More teachers are including activities that incorporate Gardner’s (1983) Multiple Intelligences, especially the naturalist intelligence that is part of the students’ heritages.

In 2003, teachers and aides in the upper grades began a dance group with the children. They teach many different types of dances to the students, and draw upon the students' motivation to participate in the activity. In so doing, listening skills and following directions are reinforced, as well as developing/reinforcing concepts such as left and right. They had their first school dance recital for the community, and the gymnasium was filled with parents, grandparents, and friends who watched enthusiastically as their children performed dances from other cultures and then ended the performance with a Native American Round Dance. The children performed their second dance recital at the end of the 2003- 2004 school year. Before the partnership, parents had not attended school events in great numbers.

Advances in Test Scores

It is important to note that there have been advances in the students' test scores in reading and math. In the past, this school was blamed by those in the district for bringing their overall test scores down. Now, the overall scores of the students are at or above the levels of the other schools in the district. Teachers feel that the extra help provided to the children from the university students has made a great deal of difference in their classrooms as they have extra hands to work with children. University students are able to see the benefits of working directly with individual and small groups of students, as well as begin to understand the nature of planning lessons for the whole class. In reflection, one of the Fort Hall teachers observed, "The interaction between the university students and the Fort Hall students is terrific. In the fourth grade we have targeted several students that need extra help. We hope that the university students' involvement with these children will help boost test scores."

As emphasis continues to be placed on high-stakes testing and difficulties emerge with underrepresented populations meeting the No

Child Left Behind Act (2001), the school continues to examine ways of increasing educational opportunities for the Native students who attend it. One of the outcomes of the Partnership has been the successful lobbying of the district in 2003 to continue to employ a reading specialist at the school, even though funding for the district was lessened due to state budget constraints in the last two years. The lobbying was done at both the school district and the tribal council levels and involved the school principal, director of Indian Education for the school district, director of education programs for the Shoshone- Bannock tribes, and the university liaison. Having so much support made a difference and the teacher was rehired for the position at the elementary school. In turn, teachers made a decision that working with students in the reading lab would be approached collaboratively with whole classrooms. Emphasis during the first half of the year is on first-grade reading skills, so the first grade spends a two-hour period in the lab. While the reading specialist designs activities for addressing specific reading needs and works with one small group at a time, the other children rotate through three additional work stations. The first grade teacher mans one of the work-stations, the teacher's aide another, and the preservice teacher the third. This pattern is repeated for the additional first grade classroom.

The Kindergarten children (two classes) begin to work in the lab the second half of the school year, while the third grade students are being phased out. While third graders still have a half-hour time in the lab, they are moving from the initial one-hour time period allotted to them. Second grade students continue to have a one-hour block in the lab throughout the year. With all of the classes, the pattern is continued of children rotating to work stations operated by the reading specialist, classroom teachers, teacher aides, and university students.

ADAPTING THE FORT HALL MODEL

Learning from each other is a part of what

helps our profession grow. The model created for the partnership between Fort Hall Elementary and Idaho State University could be adapted by other universities wanting to work collaboratively with schools in their area. Obviously the general elements of the model could be used by any partnership. Public school goals and school improvements should be at the center of the process as well as the needs of the university preservice teachers. A collaborative council can be established to make sure that there is voice in decision-making from both the university and the public schools. It was felt that participation of faculty members from both the university and the public school has given ownership to those who are working most closely with preservice and public school students. And of course, trust and respect must be established no matter where the partnership will occur. With the elements covered and a formalized agreement in place, the members of this partnership feel that the collaboration will continue to be a successful experience for all, with opportunities for everyone to grow.

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