Our leadership team at College Place Middle School will never forget the week in May, 1989 when we received word that we had been selected as one of the twenty-one grant recipients in the state of Washington to receive a "Schools for the Twenty-First Century" award. At the same time, we had been chosen as one of 4 middle schools to become a professional development school in partnership with the University of Washington. The staff had planned for this restructuring for over two years, and the process of selection for the state grant had taken over a year. In contrast, the process of applying to partner with the University of Washington as a Professional Development Center site lasted a short and intense two weeks.

Though the staff was barely familiar with the requirements of the project, teachers at our school had always been willing to assist in the training of student teachers. An additional incentive was that the Schools for the Twenty-First Century grant provided ten additional work days over the next six years for each staff member for training, planning, and implementing the school's proposal to raise student achievement through school restructuring. The years following this momentous week proved to be rich, rewarding, and marked by intense personal and professional growth and changes within the school system. Teachers assumed greater responsibility for student learning and welcomed new leadership roles. Within this dynamic and sometimes chaotic environment, the formal partnership of College Place Middle School with the University of Washington was born. For four years, our school staff worked collaboratively with our new partners. Our joint mission was to develop a teacher preparation program designed specifically for middle level teachers while, at the same time, offering opportunities for the professional growth of practicing teachers. Our overall aim was to promote school change to meet the needs of adolescents. Why, then, after six productive years did the partnership end?

In this paper we wish to explore what we learned from these four intense, dynamic and productive years. How were partner relationships established and strengthened over the years? What made this effort so important to the leadership at the school and University? What impact did the sudden curtailment of the project have on those who participated in it? Why is it that those who took part in it, even today, four years after it has ended, find it painful to talk or write about it?

We offer, in answer to these questions, a brief history of the Puget Sound Professional Development Center (PSPDC). In addition, we offer our reflections as three school leaders—the site supervisor, the teacher leader coordinator, and the partnership school principal—each of whom played a significant role in the planning and implementing the project.

A Brief History of the Puget Sound Professional Development Center

The Puget Sound Professional Development Center was a project of the Puget Sound Educational Consortium composed of 12-14 districts surrounding the city of Seattle as well as the Seattle School District. The participants included the University of Washington and four middle school sites in four different school districts. Each district was expected to make a $10,000 annual contribution. The project received additional funding and support from the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Metropolitan Life Foundation. In spite of this early support, it proved difficult in later years to sustain the same level of funding. Efforts to lobby the Washington State Legislature for a more stable source proved unsuccessful as the state turned its attention to funding different reform efforts in the K-12 system.

The Professional Development Center (PDC), nevertheless, was able to enjoy adequate funding for three of the four years. These funds supported collaborative planning and implementation of a highly successful program to train new middle school teachers while, simultaneously, providing the means to enable continuous professional development of our teachers.

During the fourth year, with funds growing scarce, the Puget Sound Education Consortium turned over the formal supervision of the project to the University of Washington. Soon, new cracks began to appear in the Consortium as districts experienced the pressure to move limited funds into other areas. The fourth year found the PDC functioning with less and less money. One of the four original schools opted out for "a period of rest." The University was now in the difficult position of maintaining two programs simultaneously: the new middle level preparation program as well as the traditional teacher education program. Unfortunately, financial constraints at the university level forced them to combine the programs. As a result, the University combined what they could of the best aspects of the middle level program into the old program; those, at any rate, that could be adapted to meet budget demands.
In spite of this merger, the program has continued to evolve. Today, forty-five Partner Schools work with University of Washington student teachers. College Place Middle School continues its participation as one of those partner schools and our faculty still considers the training of new teachers to be an important part of their work. They remain committed to the goal of preparing excellent new teachers who will also be successful agents of change in their new places of employment. We are pleased to report that over the past two years we have been able to hire two of these new graduates to replace teachers who have retired.

The Role of the Site Supervisor

One of the major innovations in the development of the school/university partnership was in the supervision of student teachers. In the traditional program, supervisors from the university were assigned pre-service teachers in several school districts. With several student teachers assigned to one school, the Professional Development Center model created the position of site supervisor within each building. Supervisors were responsible for familiarizing the pre-service teachers with the building and school rules, holding weekly meetings to clarify problems or issues, coordinating the student teachers and cooperating teachers, observing and evaluating the student teachers and for meeting monthly with the university teaching team and other site supervisors.

This new role created new opportunities for teachers and encouraged the development of many new partnerships. Within each school, for example, the supervisor established a different quality of collegiality with cooperating teachers. There was a significant increase in discussions and evaluations of teaching practices. And because four site schools were involved, the supervisors had opportunities to develop relationships with each other. They became partners in defining and creating the new roles and responsibilities of the job.

One of the most rewarding partnerships came from the close working relationship with university faculty. The professors in the program were open and collegial in their work with teachers. The monthly meetings between the university teaching team and the site supervisors were opportunities for partnerships in the development of curriculum and learning activities. Ideas from the schools and supervisors were considered and often integrated into the coursework. Our commitment to the program and the intensity of the work brought staff from the site schools and university closer together and friendships and professional connections developed that centered on a core of common goals. We were all committed to the same central goal of providing a strong middle school focus for the student teachers. It was to this goal that we continually referred back to in our discussions and decision-making.

When the university phased out the middle school program and transformed the teacher education program into the current Teacher Education Program (TEP), the position of site supervisor was one of the PDC middle school components that was retained. The student teachers in the PDC program frequently mentioned that the site supervisor was the main strength of the entire program. They liked the close access to the supervisor, who was able to link the theoretical content of university classes with the practice of the cooperating teachers.

Though several aspects of the position have been retained, some adaptations from the original site supervisor role have been made. The site coordinator still orient pre-service teachers to the building and school policies; they still conduct weekly seminars. However, the site coordinators no longer meet with the professors to discuss curriculum, assignments, and common concerns. Formal classroom observations and evaluations are now the responsibility of the university supervisor. It has not been possible to maintain the close working relationship between university professors and site coordinators that had developed in the middle school program.

The Puget Sound Professional Development Center was based on a series of beliefs that included new roles and responsibilities for educators, and that these would be supported through dialogue and inquiry on professional development. The focus on continual learning and renewal of practice created a spirit of collegiality and a sense of purpose for the teachers at the sites. Because there were additional funds and only four school sites involved in the program, it was easier to provide time and staff development to support these beliefs. These circumstances helped to form a culture in which cooperating teachers could move from their traditional role with student teachers to one that made them positive role models and reflective practitioners. These partnerships, involving close personal working relationships among different role groups, helped to develop trust, create a climate of mutual respect, and established a shared commitment to partnership goals.

Two questions now confront the TEP: Can the relationships fostered in the middle school program be replicated in the new program? Can schools and teachers create the same level of commitment and partnership if they do not enjoy the same opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that are integral to the operations of the program? Our experience tells us that the answer to both questions is probably, "No."

The initial partnership between the university and the schools worked effectively to promote teacher professional development and teacher preparation. Teachers at the sites took advantage of professional development opportunities.
The site supervisors and cooperating teachers grew in their pedagogical knowledge and became more reflective as a result. They also had opportunities to work with university faculty to build a solid program. Pre-service teachers had an excellent training experience because all those involved in the program invested considerable time and effort in their success. This partnership worked because it was practiced on a small scale by people who were able to meet together regularly and solve problems collaboratively.

The current program does not have the same feeling of partnership. The TEP program possesses some strengths, but the partnerships that were so integral to the middle school teacher education program are now of a different nature. Preservice teachers continue to collaborate with each other in their cohort groups. Cooperating teachers, pre-service teachers, and site coordinators form partnerships within the school. But the close working relationships that were so effective in promoting teacher professional development and school renewal are no longer in existence.

Could the Professional Development Center exist today and foster the same type of partnerships? Probably not. The time, energy, and funding needed to replicate the PSPDC model on a large scale would be prohibitive. The Professional Development Center was established not just to create a more effective teacher education program; it was also created to further the professional development of experienced teachers. The teacher education program has continued to thrive. However, the emphasis of each of the schools in the partnership has shifted, and although teachers continue to focus on their own staff development, there has been a major redirection of energies away from systemic reforms towards an emphasis on curriculum standards and performance-based assessment.

The Role of the Teacher Leader Coordinator

The role of the Teacher Leader Coordinator (TLC) had two main functions: to consult with the TLCs at three other middle schools and the project director from the University of Washington and to coordinate the professional development activities at the partnership school.

The first duty was a relatively easy one to accomplish. The four middle school TLCs and the University Project Director met monthly, and although each of us represented a somewhat different school population, many of the problems we faced and much of what we had to do were similar. We relayed site concerns to the project director and each other, debriefed on past events, discussed current activities, and planned future ones. Most of our problem solving revolved around the roadblocks to fuller participation at off-site events. For example, one of the aims of the multi-site PDC was to have events rotate through the four institutions.

However, attendance of teachers tended to be low when events were not held at their school.

Because of our position as experienced teachers in our respective schools, TLCs were able to influence the implementation of university proposals, sometimes to speed them up, at other times to require more time to reconsider the practical implications of new ideas. Shared decision-making worked best when the schools and the university shared common values and interests such as curriculum or teaching methods. We were more likely to disagree about day-to-day matters of school operations such as scheduling issues. For example, the university envisioned PDC sites that would prepare ten pre-service teachers at a time. The TLCs believed that although pre-service education was an essential part of a well-rounded professional development program, a large number of student teachers would be too demanding for the school to handle and affect the quality of student learning. We were concerned that students could have student teachers in most of their classes, and that the same teachers would be tapped as cooperating teachers each year. The program director argued for more student teachers as a cost-saving measure and as a factor in forming a more intense culture in which to immerse teacher interns. However, the teachers tended to look at things differently, assessing the potential impact on the school students, and held student teacher admissions to four or five.

The professional development duties of the TLC at the middle school site were more onerous and diverse. They included coordinating all PDC activities at College Place Middle School (CPMS), assisting activity organizers, organizing events if no one stepped forward to volunteer, acting as a sounding board for faculty concerns, maintaining close contact with the principal, and managing the PDC budget of $10,000.00 each year.

The largest part of the job was to promote professional growth among teachers. We sponsored workshops, study groups, mini-grants for curriculum development, fireside chats on topics of interest, colloquia (rather formal presentations on a given topic followed by informal discussion), and classes for college credit. A list of events during a single school year demonstrates the scope of these activities:

- two full-day workshops on integrated curriculum,
- a study group on technology,
- a study group on William Glasser’s quality school,
- three fireside chats on technology,
- a district-wide colloquium for middle school teachers focusing on self-directed action research projects,
- several study sessions with a professor-in-residence on questioning strategies.
Sometimes the line between different aspects of the partnership blurred. For example, teachers saw their work with teacher interns as part of their own professional development, not solely part of the pre-service program. In an end-of-the-year survey to measure the amount of participation in professional development, the staff listed 28 separate PDC events.

Not all professional development efforts, however, occurred through courses and workshops. One way was to spread leadership activities throughout the staff. Initially, some teachers were reluctant to take on new roles such as librarian for the professional library, colloquium coordinator, fireside chat facilitator or study group leader. However, when these teachers did accept these new challenges, with the support of the TLC and principal, they discovered that they did have the requisite skills.

While the staff was likely to participate in activities that were on-site and requests that came from staff, they were initially suspicious of the motives of the University. Why did professors want to work with middle school teachers? What were we doing wrong that they wanted to fix?

We felt that the University came to a better understanding of the culture and operating procedures of the school. We came to value our friendship with them, though there were points that we never did fully resolve.

One of the aims of the PSPDC was that each middle school would become a center of professional development for all middle schools in its district. Despite repeated efforts to include the other three middle schools, this never became a reality. Occasionally, one or two teachers from another middle school would attend, but their participation was intermittent. Just as our teachers had been suspicious of the motives of the University of Washington, the other Edmonds middle schools were leery of our school. Who were we to be organizing these activities and telling them what they needed? Why should we have a budget for staff development when they did not have an equal amount?

Although the budget to support professional development activities disappeared, the culture of professional learning has continued. These developments are due in some measure to the intensity with which the staff pursued knowledge and understanding during the years in which both the PDC grants and the Schools for the 21st Century Grant were in operation.

Looking at the current climate of the school nine years later and five years since the formal partnership was dissolved, it is heartening to see that not all of the gains from the PDC have disappeared. We remember the sense of responsibility that the PDC engendered, the belief that what we were creating was imperative for the future of teaching, and that we were on the cutting edge of reform in teacher preparation and professional development. It is disheartening, however, to imagine how far we might have come if the dream of partnership had survived the cost cutting and the consequent redirection of resources.

The Role of the Principal

At first the time commitment seemed daunting—one day a month away from the building to meet with the PSPDC planning team. The planning team consisted of the University of Washington director, graduate students, the four principals, site supervisors and teacher leader coordinators from each building. Finally, there was the middle school teacher who worked as a teaching associate with the University of Washington staff in the teaching of the student teacher seminars. In addition to holding a middle school teaching assignment, this person was hired to help plan and teach the student teacher seminars that were held twice weekly.

As principal, I came to appreciate highly these frequent days of study and reflection with other professionals who shared my vision of schooling. These monthly meetings were extremely important since it was here that the real partnerships between people were formed, where visions were shared and developed, where communication links were made and trust developed. This offered a contrast with meetings in my own district at which resource issues were creating a more competitive atmosphere among the principals. They were suspicious of a school that had received two major grant awards while they struggled for funds and support for change within their schools.

The partnership organization was simple and non-hierarchical. University faculty organized the details of the agenda and facilitated the meeting. School personnel were thankful for this support as we were extremely busy with many other tasks. Our facilitators kept us strictly on task but always provided time for dialogue. The agenda for our meetings encouraged collaboration with job-alike groups and site groups meeting on an assortment of topics. We always reported to the full group with detailed notes taken by graduate students. In this way, we always knew what others were thinking and planning, and what decisions had been made.

On one occasion, a debate arose on the use of the term, “mastery” and on the use of the state mandated standardized test. We did not always agree, but because we trusted each other, we felt free to speak our mind. At that time, it was the only reliable assessment tool that we had. Our university colleagues tended to be critical of the strategies associated with mastery learning (e.g. memorization of small bits of information). I had to explain constantly that although we were very interested in all our students learning basic skills, we certainly valued and targeted higher level learning. We did not use the standardized test to formulate curriculum.
Even so, the university perspective would still creep into conversations or written documents about our school.

On the other hand, our university colleagues were usually open to new information that came from teachers, though they did advance what we saw as their own theoretical perspectives. The university faculty tended to take a more theory-laden point of view in contrast to the practical orientation of the teachers. This difference was never completely resolved.

Communicating ideas within the school was always a challenge. Our 21st Century grant proposal allowed us seventeen half-day student releases for staff meetings. (We worked a slightly longer school day to allow for this). The Teacher Leader Coordinator had time on the agenda to provide information about the PDC project and to receive input from the staff. The TLC continually surveyed the staff on their needs and on ways to meet them. She encouraged staff to keep journals and promoted action research projects. But many people wondered why we were doing so many things at once. They wondered, for example, how the PDC project fit with the 21st Century grant project. We found it essential to point out the linkages and leverage points between what appeared to be unrelated activities. We viewed our task in terms of helping others to see the big picture. There were “forest” people, who saw the big picture, and the “tree” people, who had difficulty seeing the forest for the trees. The latter group seemed to be in the majority.

An important contribution of the University of Washington director was to nurture the people partnerships and to create a positive climate and caring culture. In each of the four years of the Partnership, we carefully planned and held a formal celebration of the year's accomplishments. This event was held at a “neutral” location, with the deliberate aim of avoiding the appearance that we were representing simply one side of the partnership. During the ceremony, we “graduated” each new cadre of student teachers. They, in turn, thanked the people who had mentored them. We all said thank you to each other. Small gifts were presented to each of our talented graduate students, who were leaving to start their teaching careers.

Important policy-makers were always invited to this event and many attended. During the year, we rotated the location of the meetings so that we could all take turns at playing host and guest. We often met in at parklike settings where we shared meals and discussed professional issues, informally. We learned to appreciate our professional colleagues as unique individuals. A good laugh was an important tonic, and we developed a shared humor related to the difficulties we sometimes encountered in the project.

One of the biggest hurdles I encountered was how to convince our new superintendent that he should continue to support our professional development activities with the district's $10,000 contribution. Within days of our selection as a PDC site, the district had hired an outstanding new superintendent. He was an excellent leader, but he had no experience working with the Puget Sound Educational Consortium, and he had strong feelings about equitable distribution of resources to schools in the district. Each spring, I faced the difficult task of justifying this expense to other middle school principals, who were openly hostile to it. A more formal commitment with the University (or the Consortium) by the retiring superintendent would have been helpful in securing continued support.

When the formal partnership with the middle school program ended, we continued our role as a partner school. As principal, I continued to see new student teachers come into our program, and the site supervisor continued to support them although no longer as the official supervisor. The teacher leader coordinator continued her excellent teacher leadership work, even though her official title had disappeared. Our staff development, under the mandates set by the district and state government, began to focus heavily on the new state standards and performance assessment procedures. The implementation of a training program specifically for middle level teachers is again on hold. Perhaps, in the future, a new group of leaders will revive it.

Several years after the Puget Sound Professional Development Center project had formally ended, the University of Washington project director recalls running into the two teacher leaders from College Place Middle School at a National Middle School Conference. They were very glad to see each other. This was a meeting of friends. They had worked hard together to actualize an important shared vision for middle level schools. They found that as they shared memories and talked about the project that they still felt very wounded that this effort had died. It was difficult to talk about their work together because it had meant so much to them. Nevertheless, the partnerships and relationships that the Project helped create have survived beyond the demise of the official partnership. Over the years, the original participants have managed to stay in touch professionally, and they know they can count on each other when important work needs to be done. All are still involved in various ways in teacher or principal preparation, professional growth and school renewal.

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