

Micro Journal of Education & Human Development

Volume 2, Issue 1, 2008

University and School District Grant Collaboration: How to Avoid a Logistical Nightmare

Debra Cook-Hirai, Associate Professor, California State University, Bakersfield, dhirai@csub.edu

Emilio Garza, Assistant Professor, California State University, Bakersfield, egarza6@csub.edu

Abstract

The article describes how to better establish collaboration between a university and school districts. The article expresses the experiences the authors had with initiating and implementing a staff development research grant with a high school district. Research is presented that supports the collaboration process. Discussion on the issues is addressed and some recommendations are given to anyone doing this type of grant collaboration with a school district. The recommendations are based on the authors' professional and personal experience in implementing the grant.

Definition of Collaboration

Collaboration between colleges and school districts does not usually occur because it is a "good thing" or for the simple reason that it would benefit students. It usually is forced through some type of external funding which is a state or federal mandate. The end result, however, of any type of collaboration is a "good thing", as agencies work together to enhance student achievement. Effective collaboration, where all stakeholders feel that their participation is critical and valued, is not easy to accomplish.

Organizations which are involved in partnerships are more likely to succeed if certain conditions are met. The organizations must have adequate resources, financial and human; to address the complex needs of the program. Partners must devote time and energy to meeting goals and developing a positive relationship. Moreover, they must periodically assess the effectiveness of the partnership. They must also be supported by the highest level administrator in each organization. Despite the busy nature of K-12 schools and universities, ongoing communication within and between the participating organizations is essential for the partnership to work. (Glickman, 2002)

Michael Fullan (2006) states that as educators become more confident in their collaborative role, they become more confident to take the risk and actually involve others in the process of educating our youth, which, in turn, increases the chances for success for them. He also states: "leadership is not about making clever decisions. ... It is about energizing other people to make good decisions and do better things." The purpose of collaboration is to energize and influence people to do things for students using all resources which in turn will, on the long run, impact the organizations.

Description of Collaborative Grant

The authors were "energized" when they received a nearly one million dollar, four year grant from CPEC (the California Post-Secondary Education Commission) in October, 2005. This grant required collaboration between the California State University, Bakersfield, the School of Education and School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics within the University and the Delano Joint Union High School District. Project CALLI (Cognitive Academic Language Literacy Instruction), the grant, focused on developing a research based professional development for Math and Science teachers which would increase student achievement in the district. The comprehensive goal was not only to close the achievement gap for low-income, low-performing students, but also to produce a replicable model for professional development training geared at increasing the use of academic language in the Math and Science classrooms which could be used for all low-performing schools in the State of California.

Research data on student achievement, teacher effectiveness and student motivation was gathered throughout the first three years of the grant by examining student achievement, observing teachers in the classroom, and through the use of teacher and student surveys. This was all done during the implementation years. The last year of the grant or fourth year will be spent analyzing data and reporting research back to the local community and the state.

Gathering commitments for collaboration even before the grant application is submitted can be problematic. Every grant has specific timelines for submission and it seems as though there is never enough time to meticulously and collaboratively fulfill all the requirements for the grant. In the authors' case, they had a difficult time obtaining a four year commitment for the research piece which was an inherent stipulation for our grant. Agencies are no longer just giving away funding with the expectation that the professional development training provided will be effective. Grant recipients are increasingly required to demonstrate, through research, that the results of the training are exactly what were stipulated in the grant application. This experience validates that in order to facilitate this part of the collaboration; it is helpful to already have an established relationship with a research agency or person who can assist with these functions.

Obtaining commitment from the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics was relatively easy. Because CSUB is a teaching institution, many of the undergraduate and graduate classes in math and science focus on teacher preparation. Several subject-matter preparation faculty were willing to collaborate with the School of Education on this grant. The collaboration is forging a deeper understanding of subject matter preparation curriculum and teacher education preparation curriculum, which in turn helps the local educational agencies too. Collectively, much information was shared as knowledge exchange and preparation of the joint professional development training sessions for the teachers in the school district took place. The authors were actually quite surprised at how much the Education faculty learned about building subject matter expertise in math and science and how much the Math and Science faculty learned from the Education faculty. It was enlightening for all and very beneficial for our students and teacher candidates.

On the other hand, gathering commitment from a local education agency (LEA) appears to be easy. There are many LEA's who are low-performing with a low-income population who would welcome additional funding to train their teachers to become more effective. Although the LEA does sign off on the budget sheet for the grant application and is made aware of the financial commitment on the part of the district to participate in the grant (for some grants), they often do not know what other commitments are involved. With this agreement to collaborate come clearly defined roles and responsibilities. These may include release time for teachers, in-kind contributions, moving summer school schedules or other district scheduled training to accommodate grant training, regularly scheduled meetings with grant personnel to discuss the progress of the grant, possible observations in the classroom to determine if the training is being implemented, release of student achievement information, along with other issues which may arise during the professional development training, implementation and information gathering for the research to determine the effectiveness of the grant. These commitments need to be clearly explained to the LEA at the outset.

Role of Administration in Collaboration Grants

Initially, one can expect to receive open acceptance for the grant collaboration at the local educational agency. As you begin to ask for more and more information, administrator time commitment and teacher time commitment, the grant collaboration will become, understandably so, more of an imposition than an additional support in the every day process of educating our youth. At this point, one needs to emphasize the effect of shared decision making and the importance of holding regular meetings with the administration to exchange information with them of not only what has been accomplished through the grant training, but the logistics of planning what will happen in the next few months. In order for the school administration to support the efforts of the grant, they need to be cognizant of the goals the grant is trying to achieve, what has already been accomplished and exactly what type of training the teachers are receiving. One

also needs to have a shared vision of how to accomplish the grant goals as one plans future grant activities. After establishing the initial parameters for collaboration with the local educational agency and institute of higher education, continuing them is a matter of ongoing, open and informative two-way communication.

The likelihood of having administrators attend the grant training is often not very probable. Administrators are plagued with many demands on their time and the grant, which was mutually agreed upon, may not always be a top priority, unless there is an atmosphere of ongoing and continual shared collaboration. In order to compensate for this factor, grant personnel need to maintain regular open communication with the school administrators regarding the implementation and activities of the grant.

Role of Teachers with Collaboration Grants

Even though this is an opportunity for teachers to improve instruction in their classroom, demands on their time are, perhaps, greater than those of administrators. More than likely the District that is willing to collaborate with you (low income and low performing) also has a high teacher turnover. Even if they do not, one still has to work with many new teachers as our school enrollments continue to increase. New teachers are often completing their credential classes, are expected to attend beginning teacher support training sessions, have other professional development training their district may require, may be asked to participate in after school activities, and have to spend an exhaustive amount of time preparing for their classes. Now, they are asked to attend another 80 hours or so of training in addition to their other commitments.

In order to expect that teachers attend the training, not necessarily commit to implement training, one must first offer the training at a time that is feasible for them. With No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates every minute of classroom time is spoken for. That leaves you with weekends or holidays. Holidays are a protected commodity, for good reason. If you pay teachers enough (not \$100 or \$200 per day, but their per diem rate) they may attend on Saturdays. In our case the grant could only pay \$200 per day. The school District superintendent deemed our training to be a top priority so she committed another \$100 per teacher, per day of training, to be paid to the teachers. In order to receive that type of support, you will have to successfully communicate the importance of your training and teacher participation. The superintendent also moved summer school time schedule for the students to accommodate having the teachers attend one week of training during the summer with our grant. More teachers participate during this week than any other time during the school year. This is what administrative support can do to assist you in the implementation of your grant activities.

Teacher attendance is one issue, to achieve successful teacher collaboration; teachers must be committed to implementation of the training. In order to accomplish this, grant facilitators need to carefully plan the professional development to meet the needs of the teachers in the classroom so that they increase the achievement of their students. Giving the teachers incentives for their classroom (books, supplies, etc.) also helps to increase their commitment. Money alone is not enough to garner commitment, teachers need to recognize the value of the training and the relevancy of the training to their subject matter needs in order to want to implement it.

Another positive aspect of teacher commitment and collaboration is implicit in their lesson reflections and peer coaching. The process of ensuring that educators take what they have learned from the sessions and actually implement it at the school site needs to be reviewed. Susan Imel (1992) suggests, based on her analysis of many other researcher's works, that reflection must include not only the knowledge of a given instructional practice, but also the application of the use of that strategy. This would include the implementation of the training. (Borrego and Hirai, 2003)

To conclude, the following chart summarizes seven key factors for grant collaboration:

DO'S	DON'T'S
1. Conduct face to face interviews with LEA administrators prior to the grant application to clearly define the depth of their commitment (and that of their teachers)	1. Try to elicit a commitment to collaborate over the phone from the LEA and just have them "sign off" without clearly defining their role
2. Have an established relationship with several research agencies or individuals before applying for the grant. Grant submission timelines are too short!	2. Don't try to elicit collaboration for research to demonstrate the effectiveness of your grant during the grant submission time. The grant is often a long term commitment and if you do not have an established relationship with an agency, trying to find an agency will be difficult.
3. Establish and <i>maintain</i> a good rapport with subject matter faculty in your institution—this involves including them in the grant planning and decision making through timely communication	3. Expect last minute cooperation from subject matter faculty.
4. Initiate and continue shared decision making with all participants	4. Unilaterally make budget or program decisions without collaborative input.
5. Include adequate resources to compensate all parties (including teachers) for their time and commitment to the partnership	5. Undercut your budget for teachers, university faculty, staff, or administrative (LEA) compensation
6. Conduct and share ongoing research which demonstrates the effectiveness of your grant collaboration and activities	6. Wait until the last minute to gather data to demonstrate grant effectiveness.
7. Involve the teacher's union at onset, especially in the commitment of the teachers' time and the manner in which you generate information (classroom observations) in order to determine grant training effectiveness.	7. Take the teacher's union for granted and assume that all specified teachers will participate or that it is OK to observe them in the classroom to annotate how the training affects instruction.

References

Borrego, I. and Cook- Hirai, D. (June, 2003) *Classes on Camera* Language Magazine, The Journal of Communication and Education Volume 2, No. 10 Delta Systems, McHenry, IL

Cook-Hirai, D. and Garza, E. (2005). *ELDPI Staff Development Model/Delano Joint Union High School District Grant "Cognitive Academic Literacy Language Instruction"*, California Post Secondary Education Commission\ Site 5 July 2008://www.cpec.ca.gov/FederalPrograms/ITQ301abstract.pdf

Fullan, Michael (Nov., 2006) *Leading Professional Learning*, School Administrator 63 no10 10-14.

Glickman, Carl D. (May, 2002) *The Courage to Lead*, Educational Leadership Vol.59, Issue No. 8
41-4

Imel, Susan (1989) Teaching Adults: Is it Different? *Eric Digest* No. 82 Columbus: ERIC
Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction
Service No. ED 346319).