

# A Tale of Two Cultures: Schools and Universities in Partnership for School Reform and Student Success

Adrianna Kezar

## Abstract

*School and university partnerships are a key strategy for reforming education and increasing college going. Successful programs such as GEAR UP demonstrate the need to expand these relationships. Yet, practitioners find it is difficult to work between these two very different contexts. This paper explores successful practices for navigating between the university and school cultures such as ensuring leadership, developing a shared vision, creating memorandum of understanding, conducting extensive planning and evaluation.*

School and university partnerships have received a great deal of attention in recent years as part of the school reform movement, but have a long history dating back to the late 1800s (Sirotnik and Goodlad 1988). While the purpose of these partnerships varies from increasing access to college, to capacity building for schools, to providing a laboratory for research for universities, to the development of better policy, to aligning educational processes, the most prevalent goal is school reform. For example, GEAR UP partnerships between colleges and schools were established to prepare at-risk students, who showed academic promise, for college. Although the program is not available to all students, it benefits the entire school by creating other significant changes such as promoting a college-going culture, providing additional information to counselors, and raising teacher expectations of students (Hyman 1995; Lockwood 1996). The creation of professional development schools through efforts such as the Holmes partnership serves as another example. Universities work more closely with school settings to prepare teachers and administrators who become better trained and can lead school reform because they have a grounded understanding of the issues schools face.

This trend toward developing school-university partnerships intensified in the early 1990s as research demonstrated that such partnerships had important outcomes for schools, students, and communities and were achieving the goals of school reform (Ascher 1988; Davis 1996; Lockwood 1996). Studies identified that school-university partnerships led to improved test scores (Greenberg 1992; Maeroff, Callan, and Usdan 2001; State Higher Education Executive Officers 2003; Timpane and White 1998); helped at risk students (Ascher 1988; Davis 1996; State Higher Education Executive Officers 2003); improved teacher pedagogical knowledge and skills (Goodlad 1993; Greenberg 1992; Lemma, Ferrara, and Leone 1998; State Higher Education Executive Officers 2003); enhanced innovative practices (Goodlad 1993; Greenberg 1992;

Lemma, Ferrara, and Leone 1998; Maeroff, Callan, and Usdan 2001; Osguthorpe 1999); and led to higher retention, graduation and college going rates (Greenberg 1992; Maeroff, Callan, and Usdan 2001; State Higher Education Executive Officers 2003). While studies are mixed, the overall picture suggests that they make a difference and are worth the effort and investment (State Higher Education Executive Officers 2003). Sirotnik and Goodlad (1988), who worked with and studied school-university partnerships for over three decades, suggest that school and university partnerships are so powerful in creating school reform and student success because they bring together the creators and appliers of knowledge and lead to renewal and innovation for both parties.

Though school and university partnerships have a long history and may bring many benefits, their effective creation does not always come easily (Lockwood 1996; Saxton 1997; Sirotnik and Goodlad 1988; Teitel 1991). Several studies document the challenges and tensions that emerge when schools partner with universities. Researchers have attempted to address the problem of creating and maintaining effective school-university partnerships through a variety of approaches including developing a taxonomy of approaches (Smith and Wohlstetter 2004), studying practices of successful partnerships (Button, Ponticell, and Johnson 1996; Mattessich and Murray-Close 2001; State Higher Education Executive Officers 2003; Sirotnik and Goodlad 1988), evolution of partnerships (Lockwood 1996; Wohlstetter, Smith, and Malloy 2005), delving into challenges and trying to identify strategies to overcome them (Lemma, Ferrara, and Leone 1998; Lockwood 1996; Pugach and Johnson 2002; Rafferty 1994; Sirotnik and Goodlad 1988; Timpone and White 1998), and examining the perceptions of partners (Firestone and Fisler 2003; Pugach and Johnson 2002). Looking across these various studies-many which focus on problems in collaborative relationships-scholars have recently acknowledged that schools and universities appear to have distinctive cultures which lead to challenges in collaborations (Sorenson 1998). If these different cultures are not recognized, understood, and negotiated, then even using the best practices of partnership will not result in success (Sirotnik and Goodlad 1988). In fact, Sirotnik and Goodlad (1988) posit that the cultural clash is one of the most significant challenges of school-university partnerships.

In this article, I examine the issue of cultural differences between school and university environments. While a few studies have examined this issue (Case, Norlander, and Reagan 1993; Firestone and Fisler 2003; Sandholtz and Finan 1998; Sorenson 1998), no scholarship has looked at practices that can be capitalized on to bring these two cultures closer together. Drawing on existing research, I suggest that school-university partnerships create a new, shared culture for the two organizations. Lemma, Ferrara, and Leone (1998) came to a similar conclusion after being engaged in a school-university partnership over an eight year period.

For partnerships to succeed, it is almost as if individual cultures need to be suspended and a new one created that is built upon a shared vision. We needed to be to the creators of this new culture in which we tested innovations, solved problems, and found ways to consolidate our learning. We needed to take time for reflection, collaboration, and building positive relationships and a clear

understanding of our goals. It helped that we were involved in structured activities that put us in close contact and provided opportunities for knowing each other beyond superficial niceties. We learned to share responsibilities and operate from a more equitable and trusting relationship, each of us seeing our expertise as ways to encourage and empower the other. We both were willing to take on new roles and were committed to making the partnership work. (p. 9)

Despite these insights, their study did not detail the process or practices that helped them reach the shared culture. In this article, I provide the road map for school-university partnerships to blend and develop a new culture. First, I provide a definition of collaboration and partnerships which demonstrates why an examination of culture is important. Second, I describe some of the unique characteristics of school versus university environments which results in distinctive cultures. Third, I review how cultural differences can result in problems such as lacking trust, poor communication, or differing and incompatible goals. The majority of the article focuses on strategies for bridging the two cultures and potentially creating a merged culture by generating a shared vision, conducting intensive planning, creating communication strategies, and developing clear policies and roles. The article ends by examining how partnerships between schools and universities typically move through three phases: exploration, commitment, and institutionalization. If leaders understand that collaboration develops and evolves over time, they have a better chance of creating lasting and successful partnerships.

## **Understanding Collaboration and Partnerships**

Before looking at the culture of schools and universities, it is important to define the notion of collaboration and partnerships and to distinguish it from other related concepts. What will become apparent is that collaboration involves a commitment to shared values, goals, and assumptions and that this type of deep level of engagement requires organizations to negotiate culture. Scholars studying school and university partnerships distinguish between networks, coordination/cooperation, and collaboration. Networks are not deliberately designed, do not necessarily have shared goals, and depend more on the exchange of information and ideas. Cooperative arrangements are usually more formal than networks and may involve some memorandum of agreement or formal structures. They typically involve coordination in which partners share information or work on tasks together, but usually do not fundamentally alter their work (Hagadoorn 1993; Lockwood 1996). The school and partnering organization typically have independent goals, but better achieve their goals through a coordinated approach. Networks and coordination are not designed with change in mind.

Partnerships/collaboration involve joint goals and a reliance on each other to accomplish them. Under this model, collaborators try to align goals and identify an identical mission, such as preparing children for college. They try to work at a more fundamental level, which entails joint planning and power sharing (Hagadoorn 1993; Lockwood 1996). Issues of culture become particularly important when schools and universities collaborate and develop partnerships. However, since organizations more

typically engage in coordination and networks, educational leaders are often unprepared to examine cultural issues that are particularly important to school and university partnerships.

## **Universities and Schools as Distinctive Cultures**

Within the organizational literature, one of the most cited reasons for failed partnerships is differing organizational cultures that represent distinct systems and approaches to working together (Davis 1996; Foster-Fishman et al. 2001; Tjosvold and Tsao 1989). For example, a university might believe that parents should be an instrumental part of counseling a student while the school might feel that parents should not be included. If these dissimilar assumptions are not identified and discussed openly, they may lead partners to believe that they have separate goals. Examining how a common aim can be reached by diverse approaches and developing a compromise are important steps toward creating successful partnerships (Lockwood 1996). A history of poor interaction between the partners (which may exist between universities and schools, particularly in urban areas) can exacerbate these misunderstandings and erect barriers that need to be addressed and overcome before the partnership can move forward successfully (Davis 1996; Teitel 1991; Lockwood 1996).

If culture is so important to success in school-university partnerships, why is it seldom a focus of research or practice? Some suggest that an assumption of similarity between schools and universities is the reason why culture is rarely addressed. Studies have found that school and university partners think that they have a common culture and values because they both come from educational settings (Sorenson 1998; Selke 1996). School administrators and university leaders were much more likely to perceive and address culture if they were collaborating with a business or government agency which they perceived as different (Sorenson 1998; Selke 1996). Researchers have noted how this lack of acknowledgment or understanding about the distinctive cultures between schools and universities leads to barriers and problems in working together (Sorenson 1998; Selke 1996). Some authors discovered that when schools collaborate with faculty outside of schools of education, there is even more success because they assume there will be a difference in culture with mathematics faculty (in contrast to educational faculty with whom they believe they share a similar culture). This awareness of difference made the partners spend more time on partnership development, the creation of common language and communication, development of trust, and other practices that helped to develop a shared culture.

A few studies have documented and/or suggested differences between university and school cultures related to areas such as work tempo, work focus, rewards, degree of power and autonomy, socialization, and values (Selke 1996; Sorenson 1998). In general, schools are described as cultures of practice and universities are described as cultures of theory. In schools, practicality is emphasized; strategies developed need to be transferable to classroom activities. School teachers value immediate, concrete applications and solutions. Universities have a history of separating academic and practical realms and valuing generalizable, basic and theoretical knowledge over

practical context-based knowledge. Schools tend to operate at an extremely rapid pace and decisions and judgment need to be made immediately while faculty tend to have time to read, reflect, and engage in thoughtful inquiry. Professorial work is determined more by individual calendar than by community rhythms as it is in schools. As Selke (1996) notes, the definition of time may differ as a result: “a long time might mean years to a professor and weeks to a teacher” (p. 8). Teachers and school personnel have highly structured work arrangements while faculty have a great degree of autonomy and independence. In addition, Sirotnik and Goodlad (1988) discovered that university reward systems repeatedly prevent faculty from engaging in school and university partnerships; engagement with community was not valued in the promotion and tenure processes. Reward systems within schools favor collective action and it is highly unlikely for teachers to be fired. Conversely, faculty engage in a long and individualistic socialization process, tenure requirements reward them for individual accomplishment solely, and they compete for limited tenure spots. Rewards are more competitive and challenging for university faculty. Universities traditionally value basic research, academic freedom and autonomy, and high academic standards and ideals. In contrast, schools are oriented towards practical knowledge, collaboration, and development of students more so than high academic standards. Schools tend to value affiliation, cooperation, and teamwork more than universities (Sorenson 1998). This is not an exhaustive list of differences, but surprisingly few studies have been conducted.

One explanation for this lack of research is that generic studies are not helpful, and that collaborators in the partnerships need to conduct cultural analysis as they begin their work. Scholars and partners in university-school partnerships suggest that each individual school and university culture varies tremendously (Firestone and Fisler 2002; Sorenson 1998). Therefore, the general principle that cultural differences are significant is emphasized and practices for conducting case by case cultural analyses are described as the implications within studies of school and university culture. Some university environments value and reward collaboration while others do not. Two environments might value collaboration but have different approaches for achieving collaboration based on their culture (Sorenson 1998).

Additionally, Firestone and Fisler (2002) remind us that cultures are complex and examining culture at the macro level (institutional cultures of the school and university) often hides many of the cultural differences that operate at the micro level among particular subgroups of faculty on campus or administrators or teachers in the schools. Their research suggests that cultural differences and politics that operate at this level are often more significant for partners to understand rather than global differences within school or university environments. Values, conflict, and goals need to be examined across and within institutional boundaries at the micro level.

Cultures are also not static. Universities are undergoing changes that might make their cultures more aligned with schools over time. For example, action or participatory research is gaining legitimacy on many campuses and this process, which blends theory and practice and suggests working more directly with practitioners, is an approach that might help blend university and school cultures (Catelli 1995; Rafferty

1994; Frankham and Howes 2006). In addition, applied research has gained legitimacy and is considered in the promotion and tenure process almost equally with basic research at some universities (Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt 2005). These changes in rewards and values provide incentives for college faculty to work with schools. Also, there is a national movement for colleges and universities to be more engaged with their communities, reflected by the fifteen hundred presidents belonging to Campus Compact-an organization dedicated to prioritizing campus outreach to communities and schools (Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt 2005). There is growing presidential and administrative support for faculty who are engaged with their communities in research, teaching, service, and institutional rewards and recognition are changing to reflect these priorities (Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt 2005). On some campuses, promotion and tenure requirements may not highly reward these partnerships, but merit pay and other arrangements provide incentives for faculty to engage with the community. The university environment differs greatly from when Sirotnik and Goodlad (1988) conducted their studies in the 1970s and 1980s and found that basic research and the “publish or perish” system were strongly in place. Schools are changing as well-the emphasis on creating learning communities within schools reflects a concern that educators do not have enough time to reflect and to modify their practice (Myers 1995). These changes are important for school leaders to be familiar with as they provide leverage to create and sustain partnerships with universities. In addition, campus leaders need to examine their own culture to identify ways their reward systems, values and mission, and campus structures support (or do not support) school-university partnerships.

## **Why Care about Distinctive Cultures?**

Different organizational cultures create challenges that make partnerships difficult such as different goals, lack of trust, and poor communication. A few of the many challenges that result from distinctive and clashing cultures are described next.

**Different Goals.** Universities and schools often come to partnerships with different goals and the assumption of similar cultures which often prevents them from surfacing these differences and working through them (Barringer and Harrison 2000; Lockwood 1996; Whetten 1981). Studies of failed school-university partnerships repeatedly identify differing goals as the reason the partnership dissolved (Lockwood, 1996). For example, schools might want to improve graduation rates while college faculty want a laboratory for trying out a new curriculum; schools hope to improve teacher in-service training and college faculty want to see if distributed leadership works. These differences in goals lead to strain and dissolve the partnership over time.

**Lack of Trust.** Perhaps the most prevalent finding in the research for why university-school partnerships fail is a breakdown in trust-which is linked to not understanding or valuing each other’s culture. One (or both) of the partners begins to doubt the other’s intentions or ability to sustain or contribute to the partnership (Bridges and Husbands 1996; Foster-Fishman et al. 2001; Haskins, Liedtka, and Rosenblum 1998; Lockwood 1996). Trust is also sometimes lacking due to a poor history between the groups,

stereotypes that groups have of each other, and historical isolation of parties from one another. This is exacerbated when there is inadequate time up front to develop relationships and understand each other's culture, when there is top-down governance that does not seek input from the other partner, or when there is a lack of mutuality, which often occurs when university partners dictate the parameters of the partnership. In a study of school-university collaborations (Sirotnik and Goodlad 1988), the researchers describe the role that trust plays: "No one predicted that so many pent-up fears and doubts due to previous experiences would have to be overcome before the intended collaborative work could even begin" (p. 139). This pattern was found in every partnership studied over their three decades of work. Trust is more important in collaborative arrangements, since the partners feel that more is at stake because their goals and mission are linked.

**Poor Communication.** Communication between and among parties is essential at every stage of the partnership. Poor communication often results in failure and dissolution of the partnership (Barringer and Harrison 2000; Lockwood 1996; Oliver 1990). Research has also identified a link between healthy or functional communication and understanding of each partner's culture. There needs to be respect for different approaches and an agreement on a mutual approach for communication within the partnership. Faculty often critique and are pessimistic about concepts; school personnel are problem-oriented and hopeful, for example. As these communication styles interact, there is a high chance for misunderstanding and a break down in communication if the two styles are not negotiated and school/university leaders do not help to bring these two approaches together. If partners can understand each others' organizational cultures, they are much more likely to successfully create joint goals, trust each other, and develop healthy communication patterns. Awareness of culture has significant consequences for successful partnerships and providing the foundation for effectiveness.

## **Strategies for Negotiating Distinctive Cultures**

How can school and university partnerships negotiate each other's cultures and possibly move from two distinctive cultures to a new shared culture? Research suggests some promising practices that partnerships can implement that can make a difference in collaboration and in creating a mutual culture (Sandholtz and Finan 1998). While distinctive cultures might remain, these practices have proven effective in navigating between different cultures. Not all joint projects require that cultures be negotiated, but deep and meaningful partnerships that result in school reform and substantial progress on student success typically do. Table 1 provides an overview of how each strategy addresses the three common problems that create cultural clashes.

**Table 1**

Strategies to address common problems of partnerships related to culture	Trust	Mutual goals	Communication
Convener	X	X	X
Shared Vision		X	X
Intensive Planning	X	X	X
Vehicles for communication	X		X
Clear policies	X		X
Evaluation	X		X

Throughout the rest of this article, I refer to a fictional partnership between a university and a school to help illustrate the various strategies that organizations might utilize. The partnership, entitled “*Working Together for Student Success*,” is focused on increasing college going among high school students by creating a college going culture within the school. The partnership is part of the outreach and recruitment efforts of the university and involves research with the school on the part of university researchers and changes in practices at the schools (such as new counseling techniques, mentoring, revised curriculum, modified teacher expectations) and at the university (such as new academic enrichment program, mentoring, scholarships and a revised admissions and financial aid process). I will now review the promising practices and explain how they work to make “*Working Together for Student Success*” into a healthy and lasting partnership.

**Ensure leadership/convener.** A variety of studies have demonstrated that a boundary-spanning role, often described as a liaison or convener, may be one of the most critical elements in creating a shared culture or helping two distinctive cultures to understand each other (Firestone and Fisler 2002; Sirotnik and Goodlad 1988; Stevens 1999). This individual serves as a link or bridge between the two communities, speaking both languages and helping them to understand each other. The creation of mutual goals and the planning process are often compromised because individuals from the two distinctive cultures do not understand each other well enough to create a shared language. The boundary spanner should take responsibility for monitoring the collaboration, maintaining communication, building positive group dynamics, resolving conflicts, ensuring that barriers are overcome, and creating facilitators for moving the partnership forward (Stevens 1999). A variety of partnerships have failed because they had no leader who could play this boundary-spanning role. In the example of “*Working Together for Student Success*,” the convener is the director of the office of community relations at the university who keeps in contact with the admissions office and understands the higher education culture, but who also works directly with the school and understands school culture having worked in a nonprofit agency prior to coming to the university. Given her key position and background, she

is able to maintain communication, negotiate mutual goals, and build trust-addressing all of the three challenges that typically results from distinctive cultures.

One pitfall of choosing a convener is that the project becomes the property or responsibility of that one person (for example, a principal), as opposed to the teachers and staff, which can also strain the partnership. However, several studies caution against distributed leadership for partnerships, especially in the beginning, because it can be too chaotic-especially when the process requires a focused effort at creating a shared or mutual culture with common goals (Firestone and Fisler 2003). Distributed leadership has a tendency to create different interest groups with multiple goals. While researchers are not trying to encourage hierarchical leadership, they note that a charismatic or transformational leader that plays a boundary-spanning role is particularly important for school and university partnerships (Firestone and Fisler 2002). A convener is important for the ongoing work of collaborative partnerships, but particularly so at the beginning of partnerships to convince individuals to engage in the activity (Wood and Gray 1991). Schools are often guided by routine behaviors, and working with a university disrupts the routine that teachers and staff have established. A leader, such as the principal or dean, who describes the importance of partnering at its inception is key to success.

**Develop clear, mutually derived, and attainable goals and a shared vision.** A shared culture between schools and universities is facilitated by creating clear expectations and goals (Bridges and Husbands 1996; Davis 1996; Foster-Fishman et al. 2001; Googins and Rochlin 2000; Greenberg 1992; Lockwood 1996; Mattessich and Murray-Close 2001; Nichols and Kayongo-Male 2003; Whetten 1981). Many studies suggest that it is important to begin with a needs assessment. Using our example of “*Working Together for Student Success*,” the two groups should try to determine jointly through a needs assessment what the particular problems are-why is there not a college-going culture (no college going curriculum, substance abuse, lack of expectations about college going) and how the organizations or groups can best work together to define solutions. While a needs assessment is one approach, other strategies can work as well. Ultimately, leaders need to decide on an approach for moving toward clear, mutually developed goals. Partnerships may not succeed unless the organizations jointly agree on the nature of and ways to solve the problem and create goals related to its resolution. Often groups assume that they have similar goals (e.g., preparing students for college). However, a community’s specific problems and their solutions are often very different than what may be taken for granted, and the partnering organizations continue to believe that they see the situation similarly. Conducting a needs assessment is a way of getting beyond the assumptions of each group and making joint goals based on data. In addition, the partners need to be convinced that working together is the best way to meet their identified objectives. For example, some college preparation programs at universities consider mentoring the key to student success, while school systems focus on writing instead. If they decide to work together on a program to increase rates of college going, their efforts may be thwarted if the school and university do not first discuss their differing visions.

After mutually developing clear goals, leaders within the organizations should examine their resources, decide if the goals are attainable, and determine how each party can contribute. Through this process, expectations about the work of each partner should be formally discussed and put into writing. As a result of a needs assessment and the development of mutual goals, a shared vision is typically created. Several researchers suggest that after finishing a needs assessment and statement of goals, partnering organizations might draft a statement of expectations of each partner and a formal vision statement to guide the partnership (Bridges and Husbands 1996; Foster-Fishman et al. 2001; Greenberg 1992; Lockwood 1996; Mattessich and Murray-Close 2001; Nichols and Kayongo-Male 2003). The sum total of these practices help the two organizations to move from two distinctive cultures toward a new shared culture with a common vision and mutual understanding of the issue. It also addresses the challenges that destroy partnerships such as incompatible goals and lack of trust.

**Conduct intensive planning.** While the needs assessment, development of goals, and a shared vision help the two organizations to navigate and understand each other, partnerships require an even longer planning phase if they are to create a shared culture. While a shared culture may not always be necessary, schools and universities may find it beneficial if they are developing a long-term partnership. This phase should move beyond developing a shared vision to an implementation plan that outlines how the organizations can best work together to reach their objectives (Barringer and Harrison 2000; Davis 1996; Foster-Fishman et al. 2001; Googins and Rochlin 2000; Greenberg 1992; Mattessich and Murray-Close 2001; Oliver 1990; Susman-Stillman and Schirvar 2000). One of the implementation plan's elements might include a feasibility study that determines any additional costs to conduct the partnership's work. Two other best practices are providing appropriate funding and human resources for supporting the partnership. A feasibility study can help partners ensure that these are provided later. In addition, many researchers suggest a formal memorandum of understanding that designates the partnership's expectations, shared vision, governing arrangements, roles, and financial commitments (Bridges and Husbands 1996; Davis 1996; Foster-Fishman et al. 2001; Googins and Rochlin 2000; Greenberg 1992; Lockwood 1996; Mattessich and Murray-Close 2001; Nichols and Kayongo-Male 2003; Whetten 1981). While this may sound like a tremendous amount of work, this process saves time in the long run since it creates a new mutual culture which avoids implementation problems that could occupy staff time. For "*Working Together for Student Success*," intensive planning will be required because the leaders within the organizations are signing a memorandum of agreement and establishing long-term goals for having students from the high school attend the college and the college is offering extensive commitments such as scholarships, academic support, and mentoring.

In addition to producing an implementation plan, intensive planning serves several important functions. The extended planning time helps the school and university to understand each other's cultures, develop trust, and learn to work together-barriers that I discussed earlier. For example, schools are often highly bureaucratic while universities are more loosely coupled and political. For collaboration to be successful in the long term, each organization needs to understand and navigate the other's

culture. Intensive planning is particularly important when working with disaffected groups that feel let down by communities because more time is needed to develop trust and understanding (Lockwood 1996). For example, schools that have rarely received external help often perceive the university as critiquing their efforts at creating a college-going culture. During the planning phase, the university can assure the school that it is helping to build the school's capacity, rather than suggesting that the school is doing inadequate work.

**Create frequent, open, and ongoing communication.** School and university partnerships are sustained through communication. As noted earlier, communication gaps (i.e., not enough communication) or poor communication (i.e., hostile, vague) are noted as one of the most frequent reasons for partnerships to fail (Barringer and Harrison 2000; Davis 1996; Haskins, Liedtka, and Rosenblum 1998; Lockwood 1996; Mattessich and Murray-Close 2001; Nichols and Kayongo-Male 2003; Saxton 1997). One solution to these problems is to develop a communications plan as part of the partnership's initial implementation. A communication plan designates different vehicles of communication (e.g. newsletters, e-mail updates, and group meetings), frequency, and goals (updates on work, sharing of challenges, revisions based on feedback). An example of how a communication plan effectively works in "*Working Together for Student Success*" is a yearly retreat that is scheduled to discuss progress on addressing the dropout rate with both partners being given equal time to present their suggestions and progress. The retreat should include key university administrators from admissions, financial aid, and community outreach, and the school of education. On the school side, the principal, the college counselor, and select teachers should be invited. Often universities feel that they have more expertise because they are conducting formal research and dominate the communication avenues. The convener needs to play a key role in ensuring that mutual and respectful communication is maintained and fostered.

While formal communication built into a communication plan is important, informal communication is just as significant. This is often where honest exchange occurs and problems are identified. The leader/convener often plays a key role in communication, informally checking in with various members of the partnership. While informal communication is too hard to plan or necessarily provide advice on, successful partnerships note it as one of the key factors that organizations need to consider as it helps them to understand each other's cultures (Googins and Rochlin 2000). With our example of "*Working Together for Student Success*," school counselors should be talking to the university TRIO professionals and admissions office regularly.

Partners must also learn how to talk about racial, ethnic, and economic inequalities and their causes with candor and incorporate those discussions into their partnership development process. Schools and universities routinely face these issues, but partners may have different ways of thinking about and approaching them. This relates to understanding the partnering organizations' cultures with a specific focus on issues related to inequalities. Study after study demonstrates that if these inequalities cannot be discussed openly, trust may not develop or may take much longer to build

(Leiderman et al. 2004; Lockwood 1996; Nichols and Kayongo-Male 2003). Often an outside facilitator can help to ensure that the two groups begin to speak a common language around inequalities and to understand each other.

**Develop clear policies and roles.** After the planning phase and once the partnership is underway, schools and universities need to ensure that there are clear policies and that individuals understand their roles (Bridges and Husbands 1996; Greenberg 1992; Lockwood 1996; Mattessich and Murray-Close 2001; Nichols and Kayongo-Male 2003; Wood and Gray 1991). For example, if “*Working Together for Student Success*” is to include scholarship money, there should be a clear set of policies in place about the scholarships that both counselors and financial aid officers are aware of. One way to make certain staff are better informed is to include them in the planning phase (and within on-going policy development) at strategic intervals. Such a task might be accomplished by establishing an advisory board for a school-university partnership that is composed of select counselors, teachers, a few key school administrators as well as select faculty and university administrators and that meets a few times a year. The more people who are involved in the initial planning and goal setting, the more likely that individuals within the organization will be able to effectively enact their roles. It is not uncommon for collaborations to become derailed when leaders move on to take the next challenge, and staff remain unclear about their roles in the partnership. In other words, the culture sharing has not gone deep enough and stayed at the positional leader level. Creating a new culture means that practices and policies of school personnel and university staff need to be adjusted and changed.

**Develop clear decision-making processes.** In order for collaborating organizations to work together, they require mechanisms for joint decision-making (Barringer and Harrison 2000; Davis 1996; Mattessich and Murray-Close 2001; Nichols and Kayongo-Male 2003; Susman-Stillman and Schirvar 2000). Trust is often lost in collaborative efforts when decision-making processes appear not to be mutual, decisions appear to be capricious, inappropriate people appear to be making decisions, or one partner waits an inordinate amount of time for decisions to be made. Because trust is one of the main reasons that partnerships fail, and trust is often lost through ambiguous decision-making processes, it is particularly important that partners spend time examining their decision-making processes. In the earlier section on communication, I described how the school and university could plan a retreat yearly to ensure ongoing communication. The same venue could also be used for making significant decisions. However, decision-making will need to happen on more minor decisions on an ongoing basis. The school and university might create a small committee representing both groups that has phone calls twice a month to address regular problems and develop ongoing policy.

Leaders within schools and universities need to ask themselves questions such as:  
*Do our decision-making processes allow our partners to have input?*  
*Do we communicate our decision-making process to our partners including our rationale?*  
*Are the right people included in the decision-making process?*

*Do we communicate why these are the people making decisions to our partners?*  
*Do we prioritize decision-making that relates to our partnership?*  
*Do we make decisions on a timely basis?*  
*Do our partners understand how we make decisions?*

Partners need to ensure clear paths, appropriate timing, and the right people, and they need to demonstrate the ability to compromise and be adaptable. The organization often must examine skills among key members of the collaboration including conflict resolution, negotiation, coalition and alliance development, and listening. On one hand, decision-making processes are sites where power sharing can be demonstrated, and on the other, where power differentials can emerge. Leaders should carefully watch decision-making processes to guarantee that certain members are not exerting power in inappropriate ways (Stevens 1999). In school-university partnerships, university partners have often been found to silence and marginalize school partners in the process. Decision-making processes also reflect the partners' respect for each other. In many ways, they are pivotal for fostering trust, mutual respect, empowerment, and moving toward a shared culture (Davis 1996; Lockwood 1996). These structures will likely need to be altered as the partnership matures, so partners must guard against seeing governance as static and realize it should evolve to fit the partnership's growth (Sirotnik and Goodlad 1988).

**Conduct evaluation.** Evaluation is essential to maintaining partnerships and serves a variety of important purposes (Bridges and Husbands 1996; Davis 1996; Greenberg 1992; Oliver 1990). First, evaluation helps partners determine if they are creating a shared culture with common goals and if their processes are aligned. Second, partners will not understand if they are closer to achieving their goals unless they conduct ongoing evaluations. Partnerships are often difficult and laborious to maintain. Without evidence of the partnership's impact, it is often difficult to keep both organizations involved and to maintain momentum toward creating a new culture and working through the strains of culture clash. While evaluations may not always show success, they can identify problem areas that partners can address allowing them to get closer to meeting their goals and developing a mutual culture. Third, evaluations help identify whether staff understand their roles, if policies are clear, communication is working, and appropriate resources are available for the partnership-in other words seeing if the cultural changes are deep. Evaluations should be as inclusive as possible to obtain the necessary feedback to improve the partnership and develop a shared culture. While leaders can try to track and monitor the partnership to ensure that processes are working smoothly, most partnerships have found that without a formal evaluation some information falls through the cracks and ends up creating problems for the partnering organizations. There are several surveys and instruments that have been created to evaluate the process of partnership development, and many are available online. Within "*Working Together for Student Success*," evaluation of the number of students going on to college as well as who attend the partnering university specifically can help to ensure that the partnership is working.

# Stages in Cultural Development: Moving Toward a Shared Culture

Not all joint projects are partnerships or collaboration. Some are coordinated efforts and can use a few of the strategies above to negotiate between the school and university culture. However, if the school and university want to form a partnership and create deep, sustained and institutionalized change then they need to think about the process in stages. Research suggests that there are three stages school and universities will go through when they engage in deep partnerships: exploration, commitment, and institutionalized partnership (Davis 1996; Greenberg 1992; Lockwood 1996; Teitel 1991; Whetten 1981; Wohlstetter, Smith, and Malloy 2005). To negotiate culture differences and/or develop a shared culture, leaders should be mindful of the stages and facilitate movement from one stage to the next. Leaders also need to pace the partnership's forward movement, particularly ensuring that enough time is spent in the initial planning phase. Cultural differences emerge right away and will need to be negotiated. In addition, the foundation of a new culture is planted in the initial phase, and if this phase is not negotiated successfully, it is likely that the cultures will remain distinctive.

**Exploration.** As suggested under the best practices, an extended initial planning phase in which partners conduct a needs assessment, create formal agreements, and define roles and responsibilities is important to build trust/relationships and to create a shared culture, particularly if there is a poor history of collaboration, no history between the parties, or a perceived lack of cooperation by schools or the partnering organization (Brown 2000; Davis 1996; Lockwood 1996). This is also the stage where the school and universities need to acknowledge and understand the differences in their culture so they can manage to negotiate them. Research demonstrates that partnerships that rush through this phase usually end up with problems as they progress and a shared culture is not developed over time (Teitel 1991). Also, partners need to weigh the benefits and cost of partnerships. Both parties need to make certain that this is the right decision as it will require redirecting resources, time, and effort. There are several issues that partners should consider in a cost/benefit analysis:

- Cultural fit and shared values
- Ability to work through cultural differences
- Presence of sufficient, qualified staff for shared effort
- Level of leadership from the partnering organizations
- Assessment of prior partnering experiences
- Analysis of opportunity costs - Is this the right partner?
- Loss of organizational identity and privacy
- Bureaucracy or irritation factor
- Growth - How does the proposed partnership build capacity for each organization? (Leiderman et al. 2004).

**Commitment.** After the initial phase of extended planning, the organizations make a commitment (formal agreements such as a memorandum of understanding are

suggested to make certain that expectations are clear) to the partnership and begin to work together. In this phase, learning becomes particularly important (Haskins, Liedtka, and Rosenblum 1998; Saxton 1997). In order for the partnership to be successful, each partner must learn new ways to work together-sharing spaces, exchanging information, understanding goals, and engaging different communication styles (Lockwood 1996). Through this learning, a new shared culture emerges or the distinctive cultures learn to respect and work with each other. Leaders can also facilitate learning by checking in with staff to troubleshoot issues as they emerge. Policy development is critical in this phase for furthering the partnership and solidifying the manner in which people will work together. As earlier noted, a clear governance structure and explicit decision-making processes provide a forum for stakeholders to come together. In addition, communication is significant for maintaining commitment, building the relationship, and making initial decisions that partners both believe are effective.

**Institutionalized partnership.** The last phase of a partnership is institutionalization (Doz 1996; Foster-Fishman et al. 2001; Oliver 1990). In order to reach this stage, Doz (1996) suggests that learning is again important. At this phase, the evaluation and monitoring of the partnership is critical for making adjustments in communication patterns, governance arrangements, and other ongoing structures that enable the collaboration to be successful and for a shared culture to be created and the differences negotiated. Doz (1996) found that successfully institutionalized partnerships regularly conduct an ongoing evaluation and use this data to make changes as needed. Without an ongoing evaluation and the identification of areas for improvement, cultural clashes emerge, and partnerships become strained and are not sustained.

## Conclusion

While many school and university partnerships have struggled to be successful, we now have valuable information to guide future efforts. Among the lessons learned, one is the importance of understanding and navigating organizational culture. In addition, a set of promising practices have emerged that can help the organizations create a common culture and/or negotiate cultural differences. Lastly, research has demonstrated that partnerships progress in relatively predictable stages and that leaders who know these stages can guide their organizations through them. Scholars and practitioners who are engaged in partnerships will resonate with the ideas presented here because they emerge from the cumulative evidence and advice of those who have made it their life commitment to make school and universities mutually supportive collaborators to ensure the success of children.

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### **Author Information**

Dr. Kezar has written more than 100 articles and books on the topic of change, collaboration, leadership, and access and equity issues. She consults with universities working to create change on a range of issues including governance, community service learning, diversity, and leadership training.

Adrianna Kezar  
University of Southern California  
3470 Trousdale Pkwy, 703C  
Los Angeles, CA 90089  
E-mail: kezar@usc.edu  
Telephone: 213-821-1519