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School-University Partnerships in Action: Concepts, Cases and Concerns

Susan Day Harmison
Kansas State University

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Book Review

School-University Partnerships in Action: Concepts, Cases and Concerns, edited by Kenneth A. Sirotnik and John I. Goodlad. Teachers College Press, 1988.

As editors Kenneth A. Sirotnik and John I. Goodlad point out, the "idea of recognizing formal or informal connections between individuals, groups and/or organizations as a means of furthering the interests of at least one or more of the members is not new" to American education. Nearly one hundred years ago the Committee of Ten on Secondary Studies was brought together under the direction of Charles W. Eliot. The group consisted of five college presidents, a college professor, two headmasters of private secondary schools, a public high school principal, and the United States Commissioner of Education. The group was to address the need for a uniform requirement for college entrance. During the 1930s more than three hundred colleges joined thirty secondary schools to examine the performance of the high school graduates in the college setting. The collaboration today is known as The Eight-Year Study.

Recent studies on the state of education and the resulting reforms proposed have served to usher in a new phase of school-university partnerships. Sirotnik and Goodlad identify several reasons why such alliances are currently being formed. First, the political nature of educational reform necessitates at least a symbolic association among those who have a stake in education. Second, the shift in American society from dependence upon industry to dependence upon information and services has heightened awareness of institutional interdependency. Third, which is crucial to the thesis of the text, is the premise that positive theoretical and practical reasons for collaboration exist among institutions "struggling with related aspects of a common problem."

The editors assert that the task forces and commissions of recent years have, in their zeal to identify the sources of inefficiency in education, focused on the short

term solution of rehabilitating or replacing the individuals within the instructional setting identified as being ineffective. While conceding that the identification may be correct, Sirotnik and Goodlad suggest that an alternative approach in which individual and instructional renewal occur simultaneously is in order.

But making partnerships work for all concerned is no easy task. Kenneth Sirotnik argues that a thorough evaluative self-study by all participants must occur throughout the collaborative inquiry. Such analysis will ideally lead to the examination of practices and assumptions which have shaped educational theory and methodology and will pit them against the interests, needs, and goals of the individuals and institutions involved. From an enlightened stance, future courses of action may be logically prescribed.

Contributors Schlechty and Whitford, in their essay on shared problems of a shared vision, stress that organic relationships are needed to insure partnership success. In such relationships emphasis is placed on the common good and not the good of one faction to the exclusion or diminution of another. Issues of concern are seen as belonging not to one segment of the partnership, but as being a communal problem, shared equally among the various participants. Ideally, shared problems will result in jointly contrived solutions, providing, of course, the vision is one mutually acceptable to all involved. The variables inherent in such an undertaking are indeed disturbing, a point well taken by the authors. Drawing on the fragile nature of such an endeavor, Schlechty and Whitford propose a professionalization of teaching as a method by which the gap might be bridged.

In examining the various concepts and concerns of school-university partnerships, the editors have compiled a text replete with clarification of terminology, a brief history of partnerships, projections for future collaborations and actual case histories of school-university partnerships. Contributors aid in the examination of the successes of such enterprises as well as the inherent problems. Through careful examination of previous and existing partnerships, practical and rational guidelines for collaboration emerge.

Reviewed by Susan Day Harmison
Book Review Editor