

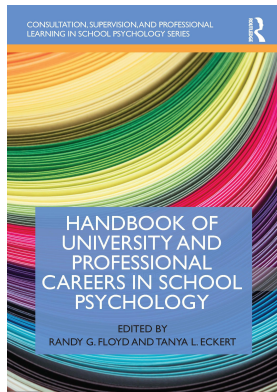
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Antoinette Halsell Miranda and Samuel Y. Song

Community engaged partnerships are rooted in the concept of community-aided public schools that existed as early as Jane Addams' Hull House, which promoted health and educational services to working immigrant families in Chicago (Campbell-Allen, Shah, Sullender, & Zazove, 2009). Underlying Addams' work was an emphasis on holistic efforts and an understanding of the interconnectedness of social issues. In today's world, these concepts remain vital components of community schools because these schools require collaboration between numerous organizations and engage community members through a democratic process (Harkavy, Hartley, Hodges, & Weeks, 2013). For example, low-income, urban communities are often stretched of their available resources and require the collaboration of their neighborhoods and communities in order to successfully improve education and health outcomes (Green & Gooden, 2014).

There are many ways communities can engage meaningfully with schools. This is especially true for urban school districts. The increasingly high expectations and goals placed on school districts require resources that can be difficult for financially strapped districts to provide. Community partnerships are a viable tool to assist schools in fulfilling many of the functions necessary to achieve the ambitious academic achievement goals set out by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Notably, ESSA is purposeful in using the term *engagement* to describe these burgeoning partnerships, which implies a process that includes "communicating to, learning from, and partnering with stakeholders that acknowledges the unique needs and strengths of the stakeholders involved" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017, p. 4). Thus, there is a belief that engagement should be meaningful, inclusive, clear, effective, and ongoing in order to support educational equity and excellence.

Traditionally, school partnerships have been described in several different ways including (a) wrap around schools, (b) full-service schools, (c) professional development schools, and (d) university-assisted community schools. Most of these partnerships aim to provide a variety of supports to vulnerable students in an effort to positively impact educational attainment. While partnerships with school districts are popular and well-intentioned, many of these efforts have not lived up to their expectations (Annenberg, 2002). There are a number of reasons these partnerships don't fulfill their promise. They include but are not limited to lack of vision, changes in leadership, lack of funding or resources, poor use of data, and non-engagement of significant stakeholders.

A task force was established in 2000, with support from the Annenberg Foundation, to examine urban school districts and ways to promote the development of school communities that are effective for students. In particular, they explored ways to create effective partnerships that were more than just collaborative but emphasized engagement. By examining effective partnerships and drawing on their own experience and research, the task force created principles that support the development and sustainability of partnerships (Annenberg, 2002). Examples of their design principles are *effective partnerships being with the ends in mind, effective*

partnerships distribute accountability among partners, effective partnerships make good use of data, and effective partnerships pool resources. These principles are to provide guidance to communities to assist them in building effective partnerships that will hopefully be long term. However, they caution that “developing effective partnerships is hard but sustaining them is harder” (Annenberg, p. 7).

Despite the difficulties in sustaining effective partnerships, there is a long history of Colleges or Schools of Education creating partnerships with local school districts to provide practicum experiences, research projects, and professional development opportunities. Ideally, these partnerships should be mutually beneficial. University programs expect that school districts and community-based agencies will provide practicum experiences in naturalistic settings, and school districts and community-based agencies expect that university programs will provide new knowledge, including evidence-based practices and resources to improve their practice. Therefore, there is tremendous potential for mutual benefits and reciprocity with these collaborations. However, as noted previously, while collaboration is important, the process of engagement between the entities is critical. Collaboration and engagement increase the probability that the partnership will be sustained and that both the university and school- or community-based parties will experience mutual benefits.

The purpose of this chapter is to feature strategies to promote and maintain community relationships that support training and engaged scholarship. The authors will describe their own personal experiences in creating partnerships and the successes as well as challenges in sustaining them. The partnerships are connected to training aspects of the program but also incorporate socially just practices. These practices take varying forms including community events, practicum sites that are chosen, and community action research. Both authors engaged in partnership-building by developing key relationships with leaders of schools. These often took several years before partnerships were actually initiated. Thus, we will detail different approaches to partnering with the community and summarize ways to sustain those connections with communities over time.

Creating Partnerships for Practicum Experiences

In school psychology, practicum experiences are a critical part of education and training. The vast majority of school psychology programs engage in practicums that occur in local school districts. While practicum experiences are a critical part of training, the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) have provided little guidance leaving “most of the defining frame to the individual program” (Li & Fiorello, 2011, p. 901). Li and Fiorello (2011) examined practicum issues in school psychology and provided recommendations for improvement at the national, state, local, and program level. Most notably, at the program level, they suggested developing written practicum agreements. Surprisingly, very little is written about the practicum experience. Yet, anecdotally trainers often discuss the trials and tribulations of developing quality training sites, creating experiences that go beyond engaging solely in assessment, and figuring out how many hours in practicum is sufficient. What is often missing is how these partnerships are created. In fact, focusing on how to build sustainable partnerships that are mutually beneficial may be the best way of creating quality practica that provides a wide range of experiences consistent with competencies outlined in the NASP and APA guidelines.

One of the challenges with creating partnerships that are built around practicum experiences is how to make sure the partnership is not one-sided, with only students gaining invaluable experience while the district provides in-kind contributions by providing supervision. Most often, the school psychology supervisor receives nothing in return. Often, they supervise because they believe in giving back as others willingly supervised them during their graduate training.

Knowing this pattern, training programs need to find creative ways to engage in collaborative partnerships in which there is mutual benefit. This can be accomplished by offering professional development, engaging school staff in action research, and providing schools and educators with resources that enhance their practice. Most importantly, the district should feel valued and believe they are an equal partner in this relationship. A description of how the first author's program developed partnerships for practicum experiences will be detailed next.

Creating Partnerships for Practicum Experiences: An Example

There is a dearth of research regarding how to identify, develop, and maintain potential partnerships. Like many programs, our practicum experiences were in multiple districts and were developed from personal relationships, most often with former students. Hands (2005) contended that developing effective partnerships in schools is challenging given "the many contextual influences and the time and energy needed to get them off the ground" (p. 81). Thus, based on examining successful partnerships between universities and schools, Hands suggested that universities should view partnership-building as a core element of the delivery of education and a fundamental means of community involvement in schooling. School psychology depends on practicum experiences including practica and internships, most often in schools, to provide the requisite skills necessary to practice competently after graduation. While practica were developed through personal relationships, there were also many challenges including varied experiences across supervisors and districts.

Because the mission and vision of the program changed to an urban and social justice focus, it was important to provide urban experiences that were consistent and complimented the program (Miranda, Radliff, & Della Flora, 2018). While placement of students already occurred in this urban district, a more formal agreement was necessary to ensure the sustainability of the partnership. This was also important as the sustainability depended on 10–15 school psychologists volunteering as supervisors in any given year. The engagement of this district that directly benefited our program required partnership cultivation. This cultivation involved four aspects: (1) personal relationships, (2) reciprocity, (3) articulated plan, and (4) flexibility.

A personal relationship by the first author with the district had long been established through the delivery of professional development, university course offerings, and research in the district. Hands (2005) posited that personal informal relationships are what often pave the way for initial contact. A long-term relationship with the school psychology department had been established initially through the development of internships. The movement toward the district being the sole placement site was possible because of the relationship that had long been established. When turnover occurred with the lead administrator of the school psychology staff, it was necessary to re-establish the relationship with the new supervisor. Of critical importance was the positive relationships that had been cultivated with the school-based supervisors of the practicum students. The goal was for the university program to become an integral part of the school psychology staff in the district.

Reciprocity can be a challenge. What do the supervisors get in return for the many hours they volunteer? A personal observation is that increasingly over the years, there is more reluctance from supervisors to agree to take on a practicum student. Unfortunately, compensation is generally not possible. However, university programs can be creative in making the relationship mutually beneficial. First, it has been our experience that many of the supervisors engage in the supervision process because they view it as an opportunity to stay abreast of the latest practices and research that is occurring in the field. Providing consistent contact is one way to demonstrate the university is invested in the partnership and recognizes the time being devoted to the practicum experience. Second, if the district receives course fee waivers in exchange for the supervisors' participation, school-based supervisors have access to these fee waivers to register

for classes at the university. Third, the university-based supervisor meets with the school psychology staff twice a year to get feedback and address concerns that may be occurring. This is in addition to the evaluation document that is distributed three times a year. Fourth, every year an appreciation luncheon is held for the supervisors that includes giveaways (e.g., university swag, books, and gift cards). We have also offered before the luncheon a short professional development seminar in which supervisors can receive continuing education units. It should be noted that supervisors do receive credit from the district for engaging in supervision that can go toward license renewal. During the luncheon, a review of the year occurs with both sides sharing things that went well and providing suggestions for possible improvements for the following year. Finally, we continue to be creative in finding ways to provide resources to the supervisors. For example, we have contributed to their school resource library and provided supervisors with university library privileges.

Cultivation of the partnerships is further enhanced by creating an articulated plan that is reviewed every year with input from the supervisors. A document is provided that outlines requirements for the students to complete over the academic year. A meeting is held at the beginning of the year with supervisors and students to review their roles and responsibilities. If students are struggling, we encourage supervisors to notify the university early so that the student can be placed on a competency remediation plan. We have found over the years that the more explicit the program can be in terms of expectations, the better the outcome for both parties.

Flexibility is also a necessary component because there are often unexpected occurrences that directly affect the practicum experience. For example, sweeping changes were instituted to the practicum experience when the school district, where the practicum experience occurred, had a scandal with respect to falsified student attendance and administrators inappropriately changing students' grades. As a result, many checks and balances were enacted in the school district that impacted the creation of practicum placements, but the new information was not clearly articulated to the program faculty. The unfortunate outcome was that much of the blame was being placed on the districts' administrators. Unfortunately, this was a highly stressful time for the district as new rules and regulations were being implemented to demonstrate to the public that reform was occurring. One of the unintended outcomes was the low morale that existed as the transgressions of a few were absorbed by all personnel in the district. The school psychology program was solution-focused and asked for a meeting with all parties involved to directly address the issue. The outcome was successful, and the true culprit of the miscommunication was identified. Our support of the administrator and our commitment to the district were important to express during the meeting in order to sustain the relationship not only with the school psychology supervisors but the district as a whole.

As previously discussed, often practicum experiences are created initially because a relationship is forged with a faculty member and someone in a district. While these relationships are important, we need to be cognizant of what happens when that faculty member leaves, retires, or moves out of the practicum space. In addition, many relationships resulted in research, engagement between college students and schools, and professional development delivered by faculty to school staff. Over time, school districts and universities have implemented regulatory policies that protect the district, their students, and the practicum students. These include required background checks and systematic procedures to approve sites and practicum students. These can be laborious and time-consuming, often adding clerical work for university-based faculty. The outcome has also been that those individual relationships now need to be formalized so that schools and universities know who is in their schools and what is being done in their schools. In some respects, we have to justify our existence in these districts and describe the mutual benefits. As a result, building sustainable relationships are more important than ever before.

While much of our engagement is around practicum experiences, we have found other ways to engage in the schools. Our ongoing partnership has allowed us to also develop and implement community projects that are consistent with our social justice mission. The Student Affiliates in School Psychology (SASP) organization in the school psychology program often adopts a family from a school in which our advanced practicum occurs. The family is identified by the principal who then provides us with the family's "wish list." The practicum students buy the gifts, wrap the gifts, and personally deliver them to the family. In the same school, the students have set up a "free store" twice a year in the parking lot of the school. This is a community event that has had wonderful attendance. The "free store" has now been combined with a community fair at the school that occurs in the spring. This event is led and organized by 4th-year doctoral students as their leadership project in collaboration with the school staff. It is a 3-hour event that generally includes the following: gently used clothing, free books by reading level, library card sign up, optometry exams, dental screenings, blood pressure and diabetes screenings, an art area for children, and back pack giveaways. The medical screenings are done in collaboration with university programs who attend as part of their service to the community commitment. Staff from the local children's hospital and community organizers assist community members with other needs they may have.

Community Action Research

Conducting action research with community members, such as a school or community activist organization, is another way to partner meaningfully with the community. It is meaningful because, by definition, *action research* must result in a change ("the action") that is important for, and carried out by, the community engaged in it (Song, Anderson, & Kuvinka, 2014). This advocacy characteristic is what sets action research apart from other similar types of collaborative research approaches, such as community-based research. Non-action community-based research would include a university and public school collaboratively researching the needs of the public school without empowering the school to make practical changes based on the research nor involving them in the entire research process; instead, the researcher typically conducts much of the research for the school. There is nothing wrong with this type of community-based research of course, but it just is not "action" research. The collaborative nature of the research process and the goal of community advocacy have its roots in the seminal work of John Dewey (1938) and Kurt Lewin (1946).

In school psychology, most of the literature on community action research has centered on the influential work of Nastasi and colleagues' Participatory Culture-Specific Intervention Model (PCSIM; Nastasi, Arora, & Varjas, 2004). This model of community action research focuses on the development of interventions (the action) that are culturally valid (i.e., implementable by the community). The PCSIM is a multiphase, multiyear, approach to program development and evaluation that involves an iterative intervention process. The phases include (a) articulating the researcher's conceptual framework based on existing theory, research, practice, and policy; (b) learning the culture; (c) establishing partnerships with key stakeholders; (d) identifying broad program goals; (e) conducting formative research on key constructs that are culturally determined; (f) developing culture-specific or local theory; (g) designing a culture-specific program; (h) implementing and evaluating the program; (i) ensuring sustainability and capacity building; and (j) disseminating and translating the program to other contexts (Nastasi et al., 2004).

There are several examples of the PCSIM approach in the literature. One group of researchers partnered with urban schools to develop an aggressive behavior prevention program (Leff et al., 2009). Additional examples include school-based mental health services within the United States (Doll, Nastasi, Cornell, & Song, 2017) and internationally (Nastasi et al., 2017). The

commonality among these is the co-construction that occurred in the action research process. In addition, the second author collaborated with a local Head Start program with the primary intention of community service through the development of an academic service learning experience in a course (Song, Thompson, & Eddy, 2020). As part of school psychology students' first term, they served this Head Start program with the goal of supporting the teachers in their classrooms, understanding their needs, and collaboratively developing "something useful" that met their needs and worked toward concrete change in their practices (via mini action research projects). This community relationship developed over the years and turned into a more in-depth community action research project that co-investigated the home-school partnership practices at the Head Start program due to several incidents of cultural misunderstandings that had occurred between the school staff and the Somali families they served. Surveys and focus groups with staff, Somali families, and practicum students revealed that this partnership was worthwhile for all stakeholders.

It is important to note that significant relationship building occurred with the director of the Head Start in the summers and throughout the year to build rapport and trust. After the 2nd year, the director left, and relationships had to be developed with the new director again. Transitions in leadership are common within urban community settings serving diverse families, and they often require additional effort to rebuild previously established relationships.

How to Partner with Communities: Lessons and Recommendations

Thus far, we have discussed the why, what, and how of community engagement. Partnering with the community is essential for school psychology programs to thrive. At a minimum, school psychology programs need to provide students with practicum and internship opportunities that provide quality experiences. The next section will highlight lessons we have learned over the years by engaging in collaborative partnerships, and we close with recommendations that will hopefully lead to quality experiences that are mutually beneficial for both parties involved.

Lessons Learned

Relationships Are Key

Relationship and trust building are the most important steps in creating partnerships (Caruso, 2000; Turley & Stevens, 2015). This is a task that is often overlooked. In fact, Turley and Stevens (2015) contended that building a partnership requires a "significant investment of time and effort" (p. 105). Partnering with the community can be beneficial to the program through enduring relationships that contribute to program development, research opportunities, and teaching opportunities through service learning. Still, before embarking on a relationship that is more in-depth than basic, it is important to remember that relationship building takes time and projects may often be interrupted due to high turnover rates among leadership and staff in community organizations. This may be frustrating and may discourage sustained efforts. It is important, therefore, to be self-reflective about your career stage and goals before entering into such a partnership. For example, if you are an assistant professor on the tenure track, a community-based action research project should probably not be the only research project that you are working on.

Diversity and Social Justice

We have found that a firm commitment to diversity and a social justice vision of school psychology assists tremendously in creating community partnerships in diverse communities. They help us to accept the frustrations without blaming the community and allow us to sustain our

efforts. For example, the second author developed relationships for 3 years with a community organization until leadership turnover occurred. This led to a stall in the community research project and required relationship building with someone new.

All accrediting organizations have standards that address diversity in a variety of ways. In keeping with APA and NASP standards, creating partnerships with diverse communities and school districts provides students with experiences in diverse communities. Undoubtedly, in some communities, it will be difficult to provide extensive experiences with diverse populations due to the lack of diversity in the community itself. Too often, urban school districts are bypassed because it can be cumbersome to create practicum experiences in them due to the procedural hoops that university-based faculty need to jump through. These barriers often occur because of district's mistrust of faculty and concerns that there will not be a benefit especially for the district. It has been helpful when the district personnel, such as the superintendent, and university administrations are committed to building a sustainable partnership.

Mutual Benefit for Both Parties

Identifying how this partnership will be mutually beneficial to both parties can and should be part of the relationship building. Both authors have found that communication is especially key in making sure it is clearly articulated what the desired outcomes are for both entities. We admit that this can be challenging to identify the benefits for the school district or community agency. Thus, it requires university faculty to listen to the perspective of the district partner and their desire to engage in the partnership. With respect to practicum experiences, as previously noted, we have found that one benefit expected of school-based supervisors is simply getting the latest information in best practice from the university. We have expanded on ways to provide that information to them through professional development, donation of books, and simply making faculty available to them when questions arise.

Recommendations

Both authors are continually seeking ways to partner with school districts and community agencies that include practicum experiences, scholarship, and service. We have included several recommendations that hopefully will enhance university-community partnerships.

One National Model for Partnership

It has been helpful to examine models of successful partnerships and adapt them to our needs. The Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania has been engaged as community partners with West Philadelphia since 1985. Their work has been instrumental in laying a foundation for the development and implementation of the university-assisted community school model. Their focus has been on effective ways to assist schools and the community in high poverty areas by providing services that benefit both students and community members. The Netter Center is the primary vehicle for engaging in this partnership work. While much of their work is through service learning, they have developed a broader model for partnerships and created a national network of partnerships across the United States. The framework has six key elements that are based on two decades of their work as well as research conducted at replication sites. The six elements identified by Harkavy et al. (2013, p. 535) are as follows:

- 1 A central office on campus that coordinates university resources. For this work to be sustained, it must become integrated into the mission of the higher educational institution and not remain the effort of a few faculty members.

- 2 Engagement across the campus that involves multiple schools and departments.
- 3 A school principal who welcomes and encourages the partnership and conveys this philosophy to the school faculty and staff.
- 4 A coordinator at the school site who is the link between the school, the community, and the higher educational institution. The coordinator may be an employee of the university, the school, or from the community.
- 5 Community school staff that are integrated into the school's operation, so that planning for and provision of supports for students, their families, and the community are as seamless as possible.
- 6 Parent and community involvement through advisory boards or other mechanisms to advise on supports needed in the school and delivery of such services.

While the Netter center is focused on building community partnerships between the University of Pennsylvania and West Philadelphia, they have also established a national and global outreach with the goal of assisting other institutions of higher education that have an interest in community partnership. Thus, they have adapted their University-Assisted Community School Model as they provide guidance to other institutions nationally as well as internationally. In 2015, because of the growing institutions involved in this work, they established a University-Assisted Community Schools Network to advance their work and provide opportunity for those institutions to share best practices. The Netter Center sponsors conferences every couple of years that highlight these partnerships and provides invaluable information on ways to partner and sustain those partnerships, especially in urban communities. Their model has a particular focus on social justice and is sensitive to the needs of diverse spaces and communities that university partners. An important aspect of their model is that the partnership be a reciprocal relationship that values the needs of what the community identifies as important. In addition, they are able to demonstrate through research the impact that these partnerships make.

An adaptation of the Netter Center model was used by the first author to create advanced practicum experiences in one urban school that was focused on providing mental health services (Miranda, et al., 2018). The goal in this practicum experience was different than the 2nd-year practicum experience previously described in this chapter, which was designed to provide students with advanced clinical skills and thus, the focus was on mental health services. (For more detailed information on the partnership, see Miranda et al., 2018.) The center, their conferences, and articles detailing their experiences, provided further guidance on best practice in developing sustainable partnerships, especially in urban communities.

Partnerships Can Lead to Assistantships

This was actually an unexpected outcome of several partnerships developed by the first author. The first author had a long-standing relationship with a local Head Start (across 25 years). The Head Start agency hired school psychology graduate students to serve as mental health consultants. Several years ago, the first author learned that her university would provide tuition waivers if an external organization paid for the stipends of graduate students completing assistantships. Because of the long-standing relationship, the Head Start agency was willing to partner with the university and pay for the stipends. While the monies were similar to what was being paid out to graduate students already, the agency saw the benefits if they engaged in a contract with the university. To support this initiative, graduate students provided 20 hours of service a week rather than only 10 hours. This was initially a challenge for the graduate students who were also engaged in their 2nd-year practicum. There were definitely some growing pains, but the long-standing relationship, the value the Head Start agency saw in partnering

with the university, and the long-term benefit for their Head Start students enabled modification of the requirements. This has definitely been a win-win for both entities across time. As a result of partnerships developed over the years, several other graduate assistantships have been created. Given the difficulty of securing grant funding, this is a viable alternative for school psychology programs interested in creating assistantships that further enhances the community partnerships.

Districts Are Seeking Partnerships

Partnerships are highly encouraged due to the challenging issues that school districts face. In the past 5 years, especially with the ESSA, school districts have increasingly requested to partner with universities and community agencies. It is clear that school districts cannot do it alone, so they are turning to universities and community organizations to assist in providing services, such as mental health services, program development, and research.

Colleges can also find other creative ways to support strong relationships with school districts. For example, at the Ohio State University College of Education and Human Ecology, the dean has created a position titled the *superintendent in residence program*, in which there are three superintendents each from urban, suburban, and rural districts. It has allowed a more fluid process in terms of identifying district needs and how the college can assist as well as gaining entry to engage in research. This relationship has also generated graduate assistantships that assisted districts in data analysis, intervention implementation, and professional development activities. The superintendents are also able to provide invaluable information about what they need, which is not always on the radar screen of academicians.

As university faculty seek grant opportunities, they often need school districts as partners. While the partnerships will have different purposes (e.g., research or practicum experiences), it is important that the collaboration is explicit in its intent and proposed outcomes. It is beneficial to acknowledge up front how the partnership will be a win-win for both parties. Turley and Stevens (2015) provided their perspective on how to form a long-term research partnership that is centered on mutual commitment to engage in high-quality research between the university and the school district. However, in our experiences, we have found that, at times, too many outside entities are part of a school. As a result, an articulated plan regarding the purpose, services provided, and expected outcomes is helpful in securing a place in the school or community agency.

Summary

Developing partnerships with school districts and community agencies is quite popular and viewed as a necessity for those entities in helping them accomplish their mission. For school psychology programs, it assists in providing quality training to prepare students for practice in a variety of settings. As detailed in this chapter, partnerships can be tricky and need to be developed in a thoughtful and organized manner. Early partnerships with school districts were often shallow and one-sided, simply providing practicum experiences to fulfill a requirement. Over the years, mandates, initiatives, and challenging societal issues have spurred districts to seek out partnerships to assist them in meeting the needs of both their students and staff.

The authors' experiences—as well as writings about community partnerships—have revealed that it is critically important that partnerships work both ways. Thus, relationship building is the key step, with both parties identifying the why, the what, and the how of the partnership. For school psychology programs, partnerships mostly revolve around practicum experiences and action research. This provides a great opportunity to expand those partnerships to also engage in service learning projects.

There are great opportunities to explore beyond what programs may already be doing, especially if the university has made engaging with school districts and community agencies a priority. In many respects, in today's society, we can no longer operate in silos and not be connected to the communities in which universities reside. Corrigan (2000) asked the question "Are we obsolete?" regarding universities and suggested that, in order to be relevant, we must connect our preparation programs to the solutions of society's problems that are evident in many areas through field-based experiences and action research. School districts and community agencies are ripe for collaborative partnerships and are eager to engage with their local university to solve complex problems practically. As programs explore ways to expand their partnerships, it is hoped that this chapter provides basic guidance in ways to build partnerships and strategies on how to sustain those partnerships over time.

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