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# **A Retrospective of *Educational Considerations* and the Evolving Nature of School Partnerships**

*Eileen Wertzberger*

## **Introduction**

In its 50-year history, *Educational Considerations* has served as a forum for diverse voices in education with a consistent purpose: “to inform you, provoke you, [and] make you think” about all aspects of education. In its inaugural issue, *Educational Considerations* encouraged educational stakeholders, whether they be a “teacher, student, administrator, or anyone else concerned with education,” to submit manuscripts—to be part of a larger conversation about educational concerns (Litz & Paul, 1973). Authors have heeded the call, and as such, *Educational Considerations* has featured important perspectives from scholars who are often excluded in other peer-reviewed journals: administrators, teachers, non-profit organization leaders, etc. Their scholarship contributions highlight key trends and changes in public education over the past 50 years, one being the evolving nature of school partnerships—the intentionally constructed relationships between K-12 schools and stakeholders that inform practice, support teachers and educational leaders, and provide resources for K-12 students over time.

This article chronicles how the concept of school partnerships has been represented in *Educational Considerations*, and to highlight the various authors who leveraged their experiences and expertise to define what it means to engage in partnerships with public schools in the United States. These partnerships encompassed numerous stakeholders, including but not limited to, community members, private industry, and institutions of higher education. Of particular interest is understanding how public schools collaborate with these stakeholders to improve student outcomes as well as teacher preparation. In narrowing down the scope of searches, three key terms were used to search for relevant articles: partnerships, collaboration, and cooperation.

## **1973-1980: Partnerships by Any Other Name**

In the early years of *Educational Considerations*, the word “partnerships” was not used in any of the articles published; however, the idea of “partnerships” was explored by two authors.

The first notable exploration of school partnerships was Heger’s (1973) article, “The Louisville Urban Center: An Experiment in Facilitation.” When published, Dr. Herbert Heger was the Associate Director of the Louisville Urban Center, after teaching at high school and university levels. He noted, “The Center is a quasi-independent institution which functions among its three sponsoring institutions to achieve a pooling of resources” that support the needs of all stakeholders (Heger, 1973, p. 18). Specifically, the Center served as a logistical hub that connected its members, which was comprised of four groups: university personnel, central school administrative personnel, school site personnel, and community personnel” (Heger, 1973, p. 21). Unique to its design, the Center did not seek to identify common goals, but rather emphasized that each group of stakeholders had their own purposes; however, they leveraged their shared resources in support of each other’s initiatives.

In 1975, Dr. Gerald Bailey was an assistant professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University. Like Heger, Bailey had been a classroom teacher prior to becoming a professor. Bailey's (1975) article, "Taking the University to the Classroom Teacher: Field-Based Graduate Programs," describes the "cooperative agreement" between Kansas State University and Topeka Public Schools which enabled the creation of a new graduate program called the Experimental Field-Based Master's Degree Program. It was specifically designed for classroom teachers who wanted to "improve their teaching effectiveness and/or who desire to become instructional leaders" (Bailey, 1975, p. 32). A unique component to this degree program is that most of the instruction was offered in Topeka, Kansas. One-third of the instruction was provided on-campus at Kansas State University. This model offered "a substantial amount of convenience" for students, and expanded access to graduate level programming to candidates who may otherwise not have seen it as feasible. The community context also enriched students' experiences, as they built long-lasting relationships with their cohort that supported their learning. Bailey did note several limitations to the experimental model. For example, he observed that some faculty were skeptical of this approach and questioned the need to move courses off campus. Bailey also commented on the "current energy crisis portends continued difficulties in scheduling off-campus courses," as fuel allocations to the university might be restricted. Yet, despite limitations, the program was deemed successful, and was replicated in Salina, Kansas.

While neither article used the term "partnership," they both provided insights into how formal collaborations could support the K-12 classrooms, students, and/or teachers. Moreover, both articles shared a common element: the vital role of the community leveraged as social capital in developing and sustaining school partnerships. In both instances, the relationships between K-12 institutions and universities were situated within their communities' cultural contexts.

### **1981-1999 Community Partnerships for Public School Improvement and Professional Development**

**1980s.** In 1983, we see the first mention of the term "partnerships" in Ishler's (1983) article, "The Relationships Between Public Education and Higher Education: Neutrality, Symbiosis or Antagonism" (p. 12). He highlighted a key observation about school and university partnerships that is still often the case in teacher education: they "exist...for the purpose of providing laboratories for field experiences in teacher education" (p. 11). He argued that true collaboration between K-12 schools and higher education demands a symbiotic relationship, in which both parties strive to identify shared problems, pool their resources to address the needs of the teaching profession, and improve the quality of education for all students—K-12 through post-secondary. Ishler (1983) argued that this requires a dismantling of the "traditional academic 'pecking order'" that positions higher education as the driving force behind establishing goals and needs, while K-12 schools assume a more passive role (p.12).

From 1986 to 1990, numerous articles discussed "partnerships," predominantly focused on the intersectionality between K-12 education, higher education, government agencies, community organizations and the business sector (Carlsson-Bull, 1989; Kahn & Larson, 1989; Martin, 1989; McDaniel & Loomis, 1986). In 1988, *Educational Considerations* published its first issue dedicated specifically to school partnerships. The authors included professors, teachers, and

school administrators who described various forms of school partnerships, particularly those with teacher education programs (Thompson & Bailey, 1988). This renewed focus on partnerships coincided with the Holmes Group (1986) report entitled “Tomorrow’s Teachers: A Report of The Holmes Group,” which is credited with introducing the Professional Development Schools (PDS) model. The Holmes report described these partnerships as “the analogue of medical education’s teaching hospitals” (p. 56). Indeed, politically, an underlying current to both the Holmes Report as well as the 1988 issue of *Educational Considerations* was “A Nation at Risk” (1983), and its decree that public education was failing and, thus, in need of intensive reform.

To that avail, this issue highlighted district and university level efforts to connect public schools with resources and professional development to address the shortcomings of public schools. Edward’s (1988) article, “One Key to Survival and Success: Making Everyone a Partner in Public Education,” described how the Dallas Independent School District leveraged community partnerships for the betterment of their schools and student outcomes. These partnerships were diverse, and included the involvement of non-profit organizations, businesses, and everyday citizens to create pilot programs, provide services, and recruit volunteers to create opportunities and resources for their schools. He highlighted that the success of these partnerships stemmed from the fact that “all partnership participants must believe that they benefit from their cooperating and alignment of effort” (p. 4).

Rowe and Merriman’s (1988) and Conkwright and DeNoon’s (1988) articles echoed this message, describing the role of partnerships with various stakeholders who support the educational aims of USD 383 Manhattan-Ogden School Districts in Manhattan, Kansas. Pankake et al.’s (1988) article, “The Council for Public School Improvement: From Coexistence to Collaboration in Professional Development Efforts,” described one such initiative housed at Kansas State University, which engaged superintendents from across the state to create a series of professional development speaking events for K-12 teachers. Superintendents were instrumental in determining the themes and topics discussed at these professional development events, as they identified their teachers and schools’ struggles and needs.

The 1988 issue of *Educational Considerations* also featured articles that focused on partnerships which supported building and district level administrators. Adkison et al. (1988) described two partnerships that faculty from the University of North Texas developed to connect administrators with intensive professional development. These programs, EXERT (Executive Educators’ Round Table) and TEAM 21 (Teaming Educational Administrators with Expert Managers for the Twenty-First Century), connected administrators with leaders in other industries to learn and discuss issues pertaining to institutional management, the role of industry in public schools, and the role of public schools in preparing the workforce of the future (Adkison et al., 1988). Another example is Thompson’s (1988) article, “A Working Partnership: Training Administrators in a Cooperative Field-Based Model,” which described Kansas State University’s partnership with USD 501 Topeka Public Schools in the creation of a leadership academy to develop and support instructional leaders and administrators within their district. This program was reminiscent of Bailey’s (1975) Experimental Field-Based Master’s Degree Program, which was also a collaboration between Kansas State University and USD 501 Topeka Public Schools.

In addition, the 1988 issue of *Educational Considerations* presented research on public school and university partnerships related specifically to teacher preparation and professional development. Three articles—in particular Ervay and Lumley’s (1988) “School/University Partnerships: A Time to Disenthrall,” Meyen’s (1988) “Schools of Education and the Evolving Nature of Partnerships,” and Bailey’s (1988) “Public School-University Partnerships: Existing Ground, Common Ground, or New Ground?”—stressed the importance of developing partnerships that are symbiotic and egalitarian in the process of co-constructing field experiences, determining evaluation measures for preservice teachers, and supporting each other’s goals.

Overall, these articles emphasized the need to create more robust and intentional partnerships that elevate the teaching profession.

**1990s.** Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, *Education Considerations* continued to feature articles pertaining to the development of community partnerships that strengthen public schools. Whitaker et al.’s (1993) study noted the necessary “selected conditions for successful collaboration”: shared vision, shared leadership, shared lines of communication, shared resources, shared decision making, shared accountability, and interdependence (p. 10). Specifically, they noted that for true collaboration to emerge, there would need to be “a sacrifice of autonomy” on the part of both entities, allowing for the creation of new goals that benefit all parties (p. 13).

Collaborative community partnerships were also the focus of DeLuccie et al.’s (1996) article, “Enhancing Family-School Partnerships.” That said, while most of the partnership research featured in *Educational Considerations* pertains to the relationships between educational institutions and the private sector, their research focused on a different critical stakeholder: families. Thus, their research offered models and strategies that districts could adopt for the development and strengthening of school-family partnerships and programming.

Collectively, the articles published from 1980-1999 pertaining to school partnerships centered on community assets, much like the symbiotic partnerships described in Heger (1973) and Bailey (1975). Yet, the impetus for partnerships was reform. As Edwards (1988) noted, “In more than 350 reform reports since 1983’s ‘A Nation at Risk,’ a common thread is evident: ‘school improvement comes most quickly and profoundly when the school, the home, and the community come together’” (Instructor, 1986 as cited in Edwards, 1988, p. 3). Thus, school partnerships were presented as an avenue to address reform and accountability efforts.

### **The 2000s-Present: Educational Leadership Academies and Professional Development School (PDS) Partnerships**

By the early 2000s, an increasing number of school districts and teacher preparation programs were formalizing partnerships in the form of PDS models and Leadership Academies as a means of strengthening both public education and teacher and administrator preparation. Numerous articles published from 2002-2016 reflected the evolution and renewal of these partnerships (Mountford, 2005; Shroyer, Yanhke, Mercer, & Allen, 2014; RedCorn, 2016; Wetig, 2002). One such article, “Teacher Leaders in Professional Development Schools,” focused on teacher

leaders' experiences, specifically clinical instructors, within the PDS partnership between Kansas State University and USD 383 Manhattan-Ogden School District (Wetig, 2002). At the time of publication, this partnership was approximately 14 years old—one of the oldest PDS partnerships in the United States. Within their PDS model, clinical instructors provided mentorship, pedagogical coaching, and professional development for preservice teachers within their buildings. As employees of the district, clinical instructors held important knowledge of their district and community, while also assuming a lead role in the development of future teachers. Her research found that as clinical leaders “assumed leadership roles in the areas of instructional facilitation, mentoring, research, collaboration, and problem solving, it deepened their understanding of their role as leaders” (p. 18).

Indeed, for Kansas State University's College of Education, PDS partnerships increased their capacity to not only prepare future educators, but also to empower in-service teachers and administrators to assume new leadership roles and opportunities that enriched teaching and learning. In the fall of 2014, *Educational Considerations* published its second special edition dedicated to school partnerships, specifically focusing on the Kansas State University PDS partnership. The authors of this issue were instrumental in the development of the PDS model, and it included professors, administrators, and teachers who were all committed to improving learning outcomes for students, as well as the field of teacher preparation. The article, “The Development of the KSU PDS Model: 25 Years in the Making,” chronicled the creation and evolution of one of the oldest PDS relationships in the state of Kansas: the partnership between KSU and the Manhattan-Ogden School District USD 383 (Shroyer et al., 2014). On the heels of the “Age of Reform,” this partnership arose from a “group of science and mathematics educators, scientists, mathematicians, and elementary teachers and administrators” who wanted to improve student outcomes in science and math while also improving the quality of candidate preparation to teach these subjects (Shroyer et al., 2014, p. 8). This partnership grew in scope, expanding to address learning in all content areas as well as teacher preparation at all levels. It positioned teachers, administrators, and university faculty as colleagues, researchers, and innovators as they sought ways to improve education for all students. Over time, KSU replicated this model with other school districts, as well, while also looking toward sustaining these relationships in meaningful ways.

Other articles in this issue of *Educational Considerations* expanded upon various attributes of the KSU PDS partnership model. Yahnke and Shroyer's (2014) article, “Theory into Practice: KSU PDS Model,” outlined the four premises that are foundational to the development and sustainability of PDS partnerships, as they 1) “strengthen and integrate practical field experiences,” 2) serve as “vehicles to extend the knowledge base in teacher education,” 3) serve as “centers of learning communities,” and 4) “play a critical role in the professionalization of teaching” (p. 16). They also explored a range of educational considerations when leveraging PDS partnerships: adapting the supervision triad model to encompass new stakeholders and roles (Allen et al., 2014; Larson, et al., 2014); leveraging the partnership model to improve mathematics education (Martinie et al., 2014); and, enriching learning opportunities for students and preservice teachers, as well as elevating the teaching profession (Holen & Yunk, 2014; Mercer & Myers, 2014; Risberg et al., 2014).

In addition to featuring research on PDS models in teacher preparation, *Educational Considerations* also highlighted research pertaining to leadership academies, and the partnerships between universities and school districts for the development of school administrators. In 2016, *Educational Considerations* published a special issue: “Exploring University Partnerships for Building Leadership Capacity in Education,” in which its authors reflected upon the evolution of such academies, and how school districts in Kansas and beyond may empower teacher leaders to take the next step into building and district level administration. Thompson (2016) offered a brief retrospective on the 30-year history of Kansas State University’s partnerships with schools focused on the “development of leadership capacity” (p. 11). He notes that these partnerships are efficacious because they capitalize on the strengths of each partner to overcome deficiencies: school districts offer rich opportunities for relevant practice, while universities offer the “deep theory-based knowledge” that should inform such practice (p. 12).

The scholarship featured in this issue of *Educational Considerations* affirmed the potential of leadership academies to develop the next generation of educational leaders in authentic and embedded ways. These articles offered research pertaining to the infrastructure and development of leadership academies (Devin, 2016; RedCorn, 2016); the benefits of leadership academies for school districts (Doll, 2016; Mejia et al., 2016); the roles and responsibilities of university and school district personnel (Gustafson & Kiltz, 2016); the differences between traditional building and district administration graduate programs and leadership academies (Devin et al., 2016); and replication and reinterpretation of the KSU leadership academy model in other settings (Hall & Clappe, 2016; RedCorn, 2016).

Collectively, the research featured in *Educational Considerations* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century captures the refinement of formal school partnerships moving beyond merely connecting schools to resources toward sustaining and long-term collaborations that position in-service teachers and educational leaders as equal partners alongside university faculty in the development of future educators.

### **Conclusion:**

In *Educational Considerations*’ 50 years, it has remained true to its central purpose: “to make room for unsolicited manuscripts of prime quality” from writers with varied experiences in the field of education (Litz & Paul, 1973). As such, I found a meaningful parallel between *Educational Considerations*’ ethos and the concept of school partnerships: both position stakeholders outside the walls of the ivory tower as integral voices in shaping our understanding of education as well as its future. Indeed, *Educational Considerations* has been fertile ground for exploring these partnerships. The journal has provided a space for school partnership stakeholders to conduct research and disseminate knowledge that informs institutional practices, supports future educators, enriches K-12 student learning, and empowers in-service educators. In the next 50 years, *Educational Considerations* will continue to be an integral space for these important collaborations and reflections, as it welcomes new and diverse perspectives into the ongoing conversations about education.

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