Leadership Institutes:
An Effective Collaborative
Outreach Activity

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Perspective

Recent commentary regarding the role of America's institutions of higher education in outreach to the nation's schools reveals the public's dissatisfaction with both the quantity and the quality of that public service (Boyer 1996; Mathews 1996; Vortuba 1996). Boyer observed that "America's colleges and universities are now suffering from a decline in the public confidence and a nagging feeling that they are no longer at the vital center of the nation's work" (1996). There is concern among leaders in higher education that the historical relationships among instruction, research, and outreach have been diminished by the current priority on producing research for discovery of knowledge and to achieve promotion and tenure, particularly at research universities. This situation is made even more complex when one considers that a research university also can be a land-grant institution which traditionally has a responsibility for outreach and public service as an integral part of its mission. Mathews suggests the practice of serving the public must be recreated on the principle that the public is a real and essential agent of democracy and that academe must demonstrate its responsibility to that democratic heritage (1996). Outreach to public schools certainly meets both of Mathews' criteria.

The higher-education community needs to consider a new paradigm emphasizing collaboration with the public which incorporates a scholarship of discovery (research), a scholarship of integration (placing discoveries in the larger context), and a scholarship of sharing knowledge (disseminating knowledge to reflecting practitioners for verification or validation and further development), thus creating dynamic interrelations and cycles of theory to practice to theory to practice (Boyer 1996). This paradigm shift also should incorporate incentive and reward systems for units and individual faculty that recognize a renewed and refined mission (Vortuba 1996) and the processes of learning throughout the life span: nontraditional patterns of teaching with nontraditional students in nontraditional settings (Mawby 1996).

One essential area in which such outreach activities are relevant is the continuing knowledge and skill enhancement of educational leaders (Hallinger 1992). The sheer number of educational reforms which are being proposed at the national, state, and local levels boggles the mind. Educational leaders who were prepared through preservice education even five years ago may be out of date with current, effective practice in education. Leaders are not always a priority for continuing knowledge and skill enhancement as evidenced by the 1996 Educational Summit which, according to Clark and Clark, "virtually ignored" the need for more effective preparation of educational leaders as an essential part of educational reform (1996). Clark and Clark suggest that characteristics of effective programs for educational leaders include a strong sense of purpose, a knowledge base drawn from the world of practice and research, instructional practices that facilitate involvement, and professional learning communities that involve university and school collaboration (1996).

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Special-education leaders — those who lead programs for educating students with disabilities — are a leadership group which needs both effective preservice preparation and continuing outreach efforts to assure continued effectiveness. The changes in legislation (e.g., Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 formerly PL 94-142 — The Education for All Handicapped Children Act), rules and regulations, legal actions (e.g., due process hearings, federal district court rulings), and best practice (e.g., inclusion efforts) are sometimes overwhelming.

One study surveyed more than fourteen hundred districts nationally to determine critical policy and personnel issues concerning educational reform (Arik and Krug 1993). Fifty-five percent of the districts anticipated replacing an average of two special-education administrators in the next four years and identified an array of policy issues — both general education and special education — for which they needed additional information. The top three general-education administrative needs were: developing grant proposals; planning information systems for program management; and developing strategies for creating collaboration. The top three special-education administrative needs were: collaboration of special- and general-education administrators; evaluation of program effectiveness and quality; and adaptation of curricula and instruction for students. In addition to the needs of special-education leaders, general-education leaders also need continuing updated information

on the changes in the law (Valesky and Hirth 1992), like the Individuals for Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997. Thus, outreach programs planned jointly for teams of administrators — both regular and special education — could be mutually beneficial.

While preservice preparation of educational leaders is required to obtain initial licensure, most leaders know they must pursue other lifelong learning experiences — including outreach activities offered in collaboration with higher education — not only to renew licensure but also to improve continually the knowledge, skills, and expertise necessary for leading effectively in ever-changing educational contexts. Although the current trends in academe may neither prioritize nor support outreach efforts, some programs in departments and colleges of education have a strong tradition and heritage of meeting the needs of non-traditional students in non-traditional instructional manners in non-traditional settings.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of educational-leadership institutes — one example of an outreach activity supported by a research and land-grant university — over a six-year period. The investment of time, energy, and resources in conducting these institutes for six years was significant on the part of the university and all participating agencies and individuals. The continuation of this outreach approach to meeting lifelong learning needs of educational leaders was based in large part on the results of this study.

Characteristics of Institutes

Each of the six collaborative educational-leadership institutes was designed for general education and special education leaders from local school systems to further professional lifelong learning concerning critical and cutting-edge topics. The institutes provided an in-depth analysis of selected problems and issues by a relatively small group of leaders resulting in the development and implementation of alternative solutions for local school systems by individual leaders or teams of leaders. Based on principles of effective interagency collaboration (Swan and Morgan 1993), the planning and conducting of each institute was the work of a collaborative team of representatives from four types of educational agencies: local education agencies, the state department of education division for exceptional students (DES), the state-wide professional organization for special education leaders, and the Department of Educational Leadership, College of Education at the University of Georgia (see Figure 1). The following features characterized the institutes:

* planned by a collaborative team of leaders (described above);
* focused on one to three problems or issues to maximize time for discussion, analysis, and alternative-resolution development;

- scheduled from two and one-half to three and one-half days, including a weekend, to provide for adequate time to solve problems and to limit time away from professional obligations;

- limited participation to forty to sixty leaders to emphasize small-group discussion, analysis, problem solving, and application;

- emphasized the participation of teams of general- and special-education leaders from local school systems;

- occurred in retreat settings to maximize learning time in a variety of ways in small groups;

- presented national and state leaders focusing on problems and issues to maximize the breadth and depth of information;

- emphasized and encouraged practical application of new knowledge and skills;

- facilitated the development and dissemination of publications;

- provided continuing-education credit for certification renewal;

- funded by independently supported, e.g., multiple agencies, participants paid a modest registration fee; the state department of education funded speakers and occasionally the coordinator; the university paid for brochure development and distribution, communications costs, and occasionally the coordinator; and the professional organization paid for the printing and distribution of publications.

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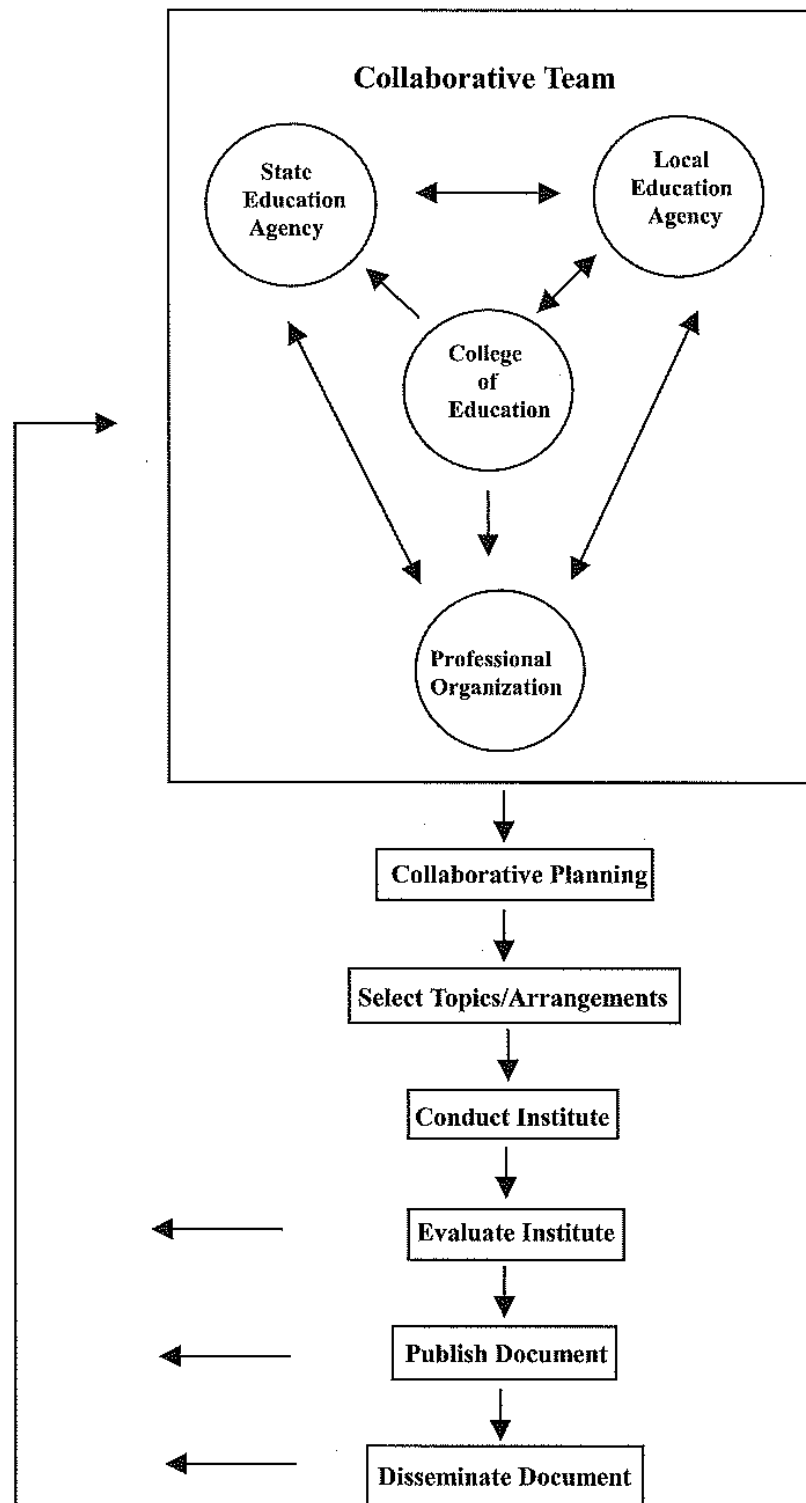
Figure 1 provides an overview of the role and tasks of the collaborative team, from planning through dissemination of documents.

The content of the six institutes over the six years included eight knowledge/skills/expertise areas. The mean participant ratings of the overall quality of each of the six institutes ranged from 4.55 to 4.70 on a five point scale (5 = Very High Quality; 1= Very Poor Quality).

Methodology

A longitudinal design was used to assess the impact of the institutes over a six-year period. This design allowed the participants

Figure 1
Educational Leadership Institute Process

Collaborative Team

- State Education Agency
- Local Education Agency
- College of Education
- Professional Organization

Collaborative Planning

Select Topics/Arrangements

Conduct Institute

Evaluate Institute

Publish Document

Disseminate Document

considerable time to reflect on implementing the knowledge and skills gained from the institutes and to determine the impact on school and school system improvement efforts.

The sample was composed of all 155 special-education and general-education leaders from seventy-two local school systems, the state department of education, regional education-services agencies, and other educational organizations from all geographic areas of the state who participated in one or more of the six institutes during the past six years. Eighty-seven percent participated in one or two institutes; thirteen percent participated in three or more institutes. A survey to document the impact of the institutes was drafted and refined with input from collaborative team members.

An individualized cover letter, an individualized list of the institutes attended, the survey, and a self-addressed stamped envelope were sent to each participant; the initial response time was four weeks; those who had not responded by the end of the fourth week were sent a reminder package during the fifth week.

Results

A total of seventy-three participants responded, yielding a response rate of forty-seven percent (73/155). Table 1 summarizes the responses for each of the eight skills areas from the six institutes, the most valuable feature(s) of the institutes, and reasons for not attending more institutes.

Skill Areas

Respondents reported significant positive major impacts in seven of the eight skill areas, with results ranging from fifty-one percent to eighty percent. The only area which received less than a fifty percent rating was the development and implementation of new discipline plans or models.

Developing effective teams. There was an eighty-eight percent positive response concerning the impact of the institutes reported by respondents regarding this skill area. Forty-five specific examples included the following: joint curriculum development, program management teams, joint staff development, collaborative-cooperative instruction, coordinated student-support teams, seminars for both regular and special-education administrators, assignment of assistant principals as building level leaders for special education, and researching this issue through a dissertation. One respondent indicated that developing effective teams remained a significant problem.

Retention of teachers in critical fields. There was a fifty-one percent positive response regarding the impact of the institute regarding this skill. Respondents provided a total of twenty-five examples of impact including the following: one hundred percent retention, kept all when there is usually a fifty percent turnover,

Table 1
Responses to Survey of Impact of Institutes (1990-1995)
(n=73)

1. As a result of participating in the Institutes, I achieved the following impacts in my organization:

	Yes	No	NA
Developed effective teams of regular and special educators	64 (88%)	5 (79%)	4 (5%)
Retention of teachers in critical fields has improved	37 (51%)	14 (19%)	22 (30%)
Issues related to the successful inclusion of students with disabilities have been improved or resolved	56 (77%)	6 (8%)	11 (15%)
Special education teachers and programs are perceived as integral parts of total school program	63 (86%)	4 (5%)	6 (9%)
Successful grants have been developed, or quality grant is being developed	38 (52%)	18 (25%)	17 (23%)
A new discipline plan or model has been implemented	27 (37%)	28 (38%)	18 (25%)
There is improved understanding among administrators/teachers of protections which must be afforded students with disabilities in discipline procedures	56 (77%)	6 (8%)	11 (15%)
Responses to major change in my school or school system have been proactive and positive	52 (71%)	6 (8%)	15 (21%)

2. What was (were) the most valuable feature(s) of the institute(s) for you?
   54 responses provided (see narrative)

3. I did not attend more of the institutes because (multiple responses possible):
   29 The timing of the institute did not fit into my system schedule
   27 The timing of the institute did not fit into my personal schedule.
   0 The registration was too high.
   1 The location was not convenient.
   6 Agendas of the other institutes did not appear relevant to my needs.
   1 I did not gain enough from my experience with the institute to make this a worthwhile activity.
   15 I did not receive registration information for other institutes.

reduced loss from forty percent to fifteen percent, increased retention from seventy percent to eighty-seven percent, provided incentives, conducted induction and orientation programs, kept one team over three years, and created special recognition program. Significant problems remained for some participants in this area as indicated by the following: continued difficulties in recruiting or retaining personnel in low-incidence programs, teacher attrition, and no change in retention rate.

Inclusion of students with disabilities. There was a seventy-seven percent positive response, including the following examples: Principals and teachers developing new models, staff development program provided, inclusion in four of ten schools and working successfully, two pilot projects started and currently operating in eight schools, inclusion teacher at each grade level, and two special education teachers in National Science Finals with collaborative teacher.

Special-education teachers and programs. There was an eighty-six percent positive response to impacts regarding this skill. Respondents provided a total of thirty-five examples of impact including the following: Special-education teachers included in staff development activities for all teachers, improvement due to administrators being invited to participate with teachers in the institute, special-education and regular-education teachers serving jointly on committees, special-education teachers serving on school improvement leadership teams, and, in one instance, as chairperson of Strategic Planning Committee, and four of nine teachers selected as School Teacher of the Year were in special education.

Successful grants. There was a fifty-two percent positive response to impacts regarding this skill. Twenty-five of the twenty-seven examples indicated that grants had been written and funded.

A new discipline plan or model. Only thirty-seven percent of respondents indicated positive impact on this skill. Respondents provided the following examples: School-wide discipline plan created and implemented, Zero Tolerance plan in place, peer mediation implemented, discipline handbook developed and distributed, alternative plans tried before suspensions implemented, and school board-modified policies. The negative impact responses suggest this skill area continues to require additional work and that changes in this area may take longer than in others.

Improved understanding. There was a seventy-seven percent positive response to impacts regarding this skill. A total of thirty-five examples of impact were provided including the following: Principals now request workshops on discipline/Section 504, only two mediations and no hearings or lawsuits in six years, all fifty-two principals have been inserviced three times that year on special-education issues, seminar provided for assistant principals during pre-planning, assistant principals' desire to attend legal workshops and special-education administration workshops.

Responses to major changes. There was a seventy-one percent positive response to impacts regarding this skill area. Respondents

provided a total of twenty-seven examples including the following: Morale improved tremendously, cooperative teaching teams of regular and special-education teachers implemented in all schools, national issues addressed through school improvement planning and planning with Chamber of Commerce, school ownership of special-education programs, and an enhanced sense of faculty importance for special-education teachers. The negative or non-impact statements suggested either there was still work to be done in selected areas or that a particular skill area was not a focus for a participant.

Valuable Features

Fifty-four narrative responses were provided in response to this question. Respondents identified specific valuable features, including: Networking among educational professionals, timely and concentrated topics, new visions developed, opportunity for group interaction-planning-sharing, brainstorming issues, skill building and emphasis on application, scheduling of institute when participants are available, stress-free environment, learning from others who face the same problems, getting to know people on a personal level, and helping participants to bring about collaborative leadership among all the administrative teams and eliminating paradigms that keep them from finding solutions to special-education and regular-education problems.

Attending Institutes

Most participants did not attend more institutes because the timing was inconsistent with their personal or professional schedules. Some did not receive registration information. Participants seemed to select institute(s) which met their needs at a particular point in time.

Other Comments

Thirty-six comments focused on the positive value of the institutes, their high quality, the responsiveness to local needs, the collaboration among presenters, the significant contributions of the institutes to local leaders, and the need for their continuation.

Other Results

Several other results can be attributed to these institutes. Two publications were completed and distributed — one on effective strategies and practices for retention and recruitment of teachers (Swan 1992) and one on grant writing (Swan 1995). Both were published by the professional organization and distributed to all school systems and institute participants. In addition, subsequent to the completion of this study, the institutes have continued to receive funding from the agencies and participants.

Discussion and Implications

Participant responses indicate that the institutes had significant impacts on leaders' knowledge and skills across multiple topics for all six years of this longitudinal study. These documented impacts resulted in continued funding of the institutes by the university over the last two years with commitment to funding for a third.

The collaborative sharing and enhancing of knowledge and skills among practitioners and university personnel through these institutes is an example of the suggested paradigm with a tripartite focus on multiple scholarships — discovery, integration, and sharing (Boyer 1996). Perhaps these institutes could serve as a partial model for other similar or expanded efforts to evaluate the impact of this new paradigm.

Outreach activities can be supported through department or college resources by funding communication efforts and part-time salaries for professors, particularly in the summer. This land-grant research university recognizes publications and external funding in service as a part of the promotion-and-tenure process. However, publication in professional journals and other scholarly outlets and developing new knowledge remain priorities for promotion and tenure.

Implementing a new paradigm in higher education to incorporate outreach may require parallel evaluation of instruction, research, and public service in order to focus attention on the impact of efforts in all three areas, rather than the scholarly production of new knowledge in all three. Such an approach would require that policies and funding for outreach be similar to that for research and instruction, which would necessarily be modeled by a commitment on the part of faculty and administrators in the institutions of higher education. ▨

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