Promoting Collaborative Research in a School of Education

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The magic formula for creating and supporting a productive researcher in schools of education has not yet been discovered. But good scholarship can make dramatic differences in the quality of academic life. Joint publications and research activities among faculty members can provide opportunities for personal and professional support and satisfaction, but alliances are not easily formed in today's hectic academic life. Miller and Strayton (1999) offer several suggestions to faculty for promoting collaborative research: get out of the protective turf mode, revisit program philosophy, plan team retreats to deal with issues and get to know each other on a personal level. This article describes the process that one small school of education used to promote collaborative research.

In order to be collaborative, education faculty first need to be productive in their scholarly activity. Recently, several authors have explored why scholarly productivity is not typical in schools of education. Mitchell (1999) offers that education faculty tend not to write, even on an individual basis, for several reasons. First, many were socialized to be

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teacher educators in response to a demand for teachers in schools, rather than as publishing scholars (Schneider & Raths, 1983). Second, many schools of education are struggling for diminishing resources (Daly, 1994). Third, an overemphasis on scholarly productivity interferes with faculty commitment to maintaining high-quality instruction. Finally, the literature is already overburdened with work ignoring wider social and community needs. Clark, Caffarella, & Ingram (1999) explored how women managers constructed their career paths, how they negotiated the demands of their professional and personal lives, and how being a woman impacted career development. Their results indicated very little gender awareness among the women interviewed despite the experiences of gender discrimination experienced in their careers. Williams (2001, p. B30) stated that "women need extra help from their academic mentors." John-Steiner (1998) suggested that, by looking for commonalities and differences across settings, tasks, working methods, goals, and values a framework for understanding collaboration can be constructed that preserves the benefits of rich descriptive accounts of collaboration. She emphasized the importance of multiple definitions and multiple models of collaborative practice.

Baldwin and Austin (1995) offer a theory regarding collaboration: "Productivity is greatest among collaborative teams mature enough to have well-defined procedures (an infrastructure) in place to operate efficiently but not so old that creative tension has diminished" (p. 67). They also suggest that academic deans and department chairs may need to be available to consult with faculty about potential problems that may arise in collaborative relationships. However, faculty may be concerned that these administrators may not be able to offer such assistance if their expertise reflects skills of teacher education rather than scholarship (Mitchell, 1999). In other words, the emphasis and expertise of such administrators may be in preparing faculty to become teacher educators rather than to become publishing scholars.

Setting the Tone for Collaborative Research

The strengths of collaborative research have long been touted. The advantages of multiple perspectives to educational research far outweigh the potential hazards of challenges to one's philosophical, methodological, or ideological viewpoints (Nichols, 1998). A study by Rovegno and Bandhauer (1998) described the process of long-term research collaboration and indicated that there were two major themes: shared privilege and shared empowerment. Each contributed expertise and knowledge constituted by different contexts.

Few education faculty would argue against the merits of collaborative research. However, getting those same faculty members to participate in collaborative research is another question. Time constraints, turf issues, philosophical or ideological differences, or a whole range of other issues often interfere with collaborative efforts. A first step would be for the school to set the tone for collaboration by providing the stage for revealing the research interests of its faculty members. The collaboration is ultimately up to the faculty members themselves.

Collay, Dunlap, Enloe, and Gagnon (1998) suggest that collaboration can take place for professional development if certain conditions exist. These conditions are: (1) building a community, (2) constructing knowledge through personal experience, (3) supporting others in their reflective practices, (4) documenting reflections on personal experiences, (5) assessing expectations, and (6) improving the culture.

How One School Began to Promote Collaborative Research: A Case Study

This paper describes the process one small, private, California school of education used to begin to promote faculty collaboration. The project helped define and focus research areas where faculty would be most effective in graduate education and yet enhance their own knowledge base. The primary goal of the project was to develop a comprehensive research agenda for current and prospective doctoral students. A second goal was to focus faculty on a unified approach toward current research interest priorities and reflective practice. The third goal was to increase collaborative research. Such collaboration would lead to presentations at professional conferences, which would then lead to publications. The process lasted two years, resulting in the development of a handbook that grouped faculty members according to their current research interests.

Description of the Process

This paper will discuss the steps taken in the two-year process during which the School of Education came to an agreement as a faculty about the research areas under which they would like to be known. We did have certain questions we asked ourselves before we began the process: (a) How did we wish to be known as a school? (b) How did we wish to be known as individuals? (c) How did we wish to be identified as researchers? (d) What was the best way to impart this information to others?

The Education faculty in this case study totals 29 (including 4 from

the university's developmental program, the faculty of that program having rank in the School of Education), with 10 graduate assistants. The institution is primarily a teaching one, but the faculty is expected to produce a certain amount of research—for promotion and tenure as well as to keep abreast of the field. Typical of most schools of education, the faculty has diverse research interests and abilities. The School of Education is an NCATE-accredited, doctoral-granting school whose students also are expected to team up with faculty members in the production of research. Prior to this initiative, doctoral and graduate students often relied on informal methods of locating faculty with similar research interests to serve on their committees. Potential doctoral students sometimes made enrollment decisions based on the research interests of the faculty. Further, faculty were unaware of the expertise of their colleagues for collaborative research efforts. The process described in this case study helped define and focus research areas where faculty would be most effective and yet enhance their own professional knowledge base.

As an NCATE-accredited institution, developing research interest areas was an important step in enriching a knowledge base for the doctoral program, thus providing better preparation of undergraduate and graduate students. Faculty narrowed their research interests to areas of importance for K-12 education, which reflected the needs in society and reflected our mission of preparing reflective practitioners. By encouraging faculty-faculty, faculty-graduate student, and student-student research efforts, it was hoped that better quality and quantity of research articles would be the outcome.

Miller and Strayton (1999) made suggestions for promoting collaborative research emphasizing an initial tone of administrative support, revisiting of program philosophy, and getting out of the protective turf mode. We began the initial categorization of topics at one of our biannual faculty retreats with informal discussion occurring among present and retired faculty, graduate assistants, and members of the local education community. In small, mixed groups, participants were asked to draw upon their varied perspectives in order to identify a small number of current pressing educational issues. The issues served as guiding principles for the final activity at the retreat, which was to group the over 200 topics of research into five to eight thematic categories. The final task was to match topics and current issues needing to be addressed as a school. At first, this activity was met with some resistance. Faculty did not wish to be pigeonholed as a particular type of research faculty. The thinking was that there were just too many research interests among the 29 faculty members. We were too diverse. We seemed to have nothing in common. Also, the culture was still one of autonomy. And, perhaps, the

faculty could not envision what the handbook might look like or what its purpose was.

As a follow-up to this first step, the School of Education's Long-Range Planning Committee synthesized the various schemes produced at the Spring retreat into a useful form with six broad categories: (1) Pluralism; (2) Personnel Induction and Renewal; (3) Curriculum Theory and Practice; (4) Educational Technology; (5) Counseling and Special Education; and (6) School and Community Cultures and Systems (See Table 1).

At the following Fall retreat, faculty further refined the categories and came to an agreement as a faculty about the research areas under which each one would like to be known. The ultimate goal was to produce an accurate summary of the research interests within the school that was useful to potential students, the community, and other faculty within the School of Education. The summary provided a significant reference point for discussion of a knowledge base in graduate education. Faculty were then given an additional opportunity to place themselves into two of the six categories, listing their first and second priorities. They were also provided with an opportunity to list any additional research interests not previously identified.

Photographs of each faculty member were included in the handbook, along with a "profile" of their research interests—a process that took over a semester to complete (See Figure 1). Each faculty member wrote an initial research profile; each was edited and returned to the faculty member; research profiles were compiled and a rough draft of the document was circulated to the entire faculty for final approval. Pictures had to be taken, choices made, and in some cases second pictures needed to be taken. The Committee wanted everyone to be pleased with the handbook. Once each faculty member approved his or her choice of picture and research profile, the handbook was printed. Two tables were included at the back of the handbook. The first table contained the six major categories that the faculty decided it wanted to be known for as a School of Education (Table 1). Under each category was listed all the specific types of research that faculty might be doing. For example, under Pluralism a whole host of research topics was listed, indicating the diverse research interests of faculty, yet fitting into a single category. Each of the other five categories had similar lists, thus allowing for the diverse research interests of the faculty, yet allowing them to formulate six broad categories of research interests within which they could classify the totality of their research interests.

The second table in the handbook listed all faculty members, in alphabetical order, with two major categories of research interests (chosen by each faculty member) following each name (See Table 2).

Table 1
Classification of Faculty Research Interests

Pluralism tice

Adjustment of Minority Students
Assessment of Bilingual/ESL Students
Cambodian Culture & History
Cultural Diversity
Ethnic Language Schools
Empowerment of Minority Students
Equity for Minority Students
Equity in Mathematics
Feminist Theology
Inclusion of Minority Students
International Discussion of
   Bilingual/ESL Education
Language Development
Multicultural Curriculum
Multicultural Music Education
Oral Narratives in Southeast Asian
   Culture
Southeast Asian Students
Staff Development for Bilingual/ESL
   Teachers
Sociocultural Characteristics
   of Minority Students
Vietnamese Culture
Upward Mobility Strategies
   for Minority Students

Personnel Induction & Renewal

Assessment Methods for
   New Teachers
Induction of New Teachers
   and Administration
Peer Coaching for Teachers
   and Administrators
Portfolio Assessment for New Teachers
Support for New Teachers

Curriculum Theory and Practice

Curriculum Development
Curriculum Theory
Early Childhood Education
Economics Education
Effective Teaching Strategies
   for Bilingual/ESL Education
Integration of Subject Areas
Literature-Based Instruction
Mathematics Education
Middle & Secondary Curriculum
Music Education
Multiple Intelligences
Play
Process Writing
Reading
Science Education
Social Science Education
Study Skills
Teaching and Learning Styles
Economics of Education
Whole Language

Educational Technology

Computers in Education
SAVT Videos
Teacher Performance Analysis
   through Video
Technology in Music Education
Technology in Science Education
Teleconferencing in Education
Teleconferencing in Teacher
   Training

Table 1
Classification of Faculty Research Interests
(continued from previous page)

Counseling and Special Education	*School and Community Cultures and Systems*
ADD in Adults	Change Processes in Schools
Cognitive Theory	Dynamic Systems Approach
Couples Theory	Economics of Education
Developmental Psychology	Middle and Secondary
Inclusion of Special Needs Students	Organizational Theory
Interpersonal Psychotherapy	Parent Involvement
Learning Disabilities	Politics of Education
Origins of Emotional Disturbance	Restructuring of Ethics
Personality Assessment	School/Community Relations
Substances Abuse	School Law
	Systems Thinking
	Transforming Models of Leadership
	TQM

Figure 1
Sample Page from Handbook, with Sample Research Profile

(Name of faculty member here), **Associate Professor**
Curriculum & Instruction
B.A., (Name of Institution), 1973
M.A., (Name of Institution), 1974
Ph.D., (Name of Institution), 1988

Picture
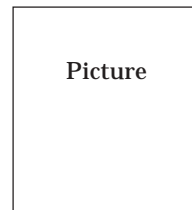
Dr. _____ is responsible for overseeing the Multiple and Single Subject Credential programs and the undergraduate diversified major, as well as advising master's and doctoral students. She works with other University colleges and schools in planning and assessing the General Education program and in implementation of policies related to undergraduates. Her publications have dealt with language and literacy development, which was her specialty in her doctoral program. She has published on topics such as directed reading-thinking (DR-TA), conceptual mapping, recall of text from expository reading selections, and basic college writing. She has also collaborated on effective elementary teaching research. Her current interests include literacy development, teacher education, portfolio assessment, curriculum planning and materials development, the politics of textbook selection and development, discourse analysis of text, and the California Frameworks and adoption procedures.

Table 2

Major Categories of Faculty Research Interests

*Dr. A*_____	School/Community Cultures & Systems	Personnel Induction & Renewal
*Dr. B*_____	Pluralism	Curriculum Theory & Practice
*Dr. B*_____	Educational Technology	Curriculum Theory & Practice
*Dr. B*_____	School/Community Cultures & Systems	Curriculum Theory & Practice
*Dr. D*_____	School/Community Cultures & Systems	Pluralism
*Dr. D*_____	Curriculum Theory & Practice	Personnel Induction & Renewal
*Dr. E*_____	Educational Technology	Curriculum Theory & Practice
*Dr. E*_____	Curriculum Theory & Practice	Educational Technology
*Dr. F*_____	Counseling & Special Education	Pluralism
*Dr. G*_____	Counseling & Special Education	School/Community Cultures & Systems
*Dr. H*_____	Educational Technology	Curriculum Theory & Practice
*Dr. H*_____	Curriculum Theory & Practice	Personnel Induction & Renewal
*Dr. H*_____	School/Community Cultures & Systems	Pluralism
*Dr. H*_____	Educational Technology	Counseling & Special Education
*Dr. I*_____	Counseling & Special Education	School/Community Cultures & Systems
*Dr. K*_____	Personnel Induction & Renewal	Pluralism
*Dr. L*_____	Curriculum Theory & Practice	Personnel Induction & Renewal
*Dr. L*_____	Pluralism	School/Community Cultures & Systems
*Dr. L*_____	Pluralism	Educational Technology
*Dr. M*_____	Pluralism	Curriculum Theory & Practice
*Dr. M*_____	Pluralism	Personnel Induction & Renewal
*Dr. N*_____	Curriculum Theory & Practice	School/Community Cultures & Systems
*Dr. S*_____	School/Community Cultures & Systems	Pluralism

Table 2
Major Categories of Faculty Research Interests
(continued from previous page)

Dr. S_____	Pluralism	Curriculum Theory & Practice
Dr. S_____	Curriculum Theory & Practice	Pluralism
Dr. T_____	Counseling & Special Education	School/Community Cultures & Systems
Dr. V_____	Counseling & Special Education	Curriculum Theory & Practice
Dr. W_____	Curriculum Theory & Practice	Counseling & Special Education
Dr. W_____	Counseling & Special Education	Curriculum Theory & Practice

Thus, students and faculty can easily locate those with whom to collaborate by looking at the back of the handbook under the alphabetized list. Or they have the option of reading the individual research profile to gain more insight about the faculty member's interests and expertise. Until the handbook was produced and made available to faculty, there did not seem to be faculty ownership of the project, let alone ownership of research categories or of a culture of collaboration. Yet, once the handbook was published, it became known as "the blue book" (the cover was "Education blue") and suddenly faculty found uses for it. Potential doctoral students were seen making visits to faculty offices with a copy in hand; faculty began making student referrals based on the information in the handbook; faculty seemed to get to know about each others' research interests by reading about their colleagues; and faculty gradually seemed to take ownership of the handbook.

The Long-Range Planning Committee conducted evaluations after each step of the two-year process. Formative evaluations by the faculty were conducted at the completion of each of the retreats. Surveys were made of current doctoral students regarding their satisfaction about the research opportunities in the school, as well as their own research interests.

In summary, the process consisted of the following steps:

Spring Retreat   Initial discussion of issues, with resultant list of over 200 Faculty Research Interests. Topics grouped into thematic categories by faculty.

Follow-up   Long-Range Planning Committee synthe-

	sized Research Interests into six broad categories. (Took several weeks to complete.)
Fall Retreat	Further refinement of categories; Agreement about which categories each faculty member wished to be identified
Follow-up	"Research Profiles" written by each Faculty Member; Pictures Taken; Profiles Collected, Edited, Returned to Faculty for Input (Took over a semester to complete.)
Editing	Final product (handbook) was typed, edited, readied for printer.
Handbook	Copies of the handbook were printed and disseminated to faculty, approximately two years after the initial project began.

Benefits of the Project

The project began to change the dynamics of our faculty. To date, there has been an increase in the number of collaborative articles published, collaborative presentations at conferences, and collaborative projects on campus. For example, three faculty members collaborated on a student assessment project within their department; four faculty members in another department worked together on another learning assessment project in their department; several collaborative grants have been submitted and funded; and there has been an increase in collaborative articles by faculty. The original research categories identified by faculty have not necessarily been the deciding factor in many of these collaborations, however. In other words, the project has instead opened up the opportunity for dialogue about the expectation of collaboration. And the culture of collaboration continues to grow in the school. At a recent Faculty Council meeting the faculty voted to have "collegiality" as its theme for their one-day Spring retreat.

The main benefits of the project have been an increase in individual publications and collaborative publications in the school, student development, state and national visibility, and school-based collaboration. The culture within the school began to shift from one where autonomy typically characterized faculty to one of collaboration. One faculty member recently remarked that she "never would have even considered collaborating with someone in (another department) until we had done this activity." Another faculty member commented, after having been at

the University for many years, "how surprised she was to learn about the research interests of the person in the very next office!" In addition, changes in promotion and tenure requirements at the University level led faculty within the School of Education to reevaluate its emphasis on publishing—whether collaborative or individual. The project may even have given some faculty incentive to begin publishing again.

There were three faculty members who worked together on a project recently who indicated that they would never have thought about collaborating until the tone had been set for such collaboration. Each was at a different career stage—one was a young, assistant professor just entering her profession, the second was about mid-career, and the third was nearing retirement. The tone had been set, within the School and by administration, for scholarly collaboration. Knowledge about each other's research interests had been made available and faculty supported each other.

There was surprise that so many faculty members were interested in Pluralism as a research category. Therefore, another benefit of the project was that of revealing our own interests to each other. We needed to learn about ourselves before we were able to begin any sort of collaboration in our research efforts.

The handbook has value for students. Faculty report that the handbook has been a useful resource for new undergraduate and graduate students, for parents of new graduates, and for new faculty. Students have initiated conversations with faculty members based on the information in the handbook. The handbook was handed out as a way to promote pluralism and assist with recruitment (an unexpected benefit). It was useful during our accreditation visits for identifying our areas of interest and strengths. One report contained laudatory comments on the collaborative efforts of faculty and of the handbook itself.

What were the pitfalls of this project? Time. Even this initial step was a two-year process. The identification of the school's major areas of research and the development of a handbook represented only a beginning step in a process of setting the tone for collaboration. A second pitfall was faculty reluctance to buy into the benefits of the project in its initial stages. Simply gathering the information for the handbook was often challenging. Faculty are busy, often overworked, and feel they have better things to do than write up their biographies or summarize their research interests for a handbook.

Some major changes took place in the school following this project that have helped the process. There was new leadership that helped continue a tone of collaboration. By this time, however, cooperation was universal. Faculty themselves wanted to move the process along. School/program philosophy was revisited and collaborative efforts

seem to beget additional collaborative efforts. This project opened up an opportunity for dialogue about collaboration in more than one area. With leadership initially willing to set the tone and provide support to improve the culture, faculty worked toward a goal of collaboration and collegiality across other tasks.

The "process" will never be over. It is a living breathing process that will evolve as faculty and students explore new ways to promote collaboration. A current endeavor by the School is to update and place this information on the World Wide Web. Ernest Johnson (1999) recently suggested that collaboration within teaching, research, and service could be used to define a non-traditional approach to the demonstration of academic scholarship that also addresses the issue of accountability. He says that the goal of the new collaboration is "to establish an emotional bond through trust that develops documentation that appropriate success and learning has occurred for all participants" (Johnson, 1999, p. 381). The project described in this paper suggests one way a school of education might embark on a path of collegiality and collaboration.

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