

Collaborations across Educational Sectors (Review)

By: David F. Ayers

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Abstract:

Edited by Marilyn J. Amey, it may serve as a resource for community college administrators and faculty, state policy- and decision- makers, institutional researchers, and educators in other sectors who may find themselves partnering with community colleges or other local organizations. The partnership was a success in that the colleges survived threats to close the colleges; however, the partnership splintered into two regimes, which the authors attribute to campus-based protectionism, unclear objectives, inadequate or nonexistent feedback loops, and authoritarian mandates from systemlevel administrators.

Article:

Marilyn J. Amey (Ed.). *Collaborations across Educational Sectors*. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, No. 139. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007. 112 pp. Paper: \$29.00. ISBN: 978-0-470- 25524-7.

This volume explores the reasons why partnerships across educational institutions are successful to varying degrees. Edited by Marilyn J. Amey, it may serve as a resource for community college administrators and faculty, state policy- and decision- makers, institutional researchers, and educators in other sectors who may find themselves partnering with community colleges or other local organizations.

The organization of the book is straightforward. In Chapter 1, Marilyn J. Amey, Pamela L. Eddy, and C. Casey Ozaki introduce a model for understanding partnerships among educational institutions. The next four chapters discuss successful partnerships and describe practices and events that lead to achievement of partnership goals. In Chapter 2, Gail Hoffman-Johnson describes how a community college and a prestigious engineering university partnered to improve transfer students' success in attaining the baccalaureate.

Carrie B. Kisker and Patrick Hauser follow in Chapter 3 with a different type of partnership, one involving a community college and an array of community organizations and businesses. The purpose of this partnership was to help students prepare for and succeed in community-oriented careers such as fire service and law enforcement.

Susan Bracken's Chapter 4 demonstrates the importance of communication in developing productive relationships among partners. She points out that using the same vocabulary is no guarantee that partners are communicating effectively. This case provides an example of miscommunication and the way it was identified and addressed by partnership leaders.

Chapter 5, by Jesse S. Watson, is the final example of a successful partnership, this one achieved by K-12 school district, a community college, and a university. The success of this partnership is explained, at least in part, by various forms of capital such as social and organizational capital.

Part 2 provides an overview of three unsuccessful partnerships, and the authors of each case analysis interrogate the circumstances for insights and lessons learned. In Chapter 6, Pamela L. Eddy describes tensions among five two-year technical colleges that partnered as a way of circling the wagons in a hostile political climate. The partnership was a success in that the colleges survived threats to close the colleges; however, the partnership splintered into two regimes, which the authors attribute to campus-based protectionism, unclear objectives, inadequate or nonexistent feedback loops, and authoritarian mandates from systemlevel administrators. Consequently, commitment to the partnership never fully materialized.

Chapter 7, by Patricia L. Farrell and Kim Allan Seifert, identifies problems associated with a dual-enrollment program. Lessons learned from this less-than-successful partnership are described in terms of academic standards, faculty standards, coordination, state policy, college preparation, and evaluation. Part 2 concludes with an account of the life and death of a partnership involving seven university education departments and four community colleges. Although the partnership served an important purpose for many years, it succumbed to an evolving institutional ecology and was terminated.

The final section of the book includes two chapters. In Chapter 9, Debra D. Bragg and Maxine L. Russman situate a partnership in a state policy context. This chapter is an important contribution to the volume because it accounts for the impact of the external political climate on educational partnerships. Finally, Ozaki, Amey, and Watson return to the model presented in Chapter 1 and, in Chapter 10, conclude that this model adequately captures the successes and failures of the partnerships described in the volume. At the same time, however, they expand the model to include social and organizational capital, which emerged as factors associated with successful partnerships. The chapter concludes with recommendations for policy.

The contributors to this book do not assume that partnerships are win-win situations, although one might draw such a conclusion from related literature and political rhetoric. Instead, the authors ask difficult questions about who benefits from the partnership, who does not, what costs accrue and to whom, what the benefits are and for whom, and the extent to which partnerships are sustainable. They acknowledge that a combination of accountability mandates, funding inadequacies, and "knowledge-economy" discourses about seamless education construct a political economy in which partnerships are viewed as common-sense solutions to what are viewed as institutional crises. The authors do not question the social forces that contribute to such a politically fraught economic environment, and I found the tacit accommodation of these forces disturbing. The authors take a pragmatic view of partnerships, however, which is appropriate given their audience: educators and policymakers who confront difficult situations

on a daily basis. For these practitioners, this volume imparts wisdom and warnings. Educational partnerships can indeed lead to synergistic movement toward institutional goals; however, neither synergy nor success is guaranteed.

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