Education Corridors: An Emerging Phenomenon

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Abstract

Education Corridors are an emerging phenomenon around the world. They constitute an auxiliary enterprise that links a college or university to its community. They may take different forms and address different issues, but all represent an attempt to collaborate with others in extending the reach of the postsecondary institution into the neighborhood or city. This theme issue on education corridors explores such issues as focus, purpose, structure, finance, and other factors.

Introduction

In recent years the concept of college/university partnerships with the local community has expanded beyond the traditional notions of service and outreach. At select institutions the partnerships have come to include the ideas of shared space, shared goals, and shared resources. These initiatives may look quite different and be called varying names, but for the purposes of this theme issue are being referred to as "education corridors." An education corridor is created when an institution of higher education works with external groups, such as the city, neighborhood associations, or nonprofit agencies to establish a physical space, often adjacent to the college/university, that serves the community as well as the postsecondary institution. The collaboration might include such entities as elementary/secondary schools, cultural centers, parks, businesses, human service agencies, and so on. This is usually a large-scale joint undertaking that is intended to be long lasting, and that goes well beyond the typical service project.

This theme issue on education corridors presents information on six such entities around the country that were created by institutions large and small, public and private, in association with their community collaborators. It addresses planning, partners, goals, funding, problems, and successes. The authors share how the ideas for their corridors came into being and evolved, how they operate, and the benefits gained.

Literature Review

Education corridors are relatively new phenomena. However, collaboration in a broader sense, between colleges and universities and their surrounding locale, is more common. Several large-scale studies have attempted to identify key factors of success and potential benefits of college/university partnerships in general. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) established the Office of University Partnerships in 1994 with the intent of encouraging the work of communities and colleges and universities in partnering to "establish meaningful and

reciprocal partnerships" (Ross 2002, p. 9). "HUD literature suggests programs that are institutionalized, are two-way streets, and are flexible, are those most likely to succeed" (Ross 2002, p. 16).

The Pew Foundation's Pew Partnership for Civic Change has shared results related to successful university-community partnerships (2003). They found faculty who are engaged in community-based research can gain in many ways and that their individual involvement can potentially lead to greater institution-wide involvement. Additionally, such activity benefits local nonprofits, local government, and local funding sources. They conclude that three important steps to furthering partnerships are "increasing access, increasing rewards, and increasing visibility" (p. 40).

The Council of Independent Colleges' Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education's Engaging Communities and Campuses Grant Program has sought to identify the core elements of effective partnerships. The findings (Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss n.d.) suggest that local groups considering working with a college or university deliberately assess potential costs and benefits to be gained from such a partnership and be aware of the importance of parity. The point is also made that "careful preparation, excellent implementation, and meticulous follow through" are critical to successful partnerships (p. 5). It appears an education corridor should neither be taken up lightly nor entered into with haste; it requires planning that takes important variables, such as equity and perceived benefits, into account before traveling too far down the road.

Judith Ramaley (2000) echoes that sentiment when she reports that successful community engagement includes "shared goals, a shared agenda, agreed upon definitions of success that are meaningful both to the university and to the community participants, and pooling or leveraging of university and public and private funds provided by other participants."

Robert Roehrich, president of Colorado Tech University, speaks to the value of partnering specifically with businesses. He indicates (cited in Rivard 2000) that partnerships allow the practicality of providing applications-based education: "… business needs more graduates who have an applications-focused education. Partnerships provide business and higher education with opportunities to engage in dialogue by identifying applications needs through content, delivery configuration, and assessment of outcomes to achieve desired business results."

When Tyler and Haberman (2002) reviewed education-community partnerships, they found the following: *(a)* Leadership is an important factor. Visibility, as well as follow through of key personalities, counts—as does charisma and title; *(b)* Setting goals is a task the community members often expect the educational partners to do. Early successes are needed; *(c)* Partnerships are not always equal in that one partner may be more the focus of needed change. This can require careful negotiation; *(d)* Not understanding the variations in structure and organization among partners can cause

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confusion—colearning can be necessary to moving forward; *(e)* As conflicts arise and are addressed, it often appears that there are winners and losers and a changing power structure. This may cause some partners to disengage or actually seek to cause a downfall of the partnership; *(f)* The "context" of the partnership is equally important to the "content" of the proposed change or goal; *(g)* A "model projects" approach can be useful, but it will still face implementation issues as it moves to a larger scale; and *(h)* Community members expect to see positive results in a fairly short time period—within a year or two at most. This may or may not seem realistic to those from colleges or universities.

Tyler and Haberman's review addresses the complexity of the interacting variables in a successful partnership. For example, there need to be goals established, yet it appears the community members typically expect the college/university partners to come up with the goals, perhaps at least the first draft for consideration. The importance of the personalities involved is included as well. It seems the best faculty member alone, without the support of the titular head of the institution (who hopefully has a strong, positive personality), may not get very far. Likewise, community leadership will likely need to be engaged.

The literature specific to education corridor-type initiatives is more limited. Most frequently one finds references to such corridors, nationally and internationally, in the popular press since it is a sharing of news with the public about large-scale projects designed to impact economic development, urban renewal, and other issues of importance. In addition to the education corridor initiatives shared within this theme issue, other such entities are reported in Minnesota (Red River Learning Corridor); in Erie, Pennsylvania (Knowledge Park at Penn State Erie); in Fredericton, New Brunswick (City of Fredericton's Knowledge Park); and in Leeds, England (The Knowledge Economy Campus).

Education Corridors
Described within this Theme Issue

This theme issue includes a range of education corridor models. The articles describe libraries, arts centers, schools, and biomedical technology organizations. The focus, planning, governance, and funding of these corridors vary enormously. The descriptions and reflections provided are intended to offer useful input to either those engaged currently with education corridors or those who wish to move in that direction. Ideally, learning how another college or university has organized to work in partnership with its community will be helpful to those trying to do the same.

Lister and Broski share their experience in Peoria, Illinois in the establishment of a collaborative organization with the intent of improving the "educational, social, economic, and physical well being of the community" via economic development with an emphasis on "discovery, innovation, and commercialization of regionally generated intellectual property." This organization, Peoria NEXT, includes schools, colleges,

businesses, a federal laboratory, hospitals, and governmental entities. It makes use of a wide variety of change strategies and a shared vision for the city.

Peterson discusses the Martin Luther King, Jr. Joint Use Library that has recently opened its doors in San José, California. This library is the result of a partnership between San José State University, the San José Public Library, and the San José Redevelopment Agency. Five years in the planning, the library incorporates a theme of life-long learning and is thought to encourage recruitment of prospective students to the university as well as offering an expanded library collection to the citizens of San José.

The University of Cincinnati has been involved over a decade in a relationship with multiple neighborhoods, government agencies, and businesses to rethink and rebuild areas that serve both the university's constituencies as well as the neighborhoods' residents. A complex master planning and building initiative has been implemented and the results include enhanced functionality, improved housing opportunities, and additional space for university needs, small businesses and incubators, and parking. Investment and funding strategies are outlined.

Howard and Allison describe Virginia Commonwealth University's relationship with the Carver community along the northern border of the university's property. This partnership focuses upon safety, health promotion, youth services, networking, and economic development. It has been in place since 1996. Benefits have been accrued by both the community and the university.

The University of Maryland and Prince George County have participated jointly in the planning, funding, construction, and operation of a 318,000 square foot structure on 17 acres of land. This structure is the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, which opened in 2001. It includes academic departments, classrooms, a library, rehearsal and practice rooms, collaborative programs with local schools, as well as the traditional performance spaces. Stamler provides the perspective of various individuals involved in the early planning as well as current stakeholders.

Sullivan and Trostle share the story of Trinity College's Learning Corridor. A 16-acre campus adjoining the Trinity property, the Learning Corridor houses four schools and additional community services. The over $100 million price tag was covered by multiple sources including the state (the primary funding source), local businesses and organizations, the college, and the city. Challenges, successes, and lessons learned are shared.

Comparisons Across Corridors

In looking across the education corridor models presented within this issue, a number of differences and similarities become apparent. The variances can offer a structure for thinking about one's own education corridor—whether it is a live, operating entity, or

still at the point of incubation. The means of organizing the comparisons will be the journalistic structure of who, what, where, when, why, and how.

WHO? All kinds of postsecondary institutions are involved in education corridors, including public, private, large, and small. They are involved with a range of partners as well. Sometimes there is a single partner, like the county. Other times there are many partners, like schools, neighborhoods, governments, human service agencies, businesses, and more. As such, communications and decision-making could potentially include, in addition to the college/university administrators and/or faculty, people who are hospital administrators, local neighbors, agency staff, the mayor, the local school principal or superintendent, and others—a diverse group. The initiatives in Peoria, Hartford, and Cincinnati in particular have a multitude of partners, whereas those in Baltimore and San José have fewer partners.

From the stories presented in this issue, individual personalities seem to be important to the process. Often the university or college president, for example, is mentioned as having an idea, going to coffee with someone (for example, a mayor), and promoting and working toward that idea over a period of time—often extensive, for this type of undertaking. As the initiative proceeds, individuals from different areas within the college or university become involved. This will vary depending on the content or focus of the corridor. For example, in Cincinnati the office of the university architect is centrally engaged, whereas in San José it is the library professionals. Offices of community relations are often involved, as are academic departments, depending on the topic.

WHAT? The content or focus and the subsequent activities of an education corridor encompass a wide range of disciplines and endeavors. If the focus is on community development, the activities may concentrate on neighborhood safety and health and human services, as in the case of Virginia Commonwealth University and its work with the Carver neighborhood. If the focus is on economic development, the activities may relate primarily to businesses, home ownership, and skill development. Real estate transactions can become very important in those situations. In the Maryland example, all variations of the performing arts (theatre, dance, music) are the focus. The result is artists in residence and other school-oriented programs; local, national, and international artists' performances; academic department program activities; community workshops; and more. At Trinity College the emphasis is on schooling and education. That undertaking encompasses four magnet schools, pre-kindergarten through high school. Peoria NEXT concentrates on high tech incubators, medical research, and wealth generation in the new economy. There are engineering-related activities, agricultural bioprocessing plans, and technician training efforts.

WHERE? Often an education corridor is physically located along the edge(s) of a college or university at the linking point with the partnering community. Trinity College and Virginia Commonwealth fit that definition. Likewise, the San José Public Library and the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center serve almost as gateway facilities between the universities and their communities. However, there could be

many variations on that theme. In Cincinnati one can find examples of several situations—that of contiguous areas and free-standing areas in other parts of the city. And Peoria NEXT has office space in one locale, but holds meetings and events all over the city.

WHEN? Is any one time better than another for a collaborative venture? Perhaps all times are good in that one has to start sometime if it is ever to happen. Yet admittedly, there are some times that seem more opportune than others. When key personalities are friends, when the grant availability seems particularly appropriate, when problems arise to such a point that everyone agrees something must be done, or when politics open a window of opportunity, successes may be achieved more quickly. But it appears that those who had already begun talking with potential partners, and had already reached some consensus as to goals and activities that would be desirable, were best positioned to act swiftly when opportunities arose.

WHY AND HOW? The reasons why an education corridor comes into being and what it focuses on are highly dependent on the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the constituencies represented around the table. Ideally the goals and resultant outcomes will be mutually beneficial to all parties, both addressing problems and capitalizing on future opportunities. The history of collaboration among the partners will play a part as well.

The path toward ongoing partnership at the level required for an education corridor is highly individualized to the situation, and includes many challenges—some predictable, others that are unexpected:
- Peoria NEXT started out as a response to an unfunded mandate of the University of Illinois, College of Medicine to increase research activity at the Peoria campus. That activity, in the context of a city whose economic base was eroding, served as an impetus to bring people together to forge a new future for their community, capitalizing on the strengths of the engaged partners.
- As the San José Library initiative got underway, objections began rising from many corners as to why a joint use library would not work. Research was conducted on the issues raised, and plans were formulated that addressed the concerns.
- The University of Cincinnati started out by developing a master plan that recognized the need for an integrated approach with the neighborhoods. They developed "principles of partnering in off-campus development activities" to guide their progress.
- Virginia Commonwealth's work with the Carver neighborhood started as a result of a meeting between a new president and angry residents. The president responded by announcing that the master plan in place would be thrown out and that he would establish a community advisory board. An office of community programs was later established to provide a focus on community service and outreach programs.
- The performing arts center at the University of Maryland was hit by a tornado during opening events. The center closed for several days while repairs were made and then reopened with continuing festivities.

- Trinity College's Learning Corridor has gone through many stages and changes as it has evolved. Originally the plan had been to serve a greater number of local residents in the schools located adjacent to the campus. A court case ruling modified that possibility such that the schools now serve more as magnet schools, attracting students from a wider area. Governance and funding of the schools has changed from the original plan as well. Along the way, The Learning Corridor became part of a state initiative to upgrade urban areas. As such, it qualified unexpectedly for generous funding.

The question of "how can a corridor be financed?" remains a central issue for any such undertaking. The answers will be different according to the context, the history, and the opportunities of the day. In many cases cited herein, city, county, state and/or federal dollars were critical. At the same time, creative approaches to joint financing and fundraising play an important role. Identifying how an education corridor will serve the needs of many organizations and entities is an important step in convincing potential sources of funding to contribute to the cause.

The "why" question can also be examined from the perspective of "What benefits can be achieved from an activity that is obviously so time and money intensive?" The benefits can vary according to the focus, of course, but they typically include such outcomes as:
- improved value of real estate contiguous to the college/university;
- a more stable neighborhood;
- enhanced neighborhood safety (for residents and students);
- recruitment of residents from the local area to the college/university as well as enhanced recruitment of students from a distance, since the surrounding area seems more welcoming;
- provision of services to multiple constituencies; for example, access to the arts, quality pre-K–12 education, human services;
- research opportunities and applications;
- service learning opportunities;
- economic development, including small business growth; and
- generally enhanced understanding of another culture on the part of both university and neighborhood constituencies.

Evan Dobelle, then president of Trinity College, explained his college's interest in pursuing their Learning Corridor in a speech to the National Press Club (1999): "At Trinity, we are trying to define a new sense of institutional purpose and a new spirit of accountability. We are attempting to call our students to a higher sense of citizenship, inviting them to lead in making their community a better place, and inviting them to act upon their idealism by showing them that anything is achievable when the cause is worthy and the will is good."

Conclusions

Education corridors are complex, multifaceted entities. Many factors go into the mix in their creation, their continuation, and their success, or lack thereof. Based on trust, they can create a foundation for good will and success. Or conversely, they could lead to a negative reputation that is difficult to overcome. Town-gown controversies have been around since the Middle Ages. Overcoming history, creating a shared culture and vision, establishing effective ground rules for decision-making, and locating needed resources are not easy tasks. The education corridors described in this issue have, in various ways, succeeded in establishing common ground and a space for their forward momentum to continue.

The potential benefits of an education corridor may be compelling, but it is clear the investment is serious and long-term. Phrases like "stay the course" and concepts of patience, trust, and equality (which can be difficult when one party at the table represents an institution of higher education) appear to be factors related to success. As such, presidential longevity and/or commitment are likely contributory variables. In these days of rapid presidential turnover, that can be a problem for a successful venture.

Other problems to be considered, preferably in advance, are such issues as: *(a)* faculty/staff time and involvement in addition to their regular, ongoing responsibilities; *(b)* fear of the unknown—the "but we've never done it that way before" syndrome; *(c)* rewards for involvement—why would an untenured faculty member at a "publish or perish" institution choose to participate in education corridor activities? *(d)* the huge complexity and intractability of the problems that may be addressed—for example, cyclical poverty, health and education interactions, addictions, and crime; *(e)* the necessity to explain and discuss over and over again, to engage a wide audience, to build consensus—all of which take time, effort, and dedication; *(f)* the crossing of boundaries—businesses don't operate like a college/university, and mixing high school drop-outs with Ph.D.s doesn't always lead to easy conversation—people have to learn together about each other and each other's organizations; *(g)* deciding in advance about the budget and how expenses will be shared on an ongoing basis; *(h)* considering how decisions will be made; *(i)* overcoming turf and agenda issues that may be historical in nature; and *(j)* the necessity for dealing with change and opportunities as they occur throughout the process.

The college/university considering an education corridor is usually well-intentioned. That is a good starting point, but is insufficient. The successful education corridor development process will require serious time, dedication, reflection, conversation, money, cultivating a readiness to venture into uncharted territory, willingness to compromise or re-frame individual and organizational thinking, flexibility, the right personalities, the relevant constituents involved, creativity, and probably more. But on balance, the benefits can be incredible. For example, there is no way to "flip a switch" and create a safe neighborhood. Such a goal might, though, be achievable through an education corridor. Cooperation with neighbors can be vital for the college/university

to move forward in important ways—one can't put a price on good will in the community. The opportunities related to research and service learning can change students' lives and careers. Institutional health and well-being are at issue in some cases. The potential is enormous.

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