Control, Trust, and Rethinking Traditional Roles:
Critical Elements in Creating a Mutually Beneficial University-School Partnership

By Mitzi Lewison & Sue Holliday

University research has nothing to offer me. They don't understand what it's like here at the school site.

—Veteran Teacher, Pine Hill School

This teacher echoes sentiments of distrust and wariness that are commonly held by many K-12 teachers toward university professors and graduate students who have worked at their schools over the years. This teacher had experienced "irrelevant lectures" by university professors and also had been a subject in two research studies by district administrators working on doctorates (she had been asked to fill out long questionnaires with little idea of the purpose or results of the studies). This account illustrates one side of a long-standing history of unsatisfactory relations between universities and schools. As Gerald W. Bracey (1990, p. 65) puts it, "...most people in [K-12] school buildings perceive the work of universities as irrelevant." In contrast, many university-based researchers have had equally

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disagreeable tales about the uncooperative nature of principals and teachers when they attempt to conduct research in school settings that could actually be of great assistance to those who are being uncooperative.

The saga of university-school partnerships and collaborations at best has been a shaky one, where the position of the university traditionally has been privileged in relation to schools (Laine, Schultz, & Smith, 1994; Little, 1993) and there are "long-standing asymmetries in status, power, and resources" (Little, 1993, p. 9). This customary level of unequal power among participants needs to be re-examined carefully to discover new structures and strategies that will enable more desirable outcomes to occur as a regular feature of collaborations between universities and schools. Better relations are critical for both sides—for university researchers, to further knowledge about the dynamics of teaching and learning in the settings in which they occur, and for school personnel, to gain new insights and frameworks from which to view beliefs and practices that have the potential of enabling them to work more effectively with students. In short, both sides need each other (Bracey, 1990).

In this article, we will describe a partnership between a university graduate student and the principal and teachers of a very traditional elementary school. Although the partnership continued in various incarnations over a five-year period, in this article we focus primarily on the outcomes that occurred during the first year. We examine the problematic practices and structures that were in place at the school when the partnership began, the assumptions that guided the development of the partnership, the components of the partnership and how they were designed to equalize power among all members, the methodology for studying the partnership and how it helped build trust among members, the outcomes of the partnership, the importance of trust in making the partnership work, and a brief summary of partnership activities in years two through five. Finally, we discuss strategic principles that we believe can be of great value to others in designing university-school partnerships that have the potential of being extremely beneficial to both sides.

Background

The partnership described in this article started with the first author (university partner) having a casual conversation with the second author (school principal) in which the university partner described how she was interested in exploring reflective practice, classroom change, and new models of professional development as part of a dissertation project for the 1991-92 school year. The principal, who was just beginning her third year at a new school in a new district was extremely interested in having the study take place at her site. The school, Pine Hill (fictitious name), was an urban K-5 elementary school in a middle-class neighborhood in Southern California. It had a population of 700 students with 25 percent of the school's students speaking a language in addition to, or instead of, English, and 16 percent demonstrating limited English proficiency. Forrest School District (ficti-

tious name) had shied away from innovation and most of the 25 faculty members had been at Pine Hill for their entire teaching careers. The principal thought the study would encourage Pine Hill's teachers to question their practice, support each other when trying new strategies, and establish a more collegial environment at the school.

During a faculty meeting, the principal introduced the university partner to the staff and told them why she was interested in having a study take place at Pine Hill. The university partner described her interest in experimenting with new forms of professional development and in using a more collaborative form of methodology than was usually found in school-based research. She read Elliot W. Eisner's (1988) observation to the staff about how researchers need to "...go back to the schools, not to conduct commando raids, but to work with teachers as colleagues in a common quest and through such collaborations to rediscover the qualities, the complexities, and the richness of life in classrooms" (p.19).

Thirteen of the 25 teachers at Pine Hill decided to participate in the study, which rapidly evolved from a research project into a collaborative partnership. The teachers had a wide range of teaching experience, from four first-year teachers to one who had taught for 33 years. We refer to the teachers as novices (0-2 years of experience), experienced teachers (7-11 years), and veterans (18-33 years).

There were three main activities that the university partner, the principal, and the teachers participated in: monthly study group sessions, reading research or theoretically-based reading, and keeping weekly journals. It was up to each member to decide which of the activities to participate in and what form their participation would take. The teachers negotiated the topic of "teaching writing to elementary students" as the major focus of the study group sessions, the readings, and the journal entries. They also negotiated how each study group session would be run. This shared power among all the participants in relation to more traditional staff development models led us to describe the project as a collaborative (or partnership), based on Virginia Richardson and Mary Lynn Hamilton's (1994) distinction between staff development that is (a) externally driven (mandated, oriented to acquisition of new skills), or (b) teacher-initiated (individually determined growth activities), or (c) collaborative (shared partnership between participants and facilitators).

Problematic Professional Practices
and Orientations at Pine Hill

During her two years at the school before this partnership began, the principal had been observing the practices and theoretical orientations of the teachers and administrators in Forrest School District. She noticed many positive aspects of the school and staff: Pine Hill School had a long tradition of excellence in the community; families moved into the area so children could go to the same school their parents had attended; and many parents were very active in PTA or in preparing materials for teachers. Staff members also perceived the school as being "the best"

(five teachers had their own children attend the school). Generally, the tone at Pine Hill was very supportive for learning.

But there were also areas the principal observed as problematic in making the school a dynamic organization in which teachers worked together to create meaningful, inquiry-based learning environments. Three broad themes characterized the principal's observations: (a) the customary role of teachers in Forrest School District; (b) the prevailing school environment; and (c) prominent instructional practices in teaching writing.

Customary Roles: Teachers as Technicians

For years, following a mandated curriculum was a powerful tradition at Pine Hill School. Teachers were expected to follow district guidelines and a "good" teacher was characterized as one who delivered the prescribed curriculum in an effective way:

> In Forrest School District for many, many years everything has come from top down. The district office annual walk-through was a critical one to see if bulletin boards were done properly. There was a prescribed method for doing everything, even bulletin board titles which were to be hand written in the form of a question on sentence strip paper. (Principal, Journal Entry)

Within this traditional institution teachers were expected to play a role of "transmitters of knowledge." The principal had eight huge notebooks in her office that prescribed curriculum teachers were to follow and each teacher had a large guide covering all subject areas. The district office served as a "fount of knowledge," telling teachers what and how to teach. In her journal, the principal noted that "up until last year, all teachers received lesson plans to follow for the first two weeks of school."

School Environment: Weak Collegiality

Classrooms at Pine Hill were fairly insulated environments with few professional influences from outside. The principal noted isolation seemed to be a salient feature of the classroom teacher's existence. Doors were closed and teachers guarded their best projects as something special for "their children" only. One novice teacher noted:

> Teaching can be an almost secretive profession. No one really knows what goes on in another teacher's room.

But, despite teachers' closed door policy, there were two places at Pine Hill where they did meet to talk: at staff meetings and in the lunch room. One novice teacher observed:

> Usually the only time we talk is either at a staff meeting—and there are all these things we need to discuss, or in the lunch room. And people don't just talk about what's going on in their classrooms in the lunch room. They talk about children,

maybe [complaining about] behavioral problems and things like that, but they really don't talk about their teaching.

And an experienced teacher adds, "It's OK to gripe in the lunch room, but you can't brag." This teacher reported that she would share successes with another teacher in private, put never in public.

Also, a hierarchical relationship based on the number of years one had taught existed at Pine Hill, with special privileges extended for longevity. Power and privilege based on seniority and a non-collaborative tradition kept teachers apart, especially the novices. The frustrations of a second year teacher illustrate the non-supportive environment she found herself in her first year at the school:

> I thought it would be really easy to be a new teacher, especially here, because there are so many teachers that had been teaching for a long time. I expected just kind of a willingness to share. Last year, I really felt I got no help in terms of other teachers...I felt lost and frustrated...I want to work with other people.

Accepted Practice: Writing as Skills Acquisition

As the partnership began, the principal was in the process of encouraging the faculty to up-date the school's curriculum and start moving toward a holistic, constructivist view of instruction. During the prior two years, she had observed spelling and grammar taught as isolated subjects at Pine Hill. She found students did little writing about their own ideas and assignments limited students to topics chosen by teachers which generally required little thought or planning on the part of young writers. The student writer's organization and understanding of audience and voice were **not** considered important. Here's one novice teacher's written description of how children become literate:

> The most important factors are recognizing letters, learning sounds, sounding out words, learning sight words, and a lot of <u>practice</u> of just reading, spelling, and writing.

The vast majority of teachers at Pine Hill had never heard of writer's workshop (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983) or the authoring cycle (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988). This is not so surprising, because these teachers attended few conferences and read few professional journals except for "how to" magazines such as *School Days, Arts and Activities*, and *Instructor*. Due to lack of district funding and an ethos of insularity, the teachers had not been able to attend many conferences or workshops outside of the district. The result was they followed curricular practices based on lessons developed over the years and often from out of date state curriculum frameworks.

Guiding Assumptions

The development of the specific activities that the members of the partnership

engaged in were guided by theoretical assumption in three areas: equalizing pre-existing power relationships, encouraging collegiality, and improving writing instruction.

Equalizing Power by Creating New Roles

There has been much in the research and theoretical literature describing how the traditional roles of educators have kept different groups in or out of power. The customary role of teachers has been one of dis-empowerment where teachers are perceived as "transmitters of knowledge and curriculum" that has been dictated from above (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Barnes, 1975; Lester & Mayher, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux (1993) describe how even many so-called reform efforts still reduce teachers to high-level clerks or specialized technicians (p. 34).

In an effort to counter this tradition of teacher-as-technician, we examined the work of psychologist William Glasser and his conceptualization of Control Theory (1986). He suggests that humans are motivated by four internal needs: love (belonging and sharing), power (I'm listened to, what I have to say is important), freedom (I have some measure of choice and control over what I do), and fun (Glasser, 1986; Gough, 1987).

In Pine Hill's professional development activities, teachers had little choice or control over the content, format, and mode of their participation. They were generally required to attend sessions mandated by site or district administrators. We felt it was critical to design this project as a collaborative effort with teachers so that they had freedom and control over participation, initiating topics, creating agendas, developing structures, and if they did participate, choosing the amount and manner of that participation.

We also examined common conceptualizations of the role of principal. Over the past decade, there has been movement away from viewing principals as supervisor or administrator to viewing them as instructional leaders. As an instructional leader, a principal is expected to know the best forms of instruction and lead her teachers to implement these "best" practices with students (Poplin, 1992). But, in the model of principal-as-instructional leader, authority still generates from the top-down. In moving beyond this concept, Michael G. Fullan (1990) articulates the principal's role as an enabler of solutions, built on developing a collaborative work culture at the school that fosters collegiality. Mary S. Poplin (1992) describes the principal as an "administrator/servant" who leads at both the top and the bottom. By leading from the bottom she calls on administrators to "...be their [teachers'] aides, locators of resources, and organizers of opportunities that will help them stay abreast of the instructional innovations they are interested in" (p. 11). We believe this model of the principal as both a leader and supporter holds promise for enabling teachers to exert more control and power over their professional lives.

As we mentioned earlier, there has been a long history of unequal status

between universities and schools (Laine, Schultz, & Smith, 1994; Little, 1993). Universities have traditionally seen schools as "sources of data" or as "tools to carry out the universities' agenda" (Bracey, 1990, p. 65). Gary Sykes (1990) calls for finding ways to create "status-equalizing access" so that schools regularly can be involved in interchanges with the scholarly community and gain new knowledge without the typical top-down relationship. We believe that universities can support classroom teachers in areas in which they wish to further their knowledge. This can be accomplished by providing access to articles and research the teachers may not be aware of, by becoming a regular part of critical discussions about teaching and learning, and by engaging in collaborative pursuits where the goals include beneficial outcomes for both sides.

Encouraging Collegiality

Johanna K. Lemlech and Sandra N. Kaplan (1990) have defined *collegiality* as "the establishment of a professional relationship for the purpose of service and accommodation through mutual exchange of perceptions and expertise" (p. 14). For this project, we expanded this definition to include **a sustained, on-going relationship where teachers are focused on curricular issues of their own choosing.** For the partnership to have a significant impact on the participants, we believed trust would need to build among the members over a considerable length of time. On-going collaboration with colleagues has been shown to be an essential component of sustained teacher growth (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Short & Burke,1989; Smith, 1995). We suspected a collegial environment would have the potential to raise levels of teacher commitment to continuing growth by meeting the critical needs identified by Glasser (1986) of love (belonging and sharing) and power (I'm listened to, what I have to say is important).

Inherent in our view of collegiality is the concept that learning is a social process (Vygotsky, 1978) and takes places as a result of experience, personal identification, and mutual collaboration (Smith, 1995). Informal teacher study groups, which give teachers opportunities to meet regularly to discuss curricular issues, can provide a supportive environment for developing new insights and understandings about learning and teaching and also provide support for change in classroom practice (Anders & Richardson, 1991; Bishop, 1989; Matlin & Short, 1991; Murphy, 1992; Short & Burke, 1989).

Challenges in Improving Writing Instruction

Over the last 20 years, many professional development efforts have been implemented that were designed to improve writing instruction in K-12 classrooms. But in spite of some very promising models including the national writing projects, there are still major problems with writing instruction. The recent National Assessment in writing has shown that one quarter of students did not even respond in a minimal fashion (brief, vague, or confusing responses) to writing tasks on the

assessment (Applebee, Langer, Mullis, Latham, & Gentile, 1994, p.3).

David D. Marsh, Debra J. Knudsen, and Gene A. Knudsen's 1987 study of the role of staff development in the Bay Area Writing Project offers insight into why the writing projects do not seem to be impacting the majority of classrooms or National Assessment scores. The writing project teachers who made the most significant changes in their classroom programs attended a three week summer institute, participated in regular follow-up meetings, and became part of a larger continuing network of respected colleagues. Because of the major time commitment that needs to be made by participants and the stringent admission procedures and policies of most projects, writing institutes are usually attended by a small number of only the most dedicated teachers. We wanted to find out if an on-going, site-based collaborative effort would be compelling enough for average teachers to make changes in their classroom writing programs.

Nancy B. Lester and John S. Mayher (1987) believe the kind of knowledge gained by researchers, theorists, and scholars can provide a "new lens" from which teachers can view practice. We thought that inviting members to read and make direct connections to classroom practice would motivate teachers to look at their own writing instruction with an openness to change.

Components of the Partnership

As was briefly mentioned, there were three major activities that members of the collaborative participated in: study group sessions, reading research or theoretically-based articles, and keeping professional journals. Although most members participated in all three of these activities, each member of the partnership ended up having more control over one of the particular activities than the other members.

Study Group Meetings: Power to the Teachers

The monthly study group meetings became the focal point for moving away from the tradition of university researchers holding the balance of power in university-school partnerships. In order to move toward equalizing power among all members, it was critical to insure that those with the least inherent power, the teachers, had control over this portion of the partnership since it was the most public and social aspect of the collaborative. The university partner and the principal took a back seat as the teachers negotiated the topics and structure of the meetings.

At the first session, the teachers brainstormed issues in language arts that they wanted to discuss and through consensus "teaching writing" was their top choice. They decided to start each meeting by sharing classroom successes in writing practices from the previous month. By beginning each session with sharing, the teachers set the tone they wanted for the meetings and also established a set routine during which they could share their knowledge, expertise, and results of experiments in teaching writing with other members of the collaborative.

Theoretically-Based Reading: Power to the University Partner

Prior to each study group meeting, the teachers and principal received three to seven articles, selected by the university partner, that related to the topic the teachers had negotiated for the upcoming meeting. The university partner chose articles that she felt would bring new perspectives to the teachers and would encourage them to reflect on their current beliefs about teaching writing. The articles addressed: definitions of writer's workshop, getting writer's workshop started, student topic choice, time for writing, inventive spelling for drafting, writing conferences, conventions, editing, author's chair, and publishing student writing.

Although the teachers decided on the broad topics they wanted to read about by having control of the selection of the articles, the university partner was able to use her expertise to guide the kinds of issues that would be addressed in study group. She chose articles that coincided with her conception of good writing instruction, that combined both research or theory with practical implications, and that dealt with student writers at a variety of grade levels.

Journal Writing: Power to the Principal

Dialogue journal writing was the final activity of the collaborative. All members of the partnership kept journals in which they could reflect on study group meetings, the professional readings, what was happening in their classrooms or jobs, or any other professional issues they chose to write on. The teachers wrote weekly journal entries which the university partner responded to on a monthly basis; the principal and the university partner dialogued weekly with each other; and the principal published a weekly journal for all the staff as a way to share more of herself.

By publishing her journal, the principal was afforded a comfortable way to be more transparent, open, and honest with the teachers. Here are a couple of journal entries she shared with the university partner:

> I also shared [at the first staff meeting of the year] that I want to be more transparent. I admitted that administrators hide what they are thinking for protection and that it hadn't really worked for me so this year I wanted to be more open with everyone.

> A couple people said they liked my journal and that's all it takes to encourage me to share it. I get excited about what's happening at school and I like to write about it but just like kids I like a real audience.

Without this strategy the principal's voice would not have been heard. She felt free to explore a variety of topics that clarified what she valued and what was important to her. The topics of her journal were extensive and included school events, planning school-wide projects (including their problems), how much she valued the staff, individual teachers and their classroom successes, how she reacted at principals' meetings, how she saw benefits to the staff from the partnership, how hard it was to be reflective with so much happening, how she dealt with problem

students, and meetings she was having with individual teachers and parents. This sharing coincides with Fullan's (1990) view that one way for principals to approach the complex task of working collaboratively with their teachers is to regularly express what they value.

Methodology and Trust Building

For the university partner, this collaboration offered the chance of being able to document and gain new knowledge and insights about what happens in establishing a university-school partnership that is based on building shared power among the members, encouraging a collegial environment, and improving writing instruction. But in addition, it offered the possibility of experimenting with how to engage in more collaborative forms of research with schools.

The critical narrative research model was particularly attractive because it seeks to interpret human experience by focusing on the narratives of teachers and researchers and to promote caring, connectedness, community, and a just society (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Advocates of this model feel that what's missing from the present knowledge base of teaching is "teachers' voices" and inherent in this type of research is the implication of giving validity to teachers' judgments and values (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). "When both researchers and practitioners tell stories of the research relationship, they have the possibility of being stories of empowerment" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4).

The university partner found that although the teachers were very amenable to sharing their "stories," they really did not want to help with analyzing data. On the other hand, the principal was actively involved in collaborating with the university partner on some phases of data analysis. There were many data sources used to help understand the multiple dimensions of the partnership including: pre-post teacher questionnaires, pre-post audio-taped teacher interviews, pre-post literacy beliefs profile (Kucer, 1991), audio-taped study group sessions, journal entries of all members of the collaborative, classroom observations and photographs, district writing test data, State of California program review findings during year two, group interview and discussion at the end of year two, and audio-taped principal interviews at various stages of the partnership (years two, three and five).

Hour-long, individual interviews with the teachers at the beginning of the partnership were extremely important for the university partner to build trust with the teachers, whom she had just recently met. Upon analysis of these audio-taped interviews, the university partner found the first 10 to 15 minutes of the interview usually were spent in informal talk about how things were going in the teachers' classrooms and with their students. The university partner shared some of her own classroom experiences as they related to the issues the teachers were sharing. This private, fairly informal time together with each teacher not only helped to establish base line data for the partnership, but also helped the university partner to gain the

trust of the teachers.

The university partner took major responsibility for the initial analysis of the data for years one and two by using qualitative, inductive, data driven methods. The analysis took place in three different stages: (a) initial coding and categorization; (b) secondary coding into subcategories (supporting partnership stories), and finally; (c) collaborative analysis with the principal on grouping the subcategories and creating domains (significant partnership stories).

Outcomes of The Partnership: Year One

In this section we describe the changes that occurred as a result of the partnership: equalizing power, encouraging collegiality, and improving writing instruction.

Equalizing Power

We found that perhaps the most important element in creating a mutually beneficial partnership for the school and the university was that the teachers became more equal partners by controlling the ways they could participate in the project and still remain full partners. The fact that there was no one "right" way to participate gave members control over exactly how and to what extent they would engage in the various activities. For example, one teacher wasn't keen on study group, but really enjoyed reading the articles so she didn't attend all of the study group meetings but read most of the articles. In another case, a teacher found no benefit in journal writing and stopped after the second month, but still read articles and participated in study group. The following excerpts from teachers' interviews point out how each resonated with a different part of the collaborative:

> It [study group] kind of opened up a whole new way of teaching which I think will influence other subjects, too. (Veteran Teacher)

> I have grown so much from this [reading], professionally. I have never before got into [teaching] writing in so many new and inventive ways. (Veteran Teacher)

> I liked writing—it was kind of cathartic after a bad day. Even though I didn't do it very much, when I did do it, I enjoyed it. (Novice Teacher)

By the end of the first year, one of the most significant changes at Pine Hill School was in the role teachers held in controlling study group meetings. For the teachers to assume more power, the university partner and the principal had to reconceptualize their customary leadership roles in professional development activities. The traditional view of the researcher's role has been one of an expert who either comes in to tell the school what to do or who examines the school , collects data, and leaves after a short while. The traditional view of the principal's role was to transmit important information from the district to the teachers.

Their new role as "supporters" led the university partner and the principal to act in ways that were congruent with their value of shared power. Kathy G. Short

and Carolyn L. Burke (1989, p. 193) very insightfully point out that:

> ...until teacher educators explore more fully how to live their own models, they will
> have a limited effect on changing the current course of education.

The university partner found it caused her to rethink the role she had usually played as an outside consultant, transmitting "the word" to the masses:

> Just as I would like to see teachers increasing their level of reflectiveness and
> professionalism, those of us who consult and work with teachers need to find new
> vantage points from which to view and critique our practice.

The principal discovered it was hard to give up the special privileges of the traditional principal role of "the authority." She consciously decided to take a passive role in the study group because she was afraid teachers might place too much value on the importance of her contributions. However, she had to fight the impulse to speak out as an advocate for whole language practices. She felt doing so might risk shutting down discussion, intimidating teachers, or even making them angry. This motivated her to become a more quiet and observant participant than she had envisioned.

Another example of questioning traditional roles happened when the authors observed study group meetings were polite and calm without the challenges or arguments they had envisioned. They discussed possibilities of restructuring study group meetings to initiate a more critical discourse. One idea was to start the meeting with a more reflective activity such as writing in journals. Another was to have either the principal or university partner take control by asking leading questions or steering the thinking and discussions in a direction other than what the teachers desired. Ongoing conversations gave the authors time to think about consequences before taking action. They decided to honor their commitment to let the teachers take the lead in running the study group and hoped that the multiplicity of opportunities for participation would cause teachers to reflect on their practice. At times, this sitting back and trusting that the teachers knew what was "best" for them to discuss was difficult for both the university partner and the principal. However, the teachers displayed their satisfaction when they rated the study group as the most highly valued part of the collaborative. We now believe if we had changed the structure of the study group to meet our own goals, we would have reclaimed traditional positions of power and robbed the teachers of their authority in assuming new roles.

Encouraging Collegiality

There was a remarkable change in school climate during the first year of the partnership. For the overwhelming majority of teachers, the study group sessions satisfied a hunger to meet and discuss issues of teaching and learning in informal settings. They felt the study group sessions cut down isolation and created closer bonds with their colleagues:

I normally don't share personal experiences, but I felt comfortable enough to do it here [in study group]. (Veteran Teacher)

It was really low keyed and relaxed. You can talk about what was going on in your class, anything funny or interesting that happened—something great or something awful. (Novice Teacher)

This growth of collegiality also altered some of the entrenched, socially-constructed norms at the school in regard to what was OK to discuss and what wasn't. One aspect of the climate at the school before the collaborative started meeting was that it was perfectly acceptable to complain about students in the lunch room and it was definitely not acceptable to discuss curricular "successes" (this latter act was viewed as bragging). Although these unexamined rules of behavior had been implicitly agreed upon by the school community, they became open to renegotiation. The partnership experience did not completely eliminate complaining about students in the lunch room, but it did provide a forum for teachers to talk about successes, share problems, question beliefs, and discuss pedagogy. During interviews at the end of the first year, most teachers mentioned how much they appreciated this aspect of the group.

Additionally, the partnership provided a vehicle for the five novice teachers to get to know their colleagues better and to feel more a part of the staff. Their initial feelings of distrust and wariness toward the more senior teachers were replaced by feelings of belonging and even some admiration for their more experienced colleagues:

You know it was amazing to hear [Ms. X] talk about the writing workshop. I had no idea [what she did with her students]! That whole thing [her implementing writer's workshop] was so different from what my impression was of her as a teacher. I never would have thought she did that! (Novice Teacher)

The principal also played a major role in promoting collegiality through her determination to do business in a new way by trying to be honest and open with the staff. She did this by sharing copies of her journal entries with the teachers. The staff reported they really enjoyed reading the principal's journal. They said that this "published" document provided them with a way: to "keep-up" on what was going on with the rest of the staff, to draw staff together, to keep more in touch with the principal, to find out what she'd been doing, to furnish insights into what was going on in other teachers' classrooms, to understand what the principal was thinking, and to get to know the principal better both personally and professionally.

Despite the rise in the level of collegiality among the group as a whole, two teachers remained isolationists throughout the first year of the partnership. They did not value meeting with their colleagues nor did they feel they learned anything from the sharing and contributions of their peers. However, it's interesting to note one of these teachers was the only staff member who responded to the principal's journal in dialogue fashion in subsequent years of the partnership.

Improving Writing Instruction

During the first year of the collaborative, teachers read and discussed articles about teaching writing, experimented with new strategies in their rooms, and shared results with their peers. Classroom practices in teaching writing changed in the classrooms of 11 of the 13 teachers who were members of the collaborative. Specific modifications in individual writing programs included: having students keep journals, encouraging students to use inventive spelling in journals and on drafts, having students choose their own writing topics, scheduling a daily writing time, providing a forum for students to share their writings with the class, teaching peer conferencing, implementing writer's workshop, publishing student works, and teachers sharing their own writings with students. Here is how two teachers described changes they made:

> Well, I was really tentative to do inventive spelling, I really was. So then I just went with it and that's what we've done [in the classroom] most of the year and my kids, compared to my other classes—I have kids writing three and four pages now. I mean front and back! (Experienced Teacher)

> I was the only one who limited their [the students'] writing and I thought I was doing an excellent job, I really did!...I never thought that second graders could peer conference. They do it very well. (Veteran Teacher)

We also saw the knowledge base of teachers in the partnership change significantly because of this project. The reading of research-based literature seemed to be most responsible for this change:

> I don't think the discussions would have been as valuable without the literature to read...I loved hearing what everyone else was doing [at study group sessions], but I think the professional reading gave us things to think about and talk about and follow through with. (Veteran Teacher)

Names of researchers like Donald H. Graves and Lucy M. Calkins (whose articles were used extensively) were mentioned numerous times during the first year of the collaborative. Everyone in the partnership knew who these writers were and what they were advocating in terms of teaching writing in schools. They became "household" names and part of the socially-constructed knowledge base (Bruffee, 1986; Kuhn, 1962) of this community of teachers. One teacher was actually able to meet Calkins in person. Here is how she connected this meeting with Calkins to the value of the partnership:

> The information [readings] and discussion [study group], I got so much out of that. If nothing else, I've really changed my whole way of thinking...and this led to me knowing [who] Lucy Calkins [is] and going to a conference with her that I would have never signed up for [before]. I got so much out of that, she's incredible! (Novice Teacher)

Not all teachers made high levels of change in their classroom writing programs. It was interesting that the four teachers who made small changes in their classrooms were novice teachers. This was not surprising since these teachers were spending so much time getting acclimated to the classroom and were concerned with management, discipline, and other fundamental issues of survival. Two veteran teachers who made no change in their writing programs were the two we identified as isolationists. In addition to remaining very insulated from their colleagues, they both had strong interests in areas other than language arts.

Successes of the First Year Based on Trust

In analyzing the successes of the first year of the partnership, we kept revisiting three issues: control, changing roles, and trust. We previously have discussed how we attempted to equalize control and power among the members, much of this accomplished through redefining traditional roles. Now we turn to the issue of trust and discuss why we believe it was a fundamental element in the success of the Pine Hill partnership.

First of all, building the foundation of the partnership was a gradual process of establishing confidence among all the members. At the beginning, there were varying levels of trust between the different participants. Although the university partner and the principal had collaborated on projects in the past, there was still a need to establish a comfortable working relationship in this new context for both. The principal and the teachers had built some trust together at the time the partnership started, but since the principal was fairly new at the school, they were not totally comfortable with each other. Although the principal had introduced the teachers to the university partner at an hour-long staff meeting where they discussed a possible partnership, the teachers and the university partner basically were strangers. Since the university partner was the person who came to the collaborative with the potential for wielding the most control and power, her role in establishing trust with the principal and teachers was critical.

Trust Building with The Principal

We strongly believe that the initial building of trust between the university partner and the principal is critical for establishing successful university-school partnerships. The principal, as leader of the school, needed to be convinced that working with the university would be good for her and good for her staff. In addition, she was is the main link between the staff and the university partner. The university partner initiated trust-building strategies with the principal six months before the partnership's conception—engaging in informal brainstorming sessions and phone calls about a potential partnership, selecting and sharing professional readings, and communicating through a fax dialogue journal.

The informal partner/principal meetings and phone calls were characterized by

a lot of "give and take," with the university partner taking special care to listen to the principal's ideas and concerns and the principal asking questions that helped her understand the possible impacts the project would have on the school. It was a time for the university partner to obtain background information about the school and, maybe more importantly, gain a greater understanding of the principal's work style, beliefs, and theoretical orientation. By participating in joint brainstorming sessions on as many issues as possible, including how to introduce the project to the staff, the principal was reassured that she would be an equal partner in the project.

The university partner also sent the principal articles on issues that the university partner was struggling with, including one on the critical narrative research model. By sharing this struggle, the university partner was acknowledging the principal as a joint partner in seeking knowledge and formulating the framework of the partnership. In addition, the principal and university partner started exchanging a weekly fax dialogue journal where they discussed what they were reading, aspirations and doubts about the project, and issues at the school. Here's a sample of portions of their written dialogue:

> It's interesting that you're viewing your new staff members' perspectives as a way to see things from a fresh perspective. In all of the reading on reflection I did, I never read about using novices as a "new lens"...well, nothing I read coming out of education, that is. Thomas Kuhn, in *The Study of Scientific Revolutions* [1962] says that all real changes in science come from people who are either new to the field or from another field. We can try to observe and see how Kuhn's observations hold with your new folks. (University Partner, Journal Entry)

> This [Connelly and Clandinin, 1990—article on critical narrative research model] is an interesting article. My first responses are disappointment that this [type of research] had been done a lot and we're not first—and dismay that so little is known about it. Truly you don't select the easiest path! Let's hope it's interesting enough to make it worthwhile. (Principal, Journal Entry)

> I'm looking at this project as an unknown adventure—something that is evolving and unfolding. I don't have a clue where we'll end up and it doesn't matter. I think that whatever happens is perfect—as long as it can be told as a compelling and interesting story that offers some insight into the business of teaching and principaling and—that somehow, the process is empowering for you, me, and the teachers. (University Partner, Journal Entry)

These strategies—informal conversations, reading articles, and exchanging and responding to weekly journal entries—continued throughout the partnership and communicated a strong message to the principal of equality among partners and of concern for the welfare of the school. The principal noted that she felt comfortable that the university partner "...wasn't going to come in, take over the school, shove me to the sidelines, use teachers as subjects, conduct an information 'raid' and leave."

Trust Building with the Teachers

The luxury of months of trust-building before the project started was not possible with the 13 teachers. The university partner's strategy of individual interviews gave her the greatest return for time spent. Although in the hour long teacher pre-interviews the university partner had a set of pre-determined questions to ask, the feeling tone of the interviews was informal and friendly with lots of laughing and sharing about teaching and other outside interests. These interviews became the main vehicle for the university partner to establish trust with each teacher.

The element of trust also framed the parameters of the study group meetings by acknowledging that the teachers knew what was important and meaningful for them to discuss. The teachers negotiated the content and structure of the meetings. The university partner attempted to adopt a nurturing stance during the meetings. She made a commitment to respect the path that a teacher was on, even if this was in opposition to her own beliefs about learning and teaching. She tried to keep in mind that she was there to encourage teachers to "find their own way." The organizational style that developed in the group was one of exploring teaching and learning issues together, with no authority keeping the group on the "right" track.

Even though they were given control, the teachers wanted the university partner to facilitate the study group sessions—no teacher would volunteer for this role. This troubled the university partner, but she couldn't force leadership on someone who didn't want it. As a result, the university partner tried to facilitate the study groups in a way that allowed the teachers' voices to predominate. As a leader she used an informal style and encouraged everyone to participate with questions like, "Does anyone else have experience with peer conferencing that you could share?" She also pointed out connections between a practice that a teacher was describing with what had been explored in the readings for that session. The fact the teachers never led the study group meetings was a source of continuing disappointment to the university partner.

Finally, dialogue journals with the teacher became another strategy for building trust. This strategy grew out of the teachers' initial frustrations with writing journals. After the second study group session, one of the teachers voiced a concern to the principal about whether she was doing the journal entries "right." The principal shared this with the university partner who decided to start dialoguing with the teachers. For every group of journal entries she collected (once a month at the study group meeting) she responded in letter format to each teacher individually. This gave the university partner a vehicle for continuing dialogue with individual teachers.

These strategies (informal individual interviews, teacher control of the topic and format of study groups, and dialogue journals) cemented trust between the university partner and teachers.

The Changing Partnership: Years Two through Five

Although the formal university-school partnership dissolved after the first year, it evolved naturally into new forms over the subsequent four years. The changes can be characterized by those that evolved directly from the activities of the partnership and spread to the rest of the staff and those that involved continuing interaction between the university partner and the teachers and principal at Pine Hill.

Evolution of the partnership to the whole school was accomplished through the transformation of study groups into grade level planning groups. Participants in the initial partnership became informal mentors to other teachers. For example, students in all four kindergarten classes began writing journals and using inventive spelling even though only two of the teachers had participated in the partnership. Eventually, the grade level study groups were transformed into cross grade groups that focused on examining student writing across grade levels. The principal has continued publishing her own journal for staff over the entire five years, attempting to model a reflective approach to her own practice.

The university partner continued her involvement in the school through visits during the second year to interview teachers from the original group to find out their reflections on the project a year later. In the third year and fourth years, the university partner participated in seven study group meetings at Pine Hill. But, more important than working with the teachers were the continuing conversations between the university partner and the principal about issues of writing, collegiality, and power. These conversations led us to revisit and analyze what had happened over the past five years at Pine Hill and collaborate on this article.

Key Principles to Consider in Creating
Mutually Beneficial University-School Partnerships

The Pine Hill university-school partnership produced important benefits for both the school and the university. On the university side, the partnership enabled the university partner to understand in a profound and significant way the potential of teacher study groups to encourage collegiality, the role of professional reading in working with veteran inservice teachers, the promise and problems of journals as a tool for supporting reflection, the difficulties of encouraging a reflective approach to practice, and the importance of investigating forms of professional development that are more empowering to teachers (Lewison, 1994).

For the school, there were many changes that made Pine Hill a better place for the principal, teachers, and students. First, the school culture and climate evolved to the point that teachers working together in collegial and collaborative ways became the rule rather than the exception. Secondly, the teachers knowledge and understanding of teaching writing grew and improved instruction was evidenced by

classroom observations, district writing test data, and state program review findings (Lewison, 1994). Students were publishing more child-authored books and writing about issues and topics that were important to them. Finally, the school structure changed so that the teachers became greater share holders in the power of managing the school. This helped to meet the principal's desire to govern the school in a more open, fair, and democratic fashion.

In reviewing the last five years of the Pine Hill university-school partnership, we have identified the four elements we believe are most critical in developing university-school collaborations that can be both positive experiences and beneficial to both sides. Although we didn't realize the importance of these elements while in the midst of planning and implementing the partnership, the careful reflection we engaged in by writing this article provided us with new insights into the critical nature of equalizing the power positions of the members, building trust with the principal, fostering individual (not just group) relationships, and insisting on frequent and continuing communication among members.

Equalizing Positions of Power

In traditional university-school partnerships, power has been asymmetrical with the university partner and the principal holding large shares of power and the teachers holding little or none. Bracey (1990) refers to the problems that stem from these differences in power and control between universities and schools as "dysfunctional." In this project we tried to avoid dysfunction and equalize power positions with particular attention to our own relationships with teachers. Besides choosing whether to be a part of the partnership and how fully teachers wished to participate in each component, they had control of the study group which was the most public and therefore the most socially powerful component. Control came in negotiating topics, initiating a sharing strategy to set the tone of the meetings, and providing the university partner with topics for the monthly professional articles. When teachers evaluated the three components and identified study groups as giving the greatest benefits, they demonstrated to us the importance of democratic structures and shared control. They viewed themselves as partners, not "subjects" to gain data from.

Building Trust at an Early Stage with the Principal

In most university-school partnerships the principal is the "gatekeeper" who controls access the university partner has to the teachers and the school. At Pine Hill, we started trust building six months before the partnership began. During this time, we had weekly contacts by phone and dialogue journal that allowed us to share articles, examine promising ideas, identify important issues, negotiate the design of the initial project, and develop a comfortable and trusting style of communication. This stage evolved naturally and we didn't understand its importance until much later. We now believe the six months we spent in "getting ready" for the partnership

was critical to the positive outcomes that came from the Pine Hill partnership. By the time the teachers were involved, the university partner and the principal had high levels of confidence and trust in each other.

Developing Relationships with Individual Teachers

The university partner inadvertently stumbled on to the importance of building trust with individual teachers rather than with the group as a whole. Before the project started, she met with each teacher for an hour pre-interview conference to gain background data about the teachers and the school. By reviewing transcripts, she noticed that the interviews frequently moved away from the pre-determined questions to topics of mutual interest to the teacher and the partner. This spontaneousness kept the communication style informal, friendly, and relaxed. As a result, the university partner established a fairly strong relationship with each teacher. We now feel building these individual relationships made it possible for the university partner to quickly become a quasi-member of the staff rather than an outsider.

Ongoing Communication

Every partner communicated with every other partner in some fashion on a regular basis. This was not directly planned from the beginning, but there were a multitude of forms that evolved with appeal to individual styles of communicating: phone conversations, dialogue journal writing, publishing journals, study group discussions, fax journaling. This regular communication allowed us to avoid having each side blaming the other for problems, a common occurrence in university-school collaborations (Laine, Schultz, & Smith, 1994). All members had the ability to deal with minor difficulties before they turned into major problem.

We strongly urge readers considering forming university-school partnerships to explore and plan in early stages ways to equalize power, build trust among all participants, and maintain flexibility in communications.

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