Understanding and Dismantling Barriers for Partnerships for Inclusive Education: A Cultural Historical Activity Theory Perspective

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Abstract

Increasingly, universities and school districts share responsibility for teacher and student learning. Sharing responsibility demands that both institutions work to develop closer relationships through ongoing engagement, dialogue and negotiation. Drawing from Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), we examined one school/university partnership to identify potential barriers to the close relationships that shared responsibility demands. We illustrate these barriers from the point of view of university-based site faculty, recognizing that a full understanding requires multiple perspectives. However, our study offers useful insights about the work and tensions that merge for individuals who serve in boundary crossing roles when two communities with different core missions engage in a common activity intended to produce mutual benefits. We offer some recommendations to anticipate and reduce barriers to active, engaged school/university partnerships.

Key words: Inclusive education, school/university partnerships (or just partnerships), Cultural Historical Activity Theory, boundary practices.

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…one of the things that the language coach was extremely upset about were some of the co-teaching strategies and assignments we would have them try. She told us,"Well, don't you know that they are adjusting their lesson plans from the curriculum maps that they have been given? The curricular map says to teach it this way, and because they're doing such and such a strategy, they are doing it that way. You need to be aware of this because you need to change what you are asking them to do, and their practicum courses [need] to be aligned with the district curriculum mapping" (A university site professor struggles to deal with the realities of practice at a professional learning school, UITE data, interview 26).

University-school partnerships for inclusive education have the potential to be conductive vehicles since they can simultaneously connect theory to practice, implement and innovate inclusive pedagogies, and develop teacher capacity. Partnerships between schools and universities are not uncommon within the inclusive education movement. In a recent review of the literature, Waitoller & Artiles (under review) found that, between 2000 and 2009, action research was the most common form of professional learning for inclusive education. Teachers, principals, and university professors and doctoral students engaged in inquiry based processes in which the development of inclusive teachers and school practices were intertwined (Waitoller & Artiles, under review). This body of research highlighted the positive impact of long-term relationships between university and schools on school inclusive practices and students outcomes. This research also demonstrated the potential of university-school partnerships to reflect and question school and university practices that exclude some students from accessing opportunities to learn (Waitoller & Artiles, under review).

Yet, there are several challenges that arise from the work done in university-school partnerships. When two institutions work together, there are simultaneous efforts to maintain, reproduce, negotiate, and transcend institutional boundaries (Daniels, Edwards, Engeström, Gallagher, & Ludvigsen, 2010). That is, when engaging in partnership work, schools and universities challenge each other's expertise, practices, policies, and social arrangements, which create conflicts and tensions. The quote at the beginning of this paper illustrates some of these challenges. The quote came from a member of the professional learning school (PLS) that we worked in, in which a university program and three schools partnered to develop the schools' capacities for inclusive education while simultaneously preparing teachers who were able to teach in general and special education classrooms (Kozleski & Waitoller, 2010).

In the quote, the site professor recounts her frustration with the school administration's insistence that the curriculum of a university seminar for teachers about inclusive practices be aligned with the district's curriculum maps for students. Her frustration stemmed from the frictions that she perceived between the pedagogies of the university program and the district curriculum. Curriculum maps were a district-wide initiative to systematize the curriculum on a daily basis to ensure that all state standards were sufficiently covered. The district's logic was that tighter alignment between district standards and practice would improve students' scores on accountability assessments. Tension emerged because some district initiatives foregrounded

specific skill development while the university's pedagogies were driven by learner-centered emergent reading practices. Theoretically, these agendas had overlaps. As practiced, their implementation seemed to have rigid boundaries and processes. While both agendas were important, the unanticipated misalignments between practices and student performance on accountability measures created friction for the school and university personnel who were supporting the teacher residents: the clinical teachers and the site professor. Teacher residents designed and implemented lessons based on their university course assignments to develop their co-teaching and culturally responsive pedagogies without connecting the practices to the school's district-sanctioned scripts for classroom activities.

The site professor's quote represents the kinds of conflicts that emerged over practices, pedagogies, and content. As McIntyre (2009) noted, university-based, teacher education programs play a regulatory role in prescribing teacher education curriculum. Yet, school leaders and classroom teachers may perceive that the prescribed curriculum is detached from the realities of school practice. While the design of school/university partnerships should reduce this conflict, the communication, co-planning, and shared design work may not take place in sufficient detail and authority for making shifts in either university or school curriculum and pedagogy. When a new teaching practice or pedagogy that disrupts schools' and school districts sanctioned practices (e.g., co-teaching and cultural responsive pedagogies) enters the classroom, negotiations are needed among the delegates of the partner institutions about what teaching practices and kinds of knowledge should be valued and included in the design and development of learning environments. Power and privilege embedded in the roles of university and school personnel become contested and disrupted in this kind of negotiation.

The context of standards and accountability can aggravate these tensions. Schools with extreme pressures due to failure to meet annual performance targets were likely to follow scripted practices that are considered by their district as the most efficient manner to increase student performances (McNeil, 2000). The quote from the university site professor highlights this point. In the PLS, all teachers, including teacher residents, needed to follow the district's curriculum map sequence. No class could afford to deviate from the sequence, even in pursuit of educational goals for teacher development. As a result, the practices and pedagogies coming from the university program disrupted the teaching of the curriculum maps content. To solve the friction, the school personnel wanted to align the university curriculum with the district content maps. The university faculty wanted to find a way to expand the learning opportunities for the teacher residents so that they could move beyond the scripted lessons.

At the core of this conflict were unexplored and disparate views of what curriculum and pedagogies should be privileged and for what reasons. Differences in approaches to curriculum and pedagogies were informed by assumptions about the purpose of education that had not been surfaced in the planning and design of the partnership yet were indexed in district and university programs and policies. For instance, the function and purpose of education was foregrounded in two very different ways. One conceptualization was that education served to prepare children and youth to become part of the labor force while another asserted that education was fundamentally a preparation for citizenship in a democracy. In a partnership bringing these divergent perspectives together form the basis of a working relationship.

While the site professor's quote reflected a local conflict, it spoke to broader tensions faced by many partnerships between university and schools. Sometimes, these negotiations occur silently, as members of the partnership evade confrontation and make adjustments so both kinds of practices and understandings can co-exist as parallel efforts. Sometimes this negotiation

provokes frictions that overtime erode relationships among university and school personnel, resulting in discontinuities in partnership that end up being reliant on the capacities of individuals to make situational compromises. Other times these negotiations occur across a number of levels of the partnership and provide a fertile ground for the emergence of emancipatory understandings and practices.

The purpose of this paper is to explore further the tensions in school/university partnership for inclusive education. We draw from research on CHAT (Engeström, 2011) and boundary practice (Star & Griesemer, 1989) to identify, examine and understand common barriers for partnerships. We anchored our examination in our own work in an urban initiative for teacher education. In particular, we describe a particular event experienced by one of our site professors who worked one day a week in a partner school. In the following section, we provide a brief history of our school/university partnership and the particular faculty member whose story we relate here. Using Merseth's (1996) case definition, we offer the description in the next segment as a research-based case that details an authentic situation from a PLS. We attempt to offer a balanced representation of the context, participants, and chronology of events. We created this case to encourage discourse, analysis and divergent interpretation. We relied on the collection of field notes and member checks to construct and refine the narrative. After defining inclusive education and describing the case, we introduce the theoretical lens that guides our analysis of some of the tensions within partnership work across institutional boundaries. Then, we offer some perspectives for dismantling those tensions.

Inclusive Education

We define inclusive education drawing from Fraser's (1997, 2008) three-dimensional conceptualization of social justice. Inclusive education should be based on redistributing quality educational opportunities for all students (dimension of redistribution), recognizing and valuing all students' differences (dimension of recognition), and on creating spaces for families and students to participate in the decisions that affect their learning trajectories (dimension of representation) (see Waitoller & Artiles, under review and Waitoller & Kozleski, under review for a further discussion of this definition). This definition positions school professionals, administrators, researchers, university professors, parents, and students as *cultural vigilantes* (Corbett & Slee, 2000) who pay continuous attention to how new margins and centers are produced in contexts that are in constant flux (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007).

Further, in our scholarship we have highlighted the significance of addressing intersecting and complex forms of exclusion when developing inclusive education systems (see Artiles & Kozleski, 2007; Kozleski & Artiles, 2012; Waitoller & Artiles, under review; Waitoller & Kozleski, under review). That is, student exclusion results from the interaction of multiple forms of marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989). For instance, in India and Kenya, marginalization has been linked to the intersections of caste, gender, and poverty (Mutua & Swadener, 2005; Singal, 2004). In the U.S, Latino, African American, and Native American students are overrepresented in high-incidence disability categories (i.e., learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disabilities, speech and language impairment, and intellectual disabilities) at the national, state and district levels (see Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2010) and are placed in more segregated educational settings than their White peers (de Valenzuela, Copeland, Huaqing Qi, & Park, 2006; Fierros & Conroy, 2002; Sullivan, 2011). Thus, efforts to expand inclusive education should address policies and practices at all levels of the educational system (i.e., school, district,

and state) to dismantle compounding barriers that keep some groups of students from accessing to and participating in quality opportunities to learn.

Partnerships have a great potential for dismantling intersecting barriers as they bring together the expertise of various professions (e.g., teachers, principals, university professors, speech pathologist, social workers) and voices and perspectives (e.g., students and families, community members from neighborhood). They are a vehicle to negotiate and synthesize different perspectives and solutions to dismantle complex forms of exclusion (Waitoller & Kozleski, under review). The next section describes an effort of a school/university partnership to engage in such daunting challenge.

Tensions at Cabrini

This case is set in the context of a partnership for educational renewal and teacher learning. The partnership was between a school district and a university's School of Education. The district educated about 6200 students from preschool through high school graduation in 11 schools. The School of Education served about 1000 graduate students in its various programs. For seven years, faculty and administrators from both institutions worked together to educate new teachers, develop innovative and exemplary practices, engage in professional development and conduct inquiry in classrooms, working in six of the 11 schools in the district. In doing this work, the partnership grew from an initial relationship based on special educator preparation to a more comprehensive, district-wide relationship that included partner schools, model demonstration projects, and systemic, statewide school improvement projects. The intended outcomes of these efforts were to establish sustainable and renewing partnerships across four levels: district, university, individual school, and faculty (district and university). In particular, four functions of the partnerships were established: 1) exemplary teacher preparation for general and special education teacher residents; 2) continuing, results-oriented professional development for district/university faculty; 3) the integration of research/evaluation and practice through collaborative, action research conducted in schools and classrooms; and, 4) exemplary education for a diverse group of P-12 students, including students with disabilities (Chatman & Poetter, 2011).

The school was in an industrial area on the northeast side of a large, western city in the U.S. At the time of this case more than 80% of the students attending elementary school in the school district qualified for free and reduced lunch. The graduation rate was only 50.1 percent as compared to 82.4 percent statewide. In the year of this case, schools in this district posted some of the lowest scores on the statewide assessment of literacy for students in third grade, falling in the bottom third of the state performance criteria. Since then, the partner schools in the district that host teacher residents demonstrated significant improvements in student achievement outcomes. This case came from data collected in the district through role-alike focus groups with university and school faculty, students, and clinical teachers as well as from the site professor's field notes, artifacts from teacher residents and clinical faculty archived in a research repository.

Solange Perry had been a tenure-line professor in the School of Education for 12 years. She had received tenure and promotion from assistant to associate. She worked hard to develop a reputation as a steady and thoughtful researcher, a talented university teacher, and a contributing member of the School of Education. When the general education teacher preparation was dismantled and reconstructed, Solange was in the thick of designing the new teacher preparation program that had all the hallmarks of best practice in contemporary teacher education. The

redesigned program was based on delivering high quality, field-based, teaching experiences from the first semester of the program. Each PLS had a site professor from the university who was on site one day a week and a teacher on site who had been released from her teaching duties. Solange served in that role at Cabrini Elementary School for over seven years at the time of the events chronicled in this case.

Cabrini Elementary School entered into a professional learning school partnership with a local university beginning the year that Solange began her work in that school. Cabrini, like its six sister schools, initially hosted two special education interns for an entire year. Students worked five hours per day, five days per week in their building. They also took three courses per semester at the university. When the new general education program began, Cabrini was also chosen to become a professional learning school site for general education teacher residents. The teachers, principal, and site professor at Cabrini had selected a focus on inclusive education as their PLS signature. This particular leadership area focused on ensuring that general education teachers were prepared to assess, differentiate curriculum and instruction, and support the needs of a broad range of learners in their classrooms. Thus, Cabrini Elementary was a partner school with both general and special education initial teacher residents. Solange had responsibility for coaching and mentoring all the teacher residents. In addition, there were special and general education teachers who served as clinical faculty, developing coaching and co-teaching relationships with individual teacher residents.

Solange spent at least one day per week in Cabrini, working with both the special education residents and the students from the general education initial teacher preparation program. She had, along with other special education faculty, helped to design the leadership area seminars for the teacher residents. Solange had been one of the special education faculty who had selected this district as the best choice for hosting teacher residents because it had had a school board policy endorsing inclusionary education prior to the advent of the partnership between the district, the schools, and the university. All students with disabilities attended their neighborhood schools, even those students with significant support needs. Each building had a full-time child advocate, trained as both a social worker and a school psychologist along with a team of special educators. With this assistance, students were assimilated into these schools. Students with severe developmental and mobility disabilities were also sent to their neighborhood schools. In a school of perhaps 400 – 500 elementary students, this meant that one or two students with significant support needs might progress through the grades at that school.

In spite of this impressive effort, there were serious but covert concerns about inclusion on the part of the teaching staff. Many teachers privately wondered why they were asked to have students with such serious needs in their classrooms. During teacher contract discussions, inclusion was always raised as an issue but it seemed to subside between contract negotiations, at least in public conversations. The district was struggling with its standardized achievement test scores. School-wide and district continuing professional development focused on literacy training. Teachers felt as if they taken on the additional challenge of teaching students with special needs without the support and skills they needed to feel confident in their roles.

In the meantime, special educators were involved in several rounds of professional development experiences that focused on inclusive programming and services. Yet, Solange began to wonder about the long term benefits of the partnership. Solange worried that teacher residents both in special and general education were not learning what was needed to become successful at universal designs for learning. In fact, because of the stresses that their clinical teachers had around having students with disabilities in their classrooms, Solange feared that the

reverse was happening. Teacher residents may be exiting from their experiences believing that students with disabilities should not be included. In the next sections, we explore this case in more detail including examining (a) the political charged context of urban schools, (b) conceptions of students' abilities and inclusive education, and (c) finding inclusive education classrooms that are sufficiently dynamic and developing where teacher residents can learn from work in progress. We use the Cabrini case and previous literature on partnerships and boundary practice to illustrate and support our points. First, we provide a brief synopsis of partnerships as boundary practice to ground the discussion.

Theorizing Partnerships as Boundary Practices and Competing Activity Systems

Research on CHAT (Engeström, 1987) and boundary practices (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Star & Griesemer, 1989) provides a theoretical framework for examining and understanding common challenges faced by partnerships for inclusive education (see Waitoller & Kozleski, under review). CHAT is based on Vygotsky's (1978) concept of artifact-mediated and object oriented action. Artifacts are both material (e.g., a book) and internal representations of such mental models (e.g., the meaning and significance of a book for a teacher) (Cole, 1996). According to this theory, people come to know, make meaning, and experience the world through the use of mediating artifacts (Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978) in participation with other community members in goal-oriented activities (e.g., a lesson in the classroom). While the internalization of these activities provides teachers the means to simulate and try different interactions without actually performing them, the externalization of activities allows them to verify and try out such interactions. The constant interaction of internal and external activities is the basis for human cognition and practice (Engeström, 1987).

Activity systems are complex social organizations that involve subjects (e.g., teachers), their communities (e.g., school staff), artifacts (e.g., a curriculum, understandings of inclusive education), outcomes (e.g., learning to be inclusive teachers), division of labor (e.g., who does what), and rules (e.g., school policies) (Engeström, 1999). People's learning and actions are mediated by the elements of the activity system. Activity systems are multi-voiced, object oriented, and are negotiated and constructed by participants (Engeström, 2001). Thus, activity systems change as participants shift their roles and tools and construct the object of the activity. Indeed, creating a shared understanding of the object of the activity takes the lion's share of the work done in activity systems (Engeström, 2008).

From a CHAT perspective, school/university partnerships can be understood as the overlap of two activity systems. This overlap occurs in a boundary practice, which is a practice in which two communities (e.g., a university program and an elementary school) engage and that has "become established and provides an ongoing forum for mutual engagement" (Wenger, 1998, p. 114). In university-school partnerships, for instance, the activity systems of teacher preparation programs (e.g., developing teachers) and the activity system of schools (e.g., educating students) overlap. Tensions are ubiquitous in boundary practices as the two activity systems may have different objects, tools, rules and ways to divide labor, and as the understandings about and levels of commitment to the goal of the partnership may vary across stakeholders. In addition, as the partnership develops, school and university personnel's roles and responsibilities may shift over time, creating more ambiguities and tensions among them.

Indeed, the artifact-mediated construction of the object of the activity rarely happens in a harmonious manner. Tensions emerge between the elements of the activity as a result of the multi-voiced nature of the activity system (Engeström, 2001). Different voices are rooted in the

histories of different communities of practice (e.g., university and schools). From this perspective, tensions within and activity system or between different activity systems offer the potential for learning. As participants in the activity system engage in dialogue and negotiation of their perspectives and understandings of the object, new objects emerge from the abstract to the concrete, and new forms of practices are developed (Engeström, 2008). This interactive dynamic has a spiral trajectory that leads towards more sophisticated understandings of the object as long as the players and organizations involved remain committed to their partnership. In CHAT, this is defined as expansive learning (Engeström, 1987).

Identifying and Dismantling Barriers at Cabrini Elementary

Drawing from CHAT, in this section we examine three barriers that we identified in our own work in partnerships for inclusive education: (a) politically charged contexts of urban schools, (b) disparate conceptions about students' abilities and inclusive education, and (c) the few examples of exemplary inclusive education classrooms. We also explore attempts to overcome these barriers. Yet, our goal is not to provide a recipe for success for partnerships or for smoothing dilemmas that emerge in them. Unfortunately, the barriers we found in our work and previous literature on partnerships are substantial and demand continuous and spiraling work. As communities, their members, their artifacts, and the contexts in which participation occurs change over time and across physical spaces (e.g., classroom and schools) so do the barriers. Thus, the work of partnerships is always in a state of incompleteness; barriers rarely disappear although they may diminish. This process always demands a reexamination of prior solutions.

Barrier 1: The Political Charged Contexts of Urban Schools

One of the common challenges that we have faced in our own work and that we have witnessed is the complexity of school/university partnerships engaged in transformation for inclusive education within the socially and politically charged contexts of urban schools. That is, that when two institutions work together to serve all students, they do so bearing the full weight of different policies, institutional histories, tools (or lack of), different individual and collective identities, assumptions, commitments, and understandings of the task of the partnership. The context of urban schools in the U.S compounds these challenges. Urban school contexts in the U.S have been extensively documented in the literature (e.g., Kozol, 1991). Urban schools tend to have the lowest economic and human resources, high teacher and principal attrition rates, high accountability pressure, and high enrollments of low-income students whose families and communities are marginalized in multiple ways, often by the institutions designed to support them (McNeil, 2000).

Cabrini Elementary was more an example than an exception of many urban schools in the U.S. At Cabrini, for instance, the district was struggling with increasing their students' scores on state assessments to meet accountability benchmarks. This was coupled with an attrition problem: the high turnover of special and general education teachers. While central administration could provide evidence of persistent professional development efforts to support inclusion, the teachers who received the training often left the district within two years. Not only did teachers leave quickly, their principals did as well. Only one current principal had been at a building for 5 years. In one 10 year span, the district had five superintendents, two associate superintendents, four curriculum directors, and three professional development directors. Only

the special education director and the research, evaluation and accountability director had stayed over the course of the partnership. At Cabrini, accountability stakes were high and resources were low and unstable.

The creation of the partnership had brought together two activity systems in a boundary zone that created tensions but also the potential for negotiation and expansive learning. As Edwards and Kinti (2010) pointed out, different meanings of professional expertise and of the object of their shared work become visible as tensions emerge between partnering institutions. The more the work of individuals become specialized and specific, the more the boundaries become visible and concrete. This happened in the Cabrini PLS as well. The object of Cabrini's activity system was students' outcomes (e.g., assessment scores, dropout rates, etc.) which determined whether the school met accountability benchmarks. Cabrini's human, spatial and time resources were geared towards complying with district mandates to increase literacy, keep kids in school and improve the climate of respect for students. The university partners were focused on formal and informal professional learning designed to improve Cabrini's inclusive practices.

Unfortunately, there was little negotiation and co-construction of the object as part of the work of the partnership. The partnership was tangential to Cabrini's efforts to meet accountability policies; minimal concerted effort was expended to tie the functions of the partnership to the school district goals. As a result, the involvement of university faculty was based on individual efforts to support specific initiatives. Furthermore, while the university faculty appeared to share a sense of the larger mission of the partnership, this same, shared purpose was not transparent to large numbers among the P-12 faculty. In part, this was true because the partnership originally emphasized teacher preparation. Thus, the ties that bound these two institutions remained individual and personal rather than systemic and infused, and the promises of the partnership remained unfulfilled.

The idea of a partnership in which shared knowledge is developed, expanded, and used to inform transformation is separate from the reality of every day crisis, missed opportunities, lost time, and external demands for immediate improvement. As a result, schools like Cabrini are remarkably bound by their inertia and culture and, even with dedicated efforts, alter their practices very slowly. As Edwards and Kinti (2010) noted, schools are inclined towards professional development agreements that provoke minimal disruptions to their established practices. Universities are bound by their own traditions of research and practice that while grounded in the realities of campus politics and demands are also removed from the fray of everyday life in schools. Thus, while university faculty may have at one time worked in schools, their daily lives are not consumed with the same issues that mark the work of P-12 faculty. University faculty have access to the accumulated wisdom, current research, and the luxury of time to understand and uncover meaning in the work of people across sites. This vantage point both sharpens understanding of broader issues and privileges knowledge that comes from observation and study rather than labor in the crucible of everyday practice. These two vantage points could embellish and enhance practice and professional learning but it makes democratic and collaborative partnerships between schools and universities difficult to construct and sustain.

Yet, as Alsup (2006) noted, the boundaries between universities and schools overlap despite the differences between the communities. These boundaries tend to be unsettled and permeable. A challenge for partnering institutions, thus, is to find points of confluence to ensure that their work is fluid. The case of Cabrini's pinpoints questions for the work of partnerships for inclusive education: How can inclusive education reform be designed and implemented despite

the political and sociocultural differences of universities and urban schools? How can universities and urban schools engage in collective work expanding their understandings and tools for inclusive education? We explore some responses to these questions in the next section.

Dismantling Barrier 1: Co-constructing the Object of the Partnership

 A potential vehicle for dismantling the lack of clarity about the object of a school/university partnership is to negotiate the object of the partnership. Engeström (1999) noted that the potential for learning within an activity arena is tightly associated with the search for object construction and redefinition. This often takes the form of finding and defining the problem. In the case of the Cabrini/university partnership serious thought needed to be dedicated in the beginning and throughout it efforts to examine the purposes of the partnership and how those purposes could further the district's and university's agendas and support improved outcomes for all the district's students. Once a common vision and purpose was tied to the district goals, it could be easier to develop and implement the various partnership functions among P-12 and university faculties. Weaving the missions of these two institutions together needed to be based on a shared understanding of their purpose, function and potential outcomes. In other words, the definition and understanding of the object of the partnership needed to emerge as collective effort between the two partnering institutions. And, this mission needed tending regularly since the players within the partnership changed.

Partners could conceptualize and nurture a boundary zone in which the object of the partnership is negotiated, re-constructed and shared. This is congruent with the National Council for Accreditation and Teacher Education's blue ribbon report recommendation (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Preparation, 2010): student and teacher learning should be a shared responsibility in partnerships. We add that the object of the partnership should include the learning and development of all members of the community, including principals, parents, university and school faculties as well as other school professionals (e.g., school psychologists, teacher aides, and other first-line providers). A common understanding of what this object means and may look like is the first step for a sustained partnership. On this note, Kozleski (2011), drawing from Gutierrez's (2008) notion of third space, stated:

> This third space produces generative dialogue among individuals and groups who may hold conflicting understandings of (a) the way that teachers come to know their practice; (b) the way that problems are resolved through policy, research, and/or practice; (c) the nature of the kinds of teacher education problems worth solving (e.g., alternative vs. university-based programs); and (d) the ways in which representations of reality are expressed through the specialized, professionalized language that we use. (p. 251)

Third spaces should create generative dialogues in which the object of the partnership is expanded. By evaluating progress and engaging in ongoing critical dialogue, it may be possible to develop a partnership that values the voices of all the members and supports continuous renewal and improvement of the institutions involved. In this third space, university and schools that partner for inclusive education should question and analyze explicitly their motives and understandings, modeling new explanations that can be examined and then implemented (Engeström, 1999). In other words, a third space is a boundary zone in which the meaning of inclusive education and its implementation is discussed and sharpened, while a common object is developed. This object should be robust enough to encompass the schools' responsibility to

comply with accountability policies and a broader inclusion agenda that moves beyond narrow policy goals. The goal of the work in this third space is to develop a shared expanded object and innovative tools as a distributed achievement between the partnering communities. This enables partnerships to have fluid and flexible boundaries, sharing and furthering expertise so that there is a rich learning environment for all members of the partnership community. In Cabrini Elementary PLS, Solange worked with her site liaison and clinical teachers to develop a rubric for how and when teacher residents might introduce unfamiliar pedagogies and approaches to literacy in the curriculum. At the beginning of each semester, clinical teachers and teacher residents used this rubric to gauge when and where in the curriculum they might try some of the practices that came out of the teacher education program.

Unfortunately in Cabrini Elementary PLS, school and university staff felt short of developing what Edwards and D'arcy (2004) called *relational agency*:

> a capacity to recognize and use the support of others in order to transform the object. It is an ability to seek out and use others as resources for action and equally to be able to respond to the need for support from others. (p.149)

One way to develop relational agency is to form and sustain leadership teams that represent the diversity of voices in a building. In our experience, leadership for change must reside within the collective vision of a learning community rather than within an individual such as a principal. Most of the conventional wisdom in school leadership research places great emphasis on the role of the principal. Reform and renewal built on individual leadership is difficult to sustain or to scale up because of the mobility of people in those roles. Further, as Miller (1996) pointed out, where vision and drive rests with a leader, only about 25% of the community typically mobilizes to carry out the agenda. The work of school reform is too complex and must contend with so much inertia that leadership must be shared. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated that shared leadership is a key characteristic on inclusive schools (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). Effective principals share decision-making power with their staff and promote collaborative practices (Elmore, 1996; Fullan, 2002; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). They are able to create spaces in where school staff can draw and learn from the resources (e.g., knowledge, perspectives, attitudes, skills) of colleagues and university professors and vice versa. The main goal is to create a distributed form of expertise in which the shared object of the activity can be developed and enhance.

As we engage in the task of co-constructing the object of the partnership, we must acknowledge that the object construction does not happen in a harmonious manner. Change is slow and incremental during reform for inclusion (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). It involves a dialogical process in which perspectives meet, collide, and sometimes merge. These perspectives are crystallized and rooted in different communities (university and school), and continue to coexist within partnership even after a shared object has been developed. The object of the partnership, thus, needs to be revisited continuously.

Barrier 2: Disparate Conceptions about Students' Abilities and Inclusive Education

The school/university partnership was sustained through several long-term professional relationships between superintendents and the dean of the school of education, principals and faculty in university leadership programs, and between teacher education and classroom faculty. Yet, deep fractures in how ability and difference and inclusive education were conceptualized

and understood remained. From a CHAT perspective, understandings of ability differences and inclusive education may be seen as artifacts. They mediate people's actions and thinking. In the partnership, the understandings of university faculty about inclusive education and ability differences enter the activity system of the school through the faculty and their teacher residents. The school, comprised of educators with a variety of cultural histories and professional identities has both a collective and a series of individual understanding of these concepts. As these concepts surface, they create what Engeström (1987) called a secondary contradiction: a tension created by an external artifact (i.e., university faculty and students' understandings of ability differences and inclusive education) entering an established and complex activity sytem (e.g., Cabrini's activity system).

For the most part, educators at Cabrini conceptualized disability within individual students while some university faculty conceptualized disability as a socially constructed phenomenon based on the nature of the social and intellectual contexts in which individuals and groups found themselves. Teacher residents may understand the university faculty ideas but remain unconvinced or they may be zealots of a particular position. Ideas about where disability is located also affected how members of the activity systems conceptualized knowledge and how its demonstration was discussed and measured. For instance, Solange heard Cabrini's principal make the following comment:

> We know that you cannot take the student who has Down's Syndrome, tell him to sit in row 5, to open up the book to page 33, to listen to the lecture, to fill out the worksheets, to answer the questions in the textbook. That is going to be a bust. *It is questionable whether that kind of education is good for any student.*

This comment seemed to capture several ideas. One notion was that Down's Syndrome was a sufficient description of a student to convey ability and potential. Students who experience Down's Syndrome demonstrate a remarkable range of skills and abilities linked to the opportunities to learn and the expectations of their families, teachers, and communities of children and other families that surround them. A second idea embedded in this comment was what formal education might entail and how it might be engaged. The principal suggested that one version of learning is a solitary act by students in interaction with materials and a teacher lecture. What we understand from the advances in learning sciences in the last 15 years is that learning is a social and interactive activity that engages learners through multiple senses and pathways and requires active involvement (Greeno, 2006). Teaching has become a design activity in which opportunities to learn are developed in ways that place the learner in driver's seat with maps for discovery. The third sentence revealed the principal's own disillusionment with much of what passed for learning in her school. It is italicized because it reveals the conflict that many educators feel about what they are asked to do and the degree to which their everyday activities result in the kind of outcomes that they strive to accomplish.

The principal's comment represented many of the conversations that Solange had had with classroom teachers, special educators, literacy coaches, and the principal. Inclusive education itself was poorly understood. For many of the educators at Cabrini, it meant that all children were to be taught in the same setting. A teacher that Solange worked with for several years stated, "*Since we are an inclusion school I have to deliver services in a way which meets the needs of all students in a classroom.*" Only a handful of the educators who Solange had enjoyed working with had any experience with successful models of inclusive practices and with worries about literacy performance, they had little time to focus on what inclusive education

might look like. While there was recognition that the same designs for learning wouldn't be effective for all students, it was also apparent that few of the educators understood how to conceptualize learning environments that offered different ways to engage in meaning making, synthesizing, and performing. Lack of experience in differentiated classrooms and with frameworks for learning compromised the capacity of the teachers to innovate and refine as they went. And, against the backdrop of accountability measures, deviating from the prescribed curriculum seemed risky.

Many of the teaching practices that Solange observed in general education classrooms were contrary to best practices for inclusive education. For instance, one grade level teacher described her approach to homogeneously grouping students for literacy instruction:

> We look at kids' needs – special education and English Learners (ELs). We have cross grade groupings. The groups have 11 to 12 kids and they are all at the same reading level which is great.

To manage the different needs of the learners, the teachers instinctively wanted to group students by their learning profiles. What they had been exposed to and what their curriculum encouraged was teacher/student directed learning in which the teacher provided information to be absorbed and then, practiced independently in worksheets. Disrupting this inclination was tricky. The teachers' response to the secondary contradiction was to sustain their practices in an effort to sustain congruence between what they understood about the nature of learning and their practice.

Dismantling barrier 2: Expanding collective understandings of ability and inclusive education

Solange's work in the school can be seen as opening a periphery that troubled school boundaries. As Wengner (1998) pointed out, "the periphery is a very fertile area for change because it is partially outside and in contact with other views and also partially inside so disruptions are likely to occurred" (p. 118). Solange, for instance, pointed out to the principal, there was little to lose. Only 25% of Cabrini's students were meeting standards with their current approach to learning. What Solange, the principal, the school psychologist, and two lead teachers did was to take time to learn about problem based learning. In this way, they begin to expand and share their own repertoire of artifacts. They developed, for instance, a set of model designs for learning in which students were grouped across abilities and interests and asked to work on an authentic problem in their school. Then, this small group demonstrated the lessons in classrooms, asking teachers to take notes and watch how their students learned and problem solved. They then coached teachers in grade level teams to build a set of lessons based on the next curriculum units. The teachers worked together on these tasks. Then, the faculty met as a whole to develop a working definition of inclusive education. This became the framework for lesson design in the building.

Over the course of an entire school year, the school developed and refined their understanding of inclusive education, resolving (at least momentarily) secondary contradictions in Cabrini's activity system. In doing so, they also connected the process to improving student performance on standardized reading and math assessments. This kind of work fed into new conversations about what ability and difference mean to students and to teachers. In this way, through re-mediating practice, the teachers learned to re-mediate their understanding of what

difference and inclusive education meant within the context of learning and growth. In CHAT terms, the school personnel together with Solange created a boundary practice in which expansive learning could occur.

Barrier 3: There Are Few Exemplary Inclusive Education Classrooms

At Cabrini School, Solange found herself in another conundrum. After spending time in classrooms and gaining teachers' trust, Solange was developing relationships with teachers and was able to have conversations like "I wondered why you handled it this way, and so-and-so often handles it another way?" The teachers not only were interested in the conversation and participated in it, but they might change what they do because of the discussion. However, collectively, the kind of teaching that occurs in many classrooms still disadvantaged students with disabilities. Solange worried that the teacher residents both in special and general education were not learning what they needed to become successful at involving students with disabilities in accessing the general education curriculum. In fact, because of the stresses that their clinical teachers often had around having students with disabilities in their classrooms and the high accountability pressure, Solange feared that the reverse was happening. Teacher residents were walking away from their experiences believing that students with disabilities should not be included because the general education classroom was not welcoming to them. The challenge, in short, was that Cabrini Elementary did not have inclusive classrooms that offered ways of apprenticing novice teachers into inclusive practices.

One of the assumptions of this conundrum is that learning is a linear and unidirectional process: knowledge travels from the expert to the novice. Therefore, a teacher and a classroom are critical to apprentice a novice teacher into attitudes, practices and predispositions for inclusive education. Apprenticeship, from this point of view, reproduces existing practices. Yet, research on communities of practice and apprenticeship has demonstrated otherwise. Lave and Wenger (1991) noted that learning refer to changing participation in ever changing communities of practice. As teacher residents participate in school practices, school practices change as in response to new understandings of the objects of their activity. This is of particular significance for inclusive education as we defined at the beginning of this paper: as a continuing process of examining the margins.

Further, lamenting the lack of exemplary classrooms for teacher resident placements underestimates the value and potential for innovative ideas that may emerge from the classroom teachers. The assumption that an exemplary classroom is needed to apprentice teachers is based on the idea that the exemplary classroom is the one that the university faculty has in mind. The university faculty's point of view is privileged over the school staff point of view. In this argument, the ideas and practices coming from university faculty are more valued than the ideas and practices that emerge from the work of classrooms and school faculties. The university faculty's favored theoretical ideas are promoted at the expense of inducting teachers into mutually meaningful dialogue between the two faculties. From a CHAT perspective, privileging the idealized notion of inclusive education favored by university faculty results in the imposition of one activity system (the university activity's system) over the other (Cabrini's activity system), rather than the negotiation of a common object and understandings about good inclusive practices. Learning occurs for all members involved in the activity (e.g., teacher residents and university faculty).

Dismantling barrier 3: Towards a collective distribution of expertise

A partnership between university and school faculties requires approaching professional and student learning as a collective endeavor in where expertise is shared, distributed, and constantly questioned and tested. A vehicle for this is the continued engagement in inquiry that is steeped in principles of equity. The school, district and university play important roles in creating a context that encourages educators to approach teaching as innovation. All educators— professors, teacher residents, teachers, school and district administrators— share responsibility for creating knowledge. Knowledge produced through action research aims to transform practice. School and district personnel as well as university personnel must commit to explore new roles, identities, responsibilities, and practices as they collaborate to engage in research on, for, and in practice. Evaluating progress and engaging in ongoing critical dialogue, it may be possible to develop a partnership that values the voices of all the members and supports continuous renewal and improvement of the institutions involved. At Cabrini PLS , Solange worked with her site-based colleagues to develop a teacher learning book group that met once a month to discuss a book about how teachers learn. For instance, the group discussed El Haj's (2006) book about *Elusive Justice*. In particular, the teachers authenticated the kind of teacher talk described in the book and how those conversations build a kind of social currency that values particular ideas and assumptions. They were intrigued with finding examples of those same practices in their own school. This led to a rich conversation about how to disrupt some of those assumptions so that more thoughtful conversations might occur. This moment in the teacher learning group translated into conversations in meetings about how teachers and teacher residents might change some practices to become more inclusive. This in turn created the opportunity for learning to teach in more inclusive settings.

Conclusion

In this paper, we drew from research on CHAT and boundary practices to examine and explore common barriers faced in partnerships between schools and universities that focus on developing inclusive education reform. Schools are remarkably bound by their inertia and culture and, even with dedicated effort, alter their patterns of regularity, sorting, and assessing very slowly. Universities are bound by their own traditions of research and best practice that bring with them a certain elitism and sense of superiority. Thus, tensions in partnerships in school/university partnerships are inevitable. At the core of these tensions there are power struggles about whose agenda, artifacts, and motives are valued. Yet, these tensions may be more of a blessing than a curse since they are a fertile ground for expansive learning (Engeström, 1987). The case of Cabrini Elementary School suggests that boundary practices where objects and artifacts are questioned and expanded in a collective and democratic manner offer rich opportunities for developing inclusive education. For this to happened, university and school personnel need to be flexible to question their own understandings and assumptions about their work, students, and the purpose of education.

Returning to the definitions of inclusive education stated at the beginning of this paper, we conclude that the work done at the school/university partnership have focused mostly on two dimensions: redistributing quality educational opportunities for all students and recognizing and valuing all students' differences. As we discussed in barrier 2, teachers at Cabrini PLS begin to develop a set of model designs for learning in which students were grouped across abilities and interests. These designs not only gave access to meaningful instruction to all students but also recognize and value students' identities. Solange played a key role on disrupting previous conceptions of ability, difference, and inclusive education and creating spaces in which they could be question and reformulated, which resulted new model designs for learning. As Bowker

and Star (1999) stated a stranger is a source of learning as it causes interruptions to the normal experience of the community.

Suchman (1994) used the term *boundary crossing* to describe social actors such as Solange who enter unfamiliar territories in which they need to negotiate the artifacts of overlapping communities in boundary practice. The experience of Solange, as of many boundary crossers, illustrates the ambiguity and tensions of boundaries. She was not only a translator between the Cabrini Elementary and the university but also embodied the divisions of these communities (Akkerman & Bakker, 2010). Yet, boundary crossers like Solange have the potential of partnerships for re-mediating policies, practices, and understandings that contribute to redistribute educational access and recognize and value students' differences.

Efforts to translate artifacts that vary across communities (e.g., understandings of ability differences and inclusive education) are key to the role of boundary crosser. Hasu and Engeström (2000) noted that the original design and translation activities for translating these artifacts may have not accounted for the interpretations of multiple actors that worked in politically and culturally charged institutions. Several scholars (e.g., Lutters & Ackerman, 2007) pointed out that providing rich information (e.g., inception, history, purpose) about artifacts that travel across communities is crucial to ensure that the artifact be considered intelligible for future use. When lead teachers, Solange, the school psychologist, and the principal created a group to learn about problem based learning, they made their disparate understandings of inclusive education and ability differences explicit. In turn, these understandings were enriched and re-mediated.

Regarding the dimension of representation of our definition of inclusive education, there was little evidence that the expansive learning that occurred in the partnership contributed to create spaces for families and students to participate in the decisions that affect their learning trajectories. Examinations of the key commitments that conduct this work indicate that the voices of university faculty and building leadership are present. But, the voices of families, students, and classroom teachers are rarely present. The question must be raised: Whose partnership is this? Whose agenda is being implemented? Where are the voices of students and families when partnerships engage in boundary work? Partnerships between schools and universities, based on democratic principles, are difficult to construct and sustain. Yet, by evaluating progress and engaging in ongoing critical dialogue, it may be possible to develop a partnership that values the voices of all the members and supports continuous renewal and improvement of the institutions involved.

As final note, we acknowledge that the work done in partnerships does not involve the dissolving of boundaries and should *not* be thought of as a process of moving from heterogeneity to homogeneity and unity. The case of Cabrini PLS made clear that differences always continue to exist. The work of partnerships, thus, should be seen as a process of maintaining continuity in spite of sociocultural difference (Akkerman & Bakker, 2010).

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