Working Together to Build a Birth-to-College Approach to Public Education:

Forming a Partnership Between the

University of Chicago Urban Education Institute and the Ounce of Prevention

Teaching Notes

November 2, 2010
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Overview

This teaching case study describes the formation of a partnership between the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute (UEI) and the Ounce of Prevention Fund (the Ounce) to create a birth-to-college model of public education. It focuses on the process of crafting the shared vision and mission over a series of meetings of a working group, comprised of members from both organizations. An outside expert facilitated the meetings. The study is designed to generate discussion about issues involved with beginning to establish such a partnership. It is intended for K-12 schools and school systems, early childhood education (ECE) agencies, and other organizations interested in forming similar partnerships to create seamlessness for children and families from ECE to the 12th grade and beyond to college.

The case study materials consist of four components. They are a teaching case study, a video, teaching notes, and supplemental materials. The case study is comprised of three parts: 1) Part One (pp. 1 – 14) “Introduction to the Partnership”; 2) Part Two (pp. 14 – 25) “Building a Partnership: Growing from ‘Us’ to ‘We’”; and 3) Part Three (pp. 25 – 33) "Evolution of the Partnership’s Shared Vision and Mission.” The video consists of three parts: 1) Part One (00:00 to 06:32) Short introduction and “Bridging Early Childhood Education and K-12”; 2) Part Two (06:32 to 10:18) “Developing the Partnership;” and 3) Part Three (10:18 to end) “Creating the Vision and Mission Statements”.

Discussion participants should read the teaching case study prior to the discussion. Discussion facilitators should read the case, watch the video, review the
discussion prompts given below, and survey the supplemental materials. The supplemental materials provide a more in-depth look at the UEI-Ounce partnership and situate the teaching case study and video within a larger context.

To begin the discussion, the facilitator should show part one of the video. Use the part one discussion prompts to discuss the video and teaching case study. Then, do the same for parts two and three.

**Prompts for part one of the discussion**

Use these prompts with part one of the video (00:00 to 06:32) and part one of the teaching case study (pp. 1 – 14).

In order to build a birth-to-college model of public education, an organization specializing in birth-to-5 education (i.e., the Ounce) and an organization specializing in K-12 education (i.e., UEI) decided to explore the merits of a partnership to share knowledge and build a program that successfully demonstrates this model. Aware of the differences between the two fields of ECE and K-12, key members from each organization formed a working group to identify underlying commonalities and to come to a shared understanding of differences.

1. Who are the key organizations and players in this case study? What is their purpose in working together?

2. Is this partnership necessary? Are these two organizations well-suited to enter into a partnership with one another? Why or why not?

3. What were the areas of common ground shared by the two organizations at the outset? Are any particularly striking or rare? Are the areas of common
ground necessary and sufficient to a successful ECE/K-12 partnership? What common ground is necessary and sufficient to your partnership?

4. What are some similarities between the two organizations that might benefit the partnership? What are some similarities between your organizations that might be beneficial to your partnership?

5. What might be some of the challenges facing the partnership? Is the historical separation between ECE and K-12 a challenge, and in what ways? What factors pose a challenge for your partnership and how you go about establishing or strengthening it?

**Prompts for part two of the discussion**

Use these prompts with part two of the video (06:32 to 10:18) and part two of the paper (pp. 14 – 25).

The working group participated in a series of meetings over nine months where, with the help of a skilled facilitator, they crafted a shared vision and mission that would define the partnership. They developed a working norm of scrutinizing and extensively discussing the meanings and connotations of words, phrases, and sentences. These discussions uncovered common ground and points of tension between the fields of ECE and K-12. Over time, discussions about recurring topics became increasingly honest. Feelings of trust solidified, and by the end of the process, the group had become a “we”.

1. What were some of the lessons learned from a previous failed partnership that UEI participated in? Why is building a working group that writes a
shared vision and mission over an extended period of time necessary for this partnership?

2. What was the importance of having a facilitator for early conversations? What were some of the strategies used by this particular facilitator that working group members found helpful? Should your partnership use a facilitator for this part of the process, and, if so, what knowledge and skills should the facilitator have?

3. What do you think of the facilitator’s practice of asking members to start the process by drawing pictorial representations of the partnership? Why did he use this activity? Why do you think the group chose the drawing they did to represent their partnership? How would you “draw” your partnership?

4. The facilitator stressed the importance of creating relationships between the members of the organizations. Why do you think having trusting relationships is important to this work? What did the facilitator and/or the group do to encourage or foster these relationships?

5. Why was so much discussion necessary for just two sentences? How did this process eventually lead to trust within the group? How did this affect their ability to question stereotypes or misconceptions about one another’s fields? Why is this important?

6. What is the significance of the shared vision and mission evolving to incorporate the term “we”? One member described it as “embodying [their] own alignment.” How is a true partnership a metaphor for the goals for
children (seamless education) and for the field of education at large (bringing ECE and K-12 together)?

**Prompts for part three of the discussion**

Use these prompts with part three of the video (10:18 to end) and part three of the teaching case study (pp. 25 – 33).

The words and sentences used in the shared vision and mission as it progressed across iterations during the nine-month period reflect the status of the partnership over time and the development of shared language and ideas. The end result was a shared vision and mission with meaning and intention co-constructed by members of each of the partnering organizations.

1. All eight iterations refer to building a model that will help children to succeed in school, college, and life. How does the wording of this goal change over time? Does this signify anything about how the goal developed over time?

2. The discussion surrounding the use of the term “accelerate student learning” is an example of the two organizations co-creating the meaning of a particular term. Why did this discussion reoccur? How do you think the discussions unfolded within the working group meetings, keeping in mind the facilitator, the working norms, and the changing relationships over time? What do you think about the use of this term and why and how the group agreed to use it? What is the significance of someone from the field of ECE defending the use of the term when questioned by someone else from the field of ECE?
3. What is the importance of the discussion surrounding the use of the term “align” with respect to instructional, curricular, assessment, and professional development approaches, and academic and social supports? What are the differences between ECE and K-12 that might make this term controversial in a partnership?

4. What is the significance of the fact that the wording about families remained relatively stable across iterations? Why is the idea of “honoring,” and not just “building upon,” the strengths of families so important to the partnership members?

5. What is significant to the partners about ensuring that this birth-to-college model becomes a part of public education? How do you think they can go about achieving this goal? Does your partnership have a large-scale vision like this? How can you go about achieving it?