Co-operation between universities and schools
- Some experiences from Dalarna Pedagogical Development centre (PUD)

**Paper presented at the conference**
Högskola och Samhälle i Samverkan (HSS)
Högskolan i Halmstad
Maj 2001

| David Oldroyd, Educational Consultant, Zorska 91/7, 43-100 Tychy, Poland Tel. + 48 502-254-262 d.oldroyd@talk21.com | Mats Lundgren Högskolan Dalarna. Pedagogiskt Utvecklingscentrum Dalarna, 791 88 FALUN Sweden Tel: 023 – 77 82 81 eller 070 – 316 82 81 Fax: 023 – 77 80 80 e-mail: mlu@du.se | Roger Melin Högskolan Dalarna. Pedagogiskt Utvecklingscentrum Dalarna, 791 88 FALUN Sweden Tel: 023-77 82 68 Fax: 023 – 77 80 80 e-mail: rme@du.se |
Introduction

It is common to claim that we live in an information society or a knowledge society in which access to the latest information and knowledge are of considerable importance for regional development. This is particularly true in school development and teacher training. Therefore in Sweden, several regional development centres (RUC) for school development have been created at universities. The general aim of these development centres is to establish a dialogue between universities and schools in a region.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss whether a pedagogical development centre, in this case Dalarna Centre for Educational Development (PUD)\(^1\), linked to a teacher training department in a university, promotes collaboration between a university and the schools in a region. Following question will be focused:

\[ \text{Does the co-operation have any impact on the practical level?} \]

Limitations and method

It is important, in order for the reader to be able to evaluate the content of this paper, to have some information about the authors of the paper. Two of these are ”insiders” and one an ”outsider”. One of the two “insiders” took active part in creating PUD and that person is still active in the organisation. It might be expected that this person has valuable insider information. But, it might also be the case that this person has a preconceived conception and has prejudices of the role played by PUD in the region. The other “insider” is recently appointed, (was employed six months ago), and might be expected to have some form of insider knowledge. But, since the

---

\(^1\) In Swedish: Pedagogiskt Utvecklingscentrum Dalarna (PUD).
appointment was recent it might also be expected that this person has maintained the critical view of an “outsider”. To be able to solve this problem of biased conception of PUD a third person, an “outsider” has been involved in writing this paper. The “outsider” was, when the paper was written, appointed to Dalarna University, but was not part of the activities of PUD. The “outsider” has extensive experience of schools and school development from different countries around the world and is in a position to counteract any “insider” bias.

Data have been collected through a “letter-survey” to the co-opted members of the PUD council. Of the thirty-five organisations that are members of PUD, sixteen answers have been received, that is, almost half. The sampled respondents represent the “interface” between the university and the organisations that are members of PUD. They are both well informed and highly involved. We can therefore get a picture of what takes place in this “interface” from the “insiders”.

**The need of a driving force in regional school development**

In the information society changes occur at an ever-increasing speed. Information proliferates rapidly and new knowledge replaces the opinions of yesterday. This fact, and the idea that knowledge is an integrated part of a society’s development, results in the claim that we are creating a knowledge society with a knowledge-based economy (Sörlin, 1996:16). Access to the latest knowledge is seen as an important competitive advantage for individuals, as well as for companies and nations.

In the long run, knowledge, especially technological knowledge, is the main source of economic growth and improvement in the quality of life. Nations which develop and manage effectively their knowledge assets perform better. (OECD, 1996:3)
Regardless of whether this is true or not, this perception is a driving force of development. This, in its turn, increases the demand for constant production and targeting of new knowledge. This is a process that involves both risks and possibilities. There are, for example, the risks that knowledge is consciously concealed for commercial reasons, or that groups of potential beneficiaries cannot access the knowledge, even though it is there for them to access and even though they need the knowledge. The reason could be that they do not have the possibility or the capacity for accessing the knowledge simply because they have not been provided with the necessary means for acquiring the knowledge. At the same time, this process of demand-oriented knowledge production increases the possibilities for producing still more knowledge and using it in practice, through conscious co-operation between knowledge producers and knowledge users.

Need for contacts between researchers and professional experts

It has often been claimed, as a result of the knowledge-based economy, that the contact between the academic world and professional organisations of different kinds in society will become increasingly important. Discussions concerning the necessity for universities and other professional organisations to come closer to each other are increasingly common. It is likely that the professionals will be able to reap the benefits of the new knowledge-based society.

The modern world is the world of the professional expert. /.../ Their power, prestige, influence, and incomes stem from their possession of specialized knowledge, based on education, competitive merit, and experience on the job - in a word, on their human capital. (Perkin, 1996:1)
From the perspective of the professionals, co-operation with universities will be important because it will support them in performing their work, but also by helping them maintain their positions. Universities that choose not to co-operate with professional groups outside the university world run the risk of becoming less successful than those universities that choose such a strategy. This, in its turn, creates a new role for the universities.

The “third assignment”

The need of the information society or knowledge society to mediate knowledge has led to an extensive discussion concerning the necessity for our universities and poly-technical schools to get closer to other parts of society. The main reasons are to inform about results from research and adjust educational programmes in accordance with the needs and desires of the players on the labour market. This has led to what in Sweden today is understood as the “third assignment” of universities and poly-technical schools. In government bill 1996/97:5: ”Forskning och samhälle”, this assignment is described in the following way:

An open dialogue between science and the ambient society increases the conditions for utilisation of knowledge generated by research and contributes thereby to the development of that society. This dialogue must therefore be strengthened. Representatives of science ought to be given a clear responsibility for diffusing the knowledge to other sectors of society. Research information is an important assignment for poly-technical schools. Active and robust research information contributes to increasing the general level of knowledge in society, which among other things increases the possibility for participation of individuals in the democratic process. (Prop. 1996/97:5).²

² Our translation.
Sörlin and Törnqvist (2000) claim that the co-operation between universities, trade and industry and municipalities has not been a priority in Sweden so far. Because of this, they maintain, the activities of the universities have failed to generate any effects.

**How is the situation for teachers?**

In the world of school, questions of “diffusion of, accessibility to and usefulness of research results for teachers amongst others are difficult and persistent questions”. (Skolverket, 1995:1).

Hultman and Hörberg (1994) established in a review of research concerning knowledge utilisation in school that research-based knowledge has surprisingly low impact on practice. They point to several possible reasons for this: the knowledge is not available, that teachers do not have the time needed to acquire the knowledge, they do not always have the necessary competence needed or there exist few points of contact between researchers and practitioners. Robertson Hörberg (1997) points out that research results are not of highest priority in a teacher’s search for knowledge. According to her teachers often understand research results as explicit confirmation of what the teachers have already thought. We also know that the further education of teachers is rarely highly regarded as influencing school activities (Ekholm, 1989).

**Regional centres for school development**

The idea to establish regional development centre (RUC) in the field of school was proposed in the report, *Lärarutbildning i förändring* (Ds 1991:16) in which the overall aim was to support school development through an expanded collaboration between schools and universities. The report calls attention to the common responsibility of schools and teacher training institutions in

---

3 Our translation
creating a mutual development. The National Agency for Education follows this line and proposes in their appropriation request 1997 that environments in which teachers and researchers can establish a dialogue concerning school development are needed. (The National Agency for Higher Education & The National Agency for Education, 1999). During autumn 1997 and spring 1998 the National Agency for Higher Education and the National Agency for Education organised five conferences in which the development of these centres was discussed. It was established that the local authorities had experienced contacts with universities as “short and loose connections” in which the meetings took place in accordance with the needs of the universities. It was claimed in a common report by the two authorities in May 1999 that the development of pedagogical regional development centres had aroused great expectations. “At last there is a meeting place between municipalities and universities with the aim of benefiting school and teacher training” (The National Agency for Higher Education & The National Agency for Education, 1999: Preface). In an evaluation report from the National Agency for Education in the autumn 2000 it is claimed that there are twenty-five centres associated with universities which offer teacher education (Lindskog, 2000). The question is whether such strongly desired co-operation will be realisable and will achieve the anticipated results.

Some experiences from the case of Dalarna Centre for Educational Development (PUD)

Dalarna Centre for Educational Development (PUD) was established in January 1998. Initially in co-operation with 15 School-departments in municipalities in the region of Dalarna and with the teacher’s and school-leader’s unions, the teacher student’s corps at Dalarna University. At

---

4 Our translation.
present time the organisation has thirty-five member-organisations. PUD was based upon the principles of a close connection between practice and theory and of collaboration between equal partners.

PUD is working as a hub in a network organisation. The council and its executive committee are the organs for formal decision-making. There is only a small annual fee for the members, but they are charged at cost when they make use of the services of PUD. The basic organisation consists of five persons. Among other things PUD’s activities involves:

- development of teacher education
- in-service and further education of teachers
- practice-oriented research
- conferences and seminars
- school development projects
- evaluation tasks

The main importance of PUD is to function as a “link of contact” between the field, i.e. representatives of the municipalities and schools, and the university, i.e. teachers and researchers at the university. Such contacts have been difficult to establish previously, since there was no receiver organisation at the university beyond individual contacts already established. By establishing PUD, such an organisation has been created. Another problem was that the activities of the university are planned in accordance with an estimated intake of students, which to a large extent determines the budget and availability of teachers. There was often a lack of university personnel when other participants have asked for co-operation and support for activities. This is so even when budget was available, for instance, through “earmarked” money from the National Agency for Education.
The question, then, is how PUD, and the activities of PUD has been perceived by the representatives of the professional organisations.

**PUD as a place to establish contact between university and schools**

When the members of the PUD-council were asked whether PUD functioned as a link of contact between their own organisation and the university, a majority claims that PUD is fulfilling an important role. Several individual members claim that it is important that the university maintains an interest in the everyday activities of schools.

PUD has an important task in bringing together municipalities and the university; especially the smaller municipalities. It has provided direct contact and an important channel of information. To have a person who participates in the work of the PUD-council is understood by us as very important. (Member).

Others mention the possibility of easier access to, and therefore increased possibilities of further education of personnel in the professional organisations, through the collaboration. The possibilities also include “/…/ some amount of support from experts in school development” (Member).

If the role of PUD is viewed from the perspective of organisation theory, the concept of letting the participating organisations be part of a council, meeting on a regular basis is conceived as a fruitful way of collaboration. How the collaboration will develop is also understood as dependent on whether there will exist an open attitude for collaboration.
At present I cannot notice any weak parts. The strong part is that the needs of local authorities are keenly listened to. (Member).

I think that PUD have succeeded in creating functioning and constructive relations with bigger as well as smaller municipalities both in and outside of Dalarna. The officials of PUD have an open and attentive attitude towards the needs and desires of the external participants. 

I view PUD as an example for collaboration between universities and local authorities. A good realisation of “the third assignment”. (Member).

Many respondents point out that they have the experience that what has been created is a kind of openness towards their needs and desires:

Very good collaboration and contacts. They are listening to the needs for skill development that municipalities have. (Member).

The collaboration “implies planning an common analysis with the other participating municipalities of the region” (Member). This is an opinion that several of the respondents offer, but another picture also exists: “PUD has not been in contact with The Swedish Association of School Principals and Directors of Education\(^5\) in matters concerning education of principals, which ought to have been a natural thing to do” (Member).

A problem perceived is that meetings of the PUD council sometimes have an air of “bureaucracy” attached to them. This could partly be due to the fact that there are many different organisations that participate at the meetings. But, nevertheless, the information given at the

\(^5\) Skolledarförbundet.
meetings is understood as both (i) valuable and a good thing that it is given to the members of the council, and (ii) that “The information meetings are extensive in time. Information that could have been assimilated without the need of time consuming meetings” (Member).

One could always discuss the function of the assembly and the routines of the meetings. The number of members are large and sometimes it seems to be unwieldy. /.../. (Member)

Someone points out that a possible problem could be that the desired skills not always are accessible. This implies that the PUD network must be part of a larger network with, for instance, other universities. Problems could, however, also be found in the participating organisations. For instance, the board of the organisation could have an unclear and vague attitude towards the collaboration. As someone expresses it: “The local authorities might themselves constitute the biggest problem by having implicit demands/desires towards the university” (Member).

**Co-operation in daily life**

A concrete example of cooperation between university and the schools of the region is the “partner-school-cooperation” in the teacher training programme, part of which is located out in the field, i.e. at schools. “According to what we have seen and heard, PUD has a strong position and is a driving force in many fields at the university, not the least in the partner-school field” (Member). Of course, whether this is a development that would have taken place regardless of PUD or not is a matter for discussion. Another strength of PUD that is pointed out is ”the form of being a network, respectively decision effective organisations in themselves” (Member). Someone summarises the strength of PUD as:
Openness, readiness to listen, a businesslike approach, a high standard of service, flexibility, speedy execution, a good position in the municipalities, effective communication and flow of information. PUD has many strengths, for instance, it is well anchored in the municipalities, very good pedagogic and subject related competence. It might be possible that PUD should meet the municipalities on their homeground, /…/ These strong features of PUD are at the same time experienced as potential risks, since they create expectations that cannot be satisfied. (Member).

Most of the organisations that are members of PUD have also had some form of collaboration with the university. Of those who has not had any concrete collaboration, for instance in the form of education contributions or school development projects, lack of time is put forward as an important constraint. A common form of collaboration is, otherwise, that members of staff have participated in education given by the university. Others mention collaboration in research projects, Dala School symposium, meetings for writing projects, projects administered by the National Agency for Education etc. In some cases the collaboration has been rather extensive. A member of the PUD-council from a municipality having a letter of intent for further collaboration claims:

Municipality X (note: our transcription to anonymity) has been helped in such matters as a report of Organisation 2000, research circles, project descriptions, applications, quality assessment and support for supervisors. The university has further supervised the magistrand. Additional positive contributions are training of special school teachers and help with evaluation reports. (Member).
All in all, then, it seems to be the case that PUD:s existence has led to a large number of activities of various kind.

**Some problems**

A general problem in the work of PUD, and this seems to be a general problem for all kinds of collaboration between school organisations in a region and universities, is that the achievements have not always permeated the whole of the organisation. It is important that not only those in the leading position of an organisation or persons participating in school development projects are affected by the contributions of PUD. This is also pointed out in the survey:

> I assume that PUD and the contributions of PUD must be anchored “at a lower level” in the municipalities in the future. In my occupational role as principal I nowadays understand that PUD can support school development to a very large extent. (Former Member).

It is, of course, difficult to know whether the actual collaboration initiated by PUD has had any real and lasting effects. What can be certain, though, is that there has been a development according to those persons who have been directly involved in the collaboration.

> It is absolutely sure that it has been of help, the support and the information given to the municipality has benefited our activities. This is probably true of all areas enumerated above. The university staff has participated at short notice and with a smile when we have asked for help and support. (Member).
How do the actors perceive the co-operation?

The fact that the participants generally have a positive attitude towards PUD and the university can be based on several different facts. One could be a changed attitude on the part of the university, where the participants consider the attitude change, in itself, as a positive fact. It could also be the case that the persons who have been involved in the collaboration and who in this case have been part of the survey have a positive bias towards collaboration between school organisations and universities. That is, it might be the case that we have asked those who already were positive to collaboration between school organisations and a university, even before the existence of PUD. Furthermore, by being directly involved in the actions of PUD they consider the collaboration as being very positive.

What remains from an investigation of the persons directly involved in the collaboration between PUD and the school organisation in the area Dalarna, is an image of a positive and fruitful collaboration in the “interface” between school organisations and universities. However, the important question remains whether the collaboration has had any real impact “inside” the involved organisations.

There is also support for the importance and impact of PUD and its activities in the region from another direction. It is a central idea that the local authorities should be able to influence the structure and content of the teacher education. To what extent this has been successful could be a matter of disagreement, but when the right to award degrees in teacher education for Dalarna University was evaluated during spring 2000, the appointed committee of persons from the academy made the following judgement:

The committee have a certain fear concerning the balance between theory and practice in teacher education due to the majority of representatives from schools in PUD,
Pedagogical Development centre in Dalarna. (The National Agency for Higher Education, Decision 2000-06-20, Reg. Nr 641-240-00).\textsuperscript{6}

It seems, then, to be the case that the representatives of the academy have the apprehension that the practitioners might get too much influence on teacher education. Practitioners, on the other hand, have a more progressive attitude toward the same development, since they view it as an opportunity to remedy their problem areas. It is not the case, though, that the result necessarily implies that the balance between theory and practice is displaced. It might rather be that the problems defined by the practitioners can be analysed from a theoretical point of view.

\section*{Discussion}

We will discuss what we have presented from three different levels:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{a) What has actually happened in terms of activities of various kinds?} The creation of PUD has made it possible to begin concrete collaboration of several different kind and forms. A concrete result of the co-operation is the PUD-council in which representatives for the member organisations meet twice a year. At the meetings matters concerning collaboration and degrees of priorities of tasks for PUD are discussed. The meetings also provide a formal forum for exchanging information, both between the university and the member organisations, but also between the member organisations themselves. Since the members of the council are in many cases also influential in their own “home organisations”, it is reasonable to assume that the decisions of the PUD-council will have an impact on everyday practice of at least these
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{6} Our translation.
organisations. Several of the members experience the creation of the council as important for developing collaboration between the own “home organisation” and the university. What this council has established is an “interface” where collaboration can evolve and take place. What is more doubtful is how far the activities of PUD (and the PUD-council) penetrate the member organisations and the university itself.

b) The participants’ views of what has happened? The results of this survey must be treated cautiously. It is reasonable to assume that the knowledge of PUD and its activities might differ to a very large extent between different persons in the member organisations. First, several of the participants of the PUD-council are deeply involved in the collaboration that their organisation has with the university. Others are involved in other ways, for instance through further education and school development projects. This group seem to have a positive attitude towards PUD and the activities of PUD because its activities have had an impact on their practical work in school. Second, we can assume that many persons in the member organisations know that PUD exists and have an opinion about PUD due to the information given to them from the more involved participants. They might in future collaborate and participate in formulating new areas and forms of collaboration. Still it is reasonable to assume that relatively large group does not know about the existence of PUD. For this group of individuals, PUD apparently has had no impact. But a question that needs to be answered is whether it is realistic to assume that collaboration and cooperation should involve all members of organisations in the field, or whether activities should be limited, but further deepened? The latter alternative is the only realistic one, even though it is desirable to diffuse research results to a larger group of people. The picture of collaboration that has been presented is a limited part of a wider complex of problems. The picture given by the participants is of a well functioning collaboration. Regardless of how this collaboration is
experienced by others, this picture conveys the possibility of expanding and deepening the collaboration.

c) Is it possible to say that the existence of PUD has any impact of any kind? The description given in this paper shows that the activities of PUD are perceived as having a positive impact on the collaboration between municipalities, schools in the region and the university. The collaboration, then, seems to have become of more enduring and permanent character since PUD was created. On the other hand, it is impossible to determine whether many of the “collaboration projects” have had any thorough impact on the activities in the participating organisations. This is for both epistemological and methodological reasons. On the first hand, it is difficult to know how an impact would “show itself”. On the other hand, even if it “showed itself”, how should data be collected? Because of these matters we have in this paper only tried to describe and map out certain central agents’ experiences of the effects of PUD and from this material draw more or less reasonable assumptions.

Since the question of co-operation between universities and society is understood, for different reasons and from different organisations, as central, we have pointed out some urgent areas that need to be further investigated.
References


Regeringens proposition 1996/97:5 Forskning och samhälle.


