From Collaboration to Collegiality

By Sheryl Boris-Schacter, Marcia Bromfield, Harriet Deane, and Sondra Langer

Background

Lesley College is a small institution in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with an undergraduate school for women and a larger coeducational graduate school. Central to its mission is the preparation of students for careers in teaching. Philosophically, the education faculty believes that the core of the teacher education program lies in its link between theory and practice. As in most such programs, the strongest evidence of this connection is in the student teaching practicum. It is widely held among the faculty that this field-based component of teacher certification serves a dual purpose: to allow students to practice what they have learned in classes and to be inducted into the norms of the profession (Graham, 1992). It seemed to us that we needed to encourage a joint effort between college faculty and schoolpeople in order to improve this link. However, because there were insufficient forums for academic dialogue between the two faculties, work that should have been purposeful and planned was serendipitous.

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In order to explore practitioner interest in creat-

ing opportunities for collaboration, we hosted a luncheon meeting for cooperating teachers involved in training Lesley College students. At this time, we gathered formal and informal data regarding the relationship between the college and the schools. The teachers reported that they viewed the event as a positive gesture of inclusion, and many said that they looked forward to other chances to exchange ideas and collaborate on future projects. Given that the need for professional dialogue among teachers exists within a framework of few opportunities for such discourse (See for example: Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz & Kyle, 1984; Johnson, 1986; Cushman, 1991), it was not at all surprising that unsolicited requests for professional exchanges surfaced from what was, predominantly, a social occasion.

Simultaneously, a Joint Task Force for Teacher Preparation (JTTP) comprised of teachers, school administrators, members of college faculties, college presidents, legislators, and public representatives, was convened in Massachusetts. The charge of this task force was to make recommendations to the Chancellor of Higher Education and the Commissioner of Education for improving teacher preparation in state colleges and universities, with implications for all institutions providing teacher education programs. Reflecting ideas espoused in recent major national reports, such as that of the Holmes Group (1986) and Carnegie Task Force on Education and the Economy (1986), the JTTP suggested the development of new roles and opportunities for professional development for experienced teachers. Furthermore, the task force identified greater collaboration between schoolpeople and college faculty in the support and supervision of new and aspiring teachers as central to the improvement of teacher education. We decided to use these two recommendations as the foundation for enhancing our current student teaching practicum.

Supported by a professional development grant from Lesley College, the "Lesley College/Cooperating Practitioner Collaborative Project" was launched. The Collaborative was to be a partnership model for the shared supervision of Lesley College teaching interns.[1] We wanted to collaborate with schoolpeople to develop an innovative model that has as its underpinnings professional collegiality and teachers as lifelong learners.[2] As was already mentioned, each of these notions is emphasized in the education reports. However, in many schools collegiality is not the norm. Rather, teachers function in isolation, with rare opportunities for reflection and professional sharing (See for example: Lipsky, 1980; Little, 1987; Joyce with Bennett & Rolheiser-Bennett, 1990; Johnson, 1990; Steinberg, 1992).[3] In fact, Roland Barth argues that in many schools it is assumed that teachers who share ideas or ask about practice are incompetent: "...as we have seen, in many school cultures, to reveal oneself as an adult learner is considered both self-indulgent and an admission of deficiency" (Barth, 1990, p. 106). The question was how to begin to alter this entrenched and pervasive professional norm before it was integrated into our graduate students' thinking (Bradley, 1991).

It seemed to us that the logical place to build a new professional culture that

supported collaboration was in the preservice experience, the time in one's teaching career when pedagogical inquiry is most expected and encouraged (Barth, 1990). It also seemed to us that we, as college faculty, had to model such collaboration by working with schoolpeople to design changes in the practicum experience that would lead to greater collegiality for our students. We forged ahead knowing full well that a more collegial preservice model did not necessarily mean a more collegial inservice teacher. However, it was not a great leap of faith, given that others have made analogous assertions regarding the transferability of collaboration and collegiality in the university preparation to the inservice experience. One such argument was made regarding the education of school administrators: "Collaboration and collegiality are crucial to the growth of all individuals in an organization, and leaders are more likely to model these concepts in their schools if preparation programs emphasize them" (Barnett, *et al.* 73).[4] Similarly, we assumed that the students who learned collegiality during the student teaching practicum would take that skill with them to the workplace.

The Planning Year

We began in 1989 by inviting eight early childhood and elementary teachers from surrounding districts to meet at the College. We included interested teachers from urban and suburban schools that already train our graduate students and were likely to continue doing so. Teachers were paid a small honorarium for their participation. The Lesley faculty facilitated the meetings and posed the broad questions guiding the agenda, but we did not determine the process, the product, or the ultimate structure for discussion and implementation. Instead, we opened the planning year with the assumption that we needed the collective wisdom of experienced school-based practitioners to inform change in the student teacher practicum (See, for example: Holmes Group, 1990; Neufeld with Boris-Schacter, 1991; Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1992).

The overarching question facing this working group the first year was: Is there a better model for collaboration between the College and the schools in their joint venture of teacher preparation? If so, how does it shape and define the student teaching component? After agreeing that it was worth developing a new model, the teachers and Lesley faculty created a pilot framework that promoted collaboration, greater attention to on-site and cross-site collegiality, exposure to a variety of student populations and instructional styles, and a more comprehensive window into the lives of teachers and the enterprise of teaching. We distilled many hours of philosophical and substantive conversations down to seven key features:

1. Students are clustered in a building for purposes of collegiality.
2. Urban and suburban clinical sites are purposefully paired so as to give each student exposure to both settings and with both populations.
3. Students observe teachers, specialists, and other student teachers in their

own school and in the urban or suburban school with which they are paired.

4. Students observe and participate in various facets of school life such as school committee meetings, faculty meetings, core evaluations, and parent conferences in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the culture of schools and the diverse responsibilities of classroom teachers.
5. When possible, students co-teach with other student teachers and/or cooperating practitioners, and college supervisors co-teach the student teaching seminar.
6. Cooperating teachers make presentations at student teaching seminars in special areas of expertise. When possible, seminars are held at member schools.
7. Schoolpeople and college faculty meet several times a year to discuss their work with students and the continued collaboration between the schools and the College. When possible, these Collaborative meetings are held at member schools.

The Pilot Year

During the fall of the second year (1990-1991), we invited four schools, one from each previously participating district, to pilot and informally evaluate the model. Each teacher from the first year's group identified two additional teachers from his/her school who would be interested in joining us in the refinement of the model and in the training of our students. In some instances, the teachers made the selections autonomously, but in other schools the identification was made by the building principal.

Once the newly expanded collaborative group was determined, we invited everyone to the College for the first meeting of the "pilot" year. The meeting served three purposes: to take a fresh look at the key features suggested by the previous year's working group, to provide a forum for professional discourse, and to build relationships with practitioners prior to our students working in their classrooms. There were two additional fall meetings where the group designed requirements for the spring student teaching experience and discussed the specifics of matching students and teachers.[5] During the spring semester, students began their placements, and planning meetings between cooperating practitioners and college faculty continued.

Now that the collaborative model was developed and in place, the meetings focused on the ongoing evaluation and implementation of the key features. As rare as such substantive discussions were for both faculties, rarer still was the fact that the group was cross-grade, cross-school, and cross-district. One teacher explained how valuable this opportunity was for her: "This is the only time that I ever get a

chance to talk about my work with teachers from other schools." The challenge facing us for the coming academic year was how to maintain what was unique about this model while making it accessible to a greater number of students and teachers.

The Expansion Year

Given that participants felt that the Collaborative Model offered an enhanced student teaching experience (see findings section), we targeted this third year for expansion. We wondered what kind of expansion would be most beneficial. For example, we could add schools or numbers of placements within existing schools. We weighed the pros and cons of including other school districts and adding new college faculty for supervision and seminars. As is always true when enlarging a group, we considered the costs and benefits to all constituencies. Finally, the decision was made to double in size to 24 students and 24 practitioners. Expansion was on three fronts: additional school districts, additional classrooms within an existing site, and one more college faculty person to supervise the added students and teach the second seminar section. As a result, the Collaborative currently has eight member schools from five districts, two urban and three suburban.

Research: Design and Methodology

Although continuous, informal evaluation was an intricate part of the Collaborative's work from the beginning, the college faculty felt that a more systematic analysis needed to be conducted following a planning year and pilot implementation. We relied upon document review, surveys, and anecdotal data (personal conversations) to give us a clearer picture of the model's impact upon its participants. Primarily, the documents reviewed were the detailed minutes kept of each of the planning meetings for the first two years. Additionally, there was a working paper written toward the end of the second year by the college faculty that was distributed to all of the Collaborative's cooperating practitioners. This paper was a compilation of thoughts to date regarding the model, and was based upon the minutes and the personal conversations that transpired during two years of planning meetings, student teaching supervision, and seminars.

A consistent picture was emerging from all of the data that the Collaborative was offering students, teachers, and college faculty more than was provided by the traditional student teaching model. However, we were not sure how important the "more" was and whether it could be replicated. Consequently, we collected qualitative survey data from all students and cooperating practitioners who participated in the pilot project and from a sample of those who participated in the traditional student teaching experience. We developed questions for each group that explored the relationship of the model's key features to the participants' experiences. Questions ranged from issues of professional satisfaction with the cooperating practitioner's role, to the value of urban/suburban pairing, to the

perceived quality of the student teaching supervision, to the importance of collegiality among the Collaborative members.

We distributed questionnaires to Collaborative students and cooperating practitioners, and to a sample of students and cooperating practitioners not involved in the model in order to determine whether components of the model made a difference in the students' clinical training. We purposefully selected students from our traditional program who were clustered so that we could begin to understand the role of clustering and determine whether it was different in the context of the Collaborative. All student questionnaires were completed during the seminars, and member teachers completed surveys during the last Collaborative meeting of the pilot year. However, other teachers received their surveys in the mail in September, asking them to recall their experiences of the previous spring.

It is likely that the response rate was affected by these different approaches to data collection. For example, we had a one hundred per cent return rate from all students (11 Collaborative and 42 traditional) and teachers (11) who filled out their surveys while in a seminar or meeting. On the other hand, the mail-in return rate, which called for retrospective data, garnered 19 of 42 (45 per cent) possible responses. We analyzed this survey data in the larger context of the meeting minutes, working paper, and informal conversations. The findings that emerged from all sources were extremely consistent.

Findings

It became clear from the data that when model features, such as clustering, were applied to traditional or collaborative settings, similar benefits were reported by both groups. However, what distinguished the collaborative members' experience from that of the traditional students and teachers was the explicit, shared agreement regarding the importance of certain pre-service experiences. Apparently, this agreement led to a more supportive environment for students to collaborate, observe, and reflect—opportunities that all respondents agreed enhanced the training of student teachers.

A. Clustering

A feature often cited by member and non-member cooperating practitioners as beneficial to students and teachers was the clustering of three students in a building. What seemed to differentiate the experience of the collaborative members from that of the traditional model participants was that their cooperating teachers were also a part of the cluster. Respondents observed that collaborative teachers felt a responsibility to offer guidance to all cluster students—not just those in their own classroom. For example, one student commented that her colleagues' cooperating teachers "willingly provided support to any student in the cluster." Another collaborative student explained how this influenced her training: "I have felt much

more at ease knowing more people in this community than just my cooperating practitioner, and felt this was extremely important to my overall experience."

All respondents reported that clustering decreased feelings of student isolation. Students conferred with one another as well as with their cooperating practitioners. For instance, one teacher noted, "The students don't feel alone. They're coaching one another." Another way in which clustering fostered collegiality was through informal lunch meetings. These meetings provided opportunities for unstructured discussions regarding professional practice. This created a relaxed learning atmosphere in which students heard ideas and received feedback from teachers who were not responsible for their evaluation. This model not only enriched the students' training and expanded the teachers' role to include mentoring, but also provided a rare opportunity for teachers to engage in shared supervision.

The professional sharing and emotional support exemplified in one school by informal luncheons were found in all settings with groups of student teachers. For example, students reported their willingness to share ideas and resources and observe in other classrooms. One student explained how clustering encouraged such collegial activities: "Having other student teachers provides tremendous support and encouragement during what usually is a difficult and overwhelming period for all."

In addition to providing emotional support, respondents indicated that working with other student teachers expanded their pedagogical repertoire and enhanced their ability to reflect on practice. For instance, a student in the traditional student teaching model observed that having colleagues in the building provided many opportunities for professional discourse: "Curriculum development and implementation discussions were ongoing." Another said, "I was able to discuss problems within the classroom, and strategies for solving and dealing with specific situations that developed."

B. Visits, Observations, and Peer Coaching within Schools and with Urban/Suburban Partners

To encourage collegial relationships, visits and observations to other classrooms and in other schools in the urban/suburban pairing were an integral part of the collaborative model. There were more such visits occurring in collaborative schools than in traditional sites because in the collaborative model observations in other classrooms and schools were specifically required and structured. Collaborative students were reminded during seminar about this obligation and given class time to schedule visits and share what they learned about each other's classrooms. Although students in both models participated in these activities, as one teacher said, "the degree to which they impact is to a large extent dependent on how deeply the cooperating teacher involves him/herself in the active training of the student." Collaborative teachers reported that they had more investment in the training of student teachers as a result of participation in the model and planning meetings.

These teachers, therefore, may have provided more guidance, structure, and encouragement for students to engage in activities that take them outside of their particular classrooms than did their traditional counterparts.

Classroom visits and observations not only encouraged conversations that stimulated new questions and ideas for the students, but they also gave veteran teachers a window into colleague's classrooms. One teacher explained how her student's visitations reminded her about the value of peer observation: "Every Wednesday morning my student teacher goes out and comes back and tells me what she sees. She sees all the specialists...I'd like to get out and do it too." In fact, a cluster of teachers in one of the urban/suburban pairs, inspired by their students' example, arranged visits to their partner schools.

According to the survey data, the most noticeable difference between students in the Collaborative and the students in traditional student teaching was in the incidence of peer coaching. Peer coaching had to be modelled and carefully structured by cooperating practitioners and college supervisors in order for it to occur. In the traditional model, only one student engaged in peer coaching activities, whereas in the Collaborative more than half of the students (6 out of 11) participated in peer coaching. It was through this activity that students began to observe one another teaching and to reflect on and discuss each other's classroom practices. They relied on one another for critiquing lesson plans and analyzing teaching styles, management strategies, and interactions with individual children. A student in the Collaborative explained how this impacted her work: "When having a particular difficulty, I had another student teacher observe. This was a non-threatening way to receive feedback with a positive result." This peer coaching activity closely approximates the elements of Judith Warren Little's definition of collegiality.

C. School Life—Working with Parents and Attending Faculty Meetings

We found little difference between the number and quality of experiences of Collaborative students and traditional students regarding interactions with parents. Rather, such involvement was dependent upon the encouragement of individual classroom teachers within a framework of existing school philosophy. Participation in parent conferences had to be structured by the cooperating practitioner, often with support from the college supervisor. Unlike classroom observation, Collaborative teachers were no more or less likley to provide such structure, even though parental interactions were mandated by the model. Importantly, students who interacted with parents felt that it was an essential part of their professional training and began to develop expertise in a different collaborative arena—the home-school partnership. One student commented, "I have come to realize what a crucial part of being a teacher the parent relationship is. These experiences were absolutely necessary."

Student comments from both groups regarding their experiences in faculty and grade level meetings and inservice workshops often focused on the role relationships in schools and on the broader school culture. This was a level of professional reflection and acumen that surprised us. For example, one student remarked, “I gained a good amount of knowledge about how schools are run and how teachers interact.” Another said, “Team meetings were very useful in getting to know teachers and the inner workings of the school.” From these experiences, students observed the process of collaboration, and viewed their cooperating teachers as members of adult teams. One student noted, “I saw a tremendous amount of respect displayed among the teachers willing to work together.” This growing awareness, based on observations and analyses of adult relationships in the larger context of school culture, may be one way of fostering the development of the student teacher’s understanding of the importance of collegiality in school settings. As such, it suggests further research for teacher education.

D. Cooperating Practitioner Participation in Student Teaching Seminars

Another feature of the Model encouraged cooperating practitioners and administrators to make presentations at the weekly student teaching seminar. Teachers spoke with students about peer coaching, record keeping, home-school relations, and cooperative learning strategies. A Collaborative member principal attended one of the seminars to discuss the implementation of a parental choice program in a large urban school system. Schoolpeople reported that they enjoyed sharing their expertise in the seminars and interacting with a larger group of student teachers; several suggested that there be additional involvement in the future.

E. Planning Meetings

A central finding of the project was that the Collaborative model provided professional development for cooperating practitioners and college faculty. Although the faculty anticipated the enjoyment we would receive from our work in the schools and our direct supervision of students, we did not realize how valuable the joint planning meetings would be to our overall perspective on teacher education. These meetings also provided professional benefits for the teachers. The teachers formed their own cohort group with practitioners from other schools, citing support and collegiality around issues of supervision. Moreover, the planning meetings were specific, sanctioned times during which practitioners and education faculty reflected on practice and the most appropriate way to induct new teachers. One cooperating practitioner described how these meetings provided a forum for discussions that otherwise would not occur: “This project is collegial for us, the mentors. This kind of conversation and sharing is very valuable and unique to this project.”

When member teachers and non-member teachers were surveyed about

relationships with college supervisors, both groups reported that they were essentially satisfied with these relationships. However, teachers involved in the Model stated that the planning meetings enhanced their work with supervisors and led to greater consistency in handling the student teaching requirements. Furthermore, they felt more personally and professionally connected to the supervisors. As one cooperating practitioner commented, “I never felt the ‘enemy’ was coming to visit.”

When teachers participating in the pilot year and expansion year were surveyed about the planning meetings, they stated that they valued hearing other approaches and opinions and sharing experiences, gave more thought to their role as a model for prospective teachers, were encouraged to think about what they had done to promote intern growth, and were reminded of appropriate expectations for new teachers. All of these remarks were indicative of increased reflection and involvement in teacher preparation than in the past.

When asked about contact with other cooperating practitioners, some non-Collaborative teachers stated that they conferred with colleagues in their building or in their system. By contrast, Collaborative members not only had contact with teachers in their building and system, but also with teachers from other systems. This is noteworthy because educators, both school practitioners and college faculty, are limited in their ability to allocate blocks of time to substantive academic discourse. Rather, such discussions are usually informal and “on-the-fly.” The collaborative planning meetings provided a structured forum for the sharing of ideas, issues, problems, and successes. As such, they were the feature that most distinguished this model from the traditional student teaching experience.

Implications for Further Work

As is often true with research, our findings raised more questions than answers. We identified two arenas of inquiry for the immediate future. The first is meant to extend the concept of professional collegiality. The second raises administrative and logistical challenges, and suggests action and problem-solving more than research. The following are those dilemmas, problems, and questions that are worthy of future exploration.

Questions regarding collegiality:

1. Is this student teaching experience (based on the seven key features) a more collegial one than our traditional student-teacher model?
2. Does a more collegial preservice model mean that our students will become more collegial teachers?
3. Does more collegiality necessarily mean greater satisfaction with the student teaching model?
4. Does this collaborative model, and teachers’ involvement in it, alter the teachers’ relationships with the College? Does it extend the willingness on their part to collaborate on other projects with us, such as

acting as resources in college courses and/or school-site workshops?

Questions regarding administrative and logistical issues:

1. Occasionally, a Collaborative student found that his/her placement was not an ideal match. How do we best handle the changing of student placements ?
2. What do we do about students who "fail" student teaching and/or teachers who are unable to provide the type of training and support necessary for developing professionals?
3. How should we expand the model? How will we select new sites or teachers in current sites? Can we design new roles for teachers when they are no longer directly participating in the project?
4. How can we encourage the involvement of teachers in the school who have not been directly connected to the Collaborative?
5. How can we continue to fund the project or increase the current level of funding? Do we have the resources to add additional supervisory visits, as was suggested by the planning team?
6. How might we include Lesley students who are not participating in the Collaborative but are interning in the same schools as Collaborative members?
7. Are all of our students receiving the same quality experience, or have we developed a two-tiered system of teacher education?
8. How can we incorporate what we have learned into our regular student teaching program?

Perhaps the most important thing that we, as college faculty, learned from this project was the necessity and the excitement of collaboration with others in the field. We certainly knew this intellectually, but our effort has underscored the limitations of attempting to revamp teacher education programs without considerable input from school-based practitioners. Although this work was originally inspired by national reports and state mandates, its impetus now is one of professional integrity and development for pre-service, in-service, and college educators. We hope that as the project evolves we will continue to learn from our experiences and to attempt to answer the important questions which have arisen thus far.

Notes

[1] Although, theoretically, a triad model of supervision (student, teacher, college faculty) had already been mandated by the state, it did not include the shared planning and increased responsibility that we hoped the Collaborative Model would embrace.

[2] The case for professional collegiality and lifelong learning has become even more compelling in the last few years as teachers are being asked to service an increasingly diverse student population within the regular education classroom. (See, for example,

Pugach & Johnson, 1990.)

[3] Our thinking about collegiality was influenced by Judith Warren Little's description: 1. Adults in schools talk about practice. 2. Adults in schools observe each other engaged in practice. 3. Adults engage together in work on curriculum. 4. Adults in schools teach each other what they know about teaching (Barth, 1990).

[4] Huling-Austin (1992) made this same assertion regarding the transferability of collegial activities during the induction year to the rest of a teacher's professional career "...by beginning their careers in this manner, they are more likely to be socialized to the norms of collegiality and continuous improvement" (75).

[5] To assist in the placement process, teachers created a detailed form in which they described various aspects of their classrooms, teaching styles, and expectations for student teachers. This form was so well received by students and teachers that it subsequently became a prototype for gathering information to aid in the placement of all Lesley graduate school students. As such, it was the first concrete contribution that the Collaborative made to the overall teacher education program.

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