

University/School District Collaboration in Teacher Education: Outcomes and Insights

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Introduction

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A critical condition for the renewal of teacher education is authentic collaboration between schools of education and schools in the preparation of teachers. Goodlad (1991) recommended "a collaboration where the schools are equal partners" and where "schools and teacher training institutions are joined together in a common mission." Many professionals like Goodlad have come to the realization that there must be a connection between the content and the process of teacher education and the needs and concerns of the schools.

Recommendations Into Action

The opportunity to follow reform advice came in 1990 when representatives of six school districts from East Multnomah County in Portland, Oregon, approached faculty at Portland State University with concerns for their teachers and students and an inter-

est in cooperative programs. It was the genesis of collaborative reflection and inquiry for members of the university and school districts. Together they developed a preservice and inservice model—"Classrooms As Families." The program model addressed their mutual concern for the increasing number of students "at risk" and the lack of preparation for teachers to meet their needs, thereby creating an increasing number of teachers "at risk."

Intent and Focus of Description

This article will describe the collaborative planning of a professional development center for teaching and teacher education. The planning process was conducted in a framework of inquiry and reflection. A significant focus for this process was recognition of the discrepancies between the content of university courses and practices observed in classrooms. These discrepancies cause serious dilemmas for preservice teachers (Driscoll & Nagel, 1992), and are one of the "visible" problems in teacher education (Goodlad, 1991). The discrepancies were also critical when considered in the context of teachers feeling unprepared to meet the changing needs of students in the participating school districts. Responses to the discrepancies included those of university faculty, classroom teachers, and school administrators. Their discussions and reflections influenced the program planning and decision making to be described here.

This article will report outcomes and insights in three related categories: responses to discrepancies between teacher education and teaching from three participant groups; the actual outcomes of the planning process, that is, changes in teacher preparation, as recommended by the participant groups; and understandings about collaboration, specifically for participants in teacher education.

Literature Perspectives for Collaborative Planning

The collaborative inquiry used in the planning process emerged from research-based concerns about teacher socialization during field experiences and from a discontent with persistent flaws in the preparation of teachers. Equally compelling in the process was ongoing criticism and concern for the quality of classroom instruction and the lack of support for teachers. Descriptions of professional development centers guided the collaboration. Literature describing reflective practice directed the process of inquiry that was maintained throughout planning sessions.

Dissonance Between Preparation and Practice

The well documented dichotomy of university and public school values and methods has been a long term problem for preservice education programs (Bean & Zulich, 1989) and one which has not been addressed directly. Preservice teachers are frequently confronted with disparate theoretical frameworks and conflicting

models of teaching (Cherland, 1989; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Evertson, 1990; Driscoll & Nagel, 1992). The resulting socialization of preservice teachers has been suggested to have potential for "miseducation" (Evertson, 1990), a time of "pedagogical schizophrenia" (Templin, 1979), and a negation of the content of university course work (Zeichner, 1980; Tabachnick, 1980; Applegate, 1986). There is a long tradition of concern for and commitment to field-based teacher education. Recent reforms simultaneously called for alternatives to classroom practice (case studies, videotaped classrooms, and so on) and extensions of field experiences for preservice teachers.

Both university faculty and school district practitioners have long been aware of the discrepancies between practices taught in teacher education course content and practices observed during practicum experiences. However, the dissonance between practices is rarely addressed openly, and both participant groups go about the business of preparing teachers as if the differences did not exist. Addressing the discrepancies was long overdue, and it became a major focus for the planning process of this study.

Professional Development Centers

Concerns about the effect of field experiences and recognition that teacher education may be preserving the *status quo* of classroom practice have been a major concern of the continuing educational reform movement. One approach that holds potential for addressing this concern is that of a professional development center or school. Proposed models of professional development centers reflect major adjustments in the definitions of teaching and teacher education. The models are defined as centers, cooperatively established and maintained by university schools of education and public schools, and as sites for mutual deliberations on problems and possible solutions (Holmes, 1986; Kennedy, 1989). Three major purposes have directed development of professional development centers: the improvement of teacher education; improvement of teaching knowledge and practice; and improvement of the status of teaching (Sedlak, 1987). Those purposes also directed the work of this collaboration. Professional development centers have been conceptualized as a context for all teachers to learn more about teaching (Kennedy, 1989). The purposes and recommended characteristics of a professional development center provided context and direction for the inquiry process in this study.

Reflective Practice

The literature describing reflection and reflective practice guided the collaboration and inquiry described in this study. Reflection as "a way of thinking about educational matters involves the ability to make choices and to assume responsibility for those choices" (Goodman, 1984; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Such reflection begins with recognition of an educational dilemma. For the planning process described here, one dilemma emerged from the discrepancies between the content

of university course work and practices observed in classrooms. Another dilemma for this group of educators was the lack of preparation for teachers to meet changing needs of children and families in the East Multnomah County school districts. Participants were encouraged to respond to both dilemmas from multiple perspectives: from the perspective of preservice teachers; from the perspective of classroom teachers; from the perspective of administrators; and from the perspective of university faculty in teacher education.

This collaboration emerged from immediate concerns for the preparation of teachers at both preservice and inservice levels to meet the needs of a changing population of students in a particular community. The characteristics of the students and their community were not unique to the East Multnomah County area; many of the characteristics describe children for whom schools nationwide are "at risk" of failure to teach. Persistent discontent with teaching and teacher education (Goodlad, 1991; Evertson, 1990) became a catalyst for the planning process, and descriptions of professional development centers guided the collaboration. Reflective practice structured the inquiry throughout the planning process.

Methodology For Studying The Planning Process

The methodology for studying the collaborative planning process was descriptive. Data sources were narratives of planning and review sessions, records of decision making, collections of planning materials and resulting program descriptions, and participant journals. Two themes guided the descriptive analysis: the dissonance between teacher education and teaching; and preparation of teachers to respond to the changing population of children and families.

Reflection And Inquiry: Phase I

Participants in the first phase of collaboration were a sample group of eight district and school administrators and eight university faculty representing three departments in the School of Education (Curriculum & Instruction, Special Education & Counselor Education, and Educational Policy, Foundations & Administration). The school districts represented in this first collaboration served a population of students whose family and neighborhood experiences did not match the classroom experiences in the schools. They were referred to as "at risk" primarily due to family situations: high mobility rate, families with substance abuse, poverty, unemployment, and unhealthy family dynamics. There was a paucity of the factors of cultural and linguistic diversity often associated with students "at risk."

This collaborative group of representatives from schools and the university met monthly for a year to discuss ways to better meet the needs of their particular population of students and families, and to design approaches for better preparation of teachers for those settings. During these discussions, the group reviewed literature on teacher education and studies of the needs and concerns of children and

families for whom schools were not well matched.

Results from a previous year-long study of discrepancies between content taught in university courses and practices observed in classroom settings (Driscoll & Nagel, 1992; Nagel & Driscoll, 1992) provided a central dilemma for reflection in the latter part of this phase. Six categories of discrepancies were studied: planning, assessment, practice, grouping, classroom management, and instructional variety. In the final session of this phase, the group met for two full day sessions. Narratives of the sessions were recorded.

Reflection and Inquiry: Phase II

The participants for this phase were: 18 classroom teachers and two administrators from the same school districts represented in the first phase; and four university faculty members who represented three departments in the School of Education. This collaborative group began with similar dilemmas: inadequacies in the preparation of teachers at preservice and inservice levels; and the problems and concerns faced by experienced teachers in the districts represented as they worked to meet the needs of children and families. This group studied the same literature and research as the participants in Phase I. This group however, expanded their knowledge base about teacher education by conducting a survey of 120 of their classroom colleagues for additional perspectives about preparation for teaching.

Narratives of the discussions and planning sessions of this group were recorded. In addition, each participant recorded their reflections in a journal for three months. Planning documents provided an additional data source. Portfolios of resulting recommendations, policies, course and program descriptions were developed. Individual interviews were conducted after the planning phase.

The major research methodology was a content analysis of multiple qualitative data sources—journals, discussion narratives, interviews, and program recommendations (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Triangulation of the data was accomplished by examining multiple data sources for consistency. The response narratives were analyzed for dominant themes of response.

Outcomes and Insights of Collaboration

To report the outcomes and insights of this collaborative process, it was often impossible to separate decisions and recommendations from perspectives or understandings. For purposes of this article, they are reported as responses, and for clarity, described in the context of the two phases of collaboration.

Responses: Phase I

In the first phase of reflection and planning, data on the discrepancies between university course content and classroom practices was presented. Examples of these discrepancies were differences in assessment practices and classroom management

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approaches. Descriptions of the differences provoked emotional responses of blame, irritation, discomfort, guilt, and mild agreement. When the participants, district and school administrators and university representatives, considered the discrepancies from perspectives of others, specifically classroom teachers and preservice teachers, three common response themes emerged.

The first theme was one of explanation, providing a rationale for discrepancies between practices taught in university courses and practices observed in classroom teaching. For example, participants attributed the discrepancies in classroom management and the lack of instructional variety in practice to curricular overload and an emphasis on order in schools. Discrepancies in planning were explained as scheduling issues and by constraints on teachers' time, although many participants argued for the value of teacher planning. Discrepancies in assessment and grouping strategies were attributed to a lack of preparation for teachers at both preservice and inservice levels.

As discussion continued, participants considered the possibility that some discrepancies were inevitable, and not necessarily harmful. This became a second theme, as participants considered the possibility that some discrepancies should be acknowledged and discussed in preservice courses and in inservice teacher education.

At the same time, participants agreed that some discrepancies were not considered advantageous. This became a third theme, and emerging recommendations addressed the need for scrutiny of university course work, for careful selection of placements for teacher education practice, and for recognition of effective practices of experienced teachers.

Recommendations for change at both preservice and inservice levels for university and school districts emerged from collaborative inquiry and reflection. They included:

1. School restructuring to provide more individual and group planning time for teachers;
2. An increase of curricular integration in classroom teaching and in teacher education course work;
3. Increased attention and resources for the development of assessment literacy and skills for both preservice and inservice teachers;
4. Increased and changed roles for classroom teachers in teacher education to include that of program planner, course instructor and inquiry/discussion participants.

The immediate plan of action which addressed the specific needs of teachers for the participating school districts was the development of a preservice and inservice program called "Classrooms As Families." A recommendation for a program orientation that addressed the social and support needs of children,

teachers, and families was the final outcome of this phase of reflection and inquiry. The participants also committed to provide resources and advisory assistance for the next phase of study and planning.

Responses: Phase II

The participants in this phase—classroom teachers, administrators, and university faculty—directed their reflection and inquiry to the actual planning of the “Classrooms As Families” teacher education program. Initial reflections focused on personal memories of preservice preparation and beginning teaching experiences, as well as current professional dilemmas of meeting the needs of a changing student population and a changing teacher role. As participants studied literature on teacher education, on students “at risk” of not succeeding in school, and on current family structures and dynamics, their concerns expanded to more global issues. As this group focused on program planning, they directed their decisions to the development of a community for teachers, children, and families with emphases on relationships and communication.

The collaboration in this phase provided many of the insights about collaboration itself. The reflection and inquiry process demanded much more time than originally anticipated. The participants experienced the intensive time demands of authentic collaboration (Quinn, 1985), and many sessions extended beyond a weekly afternoon schedule to supper and evening sessions. The time demands also prompted a tension between making actual program decisions or continued reflection. The first recommendation emerged from that tension, and it called for ongoing and extensive communication between teacher education faculty and classroom practitioners. The planning moved toward a professional development center model with this recommendation.

From the program planning process, major recommendation themes were produced. These included the following:

1. Both university and school district faculties have a responsibility to provide models of those practices which preservice teachers need to learn. Preservice teachers must be able to observe effective teaching practices both in university classrooms and in field placements.
2. The content of teacher education must be studied in an integrated format similar to the integrated curricular design recommended for classroom teaching. Program orientation of teacher education must maintain the reflective inquiry process of the collaboration. Program orientation must also reflect the “Classrooms As Families” theme in both university and school district environments.
3. The content of teacher education should include increased study of family systems, communication, conflict resolution, and time and stress management. A major segment of the program must prepare teachers to work with students with special needs to a greater extent than is currently provided. In addition, the knowledge and skills required for participation in site-based

management need to be addressed at both preservice and inservice levels.

In sum, the recommendations worked to diminish the discrepancies between teacher education and teaching by creating similar learning environments in universities and schools. Consistency in teaching practices, program orientation, and curricular approaches for preservice and experienced teachers was a theme of the planning decisions.

In addition to recommendation themes, specific structures for ongoing collaboration in the preparation of teachers were described. The structures included:

1. Participation of classroom teachers in the selection of cooperating teachers;
2. Participation of classroom teachers in teacher education admissions processes;
3. Extended participation of classroom practitioners in teacher education planning and implementation with such participation to include: review and selection of textbooks and assignments for preservice teachers; ongoing program review and revision; and an increased role in the instruction of preservice teachers.

Additional Insights about Collaboration

Beyond the specific recommendations and changes in teacher education programming which emerged from the two phases of reflection and inquiry, additional insights emerged from the collaboration. From all of the data sources came a realization expressed consistently by the majority of participants. It was an understanding and appreciation of the complexity and magnitude of the process of teacher education: "Planning a program to prepare teachers is so much more than I ever imagined," and "we will never finish this." This awareness was accompanied by another, that of the enormity of the collaborative planning process and accompanying demands and accommodations of participants.

The second insight was that a recognition of the biases of past practice was important for collaborative efforts. There was a significant need for sensitivity to the history of relationships. A school administrator described the frequent concern of her classroom teachers who were participants in Phase II, "The university isn't going to go along with all our ideas; the program will get changed when we finish." In a final review session, the same administrator reported her teachers' incredulous response to the fact that "They (university faculty) are really going to implement the program just as we designed it." The success of collaborations can be diminished by biases of the past, so early work phases might include discussion of those sentiments and perceptions.

Significance Of The Collaborative Process and Findings

This study followed the advice of Goodlad (1991) so that the collaborative inquiry worked toward and accomplished both restructuring of public schools and

redesign of teacher education. As administrators and classroom teachers reviewed the discrepancies between what preservice teachers learned in university courses and what they observed in field placements, they reflected intensely on their practices. Administrators made decisions to restructure, to provide resources and time, and to generally support a number of practices which were absent in classroom teaching. As classroom teachers planned the teacher education program, they frequently discussed changes in practice, or plans to experiment with varied practices, and the intent to observe their own classroom dynamics. Teacher educators engaged in similar reflections and made similar decisions about their own teaching when faced with the query "Do preservice teachers observe those practices in university instruction?" With these reflections and decisions came the foundation of a professional development center.

As the new teacher education program is implemented, with programming for both preservice and inservice teachers, it is expected that more insights and implications will emerge. In the meantime, there is an excitement and enthusiasm among the participants. There are promising extensions of the planning already visible. Those extensions represent the framework of a professional development center. Several examples illustrate ongoing collaboration for improvement of practice. One example is the monthly meeting of a group of administrators and teacher education faculty—a breakfast gathering for ongoing discussion of teachers' needs, of "Classrooms As Families," and of the impact of preservice teachers on schools. Another example is the work of a group of school district personnel (teachers and administrators) and teacher education faculty on the design of observational/feedback forms and assessment materials for the preservice program. Still another example is the working relationships developed between members of different university departments who have not traditionally collaborated to offer programs, and between school districts which have not collaborated in the past. Participants see the beginning of "promising and productive structural relationships" (Holmes, 1986) between and within the university and public schools.

Through collaborative reflection and inquiry, school district personnel and university faculty became significant contributors to the professionalization of teaching. There is a visible pride and respect for the participants in the "Classrooms As Families" program. More significantly, both the university and the schools took responsibility for "establishing a climate of sharing, caring, and learning" (Gonzales, 1990) for teachers and students.

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