Partnering for a Field-Based Residency: Challenges and Possibilities

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Much effective teacher education literature supports engaging pre-service teacher candidates (PST's) in a process of learning about teaching by preparing for and rehearsing the practice with guided instruction, implementing the practice with students in a classroom, and analyzing the experience to better understand ways to improve and become more effective moving forward (McDonald, Kazemi, & Schneider Kavanagh, 2013). To achieve this, there is a need for continuing collaboration with a partner school to provide candidates with mentoring and supervision. This article presents information about the successful implementation of the first two years of a re-designed field-based residency model aimed at increasing positive student outcomes for Hispanic and other historically marginalized students in teacher education. Reflective data from faculty, teacher candidates, and school administrators provide insight into ways partnerships can be reciprocal for both candidates and mentor teachers. Data also reveal gaps in our initial planning and the need for greater understanding of the complexities of building relationships. Information includes lessons learned and insights that have informed plans for change moving forward as we have gained deeper understanding of partnering with elementary schools, as well as ways to structure teaching and professional preparation to best support PST candidates.

Best practices about teaching and learning emphasize immersion in a range of meaningful experiences rather than passively observing, listening, and repeating information that has been transmitted by an "expert". Elementary education pre-service teacher candidates (PST's) are required to participate in field experiences to fulfill Illinois state requirements for teacher licensure. It is critical that candidates spend as much time as possible in classrooms with excellent mentor teachers actively engaged in teaching with informed supervision (Badiali & Titus, 2010). In 2014, a small group of education faculty at Dominican University began redesigning the undergraduate elementary education program. Dominican University is a co-educational, Catholic institution of higher education and research in River Forest, Illinois, located 10 miles west of downtown Chicago. The redesign of the elementary education program was inspired and grounded by high impact educational practices (Kuh, 2008) and core teaching practices (Ball & Forzani, 2011) situated in a field-based residency model. The program is anchored by four guiding principles: core teaching practices, a commitment to social justice, immersion in liberal arts and sciences foundations, and an emphasis on clinically-based experiences. It provides a move to a new teacher education paradigm requiring that all students meet a set of learning outcomes relevant to the knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that emanate from the university vision for undergraduate learning and also align with state and national teacher licensure standards. Additionally, the newly designed program addressed the fulfillment of field hour requirements for Illinois state teacher licensure by including intentionally planned, supported time spent in elementary classrooms from the beginning of the teacher education courses. To implement this as

part of a residency model, significant course instructional time had to be spent in a partner school, immersing the candidates in scaffolded, field-based clinical practice experiences throughout the program and culminating in student teaching. This model was a monumental departure from the traditional teacher preparation courses which required numerous hours of field experiences in random, unconnected placements, and as the professors who designed and advocated for this new program, we knew there was a lot at stake in making sure it was a success. The purpose of this article is to describe our study and present information about the successful implementation of the first two years of our Dominican University School of Education field-based residency model. In addition, we also share lessons learned and plans for change, including early assumptions about partnerships, and insights that have informed our plans for moving forward.

The Issues

Several issues became apparent as we planned to implement this model. First, developing a reciprocal, sustainable partnership requires supportive policies at the university level. Second, we are a proud Hispanic-Serving institution in a suburb close to urban, multicultural communities in the city of Chicago. Although we have a sizeable Hispanic population, there is a serious equity gap in the retention and performance of Hispanic and first generation students. With over 54% Hispanic freshman and 74% of them first generation college students, we have challenges in retaining and sustaining these minority students. Third, although there is a growing regional need for Hispanic teachers, teacher education is a low-status field in universities, and many minority students do not regard the teaching profession as a viable career (White

House Hispanic Teacher Initiative, 2016). Among those students who do want to become teachers, there is a struggle to achieve passing scores on the first gateway standardized test. According to the Dominican University Office of Institutional Effectiveness (DOIE), approximately 50% of candidates enrolled in EDUC 200 Foundations of Education, the first course in the program, do not meet test metrics. Since 2013, of those who hope to major in education, a serious equity gap exists: 62% of Hispanic freshmen and 37% of white freshmen fall below this qualification. Thus, they discontinue coursework as the Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP) or the ACT Plus Writing, in lieu of the TAP, the first gateway-standardized test required for entry into a teacher preparation program by the State of Illinois, closes their access toward licensure (DOIE, 10-1-17).

Fourth, university education faculty often lack recent teaching experience and have insufficient contact with schools, too often providing academic instruction without the application of theories in active learning classroom practice (Levine, 2011). Additionally, a practical issue has been finding ways to help our students pass the state content test requirements as they juggle five or six undergraduate courses each semester while often working more than one job to pay tuition. Another issue has been convincing the Liberal Arts and Sciences faculty that students should be able to select education as a viable major rather than having to choose to complete a double major. Once this hurdle was overcome, there was the critical issue of growing the program to make it financially viable to the university. In the first year of this study, 10 students comprised a cohort group and provided data through focus group interviews and reflective comments. Because of the opportunity to complete the program with a teaching license in four years and the possibility of increasing job opportunities in the Chicago area, the teacher education program started to grow. In the second year of our study, there were 14 students, with prospective students continuing to enroll in the program. Although the numbers are not huge, there has been a steady increase in student interest, especially with assistance provided in learning about test-taking strategies support in order to meet the Illinois state requirements.

Finding a willing and collaborative partner school was another obstacle to overcome. We were fortunate that a nearby public school has a very progressive and visionary principal whose commitment to continuing teacher education and mentoring new teachers provided the connection we were seeking. The principal was enthusiastic, supportive of our program, responsive to our request for instructional space, and helpful in providing teachers to mentor our candidates. The principal also expressed interest in a reciprocal relationship that could provide opportunities for university faculty to engage in professional development for the mentor teachers and staff as a way

of becoming a collaborative community of educators. The elementary school demographic consisted of 95% African-American students and 5% Hispanic students. This seemed to be a perfect opportunity to ensure that our students would experience highly regarded literacy practices implemented in urban field experience classrooms with experienced mentor teachers. We felt confident that our redesigned residency model would provide the students with immersion in core practices, experience with current pedagogy and course content, and practical experience working with children in urban elementary classrooms in a welcoming partner school.

One last challenge was to implement a way to evaluate the PST's teaching proficiencies and dispositions in the field. The program was designed around modules that included field-based courses and strands that supported the School of Education proficiencies and dispositions woven throughout the program, culminating in an assessment that would reveal candidates' teaching abilities, as well as foundational knowledge focused on student learning. To assess this learning and preparedness for teaching, we designed an Appraisal Center to be held at the end of the junior and senior years. We believe strongly in developing a culture of shared learning with numerous opportunities for reflection and collaborative engagement to support the pre-service teachers' stances as life-long learners. The Appraisal Center provides an opportunity for students and faculty to participate in a community of practice through which the collective work and learning of the group can enhance individual learning and move forward (Wenger, 1998). This Appraisal Center is designed as a way to formatively assess students' proficiencies and dispositions at critical points throughout the program and to provide any potential interventions before candidates enter into their student teaching or clinical practice experience. It is considered an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their learning and to receive professional feedback from the faculty evaluators, as well as responses from classmates participating in the Appraisal Center experience. All participants know they have a responsibility to provide professional feedback for each other and to use the experience to improve their craft. Results from the first year of this Appraisal Center assessment process were very positive. Comments from the teacher candidates included, "I really felt like a professional when I got such good feedback and supportive comments from peers and faculty," and. "Now I feel ready to start to student teach and take on the responsibility of teaching and managing a classroom of students" (Student reflections, 2017-18).

Theoretical Perspectives that Informed Our Work

Multiple theoretical perspectives provide insight into the development and implementation of a field-based

model. A key assumption framing this work is that learning is inherently social and that effective communication requires a dialogic relationship with a shared and evolving knowledge base grounded in effective teaching pedagogy (Barnes, 1976; Halliday, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986). This community of practice (Wenger, 1998) has been shown to be an effective way to bring about greater understanding as participants discuss, inquire, and share in the act of teaching each other and learning as a group as well as individually. The sociocultural perspective aligns with the notion of "partnership literacies" described as including "traditional ones such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening, as well as other literacies such as those necessary for the engagement and well-being of our students, citizens, and societies – that are best developed through partnerships of school and community constituents" (Zenkov et. al., 2016). An important understanding is that significant learning occurs when there is an emphasis on applying knowledge in action: in the classroom (Wells, 2001; Zeichner, 2012).

Our work is also informed by a growing body of evidence showing that effective teacher education supports candidates in a cycle of learning about teaching by preparing for and rehearsing the practice with guided instruction, implementing the practice with students in a classroom, and analyzing the experience to better understand ways to improve and become more effective moving forward (McDonald et al., 2013). To achieve this, there is a need for continuing collaboration with a partner school to provide candidates with mentoring and supervision. To ensure that the candidates develop content expertise, university faculty in Arts and Sciences and School of Education need to collaborate and provide opportunities to model, observe, and explicitly explain content in the disciplines, as well as instructional pedagogy. In addition, there should be careful oversight of the quality of all student experiences culminating in student teaching and their practicum to ensure that students are applying theories into practice as they learn to teach (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008). The teacher education pipeline improves with strong school partnerships, supported student field experiences, culturally responsive teaching, and sustained opportunities for active learning in college classrooms. (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). In our program redesign, our aim has been to increase student outcomes and success in teacher education for all students and increase the proportion of diverse students, especially Hispanic, in teacher education. We focus on several strategies, including beneficial outreach to schools, support of our students to increase the pass rate on the state standardized gateway exam and content tests qualifiers, implementation of mentoring summer workshops, and enabling of faculty to be up to date on culturally responsive, active learning methods. (Gandara & Maxwell-Jolly, 2019).

Assumptions, Challenges, and Small Changes

We entered into a relationship with our urban, elementary school partner knowing that we had to consider the needs and perspectives of all the stake holders, including teacher candidates, mentor teachers, children in the partner school, administrators, and the professors. Of great importance in our partnership was our keen awareness of the ethical obligations of stewardship for the children and the school community. As the school year proceeded, we learned many lessons and began to ask new and more insightful questions. Reflecting on the different experiences and situations that occurred in our first year of the partnership, we learned that relationships have to be built on trust and that the school, teachers, faculty, and PST candidates need to prove worthy of the collaborative partnership and the right to be called "partner." The classroom teachers needed to get to know us and understand the focus and scope of our program through the excellent participation of the PST's in their classrooms. However, as important as this was to us, we still needed to remember that our coursework, assignments, and PST experiences were not a priority for the classroom teachers and that the needs of their children always came first!

The questions that guided our inquiry focused on ways the residency model could better prepare our PST's for teaching in the future. We wanted to be clear about the advantages and possible problems of this residency model, and also to make changes as we moved forward that would benefit the university and students as well as the partner school. When school started in the fall of our first year, we felt ready and prepared to begin. Looking back, there were aspects of this partnership that we had not considered and assumptions that needed re-thinking to make the program more successful. Reflecting on our progress, we created a list of successes and some of the assumptions and issues that needed more careful consideration. (See Figure 1).

Analyzing these assumptions and expectations in retrospect, it is clear that more communication between the university professors and the partner school was needed. We assumed the classroom mentor teachers would be willing to provide teaching time, co-planning, collaboration, and critique for our PST's. However, we were not clear about our students' requirements and needed to provide more explicit direction about assignments and what PST's were expected to do while in the classroom. Some of the classroom teachers were more willing than others to explain their practice; others felt their teaching time was too valuable to relinquish, or they had student teachers who did most of the

Figure 1
Assumptions and expectations (university, instructor, and partner school)

Assumptions/Expectations	Issues	Solutions
Co-Planning time with Mentor teacher and student	*Mentor teachers did not allow time for co-planning *University instructor did not specify the need for time to co-plan	*Provide syllabus and university expectations
Classroom participation of university student	*University student was given a small group to work with in the hall *PST spent too much time observing instead of interacting with students *Teachers unwilling to give up teaching time for PST to teach a lesson	*Make expectations and assignments known *Provide a checklist of PST learning needs (e.g. classroom management strategies; differentiation)
Developing a shared professional language of classroom practices	*Classroom teachers used unfamiliar vocabulary pertaining to assessments, student levels, materials, or pedagogy	*Student keeps list of unfamiliar vocabulary and discusses them with mentor teacher during co-planning *Student is coached to ask relevant questions *Student is provided with these terms before classes begin
Student teacher already placed in mentor teacher's classroom	*Classroom teachers have student teachers all year long but PST's need to see mentor teachers teach	*Arrange a time for PST's to be in classroom when mentor teacher is teaching. *Provide university schedule and ask that mentor teachers teach during these days/times if possible
Dedicated space for course instruction during the day	*Request that a room or office be available when PST's and instructor are in the school	*Provide dates and a schedule of attendance for the semester *Arrange for an alternative room or space if the designated space is occupied (e.g. for meetings or testing)
Communicate school schedule and events in advance	*Special events, assemblies, and testing days need to be communicated to university instructor in advance	*School needs to provide calendar for PST's and instructor
Assign PST's to master teachers	*Some PST's assigned to teachers who needed help or were new teachers rather than the "best" or experienced teachers	*Discuss teacher choices with principal and agree on placement of PST's in accomplished/experienced teachers' classrooms
Integrate technology into the curriculum	*Technology too often used as digital worksheet *Minimal instruction of students using computer programs	*Discuss ways to use technology creatively across the curriculum *Offer professional development workshops to support teachers' use of technology in classrooms

teaching, thus limiting the opportunity for PST's to learn from master teachers. A big lesson learned was that, although the principal was very eager to have us at his school, the classroom teachers needed to learn more about us, our program, and ways we could help them rather than viewing us as "experts" coming into their classrooms to "show" them new ways of teaching. We knew we had to earn their respect by first meeting them at one of their professional development days, but we did not take enough time to discuss, and really listen to, their comments about curriculum and instructional goals, as well as classroom and student issues. Since we did not know the teachers early on, it felt intrusive to engage in conversations about where and how we could support them. Instead, we looked for opportunities to seamlessly demonstrate teaching strategies while participating in the classroom without disrupting their daily routines. For example, one professor noticed two young students reading a favorite book and quietly went over to them, listened to them read, and offered to video them and share it with the class. Soon after, other students wanted to also record their reading and make videos and book trailers. With the classroom teacher's permission, the PST's were able to function as teacher assistants and help students use the available technology to practice and share their reading with others.

At the end of the first year, the cohort group of ten primarily Hispanic PST candidates (8 Hispanic, 2 Caucasian) met at the university as a focus group to discuss their residency experience. The professors were also part of the group. Everyone felt that it had been a positive experience in spite of the challenges. PST's acknowledged that the assignments were appropriate and prepared them for their future student teaching experience. They were able to implement read-alouds, student assessments, lesson planning, and individual and small group instruction. However, they were not able to teach more than one small mini-lesson, and they found it difficult to get the teacher to schedule the time for them to teach at all. Some students felt they were being used as aides to copy papers or monitor students going to and from the bathrooms. Other PST's were continually asked to work with small groups doing on-line learning out in the hall rather than directly teaching. We learned that we needed to be more explicit in informing the mentor teachers about these issues. We also realized the importance of spending designated time each week in every classroom to monitor the PST's participation and student interactions. Although some teaching tips and feedback were provided by the mentor teachers, the PST learning and success in the classroom was ultimately our responsibility as their university professors.

In reflective logs, our PST's often mentioned the benefit of learning classroom management routines, but they did not always understand reasons for the mentor teacher's grouping, curricular decisions, or instructional strategies. Our students needed debriefing opportunities when we met for class time, and by being present in the classrooms, we professors were able to help the PST's analyze those experiences with an emphasis on the children's learning rather than only focusing on the development of a good lesson created for a course assignment. Reflective comments also related to the importance of managing time, handling constant interruptions during instruction (for specials, fire drills, announcements, etc.), and recognizing the importance of differentiated planning to meet the various students' needs in an inclusive classroom. During our class time discussions, the PST's were able to focus on ways to create classroom environments that supported engaged learning while honoring balanced literacy. In addition to teaching strategies and classroom management, the PST logs included reflective comments on ways to use technology for learning rather than as merely a classroom management tool to keep students quiet, ways to design and implement learning centers focused on content as well as reinforcing skills through practice, and the grouping of students based on interests and inquiries as well as learning needs.

By the end of the first year, our PST's had learned many reading strategies and had been able to try some of them in their classrooms. As a way of thanking the teachers and as part of the final "appraisal" of the candidates, we offered a reading strategy workshop for the school whereby the PST's would demonstrate some of what they had learned and share some new strategies with the teachers. Although the principal was appreciative and welcomed this reciprocal participation, he could not accept the offer as all the professional development (PD) time had already been planned and contract regulations prevented him from asking the teachers to stay (or come to school) after hours. Through these experiences, we all learned about the realities of public school life, and we also learned that we needed to be specific about our instructional needs and expectations right from the start. Moving forward, we are now planning ways to share new learning with the mentor teachers while working in their classrooms instead of providing collaboration as an "extra." For example, when a PST gives a lesson, he/she will intentionally include a demonstration of a reading strategy for a particular topic or subject and provide the mentor teacher with a handout about the strategy or a list of references for further information. When the PSTs research and present a "Hot Topic" for an assignment, they will provide their mentor teacher with a copy of their information and PowerPoint as a way for the mentor teacher to see what the PST is learning, to give feedback and comment on the content, and to learn a little more about a topic, if interested.

Next Steps Moving Forward

In the second year, we made a logistical decision to provide a second school experience for the PST's mid-year during the second semester. We wanted them to experience both a public school and a faith-based, private school with the same African-American demographic in a different urban neighborhood. After hearing the PSTs' concerns about driving to a neighborhood perceived to be "dangerous," we provided the Dominican University van to transport them every week. Pedagogically, the school switch made sense, but we found that we needed to provide more scaffolding, preparation, and support for the PST's to help them become more culturally responsive and understanding of the realities of life for the students in their second placement. With the full cooperation of the teachers and principal, the second placement proved to be a positive learning experience helping the PST's work side by side with master teachers devoted to ensuring the success of all their students by engaging them in meaningful, relevant learning experiences. Both of the partner schools were considered top tier with excellent student scores, and our PST's were able to experience two different school cultures, leadership styles, and learning outcomes with the same demographic, thereby honing their skills and understanding of ways to engage all students in meaningful learning, whether in public or private schools.

During this second year of our program, we were also more intentional about asking for the most experienced mentor teachers in both of our partner schools, identifying what our expectations were for the students and mentor teachers, and offering professional development meeting times for the teachers also to be attended by the PST's. One other way of forging a positive partner relationship was by inviting the principal of the first school to speak at the student teaching dinner hosted by the university, as well as by providing "mock interviews" with teacher candidates to help them prepare for future job interviews after graduation. Overall, we found the experience of partnering with two different schools to be significant for the PST's learning in ways that broadened their perspectives and introduced them to different models of education. It provided them with hands-on opportunities to participate in public and private urban schools and communities with the same demographic but very different approaches to teaching content, classroom management, and academic expectations.

This experience reminds us that, far from being "blank slates" waiting to accumulate pieces of information, learners actively construct their own knowledge in different ways depending on what they already know or understand to be true, what they have experienced, and how they perceive and interpret new information. To foster meaningful learning, students need consistent opportunities to create bridges between their individual learning and broader professional goals. By providing these intentional, supported field-based experiences, we aim to encourage our pre-service teachers to develop a deeper sense of care and responsibility for themselves, for the students in their classrooms, and for the wider communities they serve beyond the school walls.

Conclusion

Our experience provides qualitative evidence of our successful implementation of the field-based residency model. Reflective data from faculty, teacher candidates, and school administrators provide insight into ways the partnership can be reciprocal for both candidates and mentor teachers. It also reveals gaps in our planning and the need for greater understanding of the complexities of building relationships, as well as the positive outcomes and ideas for next steps in growing the program. Through analysis and reflection, we have a deeper awareness of the expectations and needs of the candidates and the mentor teachers that will guide our continuing work in the future. Our field-based work has generated a deeper understanding of partnering with elementary schools and ways to structure teaching and professional preparation to best support our PST candidates. This is especially critical if we hope to improve outcomes for our teacher candidates, especially those who have been historically marginalized or who are first generation students. We know that successful collaboration requires the best mentor teachers and administrators and also that all participants must be willing to work together to help the next generation of teachers, as well as to make school more equitable and successful for all students at every level. As the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education reports (AACTE, 2010), there is a great need for schools and schools of education to be thoughtfully redesigned and transformed. We think our program and all that we have learned in the first two years of our field-based residency model can provide insight into ways this can be accomplished. We hope that our experiences in implementing a field-based residency model of teacher education can inform and support other programs and PST candidates on their journeys to becoming our future teachers and educational leaders.

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