

Picture the Power of Collaboration

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Abstract

This article examines the benefits of year-long field experiences and reviews the perceptions of those involved in partnerships between public school districts and the University of Southern Maine and University of Idaho-Coeur d' Alene. Researchers found traditional student teaching to be insufficient and it can be burdensome for schools. With the demands of NCLB, yearlong internships within school—university partnerships create mutually beneficial learning environments for K-12 students, in-service teachers, administrators, university faculty, and university interns.

“When they [student teachers] do it for nine or 15 weeks, it’s like giving them ¼ of the pieces and asking them to put the puzzle together,” commented a 30 year veteran of education. Now in administration and she herself a product of the traditional student teaching model, Debbie expressed frustration and concern with the status quo, “I don’t think that student teachers feel totally part of the team. Their weeks are fragmented which results in a steep learning curve the first year.”

With like minds, three interviewed principals considered the yearlong internship vs. student teaching a definite benefit to K-12 students, “The year-long internship format produces a better trained beginning teacher and has lasting positive impact on grade school children. In education, at all levels, we are given the charge to make decisions based on what is best for our students.” Collectively, they stressed, “Since we have worked with the University [of Idaho] for 3 years with this program, we know first hand of its advantages. They include:

- interns are 100% better prepared for the classroom.
- interns are placed with highly successful practicing educators and receive a whole year of this training.
- interns have little trouble starting their first year of teaching.
- as new teachers those that come from a yearlong program don’t require as much “hand holding” mentoring from the principal and peers ... they are confident walking into their first classroom.
- a few interns weren’t ready after just a semester, but after a year they were. They had the time they needed.”

Professional Development School Background

In a 1995 report, *Tomorrow’s Schools of Education*, the Holmes Group advocated the

need for universities and schools of education adopt an approach to teacher preparation that was “more comprehensive, more long-term, and powerful enough to knock aside obsolete traditions and cultural norms that block their path” (p. 87). Teacher preparation has been defined as “thin, uneven, poor, random, chaotic, and directionless” (National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future, 1996; Zeichner, 1999). Marsha Levine (1997) maintained teacher training schools would meet student needs while simultaneously improving teacher quality by restructuring schools to provide teacher candidates with authentic learning opportunities. After a decade of uneven teacher education reform, members of the Holmes Group, a consortium of nearly 100 American research universities, asserted that schools of education cannot bring about the changes they seek by themselves (The Holmes Partnership, n.d.).

Enter the Professional Development School (PDS) model comprised of public school-university partnerships and yearlong internships that provide depth, consistency, quality and focus. According to *Tomorrow’s Schools*, a 1990 report of the Holmes Group, three characteristics distinguish PDSs: 1) the development of novice professionals, 2) the continuing development of experienced professionals, and 3) research and development about the teaching profession. Partnerships strengthen collaboration between school partners, foster a sense of inquiry and reflection, and enhance a spirit of inclusiveness. Indeed, Trietel (2001), in a review of PDS research, found important evidence that the time, effort and resources committed to creating and sustaining PDSs have positive effects on K-12 students, preservice and in-service teachers. The programs in Maine and Idaho, according to an Idaho middle school principal, “just begin to tap the potential. This program provides us the opportunity to marry the strengths of the university with the strengths of the practitioners in the field.”

Maine

Since 1990, the University of Southern Maine, year-long interns study in professional development schools in one of five selected districts within the Southern Maine Partnership’s 30 school network for renewing schools. School and university-based faculty join together in planning and coordinating each professional development school’s program, co-teaching courses, and mentoring interns in classroom experiences (University of Southern Maine, n.d.).

As part of this pioneering program, university post-baccalaureate students work under the guidance of both college and K-12 school-based faculty to develop successful teaching practices. The internship is ½ time during the fall semester and full time during spring semester. It culminates in a ¾ of a master’s degree and teacher certification. In addition to coursework on campus, university students also are immersed in field-based experiences, integrated technology activities, and seminars in local partnership schools.

Maine Research

During the 1995-1998 school years, multiple instruments designed to evaluate the University of Southern Maine program were administered. USM’s evaluation sites included 29 schools; of these, six were high schools, one was a junior-senior high, five were jr. high (middle schools), and 17 were elementary schools. One of four research questions was a comparison between the new partnership program (year-long internship) and the old traditional semester long student teaching.

Research Question: How do the ongoing restructuring efforts result in improvements in the quality of teacher preparation as evidenced by effects on candidates and graduates?

The data to answer this question were taken from sections of the following research

instruments: mentor teacher survey and focus groups, and administrator focus groups. The summary data are reported by respondent groups.

Mentor Teachers (Maine)

Mentor teachers rated preservice teachers in Partnership programs higher than in traditional programs on nearly every item. In general, 94% of mentor teachers rated Partnership preservice teachers as more able or significantly more able than preservice teachers in traditional programs. On specific items mentor teachers agreed or strongly agreed (80%-100%) that Partnership preservice teachers were better prepared on the following:

- implement and adjust plans
- alternative forms of assessment
- reflect on teaching and learning
- long and short range planning based on student need and development
- become effective teachers
- work cooperatively with colleagues
- balance the demands of teaching
- use a variety of instructional strategies
- teach for understanding and higher order reasoning
- manage a classroom effectively

Two areas the mentor teachers indicated the same or less preparation than in traditional programs were involving parents and the community (39%) and sensitivity to ethnic and cultural differences (50%).

School Administrators (Maine)

School administrators concentrated on the quality of the preservice teachers who were carefully screened before they were admitted into the program. They felt the preservice teachers in the Partnership brought more life experiences, and were more focused, mature and confident than traditional preservice teachers.

Summary of Findings

All respondent groups rated the Partnership program significantly higher than traditional teacher education programs. The quality of the candidates, clinical experiences, and program organization form the foundation of the program. Partnership preservice teachers were rated higher than preservice teachers in traditional programs in nearly all categories. Within the respondent groups the following areas were rated as particularly strong: instructional planning, assessment, reflection, working with colleagues, instructional strategies, and teaching for understanding and higher order thinking. Areas of concern for all respondent groups were working with parents and community involvement. (Major & Ridlon, 1999, p. 22).

Idaho

In 1999, the University of Idaho-Coeur d'Alene (UI-CdA) formed a university-school coalition involving three major school districts and five rural districts. The Idaho internship comprises the senior year of a four year baccalaureate program. Interns are in the classroom full-time for an entire public school year. Although major local school districts were reluctant to participate during the first year of the partnership they provided placement for only seven interns. Yet, after just three years, *each* requested as many of the 65 interns as possible for the 2003-2004 school year. Without hesitation, a junior high school principal expressed her

thoughts about the yearlong intern program, “Yearlong internship is the best thing that has happened to teacher preparation. Those folks really become part of the staff. Not just someone who comes in the second week of school and leaves the second week in December. They bond with the students; they have an understanding of what it means to be a teacher.” This feeling is echoed in the thoughts of an elementary school mentor teacher, “Given the huge challenges that teachers face in education today, it is important that student teachers are more, not less, experienced” (Hammond, 2002).

Idaho Research

Current or past mentor teachers and principals with one-to-three years experience with the University of Idaho program were interviewed and surveyed during March and April of 2002. Comments from individual interviews conducted during spring semester (Hammond, 2002) together with findings from a quantitative survey of UI-CdA (Hammond, 2002) mentor teachers indicate a preference for yearlong interns. Apparent to the survey participants, classroom competencies that demand time to comprehend and refine teaching skills require more than just eight to sixteen weeks of student teaching; more specifically, interns develop pedagogy that involves reflection, collaboration, and assessment.

The Idaho internship format prompted a particularly ardent response from an Idaho rural public school administrator, “I believe that the internship is, **by far, better than student teaching**. Teachers come out of the program with such strength that the first year of teaching is not an arduous survival story and student learning is kept at a high level with new hires.”(Hammond, 2002).

Mentor Teachers and School Administrators (Idaho)

Mentor teachers and administrators rated preservice teachers in the new year-long internship program higher than in the student teaching program on nearly every item (Table 1). In

general, 63% rated the preservice teachers in the year-long internship as demonstrating greater proficiency than semester long student teachers. On specific items interns were better prepared than student teachers on the following:

- Participates in school community 78%
- Creates meaningful learning experience 75%
- Plans long/short term lessons based on student need and development 75%
- Aligns lesson plan assessments to objectives 75%

One area mentor teachers and administrators indicated the interns and student teachers were the same was their sensitivity to ethnic and cultural differences (Hammond, 2002).

Conclusions and Reflections

Professional Development School Benefits

Today’s society has little room for those who cannot read, write, compute, utilize resources, solve problems, and function as lifelong learners in the world of new technology, skills and occupations (National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future, 1996). Societies that do not succeed at education have little chance of success in a global economy, and most schools and teachers cannot produce the learning demanded by the new reforms. Without staff knowledge and resources, successful programs cannot be reproduced. Increased graduation and testing requirements only create greater failure if teachers do not know how to reach students. “You can know the subject matter well and not be able to deliver it if you don’t know the children well” (Senge, Cambron-McCage, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000, p. 41). PDS partnerships offer new prospects to develop connections with K-12 students. School-university connections may well facilitate relationships that promote K-12 student learning.

Table 1. Student Teaching vs. PDS Year-long Internship University of Idaho - Coeur d'Alene 2002
Population surveyed: Mentor teachers and Principals

Yearlong interns demonstrate greater proficiency, the same, or less proficiency than student teachers in these areas:			
	Greater	Same	Less
Aligns lesson plan assessments to objectives	(21)75%	(5)18%	(2)7%
Aligns instruction with state and national standards	(17)61%	(9)32%	(2)7%
Uses a variety of teaching strategies	(18)64%	(9)32%	(1)4%
Teaches for higher order reasoning	(15)54%	(12)42%	(1)4%
Plans long/short term lessons based on student need and development	(21)75%	(5)18%	(2)7%
Practices effective teaching	(20)71%	(7)25%	(1)4%
Reflects on teaching and learning	(19)68%	(7)25%	(1)4%
Works cooperatively with colleagues	(19)68%	(6)21%	(3)11%
Develops/maintains interpersonal skills	(14)50%	(12)42%	(2)7%
Balances demands of teaching	(17)61%	(7)25%	(4)14%
Manages a classroom effectively	(20)71%	(7)25%	(1)4%
Involves parents and community	(16)57%	(10)36%	(2)7%
Sensitive to ethnic and cultural differences	(9)32%	(19)68%	0
Adjusts curriculum and assessment for diverse learners	(18)64%	(10)36%	0
Incorporates technology in instruction	(16)57%	(11)39%	(1)4%
Understands theories of learning and development	(17)61%	(11)39%	0
Creates meaningful learning experiences	(21)75%	(7)25%	(1)4%
Participates in school community	(22)78%	(5)18%	(1)4%
(n=28)	63%	31%	6%

Student Benefits

Envision on-going interactions between your K-12 students and trained adults, additional opportunities for teacher teaming to provide learners with authentic tasks, real—not stolen—time to address state standards and align curriculum (Idaho interns assist teachers with required state testing), enhanced possibilities for one-to-one remediation, the potential for small group instruction, improved availability of qualified substitutes, and prospects for school and university faculty to work together. More specifically, during the past three years, school districts in the University of Idaho-Coeur d'Alene (UI-CdA) program garnered an additional 34,200 hours of K-12 student support in the form of individual tutoring, class instruction, and remediation. That means the 41.5 yearlong interns, when compared to an average five hour day classroom paraprofessional salary, contributed \$274, 209.60 worth of instruction time (Hammond, 2002). In light of the mandates required by *No Child Left Behind*, that time was specifically dedicated to reading and math instruction. Additionally, 16,960 UI-CdA intern hours were committed to committee tasks, standards-based curriculum development, math, and reading before and after school projects, grade level planning, service learning projects, and staff development activities.

K-12 Teacher Benefits

Visualize expanded opportunities for your staff to co-teach university classes, onsite university faculty to assist in promoting teacher quality, and the creation of a learning community. Imagine university faculty working with children, modeling best practices, sharing learning theory with your staff, and exploring new grant or funding opportunities for innovative projects. A case in point: two junior high schools at opposite ends of the continent, Wells Junior High School in Maine and Lakeland Junior High School in Idaho placed three interns in a single grade-level teacher team. Without these interns, grade-level curriculum planning, standard alignment, major student interdisciplinary

research projects, authentic assessment presentations, and community exhibitions would not likely occur. The opportunity for collaboration between intern and mentor has tremendous deep authentic learning opportunities for K-12 students, teachers, interns, and communities.

Reciprocal Modeling

Researchers note that age twelve to fourteen is the most dramatic and traumatic time in human life. Middle school students need to be understood, valued and respected. Explained one principal, “[I have one] teacher who is set in her way . . . cut and dry in the manner which she deals with classes. The intern is much more relaxed, more sincere as she praises kids. The mentor learned from [her] intern. The internship provides active modeling for intern and mentor. Teachers are feeling isolated, it [the yearlong internship] provides an opportunity to allow a more relaxed approach rather than cramming activities into eight weeks of time. Feed back and monitoring processes are relaxed so mentors and interns can try again” (Hammond, 2002).

In longitudinal study of the University of Southern Maine, mentor teachers indicated that they “felt more comfortable trying out new methods once they had seen a preservice teacher put the theory into practice, and preservice teachers felt that a smaller student/teacher ratio allowed mentor teachers to take on bigger learning projects and do more authentic assessments” (Major & Ridlon, 1999, p 16). In fact, mentor teachers reported an increase in the connection between theory and practice. A preservice teacher noted the essence of this connection, “the ideas and theories can be used immediately in the classroom” (Hammond, 2002).

Collaboration Time

One principal defined PDS perks in terms of opportunities for collaboration between mentor and intern, as well as professional development between the middle school and university staff. With additional intern personnel, middle school faculty teams were provided

with release time to align curriculum with new state standards, to attend professional development workshops, and to evaluate student test scores. Additional caring adults in the building created potential for meaningful connections with K-12 students. A case in point, a Massachusetts' elementary school approached a local university and requested that an intern be placed in every classroom. By October, the interns assumed teaching duties for Fridays. This allowed mentor teachers to dedicate one day each week to district planning and curriculum development. Interestingly, Ponderosa Elementary School in Post Falls ID also requested an intern for each 5th grade teacher for the upcoming school year.

Teacher Opportunities for Professional Development

School-university partnerships enjoy the likelihood that the partnership will grow beyond the collegial internship program. A case in point, The Southern Maine Partnership helped to provide resources and coaching to schools throughout Maine as a result of the 2002 Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation commitment of \$10 million to improve high schools through Maine. The grant supported efforts in secondary schools across the state to prepare students for school, work and citizenship and offered 10 to 12 high schools assistance in developing new networks and leadership opportunities. The grant also provided funding to help schools engage their communities in conversations about adolescence and how schools could be structured to meet their needs.

Community Implications

Contemplate the opportunity to inform your parent organizations and business leaders of partnership benefits: enhanced student learning, improved teacher quality, increased time for teachers to effectively communicate

with parents, improved community understanding of national and state policies as a result of partnership presentations, additional opportunities to participate in comprehensive teacher training, increased professional dialogue about learning theory and application, and increased time to collegially design innovative learning models.

Parents are becoming more aware of the need for qualified teachers. Communities expect the highest quality teachers. To address these community expectations, successful partnership and yearlong internships afford school districts the opportunity to help every teacher who enters the profession become highly qualified, to provide meaningful staff development to in-service teachers, and to address specific deficiencies in student learning by providing additional, competent staff. School districts are seeing the PDS as a value added opportunity. Interns are the first hired; they have proven competencies.

The federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation requires all states by 2005-2006 to guarantee that every teacher is highly qualified. The law also zeroes in on racial and economic achievement gaps and the under-performance of high-poverty schools—where many new teachers begin classroom careers. “People who are in the intern program know what they are getting into. I believe they know the conditions of teaching,” (Hammond, 2002) emphasized a school administrator. “The kids are in the classroom early on. Teaching is a tough job. Interns start from day one, contact parents, plan, teach, discipline, counsel, [and accept the] duties [of a teacher]. They know what they are getting in to” (Hammond, 2002).

Collaboration is a lynchpin of effective teacher education programs, both initial and advanced. Teacher education relies on public school and community collaboration. Without committed school partners, teacher educators could not achieve goals to nurture quality teachers and ensure that every child has a caring, competent teacher.

A mentor teacher who coached six interns and is a strong supporter of PDSs, emphasized, "The yearlong internship is a wonderful opportunity and learning situation for new teachers to get the feel for the progression of students, the intricate building politics, the financial and time constraints that public education possesses, and most importantly the time commitment needed to have a productive classroom. Students leave this program knowing well the assessments, the many different teaching strategies, the important collaboration and staff development among the staff, and the commitment to the students. These new teachers experience ownership of the school, the students and even the building as they leave the program. Management techniques are tried, practiced and most often fine tuned as they leave prepared for their own teacher career" (Hammond, 2002).

"I have found the internship program to be far superior to the traditional student teaching situation. The yearlong aspect and seeing an entire school year in the same classroom, the developing of a mentor relationship, the relationship that is developed with the school and staff as a whole, and the acceptance of the intern as a true member of the staff are all important facets. I feel our interns were much better prepared to have their own classroom and as a principal I am going to be much more willing to hire a candidate that has had an intern experience over one with student teaching," (Hammond, 2002) noted a new district curriculum director and former principal.

Indirect Benefits

To encourage parent-teacher communication, a PDS university professor authored and received a \$20,000 grant from Washington Mutual Bank. The grant author brought a national program, Parents and Teachers Talking Together, to Idaho PDS middle schools. This program enhanced parent and teacher communication; some also received facilitator training as part of the program. These trained facilitators

then taught and monitored parent-teacher communication strategies at their respective schools.

Partner Benefits

The National Education Association's publication *Teaching to Teach* concluded with Anne Reynolds' summary of the success of PDSs: in-service teachers noted mentor stipends, an increase in morale, a sense of empowerment, and personal satisfaction in helping prospective teachers. Administrators called attention to the pool of well-prepared applicants for teaching positions that emerged from the partnerships. Teacher quality increased, and student-teacher ratios were lowered. Teacher leadership and professional development characterized educational renewal in many restructuring partnerships. Both preservice and in-service teacher's reflection on practice increased. "With greater awareness comes a propensity toward action" (Reynolds, 1999, p.194).

University of Southern Maine researchers reported that partnerships generated positive effects on K-12 school climate and culture; everyone learned from each other. Mentor teachers were exposed to new ideas and approaches. Confirmed an Idaho mentor teacher, "We have become an intellectual place—just listen to the talk in the [teachers'] lounge" (Hammond, 2002).

Summary

Idaho and Maine school-university partnerships disturb status quo, blur traditional boundaries, and induct new educators into the profession in ways that recognize and prepare them for different ways of collaboration and leadership. In addition to preservice teaching preparation, the partnerships provide public schools with additional resources to address recent federal and state reforms. So take action; educate yourself (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education AACTE, The Holmes Partnership), and share your enthusiasm and

commitment with others. The effort to create and sustain a partnership requires commitment and patience. Select a team of creative people; share with them the benefits of public school-university partnership. Create a shared vision. Develop a plan. Visit existing programs. Take the first step, open the doors, contact people, and explore opportunities. An unmistakable reminder of our purpose as educators is embedded in the thought, "We are not likely to have good schools unless we prepare excellent teachers. Yet, it is unlikely that we will send out excellent teachers unless they spend a great deal of time in exemplary schools during their preparation" (Senge et al., 2000, p. 406).

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