Toward More Effective Education through University and School Collaboration

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Webpage with this paper and related papers and material can be found at:

http://www-instruct.nmu.edu/education/rclarken
The background, nature and results of collaborations between one university teacher education program and several schools to improve the effectiveness of teacher preparation, professional development for K-12 and university faculty, and achievement for all students is described. The collaboration centers on several school-based courses and field experiences that teacher candidates have in area.

Change can be a difficult process. This is especially true in institutions known for stability and continuity such as schools and universities. When the change process involves universities and schools collaborating with one another, the challenge takes on added dimensions of difficulty. Differences in governance, leadership, roles, expectations, activities, cultures, reward systems, schedules, goals and realities are among the many possible sources of conflict between schools and universities. These same differences also provide opportunities for growth. Though collaboration on change between university and K-12 school personnel can be particularly challenging, it can each serve as an effective vehicle for improvement in their respective missions. This is especially true between teacher education programs and the schools for which they are preparing their teachers.

That change is needed in teacher preparation and in public schools a common theme in professional and popular literature. Many suggest that both teacher candidates and K-12 students are not being taught in the best ways. As schools of education prepare the teacher's for the K-12 schools, and the K-12 schools prepare the students for the schools of education, the benefits of collaboration and working together to improve each other's graduates makes good sense. An equal partnership between schools and universities allowing practicing teachers to work with preservice teachers on a consistent and long-term basis for the benefit of all students also makes good sense.

The process of developing and maintaining collaborative relationships between and within school and university communities is a complex and challenging process demanding individual qualities and virtues that are not found well developed in most people, and are not easily acquired by those who do not possess them. The project and the elements for creating collaborative communities are identified and discussed in more detail elsewhere (Clarken, 1999; Clarken and LeRoy, 1998). A full-time Director of Field Experiences oversees all teacher education field experiences to help identify, obtain and monitor field placement sites and agreements, maintain good relations with schools, provide the leadership necessary for a quality program, monitor progress, systematic development of the program, insure quality and consistency and provides a coordinated system of working with and developing placement sites.

Collaboration is a process, not an event, requiring a long-range view and a systematic. Without individuals or institutions possessing trustworthiness, responsibility, commitment, perseverance,
accountability, flexibility, adaptability, desire to improve, respect for others, tolerance and sensitivity, the possibilities for a positive outcomes. (See Appendix 1: University-School Collaboration Readiness Questionnaire.)

University and school collaboration, though it offers many benefits, also has many challenges related to time, communication, cooperation and change. Those not adequately prepared will be found wanting, and the collaborative relationship put in jeopardy.

This paper describes how a university teacher education program and area K-12 schools have become allies to improve education. They have created an effective model of how schools and institutions of higher learning can interact with one another to improve education for all of their students, and professional development for both of their faculties. Some of the data documenting the effectiveness and some of the factors that have contributed to more effective education for practicing and preservice general and special education teachers will be shared.

Because most effort has been focused on developing effective partnerships that benefit all parties, data collection from multiple perspectives have relied heavily on self-report surveys. Because of the complexity of the variables and factors involved, other data sources have not been found that would be seen as credible enough by the various stakeholders involved with the grant to warrant the resources needed to go beyond observational and self-reported data.

**How university-school collaboration has improved the education of teacher candidates**

Collaboration with area schools has extended and improved teacher preparation at NMU. Feedback from all internal and external parties related to this collaboration supports this conclusion. The lessons learned from our experiences of having teacher education courses taught in area schools and teacher candidates serving in area classrooms in collaboration with the administration and teachers in those schools can be helpful to other university programs and schools interested in exploring similar endeavors.

The history of collaboration between NMU and area schools goes back to it beginnings as a normal school in 1899. Current collaborative endeavors can be traced to the early 1990?s with the developing of relationships between university teacher education administrators and area school administrators, and between teacher education professors and school teachers. The initial impetus was to find more and better opportunities for NMU teacher candidates to become well prepared as teachers and to help them develop the needed knowledge, skills and dispositions to become excellent teachers by serving in area classrooms under the guidance of university professors and K-12 teachers.

In the early 1990?s a classroom management and multicultural education course were taught in a local middle school. These courses were considered very successful and demonstrated that
courses could be held in area schools to the benefit of all concerned. During that same time the teacher education program employed two teachers from area schools to serve a full-time faculty on a short-term basis. They helped to create greater awareness of and closer connections with area practitioners and schools. A tenure-track university professor had developed relationships with teachers in Whitman Elementary school which bordered the university campus. These relationships lead to a developing collaboration of mutual benefit to all parties. It started as a pen pal relationship between the elementary students and the languages arts methods students, then to having language arts class visit their pen pals in the school and they in turn visiting the university students in their classroom across the street on the university campus. This evolved into eventually moving the university course to a classroom in the Whitman school as soon as space became available.

The model that has developed in collaboration with Whitman has made a significant improvement in the preparation of teachers at NMU. It has much to offer other teacher training institutions. The courses that are based in schools and that involve teacher candidates in classroom experiences to prepare them to be effective teachers are listed below and briefly described. All schools identified are part of the local school district, Marquette Area Public Schools, the largest school district in the region, unless noted.

In the ED 230 and 231 course field experiences, students become oriented to and begin to conceptualize the professional roles, responsibilities and problems of being a teacher. In the methods course, students learn how to plan for instruction and apply solutions to actual learning in K-12 classrooms.

**ED 230 Teaching and Learning in the Elementary Classroom**

Students meet at Sandy Knoll elementary school and spend 30 hours tutoring, assisting and observing students in area elementary classrooms. This last year eight to sixteen of those hours were spent at Nah Tah Wahsh Public School Academy in Hannahville, MI and at schools with diverse student populations in Green Bay WI.

**ED 231 Teaching and Learning in the Secondary Classroom**

Students meet in Graverait or Bothwell Middle School and spend 30 hours working with teachers in classrooms throughout the building.

**ED 311 / 316 Language Arts Methods & Materials / Elementary Reading Instruction I**

Students meet three days a week and spend from about 30 hours in the classroom at Whitman Elementary, Superior Hills Elementary or at Father
Marquette Catholic Central School, to bring theory and practice together through real experiences teaching language arts.

**ED 312 Science Methods and Materials for Elementary Teachers**

Classes meet one session a week at the Seaborg Science Center on campus and one day a week in either Whitman Elementary, Sandy Knoll Elementary or Aspen Ridge Elementary and Middle School in the NICE school district about 20 miles from campus. They have 10 hours of field in a middle school science classroom, 10 hours in an elementary classroom, and four hours in related science teaching activities.

**ED 318 Elementary Reading Instruction II**

Students meet and spend at least 10 hours in Vandenboom, Sandy Knoll or Aspen Ridge (NICE District) elementary classrooms each tutoring one to four children based on individual literacy assessments and plans developed under the supervision of the professor and teacher.

**MA 353 Elementary Mathematics Methods**

This course is taught at Sandy Knoll Elementary or Aspen Ridge School in NICE District and students spend an hour each week in a classroom doing activities related to mathematics.

**ED 319 Teaching of Reading for Secondary Teachers and ED 349 General Secondary Methods**

Students meet from 7:30 am to 12 noon one day a week in either Marquette Senior High School or Negaunee High School and spend 20 hours assisting under the supervision of a teacher.

**350 Specialized Secondary Methods**

Some of the secondary methods classes meet in area high schools and all have their education students work in a secondary classroom for at least 15 hours and teach at least one lesson.
Students are assessed in their school-based field experiences and required to successfully complete these experiences to continue in teacher education by demonstrating the general and content knowledge and pedagogic and professional knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to be a successful teacher. These experiences help determine the student's ability to carry out the duties of a teacher and offer many sources of data for evaluation (See NMU Handbook for Field Experiences and Student Teaching for a description of these duties and proficiencies). Classroom teachers and university professors assess if these competencies are adequately demonstrated by the students and help the teacher candidates identify their strengths and weaknesses by encouraging self-evaluation through feedback, reflection, journaling, scripting, conferencing and videotaping.

The following data sources support the assessment that school-based courses and field experiences have been better in preparing teacher candidates to become more effective teachers than the previous models of university-based classes with no opportunities for application, observation or practice or university-based courses that required assigned field experiences in area schools.

1. Students? evaluations of courses. End of course evaluations by students for courses that have become more school based and with more related and supervised field experiences are highly rated by students. Student ratings and comments suggest that being in the school and being in the classroom are the most valued aspects of these courses. Though it creates scheduling, logistical and transportation problems for students, none have recommended that we move the courses back to the lecture halls or spend less time in the classrooms. The most common complaint is that there should be more time in the classroom.

2. Professors? observations and evaluations. Though there are challenges offering a course on site in a school, no professors engaged want to move their courses back to campus. If classroom space becomes unavailable in the schools, we may have to do that, but as long as they can, the professors are choosing to be in the schools. Other professors in the program who do not have a course on site in the schools also value the improvements they have seen in students as a result of their being in schools and endorse the benefits for teacher candidates.

3. University administrators? observations and evaluations. University administrators from the President of the University to the School of Education? s Director of Field Experiences value the university-school collaborations and applaud the positive influence it has had on the teacher education program and its students.

4. Teacher Education program evaluations. At the end of each semester, all student teachers do an evaluation of the teacher education program. Consistently the most highly rated part of the teacher education program is the practical experience they were given in the schools and the number one suggestion for improvement is to increase the time in schools and classrooms.

5. Evaluation by recent graduates. In surveys and communications, students indicate that the courses and experiences in the field were the most helpful.

6. Evaluations by supervising teachers. Supervising teachers consistently comment on formal reports and in informal conversations about the improved quality of student teachers and attribute the better quality of these students to the increase in quantity and
quality of field experiences and opportunities for students to be in schools to develop the attributes needed to be excellent teachers.

7. Evaluations by hiring superintendents and principals. Acknowledge on surveys and in comments on the improved quality of candidates from NMU’s program and attribute this largely to the increased and improved field experiences.

8. Evaluations by Faculty and Administrator in the buildings where course and experiences are held. Every teacher and administrator who has worked with or observed the school-based courses and field experiences feels it is a better model of teacher education over campus-based and lecture-based courses.

All the above data supports the value of university-school collaboration for improving the quality of future teachers.

Preparation for Working with Students with Special Needs

Because the schools where NMU students are developing their practice in schools that include students with special needs in regular classrooms, the teacher education candidates are learning how to deal effectively with those students and classrooms. This should have a positive impact on the future services these teacher candidates can deliver to special education students in their classrooms, as well as to the success of future teachers to effectively work with diverse students with diverse needs.

The ability of regular elementary and secondary teacher education candidates to work effectively with special education teachers and with and for children with special needs can also be enhanced as they learn together in the same courses while in the school-based field experiences involving special education students. Special education and regular education students taking classes together and working together in field sites establishes a foundation for future collaboration when they become certified regular and special education teachers. As all education students are in inclusive schools working with special education students and observing teachers who use inclusion daily and as a normal matter of course, they will consider this as the normal and preferred practice by education students.

Teacher candidates are regularly exposed to teachers working through the realities and challenges of having children with special needs in regular classrooms. From the beginning to the end of their education program, they are in inclusive classrooms. It is so common that it is seldom noted and considered the norm. Classroom teachers use NMU students to work with special education children in their classrooms and have them work with the class so the teacher can assist special education students.
In class discussion, teacher education candidates often focus on specific children who are behavioral challenges to find ways to effectively deal with them. The special education teachers candidates get to see regular education teachers working with special education kids in inclusion settings, which gives them an understanding of what happens in inclusion classrooms and the types of accommodation services special education students receive in regular education classes. They experience an inclusionary model first hand in a positive environment and can understand some of the challenges and frustrations of dealing with special education children in regular classrooms. It is expected that this experience will help breaks down the wall that can form between regular and special education teachers and programs.

How university-school collaboration benefits the schools

The impact of this type of university-school collaboration on teacher candidates is greater as their experiences in the school constitutes a larger proportion of their lives and generally is a more significant experience in their lives than the impact on a K-12 student in a classroom. Because of the limited time and impact that most teacher education candidates have with students in the course of their week, maybe one in thirty hours over a fourteen week period, to expect measurable differences in test scores is not realistic. One indicator that teachers see the value of teacher candidates in their rooms is their acceptance of NMU students by teachers into their classrooms has increased over the years. Informal surveys of teachers, students and parents indicate high satisfaction with the university-school collaboration and its benefits to the school and its children. Teachers and parents have commented that their children are excited when the teacher candidates. Some parents and teachers have noted that some children do not want to miss the days their teacher comes from the university and that attendance is higher on those days. Also, teacher candidates are especially sensitive not to miss a class on the days they are working with students. Some teachers have adopted new practices because of the ideas introduced as a result of their collaboration with the university. The energy, vision, ideas and enthusiasm of the teacher candidates have a positive effect on the school. Collaborative problem solving, openness to change and the sharing ideas are encouraged in the university-school collaboration. Modeling for teacher candidates increases the sense of importance for teachers who often forget how important their work is and how difficult it is to do it well.

The CSPI grant money is used to improve the collaboration and the ability of that collaboration to help all students learn. By all students we mean both the teacher education students and the students in K-12 buildings. We are especially interested in how we can help those students in classrooms who have special needs and who present special challenges to the teachers, and how we can help the teacher education students be better prepared to be effective with these special needs students when they become teachers. We consulted with the professors and the teachers who were involved in each building as to how they felt they could best utilize this money. They used the money for such things as attending conferences, visiting schools, book studies, retreats, cross-grade level meetings and release time to meet, plan, evaluate, and document improvements. The involvement of the teacher education candidates in the school has been instrumental in better
preparing them to be excellent teachers and has given the school children more individual instructional time and attention.

This project is conceptually based on a learning organization model of collaborative personnel preparation. Project objectives are to identify elements of multidimensional, collaborative teaming and to describe its process; to develop a teaming curriculum module for preservice and inservice training; and to disseminate learnings.

Unity in diversity in shared expertise, decision making, knowledge and vision can create a dynamic for growth. Trust, communications, respect, choice and the other elements are all part of creating and maintaining unity. The members are united, but have different abilities, interests and responsibilities. This positive interdependence enriches everyone.

Collaboration depends on leaders to communicate vision, build trust, manage conflicts, balance interests and facilitate group interactions. They must demonstrate, engender and encourage the necessary conditions for collaboration. Coordinators in collaborative relationships should communicate effectively, demonstrate commitment, be willing to follow through, have a positive/hopeful attitude, be flexible, want to get involved, be persistent, persevere, be trustworthy, show respect, and demonstrate humility (Konecki, 1998). Simmons, Konecki, Crowell, and Gates-Duffield (1998) found the effective university coordinators to be: cautious in another culture, visionary, action-oriented, open, listeners, accepting of others’ points of view, flexible, able to handle stress, helpful, hard workers and non-ego oriented. Both of these research findings are supported in our collaboration with area schools. Their beliefs and dispositions are similar to the ones identified independently by us.

Johnston (1997) states: "The ideas of difference, tensions, and dialogue are central to the work of our PDS [Professional Development School]. Put simply, our most significant learning seems to emerge out of our dialogic efforts to surface and explore the tensions related to our differences (p. 9)." These ideas were also found in our collaborative efforts, thought to a less extent as tensions were minimized because of the apparent value of the collaboration to the participants and because the differences were seen as a positive value. Our most significant result was the benefit to our preservice teachers in developing sound professional understanding and practice.

The value of the collaboration for our teacher education program has been notable. It has infused a spirit of excellence and service into our program and greatly increased the quality of preparation that our preservice teachers receive. Students and teachers in both institutions are benefiting from the increased professional collaboration.

**Conclusion**

This university-school collaboration has created new knowledge to be integrated into the teacher preparation program. One measure of the effectiveness of any educational intervention is the degree to which all students learn. Data from surveys of professors, cooperating teachers, building administrators, students, and all others who had contact with the teacher education candidates involved in this collaborative endeavor, which involved them in guided practice and reflection in real classrooms with real students, strongly supports the benefits to teacher education students. Observational data supports that K-12 students also benefit by having preservice teachers working with them.
Because the contact with teacher education candidates in the classroom is minimal there is no expectation of immediate change in standardized test scores of K-12 students as a result of these collaborative endeavors, but other data and the students, teachers and administrators report benefits. Immediate results of standardized tests provide neither a reliable nor valid measure of the impact of collaborative endeavors between universities and schools.

Perhaps the biggest benefit to the learning of the K-12 students is the professional development of their regular classroom teacher as a result of reflecting on their practice as they help teacher education candidates develop a practice of their own. As teachers describe, analyze and model effective teaching to teacher candidates, they reevaluate their own practice. Teaching is one of the best ways to learn well a subject, and teaching others how and why you teach the way you do requires you to examine and think deeply about your practice.

Because of this exposure, teacher candidates can see how expert teachers solve problems and help all students learn. They begin to understand the many and complex factors that must be accounted for in making an instructional decision. They begin to apply this knowledge in a focused, systematic and guided manner. They begin to understand that student learning is not only affected by pedagogical actions of the teacher, but is also affected by the internal state of the student, culture of the classroom and the school, school organization and resources, community expectations and many other factors. Effective instruction must take into account all of these factors.

The university professors involved in these collaborative endeavors have also benefited. The learning is more authentic and the students more motivated. Teaching a class on teaching in the context of a school and within the framework of students applying and reflecting on that learning in classrooms can create a powerful learning environment. All members in this learning community, the professor, the teacher candidates, the classroom teacher and the classroom students, are called to greater account for their ideas, actions and the beliefs.

In our collaborative endeavors change was generally gradual, incremental and mutually agreed upon. Relationships were built-up overtime and innovations introduced collaboratively. Beyond the interaction needed to facilitate these relationships little change was made in the governance, decision-making, leadership and structures of either institution.

The lives of the university teachers and students were most affected by this change. The teacher education candidates’ knowledge, disposition and capacity to help all students learn were greatly enhanced. To the degree that classroom teachers refined and improved their practice as a result of their interaction with the university students and teachers, their lives and their students’ lives were also affected. Many of the classrooms and teachers we worked with were already models of good practice, so little change was expected, but one of the marks of excellence is the ongoing striving to be ever better.

All of the schools that NMU students were in to develop their practice incorporated inclusive education to a greater or less degree. As a result they were exposed to strategies for working with diverse students with diverse learning needs in diverse settings.

The benefits to the teacher education candidates of their extensive experiences in school classrooms were evidenced by their improved skill, confidence and knowledge as teachers. The benefits to the university professors were improved learning, skills and motivation for their
students. The university also benefited by having a more respected, effective and attractive teacher education program and better prepared potential future students.

The benefits to the school included increased resources in the form of increased assistance in their classroom from both university students and professors. Sometimes, as with this grant, that assistance took the form of increased funding and opportunity for growth. It created new expectations and affected school culture.

References


Appendix 1

University-School Collaboration Readiness Questionnaire

The following questions may be asked about the parties to be involved in a potential collaboration. The greater the number of questions answered in the affirmative, the greater the likelihood the collaboration will be successful.

Are all parties trustworthy and responsible?

Are all parties willing to consult on issues and work out differences?

Are all parties able and willing to give time needed for joint decision-making and work?

Do all parties benefit from the collaboration and appreciate the benefits?

Do all parties respect one another and the work they do?

Are all parties committed to bettering themselves?

For the article to be combined with course descriptions above:

For each of the last three years Northern Michigan University in collaboration with Marquette-Alger Intermediate School District, Nice Community Schools and Marquette Area Public Schools has received over $40,000 to promote university-school collaboration to help all students learn. This year Neguanee Public School was added. For 2000-2001 the money has been disbursed to the following schools. The names of the principals of these schools and the professors that are teaching classes in those buildings for winter 2001 are listed along with the course numbers.

**Marquette Area Public Schools**

- Whitman Elementary, Joe Myskens; Drs. Standerford (2 classes 311/316), and Hrecz (312)

- Sandy Knoll Elementary, Jean Hetrick; Profs. Locke (2 sections of 230), Jamsen (2 sections of MA 353), Hrecz (312), Imdieke (318)

- Superior Hills Elementary, Mike Woodard; Prof. Nelson (2 classes 311/316),

- Vandenboom Elementary, Maxine Olsen; Dr. Imdieke (318)

- Bothwell Middle School, Bob Lantz; Dr. Davies (231)
Graveraet Middle School, Bill Ostwald, Dr. O'Neill (2 sections of 231)

Marquette Senior High School, Bob Anthony; Dr. Davies (2 classes, 319/349)

Negaunee Public Schools

Negaunee High School, Bob Bonetti; Dr. Hanlon (2 classes, 319/349)

NICE Community Schools

Aspen Ridge Middle School, Maxine Honkala, Dr. Hrecz, Prof. Jamsen (3 classes, 312, 318 and MA 353)