Systemic Reform in Teacher Education: Quality Teachers through Partnering

By Rodney S. Earle, Susan Seehafer, & Margaret F. Ostlund

Setting the Stage for Reform

For almost two decades public education has been subjected to severe scrutiny. Initial criticism focused on the shortcomings of public schools (National Commission for Excellence in Education, 1983) and the reform measures necessary for addressing those shortcomings. Other reports addressed problems with the teacher preparation process. *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, generated by the Carnegie Foundation (1986), diagnosed several problems with teacher education and offered extensive proposals, including national standards to address those problems. *Tomorrow's Teachers*, produced by the Holmes Group (1986), recommended higher entrance standards, increased intellectual vigor, closer connections with public schools, and the transformation of schools as better places to teach and learn. Others lamented the fact that, although "it is widely recognized that the best way to break the cycle by which

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ineffective teaching reproduces itself over generations is to improve dramatically the quality of teachers entering the system,...as a group, however, America's colleges and universities so far have failed to meet this challenge" (Johnston, et al, 1989, p.l).

National interest and efforts have continued to emphasize the need for good teachers as well as good schools through the Educate America Act (1994), also known as Goals 2000, which established funding for schools and communities desiring to implement plans to reach eight national education goals. The original seven goals in this legislation targeted readiness for school, subject matter competency, adult literacy, graduation, social problems, and parental involvement. What is now goal four, which was not included in the original proposal during the Bush administration, directly relates to teacher education:

> The nation's leading teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.

Hence, there exist two major themes in educational reform: the development of improved schools and the preparation of effective teachers. Which should attract our primary efforts? Which comes first—good schools or good teachers? Goodlad (1984, 1990a, 1990b, 1994) has long challenged the fallacy of the chicken-egg dilemma with regard to schools and teachers. It is not a matter of which comes first. Both must come together—as a partnership.

An additional *caveat* is presented by Rich (1983, p. 40), who, in making a strong plea for meaningful teacher education reform outcomes, warns against pushing towards a "monolithic" national model and instead recommends our reliance on the diversity within the American system by encouraging experimentation with a number of plausible models of effective teaching and teacher preparation.

A Second Wave of Partnering: Systemic Reform

Though powerful in its rhetoric, *A Nation at Risk* (1983) failed to recommend or generate fundamental changes in the systemic structure of either public education or teacher preparation. "It was like trying to make the Pony Express competitive with the telegraph by mounting a major national research effort to breed faster ponies" (Fiske, 1993). Leonard (1984), who predicted success in education "if we have the foresight to reform our schools from top to bottom, from teachers to teaching, from curriculum to computerization" (p. 49), has been especially critical of the quick-fix mentality masquerading as reform:

> ...in the space age, the reformers are offering the nation an educational horse and buggy. They would improve the buggy, keep the passengers in it longer, and pay the driver more. But it would still be a horse and buggy. (p. 50)

Over the years, in response to a variety of critical voices, the pendulum has swung excitedly from one extreme to the other, advocating this program or that activity to solve the problems in public education. However, this bandwagon approach, rather than providing valid solutions to the problems, merely administers "band-aid" treatments to the symptoms.

This prevalent quick-fix mindset reminds us of a favorite story[1] from one of our elementary school readers. A little Dutch boy who lived in the flood-prone lowlands of Holland discovered a small leak in one of the protective dikes which held back the waters of the North Sea. Although only a dribble was visible, he knew that, before he could summon adult help, the water would have eroded a large, destructive opening in the earthen bank. So he took the only practical action possible in those circumstances—he stuck his finger in the hole in the dike and stopped the leak—and thus averted a life-threatening deluge of water from destroying his village. His courageous stop-gap action, though effective, was merely a temporary measure. Eventually the dike had to be rebuilt and strengthened to avoid future deterioration.

It is thus with the public schools and teacher education institutions. There are just too many courageous, dedicated teachers, parents, students, teacher educators, and administrators with their "fingers in the educational dike"—with little hope of developing a strong and effective system as long as their efforts are concentrated on symptoms rather than causes.

In *A Place Called School* (1984), John Goodlad reached the conclusion that "a far-reaching restructuring of our schools and indeed our system of education probably is required for us to come even close to the educational ideals we so regularly espouse for this nation and all its people" (p. 92). The need for systemic change in education has been promulgated by a variety of researchers and scholars (Reigeluth, 1987, 1992; Salisbury, 1993; Banathy, 1991, 1992; Goodlad, 1984, 1990a, 1990b; Lieberman & Miller, 1990).

Goodlad (1994) has reminded us that successful efforts in educational renewal require *systemic* evaluation and review, a continuous self-examination of institutional purposes, practices, roles, responsibilities, and outcomes. Such a period of introspection and reflection brought those of us involved in the Brigham Young University-Public School Partnership to the realization that initial reform efforts across the nation had focussed on *school* renewal, often in isolation from other relevant factors. At Brigham Young University (BYU) we had not really been much different: we were anxious to improve schools through collaborative partnerships. From our myopic viewpoint, we saw the problem as being "out there in the schools". We didn't fully appreciate the linkage between school reform and reform of teacher education. We had lost sight of the fact that we cannot have good schools without good teachers.

Our partnership's vision of the true nature of educational reform improved dramatically once our reflective deliberations brought school and university

partners together in the common belief that "there must be a continuous process of educational renewal in which colleges and universities, the traditional producers of teachers, join schools, the recipients of the products, as equal partners in the *simultaneous* renewal of schooling and the education of educators" (Goodlad, 1994, p. 2). As Ferguson (1995) points out, "public education is like a web: each strand touches many others, depending upon as well as providing support for the entire structure. Any change, even a small one, ripples through the web, sometimes strengthening, sometimes weakening the whole" (p. 286).

We're looking at a synergistic union, not a dichotomy. We're looking at an intertwining of major strands of this "web" of public education which will indeed strengthen the whole by meshing the parts. An engineer friend once shared the fact that a single eight foot 2" x 4" wooden stud used in framing a house could bear a load of 615 lb.—but when bonded with another stud the combined load they could bear together was 2,460 lb.—much more than merely the sum for each individual stud. School renewal and reform in teacher education are not in conflict, nor do they occur in isolation; they must march in tandem to optimize education for our children.

So, in light of the preceding criticisms, proposals, and guidelines, and particularly in the spirit of the challenges expressed by Goodlad and Rich, we share with you an experimental collaboration to restructure teacher education—a systemic reform effort through a *second* wave of partnering at BYU.

Back to the Future: The First Wave Revisited[2]

In order to understand the successful implementation of our current *second* wave of collaborative efforts, however, it is necessary to relate the history of our partnership efforts over the past decade—to revisit the *first* wave in order to understand the essence of partnership as it emerged at BYU.

Fifteen years ago, under the personal guidance of John Goodlad, and in collaboration with five surrounding school districts, BYU established the Brigham Young University-Public School Partnership with the explicit mission to improve teaching and learning by merging theory and practice in a spirit of collaboration and trust. The overall intent of the partnership was to create a process and structure through which each equal partner would draw on the complementary strengths of the other in advancing mutual interests. The participants recognized two major benefits: that effective university programs for teacher preparation required continual support and meaningful input from the public schools *and* that university resources and expertise facilitated continuous renewal in the schools. Collaborative partnership activities concentrated on four key areas: (a) strengthening the preparation of preservice teachers, (b) providing quality professional development for inservice teachers, (c) developing and modifying school curricula, and (d) participating in action research.

Initially, each district identified one or more partner schools to which a university faculty member was assigned to promote the four mutually agreed upon areas of partnership emphasis. A partner school (a precursor for the current concept of professional development school) was considered a place where administrators, teachers, and university professors worked closely together to renew schooling and the education of teachers. Like the Holmes Group (1990, p.1), "we [did] not mean professional development schools [partner schools] to be just laboratory schools for university research, nor a demonstration school. Nor [did] we mean just a clinical setting for preparing student and intern teachers [and administrators]. Rather we [meant] all of these together: a school for the development of experienced professionals, and for the research and development of the teaching profession."

More than a decade of professional interactions, collaborative ventures, and joint conferences has generated a strong foundation built on relationships of trust. Although our path to this point has not always been smooth, and our endeavors (both successful and unsuccessful) have not always focussed on each of the key areas with balanced emphasis, our progress has resulted in a level of readiness conducive to a *second wave of partnering* based upon the conclusions identified by Harris and Harris (1992-93, pp. 6, 8). They emphasized the need for collaborative efforts among university and school educators to simultaneously reform teacher education programs and public schools by forming a seamless web of theory and practice. They felt that this union of professors and teachers as teacher educators has the potential to generate exemplary learning and teaching.

Beginning the Journey Together

The Process

Encouraged by our moderately successful history with partnership and the positive results of our initial ventures together, we embarked upon a collaborative effort to reconsider and restructure teacher education at BYU as a natural outgrowth of earlier partnership activities. During the year preceding the implementation of the project, collaborative task forces identified existing program weaknesses and developed program initiatives, a partnership conference gathered restructuring recommendations from several hundred public school teachers and administrators, and additional collaborative task forces incorporated this feedback into new program options.

Following an intensive application and screening process, Westridge Elementary School in the Provo, Utah School District was selected as a pilot site with the intent of using the data gathered from the experience to construct the best possible teacher education program. In the spirit of collaboration, the Westridge faculty and administrators, at the request of BYU, developed their set of expectations for the university. These expectations addressed the need for the assignment to the school of a full-time BYU faculty member with experience and skill in elementary

curriculum and instruction, mentoring, collaboration, organization, communication, and teaching. Additional emphasis was placed upon school renewal and professional development (through the availability of BYU faculty), external funding (for curriculum and instruction projects, resource personnel, inquiry, and planning time), and selection of interns and student teachers from within the cohort. Time was also recognized as a valuable commodity to be captured, guarded, and honored. This experiment had to be a partnership in the full sense of the word, strengthening and building upon the four facets of the mission identified during the first wave of our history: quality preservice preparation, meaningful professional development, continuous curriculum improvement, and active inquiry.

During a seven week retreat fully funded by the BYU School of Education, representatives from Westridge Elementary and other public schools, faculty from campus arts and sciences departments involved with teacher preparation, and selected university students met with the elementary education faculty to plan the pilot program. The success of this endeavor resulted from the application of the following process principles:

- *Uninterrupted time guaranteed by releasing all participants from other responsibilities during the retreat*. Since sufficient dialogue is necessary to develop trust and relationships, eliminating time constraints allowed participants to concentrate their undivided attention on the restructuring process.

- *Flexible, emerging organization for the task*. Order emerged from chaos when participants agreed on underlying principles without coercion or top-down direction. The project began with a plan that was greatly altered as it progressed.

- *Equal participation by all concerned*. An open process of discussion among all parties as full participants created a high level of agreement. Elementary education faculty, students, arts and sciences faculty, and public school personnel were equally involved and all shared their various perspectives on issues as the program developed.

- *Relationships of trust and a spirit of compromise and cooperation*.

In the relative freedom of a restructuring environment enhanced by these important process principles, we were able to look closely at our partnership in order to discover common ground and to develop our shared vision of preparing quality teachers.

Common Ground: Shared Beliefs

What has made this restructuring effort so different? It is the unique relationships and interactions between university faculty and our public school partners, relationships that have been developed and strengthened through a collaborative association spanning more than a decade. It is the tradition of collegiality that has allowed school personnel to participate in restructuring of teacher education as equal, experienced, and confident partners. In this spirit of collaboration we were

able to consider the unique roles of each partner and the overlapping areas of interests and beliefs.

Our agreement on areas of common ground for schools and the university has enabled us to develop a program founded on the following beliefs common to all participants in the BYU-Public School Partnership:

- Quality teacher preparation is synergistic, capitalizing upon the strengths of teachers, children, undergraduates, graduate students, and professors working together to improve schooling.
- Simultaneous renewal of school and university personnel is a critical aspect of quality partnering.
- Closer ties between practice and theory will produce increased learning at all levels.
- Students learn to teach most effectively through participation in a variety of experiences undergirded by personal choice.
- Teachers, like all learners, construct knowledge in a developmental sequence: structures for organizing, interpreting, and using information are built through meaningful learning experiences.
- Three types of knowledge are essential to effective teaching: declarative, procedural, and conditional (Declarative knowledge is "knowing what." Procedural knowledge is "knowing how to use a particular skill(s)," and conditional knowledge is "knowing when, why, and how" to use declarative and procedural knowledge.) (Blanton, 1992).
- Conditional knowledge, essential to quality teaching, develops through learning experiences involving contextualized activity and situation-specific application in school sites.
- The quality of any preservice teacher preparation program increases with purposeful connection to public schooling.
- Preparation of preservice teachers is most comprehensive when it involves partnerships with other departments in the education college, departments throughout the university, personnel in the local schools, and members of the community at large.

Our long-standing collegial relationship and our shared principles and beliefs have generated a collaborative program that links teams of university instructors with classroom teachers and cohorts of prospective educators in a dynamic triad: all will participate, all will teach, and all will learn.

Curriculum and Delivery

A design team comprised of university and public shool personnel developed the program for the experimental site. The design team's collective knowledge was

informed by a careful review of teacher education research, which provided directions for our consideration. We recognized that preservice teachers' constructs of teaching are strongly influenced by prior life experiences, particularly those linked with their own schooling (Lortie, 1975). We also acknowledged that such long-held beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning are often firmly entrenched and difficult to modify during the relatively short period of teacher education (Crow, 1987; Buchmann, 1988; Weinstein, 1988, 1989; Powell, 1992; Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1992; Zeichner, 1993).

However, we took courage in the findings that field experiences *early* in teacher education provide opportunities for the synthesis and adaptation of personal constructs and professional theories through implementation and evaluation in real-life settings (Birrell, 1994; Kennedy, 1991; Livingston & Borko, 1986; Powell, 1992). Practicum experiences also allow for the productive linking of university coursework with classroom teaching (Holt-Reynolds, 1992).

Hence, we considered a model which takes prospective teachers into elementary classrooms early in their preservice program to test their initial conceptions of teaching against the realities of classroom settings. This early introduction would allow prospective teachers to explore their idiosyncratic theories of learning, which should shift toward more advanced pedagogical constructs during preservice programs (Powell & Riner, 1991).

A thorough analysis of the existing preservice program revealed an extensive list of concerns. For each concern the team identified revised features and expected benefits to be considered in our restructuring. However, we realized that the major concerns in the existing program were inadequate integration of course content and teaching practice throughout the program, inconsistent fusing of the experience of public school teachers with the methodological expertise of university personnel, and the compartmentalization of courses, resulting in unnecessary repetition, fragmented scheduling, and inconsistent definitions of good teaching. The design team addressed these concerns in extended "retreat" sessions.

As a result of our deliberations, we generated a three semester cohort experience which blended methods courses with early field experiences and practica. What emerged was an intensive, field-based teacher preparation program where cohorts of students are immersed in the school community, spending each day in a combination of methods courses and classroom experiences. The methods courses are delivered by university faculty and classroom teachers at the public school site. The students "live" at the school together for a year, not just learning about teaching but involved in the process of *becoming* teachers. The instructional teams, comprised of university faculty and public school teachers and administrators, coordinated the implementation and on-site delivery of professional experiences. Modifications to the delivery, based upon the needs of cohort students for time for personal study and family/social activities, included a slight reduction in on-site time for preservice students (from eight hours daily to six). Within content

guidelines, the instructional team had full responsibility for the flexible delivery of professional experiences.

Our energies then focussed on implementation at the pilot site with frequent advisory council meetings comprised of faculty, teachers, students, and administrators. Minor adjustments were made as we identified concerns during the year.

Emerging Roles: Shared Renewal

After the first year of implementation we were anxious to see if our restructuring efforts had proved successful, at least initially. Several qualitative methodologies were used to collect data from teachers, cohort students, and faculty about the impact of the program; these methodologies included field observations, participant interviews, reflective journaling and concept mapping. These data were then processed using constant comparative analysis protocols (Strauss, 1987). Interview and journal data were reviewed in the light of two major categories: added values/benefits and related costs. Added values/benefits included positive contributions of the restructured program; related costs included negative impacts. Listings in each of these categories were grouped by theme and by participant function to generate the strengths and weaknesses noted in each of the following sections. Initial , midyear, and final concept maps, lesson plans, and journals from preservice teachers were also reviewed for the same categories as well as for evidence of professional growth. As new data were collected, they were coded, categorized, and contrasted with previous data to refine and clarify emerging themes in the research. At the end of the first year, the Westridge Elementary faculty and staff, cohort students, and a few BYU faculty partners gathered for a two-day retreat. As part of an inquiry session, the group participated in an activity called "The BYU/Westridge Partnership Journey", which reviewed partnership history and the first cohort experience. Small groups which included representatives from each stakeholder segment generated posters to illustrate the experience to that point. Benefits and costs were attached to the poster with sticky notes. These "journey" data were compared with the data and categorical listings gathered from the interviews, journals, and artifacts.

Evaluation findings are reported in the following discussion of emerging roles. Similarities between both the retreat report and the data collection are remarkable. Recommendations in both evaluation reports were acted upon as we proceeded with the second cohort.

The partnership. This collaborative effort has revitalized the partnering concept and process, refocusing energy towards the original multifaceted vision of a decade ago. We have learned that partnership is a process—there are always unanswered questions to address in an atmosphere of flexibility and open-mindedness (such as the need for a shared vision among partners). Creating reflective journeys, where from time to time participants take stock of where they have been, where they

are, and where they are heading, may be a viable way to identify strengths and weaknesses in the partnership and to avoid reinventing the wheel.

Specific recommendations include the need to explore ways to increase conversation and dialogue among all of the stakeholders, to find ways to embrace and celebrate different points of view and diversity among stakeholders, and to discover ways to communicate clear expectations more efficiently and effectively for all of the stakeholders. In addition, we saw the need to strengthen a truly *shared* vision of teacher education, to continue to evaluate the teacher education program rigorously and consistently, and to adjust administrative procedures for establishing teaching loads, awarding tenure, and providing rewards that reflect the realistic and often stressful demands of the program.

The cohort. Despite the realities of stress and load, the cohort members grew beyond our former experiences with typical beginning preservice teachers. In the words of one student, they were "not learning about teaching, [they were] becoming teachers." They became part of the Westridge faculty—from their own viewpoint and also from the perspective of the teachers who treated them as colleagues, and the children who looked to them as "our other teachers." The experience so far has demonstrated that there is strength in working with a cohort of peers, that personal choices in one's own education enhance learning, and that, when methods courses and pedagogy are combined in a setting that allows immediate application in the classroom, purposeful learning is increased.

We discovered that time was both an asset (year long involvement in the school) and a liability (insufficient time for planning and feedback). Relationships among BYU students, public school faculty, and children were positive with the development of a sense of community among all parties. The school environment provided contexts for applying knowledge and skills as well as safe places for risking and investing. Although one of the features of the new program was to provide students with increased opportunities in selecting and engaging in various learning activities, this empowerment through student choice and voice was both positive and negative, particularly as each group of stakeholders struggled to identify boundaries and common ground in this experimental setting. The cohesiveness developed in the cohort sometimes became a barrier to new faculty who found themselves not part of the "family."

Specific recommendations for program improvement include the need to examine and revise the post-cohort intern and student teaching experiences in light of the early experiences in the cohort and to ensure that cohort students apply coursework information to the extent that it becomes effective practice. We also encountered a press from BYU students to develop integrated coursework and the related authenticity of the performance assessment in order to address planning time and flexible scheduling.

The public school teacher. Simultaneous renewal and an emerging professional commitment on the part of teachers have begun to modify traditional roles. There is a magical convergence as schools and universities share equally in the role of teacher educator. We found that the teachers, often isolated within the four walls of a classroom, were experiencing renewal as they were treated as professionals, participated in methods courses and learned in a rejuvenating atmosphere, advised and learned from professors as practice and theory reinforced one another, assisted with teaching methods courses, took responsibility for mentoring, observing, and assessing preservice students' learning, and learned from one another.

We discovered that quality planning and feedback time is critical for both teachers and preservice students. Simultaneous renewal took place subtly and informally amongst BYU students and public school teachers as they interacted over the year at the school site. Although formal renewal as originally envisioned was limited and did not occur as planned, several teachers did begin to view themselves as teacher educators. We had thought that renewal would most likely occur through participation in courses. Although this was true for some teachers, the majority stated that renewal occurred informally through interactions with professors and cohort students.

Specific recommendations include the need to select teacher mentors based on sound, relevant criteria and to generate more efficient and effective ways to prepare teachers to be mentors and managers of adult resources. In order to explore ways to utilize teacher expertise in preservice teacher preparation, we need to allocate time and resources specifically for planning, professional development, and renewal activities as well as to develop possibilities for professional development experiences and graduate classes for classroom teachers.

The university methods faculty. The role of the contributing professors is changing as we bring these two contrasting learning environments together to heighten the effect for all of us as learners. The faculty responded to the need for relevance and immediate application. It is now possible to discuss a principle and then move next door to see how it works with second-graders. Professors and teachers began to work together as instructional teams.

We have discovered that, although connections between public school teachers and university faculty were limited and university course requirements were not well correlated with school curricula, teacher educators working in elementary classrooms provided good examples for both BYU students and classroom teachers and facilitated shared renewal. Quality planning time for BYU faculty is critical as they work collaboratively with teachers and cohort students.

Specific recommendations for change include the need to enhance the influence of university faculty by increasing faculty involvement in classrooms and expanding relationships with mentor teachers as well as to explore ways to support and promote opportunities for professional development and renewal for teacher

educators. Additional aspects yet to be addressed include an integrated curriculum, enrichment of the preservice experience without "watering down" the curriculum (Is less more?), examination of ways to increase quality planning time for teachers and BYU faculty and for teachers and cohort students, and ensuring connections between current methods and classroom practices.

The school facilitator. The facilitator is an experienced classroom teacher who is released from specific classroom responsibilities to assume the role of teacher leader and partnership administrator at the school site but who remains an employee of the school district. This person facilitates the partnership efforts at the building level. The role of the facilitator has expanded considerably and is crucial to the success of the experiment. The facilitator is truly a networking agent whose initial responsibilities included placements and observations of cohort members, coordination of coverage for teachers as they participate as learners and instructors in methods courses, modeling and mentoring (extending beyond preservice teachers to faculty colleagues seeking to improve their own mentoring capabilities), working with university professors (course integration, syllabus revision, attaining relevance), participation in faculty meetings (school and university),resource assistance (curriculum materials, media, and equipment), and even presentations for guests and interested groups.

Even with such tremendous responsibilities already in place, we have discovered that the facilitator's role has expanded to include evaluation of the program, consultation with other stakeholders, long-range planning as program revisions occur, training and mentoring future facilitators, coordinating practica experiences to meet the needs of all stakeholders, and collaborative evaluation of preservice student performances. Hence we quickly recognized the need for partnership support for this key individual.

It is important for the facilitator to achieve and maintain balance with respect to support for both the university and the public school. Her advocacy must be distributed equitably among all members of the school community—children, parents, classroom teachers, cohort students, and university faculty. These responsibilities have already raised a concern for further exploration: Does the facilitator carry a disproportionate share of the burden of making the partnership work?

The BYU coordinator. The coordinator is a university teacher educator who serves as liaison between the university and school as well as instructor and practicum supervisor. This role involves facilitating, communicating, coordinating, and troubleshooting. The essential attributes of the coordinator identified by the Westridge staff were an in-depth understanding of elementary curriculum and instruction, skills in mentoring and preparing preservice teachers (high expectations, concise feedback, purposeful seminars), and effective communication, collaboration, and organizational skills.

It is important that this person becomes part of the school community and is an effective liaison among all participants—children, preservice students, classroom teachers, professors, and administrators. Conclusions and recommendations discussed earlier for university methods faculty apply to coordinators as well, especially the need to hold regular advisory council meetings to "take the pulse" of the process and to discuss the needs or concerns of the stakeholders, act as liaison/mediator/troubleshooter, and facilitate integration.

The preceding data taught us much about where we had been during the first year and where we still needed to go. Had we made a difference in the preparation of our teacher candidates?

Impact on Teacher Education

The significant outcomes which we have identified at this point include the following:

- Traces of simultaneous renewal for public school and university faculty in both formal and informal settings.
- Gradual movement towards a seamless web of theory and practice.
- Development of collaborative inquiry activities initiated by teachers rather than professors.
- Application of our experiences to inform the experimental development of cluster sites in neighboring school districts.
- Allocation of a significant portion of university faculty load for partnership activities.
- Initial development of a condensed, correlated syllabus for preservice students.
- Reexamination of the post-cohort practicum experience for interns and student teachers.
- Quality placements for cohort students.
- Proposals for the development of an on-site graduate program for classroom teachers.

So where do we go from here? How has our practice been informed by the first year at our pilot site?

Future Directions

In the process of conducting any experiment we not only find answers to key questions but also generate additional questions and possibilities that are critical to the success of the venture—in this instance to the effective restructuring of teacher education. Our community of learners includes children, parents, preservice students, classroom teachers, university faculty, and administrators—each of

whom has important needs and for whom we are seeking answers to critical questions related to those needs.

To address the needs described in our prior discussion of emerging roles, our experiment has continued as we have modified elements of the delivery system in our quest for the quality education of teachers. In another phase of our quest for reform, several (3-5) schools have clustered together into a professional unit to serve larger cohorts of 28-30 preservice students, who will rotate through the cluster sites during their various methods/practica experiences, thereby experiencing a variety of teaching and learning styles, contexts, and philosophies. We have also created campus cohorts whose experiences we will compare with field-based delivery in order to more effectively evaluate the impact of experiences in school settings.

We recognize that, throughout the restructuring experience, ongoing evaluations must guide adaptation and modification of this program and that only through continual revisions based on strengths and weaknesses that become apparent through actual operation, will we eventually be able to attain higher and higher goals.

Summary and Conclusion[3]

In response to changing needs in elementary classrooms and to current research into the nature of teaching and learning, the Brigham Young University Department of Elementary Education undertook the systemic restructuring of its program for the preparation of elementary teachers. Representatives of academic departments across campus that are involved in the preparation of teachers, university students, and teachers and administrators from local public schools participated extensively in this process, highlighting a tradition of collaboration between university and public school personnel which began ten years ago with the organization of the BYU-Public School Partnership. Trust and mutual respect, built upon years of shared decision making in the partnership, have enabled us to freely share ideas, perspectives, and concerns.

Current research linked with our cohort experience has affirmed our shared belief that teachers are most effectively prepared when they participate in classrooms early in their preservice experience. Such participation enables them to test their preconceptions about teaching, formed largely from their personal experience, against the concepts and methodologies they are learning from their university preparation. Accordingly, we have developed a program that places cohorts of preservice teachers and their university professors in the public school classrooms of selected teachers for several hours each day. University methods courses taught on site at the school are integrated with classroom experiences. Through advisory councils continual dialogue occurs among preservice teachers, school personnel, and university teachers and supervisors. Supervision, reflection, and evaluation are

collaborative, so preservice teachers are exposed to multiple perspectives during their teaching experience.

More accurate application of theory to practice, greater integration of university classes with each other as well as with classroom experience, more opportunities for individual cohort student choice, and more effective supervision and mentoring of the students are among the goals and desired outcomes of this program. Program evaluation has involved all participants, as well as departmental administrators and external evaluators. Reflections, journals, questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews have been included in the program examination and assessment. We have discovered many indicators of success as well as several concerns and issues as yet unresolved.

Many aspects of the single school experimental cohort program are at this time tentative. We are truly in an experimental mode, having answered many questions, yet continually posing additional ones as we share this partnership journey. The experiences of the first cohort produced many adjustments and adaptations—including some major changes in structure and scheduling. All participants have been willing to listen to different voices, consider different perspectives, sacrifice some personal interests, and take a flexible approach to methods and ideology. With this commitment, we have positive hopes for the continued success of this venture, particularly as we move into the second phase of this restructuring experiment with the cluster cohorts. Our experiences have indeed demonstrated that systemic reform of teacher education requires quality partnering if we are to successfully produce quality teachers.

Notes

Special Note: We acknowledge the task force report, *Initial Cohort Program for Preparing Elementary Teachers,* and our colleagues with whom we spent a productive retreat as the sources for the historical details of the partnership and the redesign process.

1. This story and its relationship to systemic reform were first shared in Earle, R.S. (1990). Performance technology: A new perspective for the public schools. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 3 (4), 3-11.
2. Historical highlights were taken from the task force report, *Initial Cohort Program for Preparing Elementary Teachers,* August 1994
3. This summary first appeared in the task force report, *Initial Cohort Program for Preparing Elementary Teachers,* August 1994.

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