

The School-Based Activities Model: A Promising Alternative to Professional Development Schools

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Introduction

Partnerships, especially the Professional Development School (PDS) model, between institutions of higher education (IHE) and public schools (PS), have

become, if not commonplace, a successful model for teacher education (NCATE, 2001; Sandholtz & Dadlez, 2002). PDS teacher education projects in which preservice teachers and higher education faculty participate in school-based instruction have been established as both desirable and effective (Sedlak, 1987; Teitel, 2003). However, implementing a PDS model in some settings often fails due to certain insurmountable challenges, most often related to resources and institutional structures (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Holmes Group, 1990; Leonard & Leonard, 2003).

What we present in this account is documentation of our attempts, as teacher education faculty in a large, public institution, to overcome some of the challenges associated with the PDS model while at

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the same time developing stable partnerships with local schools. We describe here a model of college/school collaboration that requires significantly less faculty and financial investment than the PDS model. At the heart of this model are a series of school-based activities that require preservice teachers, early in their teacher preparation courses, to plan and implement small group instruction for elementary school children. This model represents a promising practice in teacher preparation which may have particular relevance for teacher educators in comprehensive colleges like ours, where teacher education faculty have heavy teaching and service loads. This model may also have appeal for schools and districts which are not quite ready or able to commit to the PDS structure, but wish to increase their interaction with local teacher preparation programs. We begin by framing our description of this promising practice with a discussion of the outcomes associated with the PDS model.

Benefits and Challenges of Professional Development Schools

The most positive outcomes of PDS partnerships have been mutually beneficial activities which integrate faculty development, preservice teacher education, public school curricula, and community participation to improve learning at multiple levels for multiple stakeholders (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Clark, 1999; Holmes Group, 1990). Significant gains have been made in teacher preparation using this model (Herbert, 2004).

The major benefits of the PDS model include opportunities for collaboration between institutional partners and for professional renewal of IHE and PS faculty alike (Bohen & Stiles, 1998; Clark, 1999; Holmes Group, 1990). Additionally, working with preservice teachers, especially in a PDS model, provides avenues for professional growth for both novice and veteran teachers especially in the areas of curriculum development, use of new instructional methods, and support for trying new technology in the classroom (Clark, 1990; Hamlin, 1997). Public school teachers linked with IHE partners often rejuvenate their own teaching and can consequently provide a creative impetus for other PS teachers to improve their own instruction (Murray & Stotko, 2004).

Similar benefits come to IHE faculty, who are given contemporary, realistic views of PS children's development, as well as insight into communities and families (Bondy & Ross, 1998). Although general collaborations between IHE and PS faculty to prepare preservice teachers is commonplace, collaborations among higher education faculty themselves are somewhat limited (George & Davis-Wiley, 2000). While IHE faculty who work with PS partnerships indicate great gains for their professional growth, a more common report is the lack of substantive return in terms of the reward system of the IHE (Leonard & Leonard, 2003; Teitel, 1994). For faculty, especially novice ones, the lack of rewards, particularly in the Retention, Tenure, and Promotion (RTP) process at the university, may be a confounding

factor in establishing or participating in the PDS model (Gundry & LaMantia, 2001; Holmes Group, 1995; Imig & Switzer, 1996).

Preservice teachers may be the greatest beneficiaries of the PDS model. By being given the responsibilities of working directly with school age children in a functioning classroom with input from experienced teachers, preservice teachers have the most realistic setting possible for professional preparation (Herbert, 2004; Holmes Group, 1990). The development of preservice teachers' instructional and interpersonal confidence within a school setting leads to a stronger understanding of the context of education within a larger community. Such in-school experiences also help develop preservice teachers' commitment to long-lasting professional growth, which is a foundational goal of the PDS model (McDermott, Gormley, Rothenberg, & Hammer, 1995).

One challenge to PDS organization is the distance, both physical and psychological, which partners must travel to implement a successful model (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994). Schools must accommodate preservice teachers' and faculty members' presence and participation in their classrooms and communities. IHE faculty and preservice teachers must travel to and from the school site. In addition, finding adequate space in a school building to accommodate the instruction and observation needs of large numbers of college participants can be challenging in some districts. Such practical considerations of implementation for PDS activities can be most difficult to overcome (Clark, 1999; Greskey, 2000). However, the benefits and unique outcomes of the PDS model strengthen the professional convictions of partners to accomplish the necessary adaptations needed to sustain the relationship (Thompson, Beacham, & Misulis, 1992).

Such concerns about the relative benefits and obstacles to establishing a PDS led us to consider what other alternatives might forge bonds and professional bridges between local PS teachers, IHE faculty and preservice teachers. There was a history at our institution of failed efforts to establish PDS partnerships with local schools. Nevertheless, with an influx of new, energetic teacher education faculty in the late 1990's, we began to explore alternative means to develop collaborative relationships with public school colleagues.

Setting and Context

The school district involved in this project is located in a rural setting in central New York State, with one campus housing PreK through grade 12 students. This district generally has a student population of around 750 and employs approximately 75 teachers. Approximately 50% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch and 8% of the teachers are teaching out of their area of certification or without certification. Because of its small size, there is some variation in the standardized test score averages for this district, but in general, most students meet state standards. The community is generally supportive and enthusiastic about their school system.

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The comprehensive state college involved in this project is located some 20 miles northwest of this district and prepares the largest number of teachers in the state. This college began as a “normal” school but converted its status to a liberal arts college in the late 1960s. Nevertheless, the college retains a strong teacher education reputation, offering 71 undergraduate and graduate teacher certification programs. Of the College’s 7,300 students, 65% are enrolled in a teacher preparation program. The childhood and early childhood education programs are among the largest teacher preparation programs at this college. Nearly 1,200 students are enrolled in one of these programs, which support a department of 20 full-time and 40 part-time faculty members. Depending upon the semester, between five and seven faculty members who teach initial methodology courses participate in collaborative activities with this district. The approximately 50-100 preservice teachers whom these faculty teach are also the college’s participants in this partnership. Approximately twelve teachers, their students and students’ parents are the PS participants.

As with many state colleges, our institution struggles to match needs with available resources. Most of the teacher education faculty members teach a four/three or four/four course load per year, and generally, only grant-supported release time is available for faculty to work in partnership with local schools. Lack of participation with public schools and a need for innovation in the IHE childhood and early childhood education curricula in teacher preparation were impetuses for our faculty to begin this partnership. In addition, both partners had long-range goals of maximizing achievement outcomes for their respective students.

The Start of a Model Relationship

The collaborative model involving these two institutions grew out of inservice work involving faculty in both settings. The inservice work was sponsored by a Dwight D. Eisenhower Grant and was aimed at improving elementary school teachers’ understanding and teaching of mathematics, science and technology in high-need rural or urban settings. The first year of this work (1999-2000) involved workshops for the district teachers generally in the area of mathematics. Teachers suggested the topics for these workshops and one IHE faculty member planned and implemented all the workshops.

As with many new relationships, “breaking the ice” was not easy. The district personnel had experienced a great deal of administrator turnover in previous years and were wary of outside intervention. At the same time, the faculty member who conducted the workshops was new to both the IHE and the district.

Through these workshops, the college faculty member began to ask the teachers for suggestions on improving preservice teacher education at her institution. The teachers in this district often hosted student teachers from this institution and thus were familiar with the various teacher certification programs at the college. Happy

to be asked to provide input, the PS teachers' strongest suggestion was to give the college's preservice teachers more experience in classrooms prior to student teaching. This feedback supported the college faculty member's point of view, as her early experiences teaching in the childhood education program at the college indicated that preservice teachers had limited knowledge or understanding of classroom contexts.

Based on this feedback and in collaboration with several teachers, the college faculty member created a school-based activity for her elementary-level mathematics methods course. This course is part of the first set of methods courses (called Block I), in which childhood education majors take two semesters prior to student teaching. The activity is called "Family Math Night" and it requires preservice teachers to create hands-on, mathematics activities for use with elementary school children and their families.

First Activity: Family Math Night

Family Math Night has several components. Not only do preservice teachers plan the mathematics activities they will implement at Family Math Night, they also present their plans for review to at least one teacher in the district and to one college faculty member. The faculty members then give the preservice teachers feedback for revision and refinement of their plans for the activities.

In addition to the planning component, the preservice teachers also implement the activity at the school on Family Math Night. The PS teachers in the district arrange all the school-side details for this night, including preparing the venue, distributing publicity and other community participation details. The college faculty member accompanies preservice students to the school for the two-hour, evening event. During the evening, as preservice teachers implement the math activities with children and their families, the college faculty member and the PS teachers observe and assess the preservice teachers' instruction and interpersonal interactions.

After the event, preservice teachers complete a written reflection on their experiences and receive feedback on their teaching and reflection. The completion of this activity, from planning to reflection, is graded and counted as a required assignment in the preservice teachers' mathematics methods course.

Expanding the Activities Model

Since the spring of 2000, when the initial Family Math Night took place, the PS teachers and IHE faculty have worked collaboratively to develop a series of school-based activities that are now used with approximately 50 preservice teachers in their initial methods courses each semester. A team of five to seven IHE teacher education faculty members and twelve PS teachers are now involved in the planning and delivery of these activities. .

From the district's perspective, these activities provide a means to expose their

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K-12 students to various models of instruction and new content. PS teachers in this rural, high-needs district are greatly concerned with giving their students new experiences in learning, sometimes away from the PS campus. At the same time, IHE faculty wanted to give preservice teachers more extensive experiences working directly with elementary school children.

These collaboratively identified goals led to the development of several off-site field trips for PS students. In the fall semester, one of the college's science educators prepares preservice teachers to host first graders at a local outdoor education center. The preservice teachers create a variety of science activities for the children that involve environmental and outdoor education. During the day of the field trip, the preservice teachers are "in charge" of the children, with the school's teachers and college faculty observing their efforts.

Similarly, in the spring semester, a group of IHE faculty members, who team teach in Block I, work with preservice teachers to bring a group of sixth-graders to campus for a field trip called, "Exploring College Life." Small groups of preservice teachers (8-10) work with a faculty member to create activities to have the sixth-graders explore aspects of college life. In the past, students have explored food, housing, fitness, classroom space, and the physical layout of the campus. As part of the exploration, the preservice teachers have the sixth-graders collect data on their topic, for example exploring food service on campus by surveying college students about their favorite campus eatery.

Over the course of their day on campus, sixth graders get to take a tour of the college, eat lunch in a college dining facility, and interact with college students and faculty. After lunch, preservice teachers and sixth-graders work in a college computer lab to create a webpage to commemorate their visit, and a large-screen viewing of student web pages marks the end of the day. Again, during this day, preservice teachers conduct all the activities, while the PS and IHE faculty observe. As with Family Math Night, planning, implementation and reflection on the field trips are a course assignment in one of the preservice teachers' methods courses. This helps preservice teachers acknowledge the educational value, as well as the professional accountability, related to the experience.

Based on the success of these events, a significant number of school-based activities have now been developed through the partnership. In addition to the field trips, PS and IHE faculty have collaborated on Family Literacy Nights, college student visits to the PS school, and a middle school science fair supported by college faculty and IHE resources. For all of these events, IHE faculty and PS teachers work together to implement the activities; the PS teachers generally work on the arrangements at the district level and the IHE faculty work within their methods courses to support preservice teachers' preparation for the events.

There is little fiscal cost involved in implementing these field-based collaborative activities. Materials and transportation costs are minimal. Although currently we are funded through a moderate state grant, at times these costs have been shared

by the college, the district, and the preservice teachers. Prior to grant funding, no external collaborations of this kind were supported by the college budget. Faculty and preservice teachers provided their own transportation to and from the PS site and the district's PTA often provided things like refreshments at events. Thus, while grant procurement was an impetus for scaling up and establishing some consistency with this model, the biggest investment has been IHE and PS faculty time and effort for collaboration.

While time is also a common problem cited as a barrier to establishing a PDS, we see a qualitative difference in the time investment required by our model and the PDS model. First, the relative formal organizational and relational time expended for PDS appears to be far greater than in our model. Faculty and teachers in PDS partnerships have more continual and on-going time commitments. IHE faculty and preservice teachers tend to be at the PS location on a regular basis with time needed for both travel and class sessions or meetings at the PS site. This often happens on a weekly basis throughout the school year.

Our model is focused more on a limited set of unique events which occur each semester. For each of the participants involved, the number of events varies from one to four over the course of a semester. This significantly reduces the time that both IHE faculty and preservice teachers spend traveling to and working at the PS site. Likewise, the time expectation on PS teachers and their students is reduced as the IHE partners are not continually at the school needing to observe in classrooms or work with children on an on-going basis.

In addition, although there is time needed for preparation of these events, that preparation is part of a faculty member's teaching preparation because the events are part of course assignments. In our model, IHE faculty have essentially substituted school-based activities for other course assignments they typically do in a methods course. And while school-based activities may involve more preparation than more typical methods course assignments, this additional time is minimal compared to the energy both IHE and PS faculty have to invest to sustain a quality PDS.

For our faculty, this difference in the necessary time investment between the PDS model and school-based activities model is critical. Given our heavy teaching loads and the lack of release time our college grants to do school-based work, we simply could not maintain the time investment required by a PDS. But as is likely the case with PDS model, participants from both institutions recognize the enormous benefits these activities provide for both college and school-age students, so as long as the time investment is manageable, it is also freely made.

Methods of Evaluation

Over the past three years, IHE faculty conducted evaluations on each of the school-based activities using open-ended surveys. We solicited feedback from preservice teachers and PS teachers, K-12 administrators, and K-12 students and

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their families. Surveys vary by stakeholder group and event and are not standardized. Items tend to be broad to allow for a variety of unstructured responses and focus on the specific activity under study. For example, after a Family Math Night, partner K-12 teachers might be asked, "Describe your general reaction to tonight's event. In what way, if any, did this event benefit your students? How could we improve this event for use in the future?" A parent may be asked to: "Describe what you think your child may have learned at Family Math Night. What was the best part of Family Math Night from your perspective? How can we improve this event?" A sample of a survey given to preservice teachers after a field trip for PS sixth graders can be found in the Appendix.

At the end of each semester, evaluation data are used to revise partnership activities for implementation in future semesters. Representatives from both the district and the college discuss responses from the evaluations and propose essential changes. For example, in evaluations of evening events, such as math and literacy nights, PS teachers expressed disappointment that not all their students got to participate in these events; only children whose parents are willing to bring them to these events were able to participate. Teachers felt strongly that sometimes the students who needed these activities the most were unable to participate for family reasons.

At the same time, IHE faculty expressed the importance of having events in the evening so that preservice teachers had the opportunity to interact with parents as well as children. In many instances, preservice teachers do not get to interact with parents until they student teach. As a result, preservice teachers often feel intimidated and unprepared for their initial parent interactions. Having preservice teachers interact with parents in a meaningful but informal context such as a Family Math or Literacy Night allows them to gain some confidence in their ability to work with parents before they participate in formal parent/teacher conferences during student teaching.

Based on this feedback, the college and school representatives tried to find a means to structure events so that both sets of needs are met. Recently, the group scheduled two related events, one in the evening and one during the school day, in each semester for a given set of grade levels. Thus, a math night for grades 1-3 was scheduled in the evening in the same semester as a literacy day for the same students was scheduled during the school day.

Having conducted both these events, the feedback was split by stakeholder groups. The faculty who ran the literacy day event, which was held during the school day at the college, would prefer to offer this event at night in the future. It was difficult to find a space big enough to hold this event at the college and the logistical issues (providing bus service and lunches for the PS students) made the organization of such an event much more challenging for them.

On the other hand, both the PS teachers and students *loved* the event. The children were very excited about coming to the college and experiencing a new

environment. Many told their parents, “I went to college today!” The teachers felt it was important that ALL of their students got to participate in the event. One teacher said, “When we have evening activities, we only get kids whose parents are already very involved in their education. The kids whose parents aren’t as invested don’t get these kinds of special experiences. I hope you will consider having changing math night to ‘math day’ in the future.” Given this varying feedback, we will likely continue with alternating the events, their times, and locations to try to satisfy all the stakeholders involved in the partnership.

In the following sections, we present more specific issues that have emerged through our evaluation of activities as a means to document the strength of our School-based Activities Model as a promising practice for teacher preparation. The discussion is organized by stakeholder group, with the most significant issues for a given stakeholder group highlighted in each section.

Evidence of Effectiveness

Feedback from Parents

In general, feedback from parents has been difficult for us to obtain. Although we make feedback sheets available at each event, parents often forget to fill them out and return them to us. However, the evaluation results we do receive from parent and community stakeholders have been overwhelmingly positive. For example, one parent wrote on an evaluation of Family Math Night: “This event was really great. It helped me to see how much math I can do at home. It also made me see that math can be fun.” Similarly, the comments on a Family Literacy Night evaluation were equally positive: “This event gave me a good idea of the reading activities my child enjoys.”

Some of the most compelling parental feedback on partnership events has come from informal conversations college faculty and PS teachers have had with parents during the events. For example, one father recounted to a college faculty member that he had been to three partnership events with his children. When he described these events to a co-worker whose children went to school in a much larger and more affluent city district, the co-worker was impressed. The co-worker said his children’s school offered nothing like the math nights and literacy nights he was hearing about.

His co-worker’s reaction made this parent feel that his district, which is substantially smaller and more remote, was “privileged” and “very fortunate” to have a connection to the college which allowed these events to take place. Indeed, this idea that the district is “lucky” to have college involvement with its students is a recurring theme in both formal and informal parental feedback. Parents are consistently appreciative of the opportunities partnership events provide for them and their children and perhaps as a result, we have received no substantive negative feedback in parent evaluations of our work.

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Feedback from Partner School Teachers

PS teachers have also been exceptionally positive in their assessment of these school-based activities. In commenting on preservice teachers' efforts during a field trip, one teacher wrote: "The activities the college students did were excellent. They were creative and really helped the kids get excited about science. Can we do this kind of thing more often?" Several teachers have mentioned that the field trips and evening events provide enriching learning experiences for many of their students who do not have the opportunity to travel outside of their small town and meet different types of people. Thus, partnership activities provide many district students with opportunities to experience new ideas and people that they might not ordinarily have.

Writing about the benefits of the partnership activities in general, another teacher pointed to benefits for many stakeholders:

Our students gain enrichment activities and additional support from college students.
Our parents gain ideas and strategies to use at home. Our teachers gain new ideas and strategies. The college students gain practical teaching experience.

The theme of multiple benefits of these activities is a recurring one. Having experienced teacher preparation themselves, teachers are aware of how important hands-on experience is for preservice teachers. One teacher said, "You can tell the student teachers who have had these types of experiences before they student teach. They are much more comfortable and natural with children. All your students should get these types of experiences." At the same time, they recognize how partnership activities support their own teaching by providing interesting learning opportunities for their students and new strategies for instruction for themselves. Teachers therefore continually comment, both in formal evaluations and informal discussions, how important it is that this college/district partnership is one that benefits all of its stakeholders.

While the PS teachers are enthusiastic about the work we have done, they recognize how difficult it is to maintain such work. They cite difficulties in coordinating school and college schedules and the distance between the college and the district as on-going issues with which we need to contend. In addition, because the district's single campus basically acts as a community center, finding time and space to conduct our partnership activities, amidst the heavy schedule of sporting events and community activities, is often a challenge.

Yet, despite these acknowledged challenges, PS teachers continue to suggest ways in which the college and district can expand the partnership. In recent evaluations, about half of the teachers (of 20 respondents) suggest having more frequent visits by preservice teachers, where they could act as tutors, coaches, and big brothers/sisters to the district's children. Again, this theme of providing additional learning experiences for the children of the district appears to be a significant motivation for PS teachers to continue maintaining this partnership.

In discussions about this feedback, IHE faculty have been honest about our multiple commitments in our roles as IHE faculty. Being part of a small, rural district where many teachers play a number of different roles (coach, student club advisor, text book adoption committee member, etc.), PS teachers are very aware and respectful of the many demands on our time and energy. Indeed, some of the PS teachers have “cut back” on the number of partnership activities in which they are actively involved. Thus, we continue to work together, within the limitations of our positions and institutions, to meet as many mutually defined needs as we can.

Recently, we have attempted to involve other colleagues in activities that would extend to other parts of the preservice curriculum. Further expansion with this single PS is probably not feasible given that all of our students need to work with elementary level children, but the use of the model by our colleagues in other areas of the curriculum and with other partners is increasing.

Feedback from Preservice Teachers

Similar to PS teachers, our preservice teachers have generally positive feedback on partnership activities. In classroom teaching evaluations, one of our preservice teachers wrote: “The activities we did with [district name] were among the best activities we completed.”

Preservice teacher feedback also helps illuminate some of the challenges these activities present for them:

While I really feel I learned a lot from things like Family Literacy Night, they took a lot of out of class time. I did not like having to go way out in the boondocks to [town name] in the evening. I wish we could have done more of this stuff during class time and at the college.

However, at the same time, many preservice teachers (about 40% in a recent evaluation of a Family Math Night) discussed the benefits of being exposed to a rural, high-needs setting so early in their preparation:

I grew up in a large suburb where there were many schools in our district. It was so cool to see how well a small district can work. Having all the schools in one building made me think there would be some good things you could do with multi-grade projects. And even though this is supposed to be a poor district, everyone was really friendly and warm. I could actually see myself working in a district like this!

Given the difficulty many rural schools have attracting qualified teachers, involving preservice teachers in these settings could contribute to recruitment of teachers for such rural districts. Alumni polls indicate graduates of our programs are generally as likely to teach in rural settings as in urban ones. Monitoring of the college program’s success in preparation indicates preservice teachers choice of job placement is often dependent on prior practicum or student teaching experiences in a given setting. Thus, these early experiences in a rural setting could lead our graduates to be more open to a position in a rural school.

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Perhaps the strongest endorsement of our partnership activities can be found in the “comparison shopping” many of our preservice teachers do when determining which sections of Block I courses they will take. Because this school-based work has involved only about 25% of our preservice teachers, those candidates participating in the school-based activities model have begun to recognize they are getting something different from their peers in other sections of Block I:

I loved the work we did with [name of district] kids. It was the best part of your courses (no offense!). I’ve talked to some of my friends in other sections of Block I and they don’t do anything with real kids in real schools like we did. I feel like I am going to be better prepared for student teaching because I’ve actually been teaching kids already. And I’ve done it with teachers and parents watching. This has given me a ton of confidence.

We did not anticipate that our school-based activities would prompt our preservice teachers to compare their preparation experiences to those in other sections of Block I methods course. However, not only did the written feedback indicate that our preservice teachers were doing this, but verbal feedback also suggested this. During informal conversations about why preservice teachers decide to take our sections of methods courses, they have told us that they “heard” from our previous students that we had a series of activities requiring them to work in schools. The previous students admitted to the then-prospective students that these activities often required “more work” than that required in other sections of Block I. But our alumni also admitted that the additional work paid dividends in terms of greater experience in teaching. As one of our current students put it, “That sold me. I was signing up for your sections.” Both formal and informal evaluative feedback from preservice teachers generally supports this sentiment that working in a school context with “real kids” makes our course work more authentic and rewarding.

Feedback from College Faculty

From our perspective as teacher educators, we are convinced by our experiences that our School-based Activities Model allows us to have a greater influence on our preservice teachers’ thinking about teaching. We know from the research literature that despite our best efforts, the most influential force in preparing preservice teachers to teach content is their “apprenticeship of observation,” which encourages a “stand and deliver” model of instruction (Lortie, 1975; Lampert & Ball, 1998; Slekar 1998). By doing structured, but informal teaching in schools early in their preparation, our preservice teachers have experiences that may replace or diminish the influence of their “apprenticeship of observation” in traditional classrooms. These experiences enrich other class activities and discussions and thus further extend preservice teachers’ understanding of teaching in nontraditional ways.

We are in the process of following up with some of our alumni who are now teaching in classrooms of their own. We have conducted a limited number of

interviews with some of these graduates to ascertain how these early school-based experiences have influenced their teaching. Nearly all of them have said these experiences gave them confidence going into both student teaching and their first teaching jobs. They compare themselves positively to more veteran colleagues with statements such as, “I didn’t want to use as many worksheets as my host teacher, so I came up with a some different stations kids could do to practice the same skills.”

In our preliminary analysis of the interview and anecdotal data we have gathered from our alumni, we find they continue to value more non-traditional, active learning activities for their students, although they find it hard to implement such activities given current expectations for student achievement. As one new teacher said, “It is hard to try new things when your principal expects you to be on the same page of the curriculum as everyone else teaching in your grade.” So while we are not certain of the long term impacts of this work, we predict these early experiences do have some influence on the teaching of our graduates.

Considering the heavy teaching load carried by most faculty at our IHE, if we were not able to implement school-based activities within our courses, we would be unable to continue this work. The integration of these activities into course assignments allows us to devote some of our teaching energy to partnership goals. Although doing these school-based activities as course assignments does take more time to plan and implement than more typical course assignments, the benefits to both students and IHE faculty appear to be far greater than any outcomes we have experienced with more typical assignments. Like our preservice teachers, we find the work to be more authentic and rewarding.

Finally, working with this district has supported collaboration among IHE colleagues, which the literature about the PDS model suggest may be difficult in some settings (George & Davis-Wiley, 2000). As the district continues to suggest new and different ways we can collaborate, IHE faculty have worked collegially to meet defined PS needs. This has included consulting with our colleagues in the arts and sciences when issues related to preservice or PS teachers’ content knowledge need to be addressed, as well as encouraging and structuring new IHE faculty involvement in partnership activities as interest in the model has grown.

On-Going Challenges

Despite the general success of this model, there are some continuing challenges. One challenge is creating better means for PS teachers to offer more feedback on preservice teachers’ work. As the number of school-based activities we conduct has increased, it becomes more difficult to have PS teachers offer comments on preservice teachers’ plans prior to the event. It is difficult for the PS teachers to come to the college during course meeting times to talk with preservice teachers about their plans, which was the original structure used for this process.

To address this issue, we have tried to switch the focus from having PS teachers

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offer formal feedback on preservice teachers' plans prior to an event, to having them offer more informal feedback on the preservice teachers' instruction during the event. However, the PS teachers have not felt comfortable in this role. PS teachers definitely see the work of the preservice teachers at these events, where they are often implementing a lesson for the first time with both parents and potential colleagues observing, as "high stakes." The PS teachers typically define their role as supportive, rather than evaluative, and are thus reluctant to critique the preservice teachers' work.

Therefore, in conjunction with our partner PS teachers, we are now trying to develop a simple rubric or checklist evaluation form which they can use as they observe preservice teachers during a school-based activity. These forms will be designed to offer gentle, formative assessment of the preservice teachers' instruction. We hope this will provide a more comfortable format to better integrate our PS teacher partners into the preparation of our preservice teachers.

Another significant challenge is the institutionalization of the partnership. This partnership was originally built on relationships between one IHE faculty member and about four PS teachers. Inasmuch as we often describe school/college partnerships as collaborations between institutions, they are really a set of relationships between people working in both institutions. What happens if the personnel heavily invested in the partnership at either institution leaves? What becomes of the partnership?

Early in our partnership, when a teacher who had been a critical player in the partnership retired, there were some tense moments for the IHE faculty involved in the partnership. However, as more faculty from both the IHE and the PS have become involved in the partnership activities, the number of relationships connected to the partnership has increased.

For example, many of the PS teachers have taken graduate level classes taught by IHE faculty, often supported by local grants. During the courses, a significant bond between these IHE and PS faculty has developed that has led to more partnership activity. Thus, we now have a "critical mass" of participants in the partnership at both the IHE and the PS, such that recovery from the loss of individual personnel has been relatively quick. In essence, a wider network of relationships now makes the partnership stronger and more viable for the future. This phenomenon effectively offsets some of the drawbacks of the model, in that time invested in relationship-building and a predictable set of activities and structures have been put in place, so that the loss or gain of additional individuals in the partnership is easily accomplished. Similarly, the introduction of new or improved activities can be accomplished with proportionately less time invested.

However, as interest in this model has grown among IHE faculty and we have tried to replicate this model with other districts in our area, we have been reminded of the primacy of these relationships between IHE and PS faculty to building a successful partnership. We have found that initially, these relationships are slow to develop. Several successful activities must be conducted before the partnership

begins to feel stable. This can take several semesters and all stakeholders have to be patient as trust is built. Once the trust is built, however, the partnership seems to expand much more quickly and efficiently with benefits for all participants.

Conclusions

Given our experiences in this partnership, we believe our School-based Activities Model results in many of the same benefits as the PDS model. Preservice teachers are given opportunities to work in authentic school settings while being supported by experienced PS teachers and IHE faculty (Herbert, 2004; Holmes Group, 1990). Both IHE faculty and PS teachers report feeling “energized” by the work of these preservice teachers and by the collaborative efforts to support this work (Bohen & Stiles, 1998). And despite a significant investment of time and the challenges typically involved in collaborating across institutions, both the PS teachers and IHE faculty remain committed to maintaining and expanding partnership activities for the benefit of their students (Thompson, Beacham, & Miculis, 1992).

As mentioned previously, there may be one major benefit to our model that has been cited as a challenge in some contexts utilizing the PDS model. Our model has supported collaboration among IHE faculty and increased participation of IHE faculty in partnership activity. This has been reported as a challenge to the PDS model in some settings (Gundry & LaMantia, 2001; Holmes Group, 1995; Imig & Switzer, 1996). We attribute the IHE faculty interest in partnership work to campus recognition. IHE faculty who have participated in our partnership activities have received teaching awards and letters of recognition that have supported their tenure and promotion. Our college president has cited the work of this partnership in several public addresses. This recognition has encouraged participation and collaboration among the teacher education faculty in our college. As we add new faculty members to our department, they are eager to collaborate with us to become part of these partnership efforts and hopefully build their own partnerships.

Recognition for our model can be best attributed to the fact that it revolves around visible, community activities that are making a difference for all constituents. When we conduct a Family Math Night, many community families see and appreciate our partnership’s work. When we host 60 sixth-graders on our college’s campus, campus administrators observe the existence and impact of this college/school collaboration. The energy such events generate at both institutions is difficult to ignore. When this is contrasted with the work in a PDS model, which most often takes place on-site at the school, during the normal course of the school day, it is easy to understand why in some contexts recognition for IHE faculty involved in a PDS model may be more difficult to gain.

Thus, we believe this model provides a viable alternative for college/K-12 partnerships to PDS models. While the PDS model is a powerful means to structure both inservice and preservice teacher development (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Clark,

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1999), not all schools and colleges have the resources to implement and maintain such a model. The model presented here requires fewer resources to implement than the PDS model, yet despite a smaller investment, our experiences suggest this model has many of the same benefits. For those of us in large, teacher preparation programs, such a model provides a means by which we can sustain on-going, productive relationships with our PS partners for the benefit of all the different constituencies we collectively serve.

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Appendix

Preservice Teacher Survey Evaluation of Sixth Grade Visit to the University Campus

Thank you for participating in the field trip for sixth grade students from [school district name]. In an effort to improve this experience for future [university] Childhood and Early Childhood Education majors, we would appreciate your feedback on this experience. Use the back of this paper if necessary. *Thank you for your cooperation!*

1. Describe the most important things you learned *about children* from this experience.

2. Describe the most important things you learned *about teaching* from this experience.

3. Describe the most important things you learned *about yourself* from this experience.

4. What was the best part of this experience for you?

5. How can we improve this experience for future [university] students?