Building Sustainable Afterschool Literacy Programs by Partnering With University Teacher Candidates

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Abstract

In this article we expand the scope of school–university partnerships to include a community partner. This study involved an afterschool tutoring program known as the Discovery Center (pseudonym) partnering with a university reading class. This partnership, which is in its sixth year of implementation, prepares teacher candidates in the area of literacy while providing additional, free support to students in Grades K–2. Forty students engaged in co-taught tutoring sessions by 24 teacher candidates who were overseen by three center directors and the university professor. Data for this study were collected through preservice teacher focus groups, center director interviews, and parent interviews. Results indicate that teacher candidates' knowledge of differentiation and co-teaching increased throughout the semester. Teacher candidates also felt that additional tutoring times should be scheduled to allow more flexibility. The parents noted academic growth in literacy as a result of the tutoring. The findings suggest that all parties find the collaboration highly successful and provide ideas on how to strengthen and establish such partnerships elsewhere.

Key Words: university–afterschool program, community partnerships, literacy, community program, preservice teacher candidates, elementary school students, tutors, staff, parent perspectives, reading intervention, undergraduate student development, field placements

Introduction

Throughout the education system, there is widespread agreement that strong university–school partnerships support preservice teachers' professional learning (Allen, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Our experiences suggest many entities can benefit from such partnerships. University professors can stay connected with what is happening at the school level, principals can stay informed with the initiatives occurring in higher education, student achievement can be impacted, teacher candidates can hone their craft, and professional development or adjunct opportunities can arise for classroom teachers. However, research indicates that challenges exist to building and sustaining such school–university partnerships. Turnover rate, changes in policies, limited resources, and time are just a few of the barriers faced (Colwell, MacIsaac, Tichenor, Heins, & Piechurra, 2014). Another challenge not widely accounted for in the literature remains the concern that large universities face—how can a large number of quality school placements be established?

This university, located in the southeastern United States, typically graduates about 125 teacher candidates from the undergraduate elementary education program in each fall semester and an additional 300 teacher candidates in the spring semester. In a given academic year, this large teacher preparation program needs at least 425 student teaching placements alone, in addition to other field placements required for other courses. The question remains, how can large universities ensure all field placements maintain the goal of preparing and sustaining professional educators?

This study was situated around utilizing a community partnership for a tutoring field placement in an elementary literacy education course. Although similar studies have been conducted with regards to graduate students tutoring elementary students 1:1 in literacy, there is little research regarding undergraduate teacher candidates co-teaching students in small groups in afterschool programs (Magiera & Geraci, 2014; Saddler & Staulters, 2008). In fact, Magiera and Geraci (2014) asserted that since no undergraduate teacher candidates were included in their study, it was suggested that future research should include data from teacher candidates and school district students who participate in such programs. The data from our study included those participants as well as reflections from the center directors and parents.

The purpose of this study was to examine the benefits, challenges, and sustainability of establishing and sustaining a university–afterschool program community partnership. The study included three research questions:

1. What were the perceived benefits of the Discovery Center–university tutoring program according to the tutors, directors, and parents?

2. What were the perceived challenges of the Discovery Center–university tutoring program according to the tutors, directors, and parents?

3. How could the Discovery Center–university tutoring program be improved upon and sustained?

In 2014, this partnership was nominated for a state field director's award in the category of Innovative Placement Processes and Procedures. The former college of education field placement assistant director suggested that the authors collect data on the perceived benefits, challenges, and sustainability of the program. Other colleagues at neighboring institutions were interested in replicating this type of partnership.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study is known as the university–community partnership model developed by Brewster, Pisani, Ramseyer, and Wise (2016). "The model is intended to specify in reasonable detail how universities and communities can be ideally synergistic as they go about collaboratively solving important social and other problems" (Brewster et al., 2016, p. 48). This model starts with identifying a substantive social issue. University–community partnerships are driven by a common interest, typically involving a geographical or economic concern. Within the context of this study, students attending the Discovery Center came from a school in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood where students were falling behind other students in the state, and there were significant achievement gaps in reading according to the online school report card. The common interest between the university and the community partners was to provide reading intervention and support to students attending the Discovery Center. Additionally, the university researchers wanted to research the partnership, including interacting with members of the community, to better address issues from multiple perspectives.

The second component in the model involves the university–community partnership itself. Rather than universities reaching out to community partners when they are in need of a sample or location to conduct an already-assigned research project, it is important for both stakeholders to feel invested and involved in the work. "By instead prioritizing the partnership *per se* and explicitly including community stakeholders at every point in development and execution, a particular project becomes part of a broader effort toward strengthening collaborations" (Brewster et al., 2016, p. 49). This places an emphasis on collaboration and thus is likely to generate long-term benefits for all participants.

A comprehensive collaboration amongst schools, families, and businesses within the community exists in a true community partnership. Hidden or

underutilized resources that the community can use on its own behalf may be discovered. Stakeholders must ask, what community resources could be used to promote student success?

The final component in the framework is known as student development. In our study, this referred to undergraduate student (i.e., teacher candidate) development. Within this phase, undergraduates critique, create, compare, contrast, and evaluate curricula designed to meet the individual needs of the elementary students. Mentoring is a part of this, and throughout this study, the candidates were mentored through the presence of the university professor who was present throughout the tutoring sessions. "From a mentoring perspective, pedagogical strategies that identify students' interests, teach them that their prior work and life experience is important and useful, and encourage them to bring those interests and experiences to bear on a problem, are particularly beneficial" (Brewster et al., 2016, p. 50). This mentoring can take the form of university professor to undergraduate student as well as from undergraduate student to elementary student.

Literature Review

We begin this literature review by situating the discussion, and our study more generally, within a brief history of university and afterschool partnerships. Literature is then highlighted that points to literacy instruction in afterschool programs. In doing so, it is shown how little research there is regarding preservice teachers providing literacy instruction in afterschool programs while the university instructor is on-site.

University and Afterschool Partnerships

While there has been much literature written embedding the nine essentials of what it means to be a professional development school (National Association for Professional Development Schools, 2018), far less research has examined experiences of those who participate in university–afterschool partnerships (which relates to the first essential element). Despite this literature gap, recent work examining university–school partnerships has grown beyond school walls to include community partnerships (Epstein, 2010; Lester, Kronick, & Benson, 2013; Luter, Lester, Lochmiller, & Kronick, 2017). Many institutions of higher education have prioritized an interest in building strong relationships with the communities that surround their campuses. These partnerships can be utilized so that university students can participate in service activities or field work requirements. These allow university students to address community needs while receiving academic credit and reflecting on their experiences.

Partnerships between communities and universities as a strategy for social change are gaining momentum; however, the voices of community partners are largely missing (Community–Campus Partnerships for Health, 2007). Families who live in socioeconomically marginalized communities encounter challenges as they attempt to earn an adequate living, build community, and raise their children (Boston, Ross, & Weglarz, 2013). University–community partnerships can strengthen the lives of the participants as their programs help K–12 students build healthy relationships with peers, participate in academic enrichment opportunities, and become leaders within the community in which they live and play. Yaffe (2016) contends that districts across the country are finding ways of turning afterschool programs (which were once known as homework helpers) into learning experiences that motivate students and close equity gaps.

Afterschool programs are growing nationwide. More than 10 million schoolchildren participated in afterschool programs in 2014. That number jumped by 6.5 million as compared to a decade prior (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). Nearly one in four families currently have a child enrolled in an afterschool program. Additionally, children from low-income households are more likely than their higher income peers to attend an afterschool program (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). Combining the efforts of afterschool program providers and universities can create a wealth of opportunity for the children in these communities.

Literacy Instruction in Afterschool Programs

Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and subsequent Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), many schools have turned to afterschool programs as a way to supplement the school day and offer support to help increase reading and math scores (Cheatham, Cheatham, & Phalen, 2013; Van Dyke, 2015). Saddler and Staulters (2008) discussed how "afterschool tutoring sessions can impact reading performance while offering additional tangible benefits" (p. 203). These benefits include: supportive relationships, social skills support, and physical and emotional safety (National Research Council, 2002). Furthermore, afterschool programs can give children from low-income families access to the types of enrichment activities that middle-class children typically experience (Hofferth & Jankuniene, 2001).

While a gap in the literature exists among literacy tutoring between university teacher candidates and afterschool students, rare examples are found. Gelzheiser, Scanlon, and D'Angelo (2001) found that a structured afterschool reading tutoring program significantly improved participating fourth grade students' decoding and comprehension skills compared to students who were not in the program. Their partnership blended rigor and relevancy to help prepare students for success in school and life.

An extensive review of literature related to literacy and afterschool programs found 20 studies, and 18 out of 20 studies showed positive outcomes for literacy learning (Britsch, Martin, Stuczynski, Tomala, & Tucci, 2005). Five of the 18 studies focused on tutoring and homework help, while 13 studies were categorized as academic enrichment (curriculum designed by the tutors). Although the degrees of literacy instruction varied, "the extant body of research provides enough positive findings to indicate that afterschool literacy enrichment does have benefits for participants' reading achievement" (Britsch et al., 2005, p. 16). Some of these participants included struggling readers. Afterschool programs could be an ideal opportunity to help struggling readers, in particular, improve academically.

Program Description and Context

The elementary education program at Mountain State University (pseudonym) employs a curriculum of study in which teacher candidates at the undergraduate level take three literacy courses throughout the program. The first course is known as "Teaching Reading and Writing in the Early Grades, K–2," and introduces candidates to a balanced literacy curriculum that encompasses the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to teach literacy to children in kindergarten through second grade. This three-credit hour course involves an additional 20-hour field component in which teacher candidates tutor struggling readers one-on-one, across the semester.

Previously, the Educational Placements and Partnerships Center (EPPC), in conjunction with the elementary reading coordinator, sought out tutoring placements for the teacher candidates. Most of the placements were located in local elementary schools, while in the summer, teacher candidates had to find their own child to tutor. There were many challenges with these previous field placement attempts. First, due to the large number of teacher candidates being placed in the schools, the collaborating teachers would sometimes not be fully aware of their requirements for the semester. Often, teachers would give the preservice teacher homework to help the child with instead of allowing them to assess the child in reading, set goals, and then create lessons that would help students reach those goals.

Another challenge was the amount of time that teacher candidates could access the student to tutor. Many teachers would encourage the preservice teacher to pull the child out for the one-on-one tutoring during the literacy block, which was limited to an hour and a half of instructional time per day. If a candidate had a class or work during that same time, it would be difficult to find a different time to reach the targeted number of hours.

Summer also made for an additional challenge. Teacher candidates sometimes could not find a struggling reader to tutor. Although they would advertise at the local schools or libraries, they found that students were busy with other summer activities. At times, a teacher candidate's final tutoring hours time sheet (that was supposed to be signed by a parent or guardian) looked forged.

Community arrangements and other innovative field practices were examined to see if they might alleviate some of the challenges that had arisen throughout the years. Then one of the faculty members in the EPPC reached out to a literacy instructor to see if she would be willing to meet and partner with the Discovery Center of a local apartment complex. Moyer Communities (pseudonym) is a privately held company that manages apartment communities across the metro region of a large city in the Southeastern United States. Moyer provides a range of educational, cultural, and recreational programs tailored to the individual interests and needs of the people who reside in their communities. One such educational program that Moyer Communities provides is an afterschool enrichment program. They have partnered with a nonprofit, faith-based organization, which offers the afterschool and summer programs at no cost to parents at five of the six apartment locations.

Method

Participants and Setting

Although the afterschool program houses students in grades K–5, the participants in this study were in grades K–2. On average, about 40 students in K–2 participated in the afterschool–university partnership tutoring. The K–2 participants included 90% African American, 6% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Other students. A majority (60%) of the elementary student participants came from single-parent homes. The tutors consisted of 80% White, 10% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 5% African American teacher candidates. The ages of the preservice teacher tutors ranged from 20–50 years old, with 22 females and two males. Additional study participants included two center directors and 10 parents of children who attended the Discovery Center. Consent to participate forms were sent home with all parents whose children attended the Discovery Center tutoring, but only 10 parents returned signed consents.

The tutoring was held on-site at the Discovery Center, located about eight miles from the university. Tutoring was held for one hour each Tuesday, totaling 15 tutoring hours (15 weeks) across the semester. An additional five hours were spent planning lessons and assessing the children at the beginning. During each session, the university professor was on-site to model, answer questions, and observe. Teacher candidates were paired up to co-teach by the course instructor at the beginning of the semester. The instructor matched candidates

by closely examining their introductions and trying to pair them according to backgrounds and interests. Teacher candidates co-taught two to five students per group, with most groups averaging around four students. The center director grouped the elementary students based on grade level and behavior. If some students tended not to get along, they were not placed in the same group.

At the beginning of the semester, the center director and course instructor held an organizational meeting during part of the first tutoring session to go over the logistics of the program with the co-teachers. The director provided background information related to the afterschool program, demographic information, and housekeeping points. The university instructor also mentioned to co-teachers that by participating in this experience, the afterschool program offered a $1,000.00 scholarship to a co-teacher during his/her senior year. After the application essays were submitted to the university, university literacy faculty evaluated the applications to select a recipient of the scholarship. This scholarship was something that was established over time because the afterschool program felt like the partnership was mutually beneficial, and they wanted to reciprocate in this way.

Within the first month of the tutoring sessions, an open house was also conducted to give teacher candidates the opportunity to meet the students' parents and teachers from the local elementary school. The open house was held on a Tuesday evening, and the teacher candidates wrote short introductory paragraphs about themselves, which were included with their pictures in an open house program. During the event, the center director, the university instructor, and local teachers spoke. The elementary students then performed songs before small break-out meetings were held between the students, parents, teachers, and teacher candidates. The open house allowed co-teachers a window into the lives of their students in school and at home. They were able to learn more about students' funds of knowledge and how they could capitalize on their personal, cultural, and community assets during the tutoring sessions. Funds of knowledge are "strategic bodies of essential information that households need to maintain their well-being" (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992, p. 314). The teacher candidates learned about funds of knowledge in their literacy course prior to the open house. Teacher candidates took notes as they learned about their students' historical and personal situations in school and at home. They were then able to compare notes and facilitate learning while embedding these concepts into their lesson plans using the template found in Appendix A.

Data Collection

A qualitative methodology was employed in this study. The first researcher taught the online literacy course and was on-site with the candidates as they

tutored. The second researcher assisted in conducting the focus groups. Data collected included preservice teacher focus groups, individual director and parent interviews, and observations. Using the coding steps suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), the researchers first transcribed the focus groups and individual interviews, then analyzed the interview and reflection data to develop a code list. We identified and developed codes as we analyzed the data. After this step was complete, we met to discuss, refine, and establish pattern codes.

Focus groups with the teacher candidates were selected due to the fact that they can yield deep information and insight. Krueger and Casey (2000) asserted that focus groups provide researchers with tiny glimpses into the world that they may not normally experience. The researcher who had not taught this class conducted the focus group interviews so that teacher candidates potentially felt less intimidated and more inclined to speak. Each pair of co-teachers was split into equally divided Candidate A or Candidate B groups. The researcher brought all Candidate As together first in order to conduct a focus group with them, while Candidate Bs continued tutoring their students. Then the teacher candidates switched roles, and those designated to the Candidate B group participated in a focus group. Thirteen questions were asked of the teacher candidate groups related to the research questions of the study (see Appendix A).

One-on-one interviews were conducted with three center directors and 10 parents. Separate interview questions were asked of directors (see Appendix B) and parents (see Appendix C). Participant observations took place during weekly tutoring sessions to better understand the factors that contributed to the success of the Discovery Center–university partnership. The lead researcher conducted the observations and recorded notes in a journal. The focus groups and interviews were audiorecorded, and the data were transcribed and coded.

Data Analysis

Using a constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the researchers used selective coding and generated analysis summaries. The researchers conducted member checks of analysis summaries for accuracy or clarification. This information was triangulated through information from participant observations. The above was done for the focus group findings and then for the individual interviews. The two data sets are separated below due to the fact that different questions (directly related to the research questions) were asked of the teacher candidates, the parents, and the center directors, respectively. In the following sections the authors share the findings uncovered through the analysis of data collected, then analyze those findings, and finally share their conclusions and future recommendations.

Findings

The themes that emerged from the teacher candidate focus group data included: (1) scheduling; (2) differentiation; (3) and co-teaching. Scheduling remained a theme from the individual interviews, also. In addition, gratitude and academic growth were themes from the directors and parents. We discuss the focus group interview findings below, followed by the individual interview findings. Please note that all names used throughout are pseudonyms.

Focus Group Findings

Tutoring Scheduling Considerations

One concern expressed throughout the focus groups related to scheduling. It should be noted that when candidates registered for the course, they understood that it would be an online course with a face-to-face tutoring component of a set time for one hour on Tuesday afternoons. A few candidates found it challenging to balance their work schedule with the set tutoring schedule. Cynthia commented,

> Yes, the timing of the tutoring was definitely kind of an issue because I am a supervisor at my job, so I am supposed to be there now, but I've had to make a whole lot of arrangements to make sure I could be here every Tuesday.

Most of the teacher candidates held at least one job during the semester, and the tutoring dates/times were not available to them when they registered for the course. Rather, the course instructor sent them the dates and times once registration was final, about two weeks before the class started.

Family life also intervened with the tutoring schedule. As Heather mentioned, "I was having to put my son in an afterschool program for the first time to come to tutoring. It wasn't really a big deal, but it was one concern I had." While most teacher candidates were traditional students, there were a few nontraditional students who had families. These nontraditional students enjoyed the availability of the class being online but were restricted to the schedule of the Tuesday tutoring.

After reviewing the course schedules of each preservice teacher enrolled in the course and discussing their availability, the course instructor and the Discovery Center director selected the most convenient time for all students. The instructor's goal was to hold tutoring during a single common time so she could be present to help facilitate and guide the teacher candidates throughout the sessions. She found a common time when they would not be in other classes. The Discovery Center director aimed to find a common time when the K–2 students would be available and not involved in other activities.

Since the tutoring hours were set at the beginning of the semester, all of the teacher candidates were clear about the expectations and worried less about the field placement. Amy agreed with these thoughts when she stated,

I found it a lot less stressful to come at the set day and time rather than to work that out on my own or stress about regular field placement sign-ups. We did not need to contact a school placement because we knew we were going to come here and get all our hours in.

Although work and family commitments were initial concerns related to the field placement scheduling, overall, the teacher candidates found that having a set day and time for the field placement was better than having to work out a time with the field placement on their own.

Differentiated Instruction

Teacher candidates noted that they made positive gains in understanding how to differentiate learning as they co-taught together and worked with small groups of students. Terra shared,

I have one student in my group who is gifted and two students who are struggling readers, so I have benefited from the tutoring experience because I've had to create lesson plans that hit the middle line and keep the gifted child on task and interested but at the same time keeping it on a level that the other students can benefit from. So that's been interesting, and it's helped me grow, just trying to figure out how to differentiate for each individual student in my group.

The lead researcher observed the teacher candidates differentiating the content, process, product, and environment for their students. Examples of ways content was differentiated included: utilizing e-books, using varied texts, and attending to multiple intelligences. The process and products of the tutoring sessions were differentiated according to students' cultural, community, and personal assets through flexible grouping, independent study, and tiered products. There was also enough space in the Discovery Center that groups could move to different room configurations or go outside in order to differentiate the learning environment.

Teacher candidates assessed the students early on and set curriculum goals for the semester. They then planned out weekly lesson plans together (in their co-teaching pairs), which consisted of design, instruction, and differentiation.

The notion of creating weekly lesson plans was new to these teacher candidates as this was their first intensive field experience in the elementary program. They commented on how the lesson plans gave them additional practice in being reflective of their students' needs. As Casey stated,

There are a good portion of us who have not tutored previously, so this experience was good at getting us prepared for teaching in the classroom and being reflective practitioners. For example, I had to figure out how to differentiate for all of my students, and then I received a new student midway through the semester in which I had to access his literacy learning. It made me realize how this experience connects so closely to what will be happening in my own classroom eventually.

These findings demonstrate that teacher efficacy was positively impacted as a result of this field experience. Efficacy included preservice teacher confidence in differentiated instruction, lesson planning, collaboration skills, and co-teaching.

Co-Teaching

The third overarching theme across the data was the fact that teacher candidates enjoyed the co-teaching experience with another teacher candidate. They cited how it assisted them in learning to collaborate, coordinate, and share ideas with another professional. As Matt shared,

I liked the co-teaching because I had a second person who could look over my lesson plan before I submitted it—a second set of eyes, and a new perspective. My co-teacher could tell me, you should add this or that, or that it was too much for one session. It helped me learn good cooperation and coordinating skills and those things I will need to do with other teachers eventually.

Kyle echoed these sentiments and added, "This experience also helped me so if I ever get hired within a co-teaching classroom, I will have the background knowledge that prepared me on various co-teaching models."

Most (90%) of the teacher candidates claimed that working with a co-teacher was beneficial to their professional growth. They also concluded by stating the importance of having the course instructor on-site with them as they tutored. Beth commented,

I would recommend this experience to others because it was nice having our professor on-site with us. She was very encouraging, and we could use it as a motivational tool for our students. For example, when my students were loud, they tended to get off topic, but having our professor come in and observe, we could say, "Hey, show our professor how well you know the long and short I's." That helped focus the students. Having her on-site also made it possible for any questions I had to be answered.

The preservice co-teachers respected each other, were flexible, planned together, and sought the support of the instructor. As an observer and mentor,

the university instructor offered feedback to both co-teachers in each pair and assisted them in implementing the six co-teaching strategies discussed in the course (St. Cloud University, 2009).

Individual Interview Findings

One-on-one interviews were conducted with the parents and center directors. Common themes that emerged within this data included: (1) appreciation of tutoring help; (2) scheduling conflicts; (3) and academic growth. These three themes are discussed in greater detail below.

It was important to obtain the parents' voices in relation to their thoughts on the partnership. One parent who was from South Korea and had recently moved to the area with her family explained the importance of the additional tutoring help for her child:

> I met the tutors, and I like it because I graduated school elsewhere, and my daughter is the first to go to American school. I moved to this apartment complex because I had heard good things about this afterschool program, and she can make friends. I lived in another complex for five years, but it was nothing like this. The free tutoring helps my child. I cannot afford to pay for any tutoring. The tutors are intelligent and nice to her. At first, she knew three sight words, but they have taught her 15. (Lei, parent of a kindergarten student)

In both Lei's interview and Isabel's interview (as quoted below), the parents noted that they would not be able to afford the cost of outside tutoring and that this free service provided assistance their child might not be able to have otherwise.

A common challenge noted among the parent interviews was how the day and time of the week that the tutoring took place conflicted with existing plans. Parents wished tutoring was held on a different day or that there were more options for the time:

> Last year I saw my child's reading fluency increase as a result of the semester-long tutoring. It is unfortunate this year that she cannot participate because we have commitments each Tuesday, which is when the tutors are here. Other outside tutoring is expensive, and I would not be able to afford that. (Isabel, parent of a second grader)

Additional parents commented that if their child was sick during the day of tutoring, that instruction time was essentially lost, due to the fact that the teacher candidates did not conduct make-up sessions. Although parents noted the challenge of the schedule, no suggestions were offered as to how a different way might overcome this challenge. Parents were aware of the teacher candidates' busy university/work/life schedules.

Academic growth was also noted as a benefit that the parents found as a result of the partnership:

Carlton was having trouble with his short vowel sounds at school. When I talked to his tutors about this, they also found the same thing according to phonics tests they did with him. Throughout the tutoring sessions, they worked with his group in creative ways. They even sent word sorts and games home they made for him. Each week I got an updated letter on his progress, and by the end I could tell he knew his vowels (James, parent of a first grader)

Academic growth over time was also noted as the lead researcher observed a co-teaching pair learning more about how one of their students enjoyed writing poetry. This particular student was at a reading level two levels below her given grade level. She needed targeted instruction in sight words. Knowing this information, the co-teachers incorporated poetry into their study of sight words as they selected poems to be their mentor text. Her sight word vocabulary improved over the semester as a result. Of course, it is important to note that the student also received sight word instruction at her elementary school; however, the added repetition and consistency of targeted sight word instruction through the teacher candidates' sight word assessment showed an improvement. Hence, this is one example of student development over time.

It was equally important to hear the voices of the center directors. They collaborated and worked with the university instructor and candidates on a weekly basis. When interviewed, the lead director, who had been with the program for one year, commented on change in the partnership:

The open house was a great bonding experience for the families and the candidates. The parents are just so grateful that the candidates come and give their time and assistance. There are also strong bonds that I see between the candidates and the students, but to hear the parents say, "It's working," and they are glad, and they can see the difference and the faces of the children, and the partner school also checks in to see how the tutoring is going as well. (Sofia, lead director)

Although there were no concerns or challenges noted by the directors, they were able to discuss ways in which the partnership had benefited all entities:

The structure of the program and the creativity that the candidates bring in are definitely some of the benefits of the partnership. Many times, the candidates will be working with the students, and they will present an idea that our staff could adopt and complete with the kids. (Sofia, lead director)

One of the center staff members observed the teacher candidates playing a game of sight word bingo related to a book they were reading during the tutoring sessions. That staff member told the lead researcher that she had asked the teacher candidates for a copy of the bingo sheet so that she could use it with the children during other times throughout the week. She mentioned that she had seen bingo before; however, she had never thought to create a bingo game based on the vocabulary and sight words that the students were studying.

The researchers also sought to learn more about sustaining the partnership. A director noted the importance of communication and organization between all entities in order to successfully sustain and move the partnership forward from year to year:

> What has made this partnership stronger over time is the collaboration we have had. Whenever there is an issue, I can reach out to the professor, and the professor and I even met weeks before the class started to plan out how we would organize the first class. (Sofia, lead director)

All of the parent and director interview participants indicated they felt like the partnership could and should be sustained in the future. While enthusiastic about the opportunity, they also acknowledged that work by all stakeholders was necessary to further enhance the partnership in order for it to be sustained.

Implications and Discussion

During the data analysis we found congruence between the university–Discovery Center partnership and the conceptual framework used. Following the university–community partnership model as a framework in this study, the common interest held by both the university and the afterschool program was supporting students from disadvantaged neighborhoods and attempting to close the achievement gap through literacy tutoring. Part of what contributed to this problem was the fact that the majority of the parents whose children attended the Discovery Center could not afford out-of-school tutoring services to compensate in those areas in which their children were falling behind. By implementing afterschool tutoring, both the problem and the potential solution were mutually owned and negotiated (Brewster et al., 2016).

The second component of this model involved the university–community partnership itself and how each entity focused their efforts to address the common issue. The university was able to provide free tutoring services since field placement for teacher candidates was required. As evident in the parent interviews, no-cost tutoring was a positive part of the partnership. As Hands (2005) described, the role of reciprocity creates a win-win situation for all partners.

While both the university and the community partner's primary concern was the students, "one of the major goals common to both partners was to satisfy needs that could not be addressed by the organizations individually" (Hands, 2005, p. 72).

Step three of the university–community partnership model involves, in this case, K–2 student development. The collaborative nature of the open house allowed teacher candidates to tap into their students' funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). These funds of knowledge referred to the knowledge the teacher candidates gained from the students' families about their lives and cultural backgrounds to make the learning more inclusive during the tutoring sessions.

Our findings, such as when the co-teaching candidates incorporated poetry to engage a student, echo the instructional methods findings from Kuo's (2016) study; the teacher candidates began tutoring by discovering their students' strengths and areas of need, then "incorporated evidence-based practices to help them develop literacy skills" (p. 209). The findings of this study also indicate that teacher candidates developed a better understanding of those evidence-based practices throughout their tutoring work. Learning outcomes were challenging to document in the study for various reasons (e.g., student attendance was not mandatory, tutors worked with different groups of students).

In terms of student development associated with preservice teacher development, these teachers were asked to "create, implement, and evaluate curricula designed to meet the particular needs of schools" (Brewster et al., 2016, p. 50). This allowed teacher candidates to engage in personal growth and reflection, both important for preservice teacher development. As evident in the focus group data, candidates felt better prepared to differentiate instruction for various types of learners. "Differentiated instruction is an approach to teaching that promotes equitable learning experiences for all students. It is teaching with planned responsiveness to the inherent diversity present in the population of a classroom" (Milman, Carlson-Bancroft, & Boogart, 2014, p. 124). This partnership authentically represented the learners who candidates will have in their own classrooms, despite the fact that this afterschool placement was not a traditional classroom field experience.

Our findings expanded current knowledge on how to sustain partnerships over time. Reischl, Khasnabis, and Karr (2017) described sustainability considerations for university–community partners to consider: time, space, communications, operating costs, materials, and staff. In our study, space and operating costs were sustained over time by the community partner. Time continues to be a consideration as evident from the focus group and individual interviews. University partners must consider the time allotted for such field

placements in a manner that aligns with the community partner schedule. The university faculty must communicate frequently with the staff and directors of the community program. For example, as the director mentioned in the interview, she met with the university professor prior to the start of the semester and maintained contact throughout.

Sustainability holds the key to potentially influence change and innovation (Rogers, 2003). According to the National Curriculum Services of Australia (2013), there are four key points to consider for a school–community partnership to be sustainable, starting with the beginning when the partners should:

- Establish an agreed purpose based on the students they serve,

- Create clear statements of roles and responsibilities,

- Engage in two-way communication supported through well-designed processes, and

- Form positive relationships among all stakeholders (directors, professors, parents, students, teacher candidates, school).

The points stated above were all considered and utilized when creating this university–afterschool program partnership. The partnership will continue to be sustained with these four points in mind. Additionally, each partner felt that this was a mutually beneficial relationship. The center directors appreciated the free tutoring that their students received, and the university instructor and candidates appreciated the generous donation of the yearly $1,000 senior scholarship.

Data findings from numerous studies show academic and social gains for students and document such partnerships as providing a sustainable intervention (Magiera & Geraci, 2014; Saddler & Staulters, 2008). Benefits were provided to the tutors as well, such as increased motivation and confidence as well as professional and academic growth in differentiation and co-teaching. Similarly, Magiera and Geraci (2014) found that their participants indicated "teacher candidates learned about pedagogy through an authentic experience, as well as how to collaborate with a teaching peer. Candidates also received firsthand experience working with students representing lower socioeconomic levels and English Language Learners" (p. 14). Future studies are needed to explore whether K–2 student academic growth also occurs in such partnerships.

Conclusion

It is our recommendation that university education programs reach out to community organizations to implement possible field experiences for teacher candidates. Although some programs may not include certified teachers that

are able to model research-based best practices for candidates, there are ways to handle this. First, a partnership could be made with the organization and the local school that the students served by the community organization attend. Candidates could spend part of their time at the school and the other part at the community organization. Other alternatives could be that teachers from the school record certain aspects of their instruction that could be viewed in the teacher candidates' class, or the university professor could teach the students a specific strategy while the teacher candidates observe.

The authors do acknowledge that university and community institutional policies can influence partnerships to be drawn closer together or pushed apart (Sheldon, 2003). For instance, a university might feel that field placements must take place within a school with a certified teacher. This would push a community-based partner further away. However, this study discussed ways in which a university–school–community partnership thrived and had benefits for all stakeholders. Thus, community-based organizations and afterschool programs may be viable options for teacher candidates completing education field experiences. They provide real-world opportunities to assess, plan, differentiate, and instruct elementary students from diverse backgrounds. Together, universities and communities can work together to assure placement options provide robust educational opportunities for both teacher candidates and the students with whom they work.

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Appendix A. Lesson Plan Template

Teacher Candidate(s) Names:

Session #   **Grade Level:**

Reflection from Previous Session (briefly explain what skills were taught at the last session and the student(s) strengths and areas of improvement that you observed).

Materials and Preparation

Text(s)	
Other materials needed	
Technology needed	
Preparation required	

Theory-Based Learning Activities (Must have at least 1)

Theory:	Related learning activity:
Theory:	Related learning activity:
Theory:	Related learning activity:
Academic language addressed in the session	

Objectives and Assessments

ELA Standard(s)	
Learning Objective(s) (Must be measurable and relate to your session assessment)	
Comprehension, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, or writing strategy taught across learning segment	
Informal assessment(s) and specific criteria you will use to monitor the students' progress toward the learning objective	

Learning Adaptations/Supports

Explain how you will differentiate instruction for struggling readers, writers, gifted students, ELLs, or students with exceptionalities. What learning supports will you provide?

Explicit Teaching

	What You Will Do	What You Will Say
Reflect/Review from previous session.		
Build background knowledge or access prior knowledge for the content. Introduce or review the content vocabulary needed to understand the content.		

Appendix A, continued

Explain what the strategy/ skill is called. Explain why good readers use this strategy/skill. Explain when in the reading or writing process (before, during, or after) the reader would use this skill.		
Review the skills/strategies they already know and relate it/them to the new skill.		
Introduce the new skill with a think-aloud and model the strategy ("I" part).		
Practice the skill with the students or have them practice it in small groups ("We" part).		
Informal assessment while observing students in "We" part.		
Have the students use the strategy independently ("You" part).		
Assessment		
Close: Have the students explain what the strategy/skill is called, why good readers use this strategy/skill, and when in the reading process (before, during, or after) the reader would use this skill.		

Appendix B. Teacher Candidate Focus Group Questions

1. Have you tutored children at the Discovery Center in the past or present?
2. What were your initial concerns/questions about the field placement?
3. Did you feel having the set day/time/placement was better than signing up for a field placement online?
4. What do you know about the Discovery Center/University scholarship? Was that a motivating factor for you in selecting this class?
5. Why did you sign up for the class?
6. How do the parents benefit from the partnership?
7. How do the children benefit from the partnership?
8. How do teacher candidates benefit from the partnership?
9. Did you like the teaching facilities? Why or why not?
10. Do you like co-teaching with another teacher candidate? Why or why not?
11. Did this field placement prepare you for working in the classroom? Why or why not?
12. What could be done to improve this field placement? To sustain it?
13. Would you recommend this field placement to others? Why or why not?

Appendix C. Discovery Center Director Interview Questions

1. What is your role at the Discovery Center? How long have you had this role?
2. How are you involved in the University/Discovery Center partnership?
3. Can you recall what planning was involved as this partnership was formed?
4. What were your initial fears/concerns/questions about the partnership?
5. Describe your general student population and program.
6. Describe how the parents have remained informed about the partnership.
7. Describe three great traits of the program.
8. What improvements/expansions would you like to see in the future?
9. Does this program benefit the students? How? The parents? How?
10. Have you received compliments from parents? What have they said? Complaints? What have they said?
11. Would you like to continue this partnership in the future? Why or why not? How could this partnership be sustained?

Appendix D. Discovery Center Parent Interview Questions

1. Has your child participated in tutoring services ever before? If so, describe.
2. What do you like about the university tutoring services?
3. What would you improve about the university tutoring services?
4. What perceptions does your child have about the tutoring?
5. What could be done to sustain the Discovery Center/university partnership in the future?
6. Do you have any other comments or thoughts about the program?