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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how four teacher educators, who were collaborating with school-based partners to reconceptualize the portion of the teacher education curriculum traditionally delivered in the university methods courses, approached course reconceptualization. Data from interviews with the teacher educators highlighted four themes: learning how to create a participative culture and deal with the resulting tensions; being ready to look at one's own curriculum rather than reform someone else's curriculum; recognizing the threads that unite their work as teacher educators; and learning how to balance theory and practice. Despite all of the tensions throughout this collaborative planning experience, teacher educators recognized progress in the schools and in their teacher preparation. For example, mentors and principals were acknowledging successful practice on the part of the interns and improved practice and interest in professional growth on the part of teachers. Teacher educators acknowledged that they learned from both their work with teachers and their work with each other. They were reminded that change can be a slow process in schools and that PDS curriculum teams become organisms driven by certain tasks but influenced by so much more. (Contains 28 references.) (SM)

Running Head: RECONCEPTUALIZING CURRICULUM FOR THE PDS

**Reconceptualizing Curriculum for the Professional Development
School: Methods Faculty Self-Reflections**

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In recent years, collaborative relationships have grown and flourished in teacher education programs across the country. These collaborations include teacher educators reaching out to school personnel in order to improve their teacher preparation programs with K-12 school representatives responding in kind as they see the benefits of school/university collaboration impact their own schools and classrooms. Interest in redesigning clinical experiences for preservice teachers in partnership contexts has motivated university faculty to invite input from the school-based faculty with whom the preservice teachers work. Most recently, in an effort to merge theory and practice, these collaborative experiences have also instigated the call for partnering with school-based colleagues in the conceptualization and delivery of teacher education methods courses. This study explores how one group of university faculty experienced the collaborative process of course reconceptualization with school based partners.

Because of the nature of collaboration, the impact these changes have on a teacher preparation program is largely connected to the context where the experience is delivered. One such context, the professional development school (PDSs), was developed in response to national critiques of teacher education. PDSs have been reborn as the vehicle for simultaneously transforming teacher education and K-12 education by building a new culture of professional learning within schools that will better meet the unique needs of today's students (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Goodlad, 1990; Holmes, 1986, 1990; Levine, 1992, 1997). Teacher educators and school faculty have identified PDSs as the nexus between the theory, typically delivered at the university, and practice that plays out in the schools (Darling-Hammond, 1989). To date, the teacher education partnership literature discusses the new roles, relationships, processes, and tensions

associated with building the bridge between theory and practice and maintaining a PDS. These stories delineate the hard work and struggle that go into collaborative PDS practices (Byrd & McIntyre, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Johnston et al, 2000).

Although collaboration is central to the PDS, the literature has only targeted portions of the collaborative work. For example, recent PDS literature includes reviews of collaboration around field experiences for preservice teachers (Stallings & Kowalski, 1990), or even classroom teacher input into university curriculum (Heikkinen & McDevitt, & Stone, 1992), but rarely does one find a description and analysis of the process the *university faculty* go through in reconceptualizing university curriculum to meet the needs of a PDS context. When such literature can be found, it generally includes the collaborative voices of classroom teachers, administrators and one university faculty member (Chase & Merryfield, 2000). This study fills a gap in the literature by raising the voices and experiences of a group of university faculty collaborating together, as well as with elementary teachers, administrators and curriculum specialists to blend theory and practice within the methods courses delivered in a PDS context.

Examining the experience of four teacher educators who began collaborating with school based partners to reconceptualize that portion of the teacher education curriculum traditionally delivered in the university methods courses, this study investigates how they approached course reconceptualization and explores the following research questions: How do university faculty members experience teaching methods courses within a PDS context? How does the PDS shape the faculty members' syllabi, their teaching, their relationships, and their thinking about teaching methods courses? What do faculty members learn from this process?

Background

The PDSs in this study are located in the Northeastern United States and are the result of a Holmes Partnership commitment between a Research One University and a local school district. During the 1999-2000 school year, the partnership's PDSs became the "living classrooms" for prospective teachers to learn the art and science of teaching. Their teaching develops through the completion of a full-year undergraduate internship where learning to teach is accomplished through teaming with a mentor teacher for an entire school year (Silva & Dana, in press). The interns begin this field experience during the second week in August with an intensive two-week campus based preparation experience that is co-conceptualized and co-taught by school and university based faculty. As the mentors begin their first work day, interns join them for orientation, classroom preparation, and district or school meetings. Once the year begins, the interns plan, teach, and inquire about teaching alongside their mentor on a daily basis.

In addition to teaching alongside their mentor, interns engage in seminars and coursework conducted in school sites to earn 30 credits. During the fall semester, interns take twelve credits of methods instruction: three credits each of math, science, social studies, and classroom learning environments. The fall and spring field seminars and practicum experiences comprise the additional 18 credits. As a result of the partners' commitment to blending theory and practice, K-6 faculty members collaborate with university teacher educators to develop and implement a structure for the coursework that ensures that the objectives of each of these courses are met within the school-based context. This PDS program departs from the traditional program in three important ways: 1) mentor and intern team to teach children throughout an *entire* school year, 2) mentors

work closely with teacher educators to plan the intern teacher education curriculum on an individual basis, and 3) mentor and intern engage in teacher inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

This study captures the experiences of university faculty after the first year of implementation. However, a discussion of the pilot year is warranted to contextualize the study. During the pilot year, the methods courses were left primarily for the assigned faculty instructors to design. These faculty members primarily relied on modestly “revising” their existing syllabi from the traditional university-based methods courses. Although each university faculty member made alterations in the syllabi for the pilot year, the PDS participants collectively named the pilot year’s coursework as a “disaster” and forged new plans for improving the upcoming year’s coursework.

Four reconceptualized methods courses emerged during the second year as school-based and university educators collaborated around the methods curricula. This new interest in collaboratively reconceptualizing the courses stemmed from several sources. First, as a result of the frustration experienced during the pilot year, the university faculty members became motivated to better integrate their syllabi and coursework into the PDS context. Second, out of a sense of responsibility to their interns, mentor teachers from the pilot year became committed to revising, improving, and connecting the coursework. Specifically, the mentors expressed a need to alleviate stress and redundancy experienced in the interns’ lives. Third, a grant from The Lucent Technologies Foundation provided funding and momentum for team meetings and collaborative planning around each methods course. Fourth, district curriculum specialists from each of the content areas agreed to participate.

As a result, each university faculty member met with a PDS curriculum team consisting of mentors, administrators, and curriculum specialists to reconceptualize the courses with a goal of integrating experiences into the daily work of interns in PDS schools. Additionally, the teams met on an ongoing basis to discuss the courses as they were being taught and after the courses had ended. These meetings resulted in completely restructured courses and syllabi as well as a renewed effort of bringing theory to practice and practice to theory. Through this collaboration, the partners resituated university methods courses for a new context, attempted to balance theory and practice, and lived through the struggles of negotiating curriculum all while serving as the instructor of record for PDS methods courses.

Notably, the course curriculums were altered dramatically from their traditional university-based curriculum and from the pilot year PDS curriculum. For example, the PDS Classroom Learning Environments course now consisted of management tasks for the interns to conduct in the PDS classrooms each week as well as a case study of an individual learner, activities not approached in the traditional course. Similarly, the math methods course deleted several tasks to meet the contextualized needs of interns working in K-6 classrooms. Social studies and science also made changes to match course assignments and topics to events unfolding in the PDS classrooms.

Methods

This exploratory study employed a descriptive case study methodology as presented by Merriam (1998) to describe how these four university faculty members, each working with school-based teams, experienced the process of planning and teaching a university methods course. The initial unit of analysis was the individual university

faculty member who delivered reconceptualized methods courses for interns in a PDS. After a full understanding of the individual cases, the cases were aggregated to suggest themes across case patterns (Patton, 1990). The university faculty members were selected using a “unique case selection” procedure which encourages participants to be selected based on a unique attribute inherent in the population (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). In this case, the unique attribute was the faculty member’s commitment to course reconceptualization for the PDS context. Each faculty member participated in a semi-structured interview using the general interview guide approach described by Patton (1990). This structure focused on the following three major categories of information: 1) a biographical description of the faculty member’s professional career, 2) a description of the faculty member’s experiences as a PDS methods instructor, and 3) thoughts about the possibilities for future PDS methods instruction. The following interview procedures were used.

1. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 to 75 minutes, allowing time to explore questions in depth.
2. Interviews were conducted privately with no interruptions.
3. The use of an interview guide ensured that the same areas would be discussed. The questions focused on events that were poignant to the course development.
4. Probing questions encouraged participants to expand their responses.
5. The interviews were tape-recorded, allowing the researcher to concentrate on the participant’s responses and ask probing questions.

The tape recordings of each interview were then transcribed, allowing for accurate reporting of responses and enabling the researcher to interpret specific responses in the context of the entire transcript. The typical length of the responses was in the form of many paragraphs. In an effort to provide data triangulation (Patton, 1990), other supporting data sources included the course syllabi, supporting curriculum documents, and field notes maintained by one of the researchers.

In an effort to provide investigator triangulation (Patton, 1990; Merriam, 1998), the initial analysis was conducted by an outside researcher not working in the PDS context and one of the faculty members. This data analysis consisted of many readings and rereadings to identify themes and categories (Patton, 1990) that emerged from within each participant's story. After completing the analysis of each individual case, data analysis continued to build themes that informed our understanding of the university faculties' collective experiences in methods course development and implementation. These themes were built using examples of both successful and unsuccessful examples of course development. The results of these two independent analyses were then compiled and shared with two other methods course faculty who provided member checks on the findings (Patton, 1990). In Table One, we outline who each of the instructors are, what their experience in the PDS is, and who made up the composition of the planning team with which they participated.

Individual Stories

The four faculty members varied in their experience in higher education and PDS work and this variation influenced the ways in which they collaborated with each other

and with the planning teams. The following portraits provide a look at the faculty members' individual experiences collaborating to reconceptualize methods curriculum.

Portrait One: The Leader of the PDS Pack

Jim was the “Leader of the PDS Pack.” As the new director for the Collaborative, stepping in this second year for the pilot year director who was on sabbatical, Jim was also in charge of the classroom management course. Although Jim was a seasoned faculty member who had prior collaborative relationships with professionals in the school district, this was Jim’s first year as a PDS methods course instructor. Jim expressed that as a result of collaboration, his course curriculum and assignments were well-integrated into the school’s curriculum. He brought his syllabus for the university-based course to the planning team, but “no one even looked at it.” According to Jim, the teachers were quite comfortable raising issues and the syllabus “took on a life of its own as teachers planned activities the interns could perform in their classrooms.”

Jim also remained intrigued by the possibility that the PDS could have the potential to negotiate space for teachers and university faculty members to collaboratively study curriculum. This school district has curriculum units designed around particular topics for each grade. Initially, interns felt constrained by the lack of control over their lessons, but eventually the space negotiated by the interns with the support of the university faculty and mentors for intern lesson planning and the teacher inquiry projects allowed for opportunities to enrich existing units.

Portraits Two and Three: Switching gears

Ron and Carla had been the math and science methods course instructors, respectively, during the PDS pilot year. However, these two faculty members were at

different ends of the tenure continuum. Ron was near the end and Carla was approaching the mid-point of her tenure process. Even with their varying levels of experience in higher education, they each possessed previous collaborative or PDS experiences. The theme they most described in reflecting on their encounter was the need to adjust their curriculum to this PDS context.

Ron described the challenges associated with focusing on math content and the lack of time available to complete all the necessary content development and course requirements. Throughout the year, Ron wrestled with how to meet the scope of mathematics content for interns teaching at all levels of elementary school. For example, although Ron mentions that his teaching time doubled as an instructor for a methods course (in comparison to the traditional university-based course), while revising the math methods course curriculum, the planning team found they had to cut activities and content from the syllabus. Ron felt like he was dedicating more time to his methods course but teaching less content. The mathematics planning team had to remove the peer teaching exercise and many of the readings focusing on how to teach math. They also decided to combine some assignments because “the agenda was really full.” The most prominent theme Ron expressed was the lack of time to adequately prepare preservice teachers in mathematics.

Likewise, Carla was also switching gears as she developed this science methods course. Her background as a secondary science teacher in an urban area contrasted with the suburban elementary schools found in this district. Carla also drew on her more recent work in elementary science education in another PDS setting as she reconceptualized her course. She had a history of working

collaboratively, but she too needed to adjust to her new setting. Although Carla and her team still faced challenges of implementation, Carla's second year of PDS science instruction seemed on most accounts successfully integrated into the PDS context.

Portrait Four: Insider and Outsider

Diane came to teach the social studies methods course as a "brand new" university faculty member. She completed her dissertation the year before and worked in this PDS as a Professional Development Associate (PDA), more commonly known as an intern supervisor, during the pilot and first year. As a supervisor she had the opportunity to observe interns as they negotiated their course assignments and teaching responsibilities during the pilot year. Before moving to higher education, Diane had also been a teacher in the district for many years. Therefore, she brought both PDS experience and methods course inexperience to her new position as a social studies methods instructor.

When Diane reflected on her collaborative methods course planning, her individual stories focused on the impact of her prior relationships with people in the district, the need to have things "run smoothly," and the need to assist interns in finding space to contribute to the curriculum. She viewed these themes as simultaneously benefiting and limiting the curriculum reconceptualization efforts. Since Diane knew the members of the team, she believed she avoided tensions due to her ability to foresee how different personalities would react to suggestions. On the other hand, she believed her position as a former teacher in the district also hindered her progress with the team. She noted,

Part of the problem was that they knew me as a teacher. I know no more, to them, than they know about social studies. There wasn't enough dialectic or tension around the subject area. Unfortunately, people think outsiders know more than insiders" (interview, 5/15/00, p. 5).

As the literature suggests, power in collaborative relationships is complex and often takes a great deal of negotiation to result in equitable relationships (Johnston & Kerper, 1996).

The power to change curriculum also impacted Diane's experiences as she saw the interns contributing new social studies lessons to the district's units. Diane felt she "had to convince the curriculum specialists, not the mentors, to give the interns space to write their own pieces of curriculum." Diane expressed the need to both appreciate the strengths of the local context but, in the spirit of simultaneous renewal, all participants needed to be willing to consider alternatives. She felt that the PDS could "shake all of the partners up a little bit" so that space might be provided to explore existing K-6 social studies curriculum. She felt that some members of the planning team seemed content with the status quo in both the social studies methods course and their own K-6 social studies curriculum.

Collective Stories

Although the importance of the faculty members' individual experiences within this collaborative effort cannot be denied, equally powerful themes emerged after reviewing the data across the group. We believe four themes tell the methods course faculties' collective story: 1) Learning how to create a participative culture, 2) Readiness to look at "your" curriculum, 3) The threads that unite, and 4) Balancing theory and practice.

Learning How to Create a Participative Culture

Power and parity merit continual examination in cultivating participative cultures as inequities and hierarchical contexts contradict collaborative norms (Johnston & Kerper, 1996). This school-university partnership and the university faculty members participating in the collaborative planning of methods courses had experiences in collaborative cultures previously. However, there were still some tensions within the new roles for co-constructing methods course curriculum for PDS interns. While it was unanimous among the university faculty that collaborating was a positive step toward improving the experience of PDS interns, two features of developing a participative culture challenged the university faculty – developing participant voice and encouraging inquiry.

Each faculty member noted that becoming comfortable with their changing roles and responsibilities took time. For example, university faculty described the tensions and questions they struggled with regarding how to lead the collaborative planning teams. In each case, faculty believed that their school-based partners were waiting for them to lead the meetings (Goodlad, 1975) while they were trying not to take too much control. Roles were being redefined and relationships were beginning or changing. Diane's familiarity with the district impacted the way she led her team curriculum collaboration. Diane described her leadership as a type of "planned incompetence:"

Earlier in the year I felt like I led the meetings through a type of planned incompetence. I had to act like I didn't have an idea, until they would start participating. (interview, 5/15/00, p. 10).

She believed that since collaborative decision making was rarely a part of the district's culture, the teachers were at first reluctant to offer their thoughts. However, this

awkward stage quickly passed and the faculty noted that the groups quickly became comfortable raising issues for discussion. Carla also shared her leadership approach:

Oftentimes I would bring in notes or email notes from the last meeting to remind people what we had done. We would review what was done and then identify areas of need. Then we would open it up for discussion and get started... It's not that I came in with an agenda, these were things that *we as a group* decided... (interview, 5/25/00, p. 14-15).

Shared leadership and collaborative decision making characterized this new PDS context even though all partners were renegotiating new territory in collaborative curriculum reconceptualization.

The possibilities for this culture existed within different discourses that also needed to be navigated in order for partners to understand the various positions with which members on the teams identified. As described by Johnston & Kerper (1996), "The position(s) we use to interpret the world sometimes makes it difficult to converse with someone who uses different discourses to construct interpretations. Different discourses are often tied to power relations in the social world" (p. 9). This disparity could account for the awkwardness of leading team meetings within an already collaborative culture. These partners had experienced collaborative efforts at redesigning teacher preparation, but had previously left methods courses to the direction of the assigned university faculty member. Reconceptualizing the curriculum in a collaborative manner added a new dimension to the existing partnership.

Another change that impacted culture was the PDS's commitment to creating a context of shared inquiry (Silva & Dana, in press) in a culture where inquiry was not "a way of being" (Silva, 1999). This process was complicated since this type of questioning behavior may have been considered rebellious or insubordinate to the mentors and other

planning team members. Interestingly, at the same time the university faculty members strove to encourage inquiry on the part of the teachers, the university faculty consciously fought their academic inclination to question ideas and practices. Because they wanted to develop relationships, they avoided being critical. Each university faculty member worked hard to maintain equity in meetings by creating space for their partners' voices to be heard. This question emerges, "Was the result a marginalized faculty voice?"

Readiness to Look at "Your" Curriculum

Evidence indicates that each of the four university methods instructors recognized that it took time to develop their own readiness to reshape their course curriculum and that it would also take time for their PDS partners to develop the readiness needed to investigate their curriculum as well. However, as the teams became more cohesive most participants found that they all needed to be prepared to closely and perhaps critically examine their teaching practices and curricula. Differing levels of comfort or readiness toward examining both university and district curricula existed, and these differences escalated feelings of vulnerability among many of the participants. Jim, an expert in the area of classroom management, discussed becoming vulnerable as he interacted with a particularly challenging child in one of the PDS classrooms. Diane, the new faculty member, became vulnerable as she shared her novice ideas about teacher education with other methods faculty. Ron became vulnerable as he gave up pieces of his curriculum, and curriculum specialists from the district became vulnerable as faculty and mentors questioned the existing curriculum or lack of space for interns, mentors, and university faculty to shape curriculum.

One faculty member's interaction with a member of her planning team demonstrates the mentor's emerging readiness to look into district curriculum. Carla shared that by taking some risks in her teaching she made herself vulnerable to one of the mentors on her planning team. However, this vulnerability led to co-exploration of a slice of the school's science curriculum. Carla explained,

Because she [mentor teacher] was really wanting to try some things and she was willing to make herself vulnerable, and I think, because I was also willing to try some things and do some things where I didn't know what was going to happen... it really helped develop a trust relationship with the teachers (interview, 5/25/00, p. 11).

This trust relationship resulted in other mentor teachers asking Carla for assistance with the district units as well as their willingness to reciprocate by providing Carla with access to mentor teachers' thinking about how best to encourage the interns' learning to teach science. The collaborative inquiry into a science unit on prehistoric life resulted in more mentor teachers in the district exploring an inquiry-oriented approach for their students. This exemplifies the emerging readiness to look at both teacher education and K-6 curriculum.

Similarly, new social studies curriculum ideas emerged as a result of the PDS course assignments. One example was an intern's mini-unit that looked at developmentally appropriate ways to infuse issues of race, class, and gender into an existing district developed unit on Japan (Silva & Gimbert, in press). Although tension existed at the curriculum specialist level, mentor teachers recognized and applauded the quality of the effort and planned to do similar lessons in future years. This indicated the mentors' readiness to look at their curriculum.

Readiness to look at curriculum differed across PDS roles but clearly influenced the type of collaboration that evolved. Each of the university faculty members invited mentors and curriculum specialists to co-teach or teach sections of their methods courses. School representatives were solicited to co-construct the methods course syllabi. University faculty co-taught or supported K-6 student learning in classrooms. But, readiness to inquire into K-6 curriculum continued to challenge the partnership and raised the question, “What is it about institutions that inhibits readiness to look at curriculum?”

The Threads that Unite

In discussions of collaborative planning of curriculum, there are two school cultures described by Hargreaves and Macmillan (1995). Borrowing from literature on secondary school culture and its departmental, subject-specific allegiances, commonalities can be found within this study of school-university collaborative curriculum planning. As subject-specific secondary school teachers experience the “prevailing culture of isolation, individualism and privatism” (p. 141), university faculty members typically also experience isolation from school environments within their methods curriculum. In the effort to collaboratively plan university methods curriculum with school-based representatives, the faculty members in this study are experiencing a

culture of collaboration, characterized by norms of collegiality, where teachers routinely help and support one another, agree on common goals and purposes, engage in frequent professional talk about shared concerns and problems, and (albeit more rarely) work together in each other’s classrooms as well (Little, 1990; Nias, Southworth, & Yeomans, 1989 as cited in Hargreaves & Macmillan, 1995, p. 141).

Participating in a collaborative culture has led university faculty members to become aware not only of the value of hearing their school-based partners’ voices, but also the

value of excavating the voices of each other. They found that within their various methods courses, there were “ties that bind.”

Evidence suggests that these methods instructors became aware of specific threads that united or connected their individual courses to each other. They were struck by similar ways that they understood teaching and learning. Throughout the year, these four faculty members met bimonthly to update each other and discuss their courses. Early in the year, conversations were very course specific and little connection was made across courses. However, as the year progressed each of the university faculty members began to see more connections across the courses and began to include ways that they could help interns see these connections as well.

As a result of these discussions, the university faculty began to recognize the many similarities that tied their courses together. Specifically, the underlying framework of each of the courses connected to the “trinity” of: 1) understanding children’s conceptual and prior knowledge, 2) understanding curriculum and content, and 3) understanding pedagogy. Three of the methods faculty explicitly emphasized these components as central ideas to organizing their own course and eventually began helping interns see those connections as well.

At one point Diane put a diagram on the board during her social studies class that showed the interns a way of thinking about teaching that Ron was trying to get them to see in math. Later in the year, when a mentor teacher was talking to the interns about the importance of the underlying framework to mathematics, Ron explained that the features were not unique to math but a feature of good teaching across subject areas. Carla was focusing on the future of an integrated PDS methods curriculum:

For *me*, the benefit would be to try and find more ways to integrate methods curriculum. The interns need to see ways to integrate across curriculum and thus hopefully raising the status of their ideas about their conceptions about teaching science and how they can pull that off (interview, 5/25/00, p. 9).

Carla believes that integration is the “next step, the next big challenge” for this PDS context. The PDS had now moved from collaboratively reconceptualizing methods courses with school-based partners to potentially identifying ways that the university faculty might think about reconceptualizing their courses to integrate with each other. This leads us to ponder “What might this integrated course look like?”

Balancing Theory and Practice

Two questions emerged around the issue of theory and practice when the university faculty reflected on their collaborative curriculum reconceptualization process. First, the faculty members wondered “Will we ever get the balance between theory and practice right?” Second, they asked, “Whose knowledge counts?” These struggles became apparent at a variety of times across the course of the year. Again, a connection can be made to literature on interdisciplinary team planning within secondary schools. Typically, as teachers struggle to create a “special kind of unity” for integrated curriculum (Beane, 1997), “they become concerned with the loss of subject-area content. This struggle between fulfilling content requirements and remaining loyal to the team’s goal of interdisciplinary work create[s] individual and group tension” (Nolan & Meister, 2000, p. 129). The parallel here stems from the university faculty’s inclination to preserve theory within their courses while at the same time remain loyal to the goals of bridging theory and practice within the PDS for the interns.

Although Ron wanted to connect the theory to the practice, Ron remembers feeling reluctant to allow the teachers on his team to negate the importance of “theory.” In fact, he felt the loss of some theoretical content in his course in trying to meet the needs of the PDS context. The theory/practice tensions that emerged in Ron’s course were exemplified as the math team struggled with the scope of math in elementary school. In covering this scope with theoretically-based concepts, Ron wanted to move the math course curriculum away from what interns were doing in their individual K-6 classrooms. Ron explained that he believed that it was of the utmost importance to “create a learning experience of learning how you as a teacher need to understand... that’s the essence of all teaching. If you want to say what is teaching all about, it is that I have to understand what my kids understand and don’t” (interview, 3/23/00, p. 9). At the same time, the team emphasized the importance of the interns understanding how to design lessons for their students. A tension existed between the breadth and depth needed to conceptually understand math, math methods and the demands of the PDS context.

Likewise, two other methods faculty members mentioned regret at the lack of theory in their courses brought on by the commitment to integrate the intern’s work into the context. They seemed to feel that they “gave up” some of their theoretical foundation by accommodating the needs of the schools. Jim noted, “They (the interns) know what to do, but they don’t know why they are doing it (interview, 5/17/00).” He believed that a lack of readings and discussions behind why children might act the way they do indicated a lack of theory in the interns’ preparation. Diane also shared that her group actually separated the theory from the practice in the social studies course. The team suggested

that the beginning of the semester should focus on the theory or the “university stuff” and they considered that her responsibility. Diane said, “they thought the first part of the semester would be me doing this ‘university thing.’ And they had little interest in what I was going to do at first” (interview, 5/15/00, p. 2). However, the team had lots of ideas about how the interns could spend the rest of the semester. She acknowledged that the social studies planning team had “substantial influence over the syllabus.” In reflecting on the course, Diane wondered how this course that was so focused on the practice in this particular context would prepare the interns to teach in other contexts.

However, as the year progressed teachers were becoming more interested in theory and its connection to practice. An example is Carla’s experience with her team becoming interested in her use of inquiry in a science classroom. She described them as an “emerging cadre of people who are interested in science teaching and learning.” This was a definite sign of hope for Carla in bridging the gap between theory and practice in teacher education and schools. When asked about this balance, she said,

I think we’re always going to be fiddling with that and tweaking that a little bit as we learn more about what kinds of experiences in the PDS really support the interns’ learning about learning to teach science... I think we’ll constantly be playing with that and trying to make the course and the assignments and the experiences even more connected to what’s going on in the classroom. And the connection between theory and practice is more explicit and meaningful. It’s just how do we do that? It’s constantly a negotiation, and it’s an opportunity to try some things out too, as a teaching team and as an instructional team (interview, 5/25/00, p. 9).

The theory and practice divide has always proved to be a difficult one to bridge for preservice teachers.

Clearly, these university faculty members recognized that the methods courses needed to be redesigned to meet the needs of interns in the PDS. However, several

questions emerged. Does the PDS necessitate that universities completely shift gears toward existing K-12 curriculum? Whose knowledge was going to be represented in the courses? Was the knowledge of different participants really so different?

Discussion

This study has raised the voices of university faculty engaged in the process of methods course reconceptualization for the PDS context. Although the themes that emerge in this study grow out of the experience of these university faculty members in this one PDS context, the accounts of collaborative curriculum development highlight the substantial impact a PDS context can have on the conceptualization of methods courses. Specifically, this study outlines four themes that university faculty members collectively wrestled with as they co-constructed curriculum with school based partners.

The faculty described the tensions associated with creating a participative planning team culture that included a focus on inquiry. The tensions around leadership suggest that university faculty interested in partnership work could benefit from participative leadership development. The “contradictions in collaboration” (Johnston, 1997) persist, and for productive collaborative cultures to flourish, partners must explore power and parity within their positions, discourses, and efforts. Additionally, if university faculty seek to create a culture of inquiry as a part of the PDS mission, a commitment to simultaneous renewal must also be made by the local school district. This study suggests that school or district cultures that exclude stances conducive to teacher inquiry into curriculum areas may provide substantial challenges to recognizing PDS goals.

These faculty members also identified “readiness” as a central theme for facilitating curriculum change. Generally, all participants found it easier to critically

reform someone else's curriculum rather than their curriculum. Readiness to look at curriculum began with the university faculty allowing partners to reshape methods course curriculum and then moved, more tentatively, to mentor teachers allowing university faculty to collaboratively construct K-6 curriculum. This partnership continues to struggle with the readiness issue at the district curriculum office. Districts who agree to engage in PDS partnerships need to consider their institutional readiness to provide space for inquiry into curriculum. One can imagine that as state standards and testing become more integrated into school district curriculum, this may become an area of future tension for partnerships interested in well-integrated teacher education curriculum. Because of the high level of faculty mobility in K-6 schools and higher education, the readiness issue- at the university faculty, K-6 faculty, and institutional level- becomes particularly important to PDS contexts.

Third, these faculty members recognized the threads that unite their work as teacher educators. In fact, they indicated the potential for working toward a more interdisciplinary model of teacher education. Interestingly, this study finds evidence in the literature on interdisciplinary curriculum (Nolan & Meister, 2000; Beane, 1997; Siskin & Little, 1995; and Hayes-Jacobs, 1989) that parallels the tensions within school-university planning of methods curriculum. There are subject-specific (or content) loyalties as well as team (or collaborative) allegiances. In terms of the unifying themes found across the methods courses, university faculty could benefit from frequent collegial conversations around issues of teacher education and the development of shared frameworks that could help prospective teachers see the connections among subject areas.

As university faculty negotiated “their” curriculum, they also became aware of the emerging imbalance between theory and practice. Even in a context dedicated to linking theory and practice, the tensions between the two remain. However, this tension led to new questions about the nexus between theory and practice. Is it necessary to include readings of theoretical literature in preservice teacher education? Can a bridge be built across these notions and if so what will it look like? Is there a focus on “doing” at the expense of “knowing why?” Future studies of curriculum in PDS contexts can shed more light on what the nexus between theory and practice looks like in partnership contexts.

Even taking into account all of the tensions throughout this collaborative planning experience, university faculty members recognized progress in the schools and in their teacher preparation. For one, mentors and principals were acknowledging successful practice on the part of the interns and improved practice and interest in professional growth on the part of the teachers. These university faculty members acknowledged that they learned from both their work with teachers and their work with each other. They also were reminded that change can be a slow process in schools and that the PDS curriculum teams become organisms driven by certain tasks but influenced by so much more. This exploratory study captured the experiences of these methods faculty and begins a conversation that we hope others will contribute to as partnership work continues to flourish. We believe that other university faculty interested in co-constructing curriculum with school-based partners could benefit from recognizing and studying many of these same tensions.

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