

# *Partnership Across Programs and Schools: Fostering Collaboration in Shared Spaces*

Heejeong Sophia Han, University of South Florida  
Audra K. Parker, George Mason University  
Ilene R. Berson, University of South Florida

**ABSTRACT:** Recent reports call for a structural transformation of teacher preparation programs with increased attention to quality field-based learning experiences for pre-service teachers. Ideally, this occurs in the context of robust university-school partnerships. The challenges lie in identifying such school sites and building meaningful, reciprocal relationships, particularly in large Colleges of Education that house a multitude of certification programs. This paper discusses how two programs within a department collaborated across programs to create school partnerships in shared spaces. Reflections on success and challenges, implications for reform efforts, and thoughts for future directions are shared.

*NAPDS Essentials Addressed: #2/A school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community; #4/A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practices by all participants; #5/Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants.*

## **Introduction**

Recent calls to transform teacher education from its historically isolated focus on theory and pedagogy have resulted in a seismic shift toward field-based preparation as a context for theory to practice connections (AACTE, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2009; NCATE, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). For example, the 2010 National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Learning urged teacher educators to turn teacher preparation “upside down and shift away from a norm which emphasizes academic

preparation and coursework loosely linked to school based experiences...[and] move to programs that are fully grown in clinical practice and interwoven with academic content and professional courses” (p. ii). With increased attention to clinical experiences, extended clinical preparation in authentic contexts may increase pre-service teachers’ access to practitioner knowledge and improve preparation for employment in the districts within which they have worked. In addition, opportunities for pre-service teachers to learn in high quality field experiences may enhance outcomes for P-12 student learning and development of pre-service teachers’ inquiry and analytical skills (Campbell, 2008; NCATE, 2010).

Colleges of Education often seek Professional Development School (PDS) partnerships as contexts within which high quality field experiences can be cultivated (NAPDS, 2008). These robust school-university partnerships are more than sites for placing interns. Rather, they adhere to nine tenets that include a comprehensive mission that considers the needs of both the university and the school, a shared responsibility for teacher preparation, engagement in professional development by all stakeholders, and inquiry into practice as a means for continuous improvement (NAPDS, 2008). The National Council for Accreditation in Teacher Education (NCATE, 2010) further characterizes the potential power of PDSs for improving the quality of teaching and enhancing student learning through partnerships between professional education programs (i.e., university faculty, pre-service teachers) and P-12 schools (i.e., administrators, in-service teachers). Recent research indicates pre-service teachers prepared in PDS school sites are better prepared for their first year of teaching (Featherstone, 2007; Soares & Soares, 2002), have more positive attitudes and perceptions about teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Johnson & Birkeland, 2004; Ridley et al., 2005), and score higher on performance evaluations (Castle, Fox, & Souder, 2006).

From the university perspective, one of the challenges of engaging in partnership work is finding school administrators who are willing to open their doors to university faculty and students. This is particularly difficult for larger universities housing a multitude of undergraduate and graduate certification programs. The search for school partners and placements becomes a feeding frenzy, and the toll of constant requests by faculty and students for structured field experiences and class project sites can overwhelm schools – particularly those located in proximity to a partnering university. Add in multiple universities in the immediate region

seeking collaboration, and the situation is exacerbated. Additionally, universities committed to such connections must consider whether they are focusing on partnerships that exist in name only or ones that actually build mutually beneficial collaborations. The question becomes “How can we foster meaningful, high quality partnership development with so many factors in play?”

The purpose of this paper is to share how the current context of teacher education in our university setting drove the two programs on which we report here to “share space” in creating school university partnerships and ultimately fostered an intra-departmental collaboration enhancing pre-service teachers’ professional development opportunities. We first describe our context and our reform efforts, and then share our initial findings and our reflections for future directions.

## Our Partnership Context

It is important to understand our departmental and college contexts in order to situate our dilemma with the ‘shared space’ we were considering in our partnership. We are in the seventh largest College of Education in the country, and currently there are more than ten programs seeking collaboration with schools in our local communities. Our context situates us in the county of one of the largest urban school districts in the nation. Within our own department, there are four programs seeking to place 200+ students each semester. The undergraduate Elementary Education teacher residency program places students in the six Title I schools in the immediate vicinity of the university. These students agree to complete over 200 hours in field experiences as well as a final year-long residency.

In addition, our traditional undergraduate Elementary Education program recently transitioned to a cohort model. In a given year, four cohorts of 30 students each are

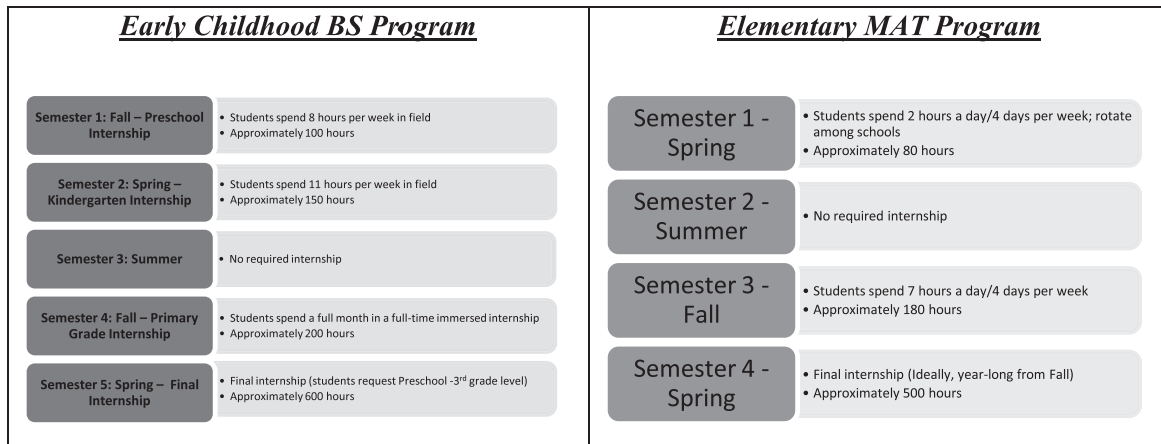


Figure 1. Structure of Two Program

enrolled in our department. To fulfill the field experience needs of students in the elementary cohort program, eight Title I schools were sought in the first year of program implementation, based on geographic location and principal buy-in to the partnership mission, and eventually clustered into four pairs.

The cohort students are placed for their first three field experiences in one of two schools in their cluster. These school clusters are located throughout the school district. As the revised undergraduate cohort program moves into its second year, an additional eight schools will be needed for partnership development. Pre-service teachers in the cohort, in collaboration with administration, may elect to return to one of their cohort schools to complete their final internship, or they may move outside of their cohort schools. It is within this context that the two programs described below are situated.

## Our Programs

The Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) in Elementary Education is a graduate program for students who have an undergraduate degree outside of education but are seeking certification to teach in grades K-6. Recently

the program moved from part time and evening courses to a full time, day-based, cohort model. This change coincided with the NCATE and NAPDS calls for an increase in course-based field opportunities and a need to foster high quality field experiences such as a year-long residency. The program of study is currently 53 credit hours spread across four semesters. The first semester requires students to spend 6 weeks in a K-6 classroom observing, assisting, and working with individual and small groups of children. In the summer semester, MAT students take planning and assessment courses on an alternative calendar in the months of May/June. Their courses are structured so that a portion of each is spent in a field experience in which they can gather information about learner differences and plan, teach, and assess instruction. Their final two semesters (fall and spring) form a year-long residency. MAT students begin the school year with a classroom teacher, and spend four half days in the field. The remaining half days are spent in coursework at the university. The MAT students finish their program with a final, full-time internship. These may occur in the context of the same classroom, the same school, or in another setting altogether.

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) program in this university is following a

cohort model with five semesters of coursework, including a summer semester between their junior and senior year. The ECE program is preparing pre-service teachers to teach students from Pre-K through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. A total of four internships are built into the program to provide diverse experiences across the grade range (NAECTE, 2008). Level 1 internship during the first fall semester is in a preschool setting; Level 2 during the following spring semester is in a kindergarten setting; and Level 3 during the second fall semester is in a primary grade setting. Each level of internship is accompanied by a weekly seminar for the entire cohort to come together for information sharing, debriefing, and reflecting on their experiences. Two official observations by the university supervisor are required for each level of internship. During these three levels of internship, ECE faculty members determine placements in school sites in which emerging partnerships are developing for each grade span. The final Level 4 internship is a 16-week long full time internship; however, historically the school district handled placement decisions. There is a separate capstone seminar course required concurrently during this final internship.

A key part of our departmental reform efforts included moving from an attitude of 'schools as placement sites' and toward a philosophy immersed in growing partnerships with schools. Fortunately, the MAT program faculty had previously established a positive working relationship with two schools: a successful charter school, Triton Elementary, and a high performing Title I school, Brooks Elementary. Triton had been a long-standing 'friend' of the department and had a keen interest in maximizing connections with the university. Moving from haphazard activities and on the path towards partnership was a logical next step (NAPDS, 2008). In fact, school administrators were thrilled at the opportunities for

greater access to MAT students and university faculty. While the relationship with Brooks was new at the time of our program reform, the administrators were eager to explore opportunities for advancing the partnership. In particular the principal saw the mutual benefits for both her teachers' professional development and pre-service teachers' learning (NAPDS, 2008).

Likewise, the ECE program faculty also had previous working relationships with several schools, and of these, two Title I schools - Shelly Elementary and Terra Elementary - were identified as possible sites to pursue further partnership based on the level of administrators' and collaborating teachers' receptiveness and buy-in. An earlier pilot for the Level 3 field experience met with success at these school sites. The principals at each site sought out teachers who were skilled in interpersonal relationships, interested in assuming a role as a mentor, and not only committed to sharing their highly competent expertise in the classroom, but also willing to grow through a reciprocal process of shared professional inquiry and development.

In return, for every 300 contact hours supervising interns, the collaborating teacher earned a certificate that waived the matriculation fees for up to six credit hours of coursework at any state university. The 300 contact hours could be earned over a number of semesters provided there were at least 100 hours of direct supervision per semester. For the Early Childhood Level 3 internship the collaborating teachers received 200 contact hours for each intern supervised. In addition to the Elementary schools, the ECE program also was in the process of developing partnerships with a preschool on-campus that served as a site for Level 1 interns and final interns who preferred the Pre-K grade level.

Separately, faculty in the Elementary MAT and in the ECE programs recognized

that two schools would not be sufficient for meeting the individual program's placement needs. However, we also realized that finding new school sites with (1) engaged administrators, (2) high quality teachers, and (3) a climate open to engaging with university faculty was no easy task, particularly given the commitment by many nearby schools to engage in partnership work with the undergraduate elementary program in our department. The resulting collaboration between our two programs emerged from this complex contextual dilemma.

## Our Reform Efforts: Cross-Program Collaboration and School Partnership

The experiences and our subsequent learnings emerged from our collective reflections and shared anecdotal stories as we engaged in partnership across programs and schools in shared spaces. The following is a chronological description of the programmatic reform efforts for ECE and Elementary MAT programs.

### Phase 1: Advanced Planning

Based upon ongoing concerns with the practical dilemma of our context, as well as the newly shaped vision of partnership, we, the coordinators of the ECE and Elementary MAT programs, agreed to pursue shared partnership sites. We first reviewed each program sequence and internship structure to ensure the shared partnership was feasible and could accommodate the intern placement schedule across the range of grade levels. Because the ECE program (Pre-K through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade) and the MAT program (K-6<sup>th</sup> grade) overlapped in the primary years, we mapped out a semester by semester plan to ensure placement availability for both programs. Then, we separately initiated contact with school administrators with whom we had prior working relationships to explore their

interest in expanding the partnership across two programs. At this point, schools were identified based on the history of administrators' and collaborating teachers' receptiveness. Triton, Brooks, Shelly, and Terra were on board.

Rather than bring in a prescribed agenda to our first meetings with each administrative team, we instead opted to listen to their perspectives about this emerging partnership. We also inquired about their schools' professional development areas of interest. We asked about vision and mission statements, and how those were reflected in their expectations for interns. Instead of giving them the number of interns we need to place at their school, we solicited the number of collaborating teachers the principals wished to recommend as mentors.

It is interesting to note significantly smaller number of collaborating teachers were recommended by the principals than we have worked with in the past. For example, Shelly and Terra offered the ECE program only three and four collaborating teachers, respectively, when they had previously hosted seven and eight interns during the prior school year. This signaled to us that administrators were cognizant of the importance of identifying collaborating teachers who possessed the requisite skills and dispositions for mentoring the interns. At the same time, this led us to the pragmatic problem of identifying several additional partnership schools in order to ensure a sufficient number of collaborating teachers for our interns every semester.

We re-reviewed our resources to seek additional partnership schools. Using recent literature describing the nature of effective field placements (e.g., Ronfeldt, 2012), our prior working relationships with multiple schools, as well as information about outstanding teaching practices recognized by school district personnel, we contacted Littlewood, Henry, and Lowten Elementary Schools to explore possible partnerships. The administration from Henry and Lowten expressed their interest, but



requested a time extension in order to become better ready for the partnership. Since both principals in these sites were in their first year in new administrative positions, we agreed to revisit the possibility at a later date. Although it was not an immediate success for us to expand our partnership schools, we assessed that it was a good indicator that our partnership was growing upon a truly mutual and organic foundation. We believe this is a critical ingredient for long-lasting, successful partnership work. We were excited that the principal at Littlewood instantly understood the mutual benefits of partnership and engaged in a dialogue with us. Fortunately, Littlewood was a large school and was able to offer us the necessary number of collaborating teachers to accommodate our students.

### Phase 2: During the Break

During the summer, after receiving the number of collaborating teachers provided by each school principal, we explored effective strategies for assigning interns in the aforementioned five partnership schools. A review of the literature underscored the importance of the relationship between interns and collaborating teachers (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Zeichner & Conklin, 2005). However there were few practical suggestions in this literature regarding how to best make the match. Tripp and Eick (2008) used a simple personality assessment (e.g., MBTI) to match interns with collaborating teachers. This appeared to be a promising approach, but was not possible for us at the time since we did not yet know the collaborating teachers.

As an alternative, we decided to explore two different strategies. First, we introduced the unique characteristics of each school (i.e., charter school, technology-focused school, Title I school, etc.) to the interns and surveyed their preferences of schools and/or grade levels. Then, using an online survey, we had interns self-assess their personality based on

the descriptors each school principal shared with us during the initial meeting (i.e., risk taker, technology friendly, team player, etc.). We used the information to assign interns with most compatibility to each corresponding school.

### Phase 3: A New Academic Year

As the new school year approached, we communicated with each school's principal to confirm the number of collaborating teachers and make specific assignments. Across the schools, there were staff changes over the summer, and we had to adjust some of our initial placement plans. Once all the intern assignments were finalized, we held an orientation at each school during their pre-planning week to meet all of the collaborating teachers hosting interns across the two programs. The purpose of this orientation was to introduce our new model of sharing school sites across programs. This ensured that the entire school staff understood who was in the school, why interns' requirements differed depending on programs, and why attendance timelines varied.

One of the key features we wanted to embed as part of this partnership was to align the field experience with the school district calendar, which preceded the beginning of the university semester. Since the school district calendar begins before the university, interns historically did not start their internship until the schools had been in session for several weeks. In order to provide interns with the benefits of experiencing the process of preparing the classroom for the new school year and to offer collaborating teachers extra assistance during the busy first days of instruction, interns were asked to participate during planning week and trainings and then attend open house and the first day/week of school. In the case of ECE interns, one of the summer courses was offered on an alternative schedule calendar, and participation during these days counted as part of the course requirements.

#### Phase 4: Planning for Final Internship

Once the semester started, we initiated planning of the final internship for the following spring semester. Our vision was to foster a year-long continuous internship model or a teacher residency model. This would allow the dyad – the current intern and collaborating teacher – to stay together for the entire school year. Research suggests interns in year-long experiences are fully immersed within the school/classroom culture and more likely to develop a deeper conceptual understanding of the complexities of teaching (Conway & Clark, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2007). Since the collaborating teachers needed additional qualifications (i.e., three years of teaching experience and Clinical Education training) to mentor a final intern, the first step was to determine the current collaborating teachers' eligibility to host a final intern. At the same time, we surveyed the interns' preferred grade level. This was particularly important as some of the ECE interns wanted to choose Pre-K or Kindergarten placements.

After the first round of data gathering, 11 out of 24 ECE intern/collaborating teacher pairs and 22 of the 28 MAT pairs were willing to continue in the same placement. In some cases, collaborating teachers had the prerequisite years of teaching experience but did not have Clinical Education training. Our department offered an online format of the training in order to accommodate teachers' varying schedules. Each partnership school's principal played a critical role at this stage in both identifying additional collaborating teachers and encouraging participation in this endeavor.

For both Elementary MAT and ECE interns who needed a different grade level, they were given options to be moved within school, to another partnership school, or defer the placement to the school district standard process. In the case of ECE interns, all but two interns, which accounts for 93% of the cohort, requested continued placement within the partnership schools, either remaining in their current classroom or moving to a

Pre-K or Kindergarten classroom in a partnership site. Similarly, all but three of the MAT interns requested staying in the partnership schools – and these three preferred being in a county closer to their homes. With the information about collaborating teachers' eligibility and interns' grade preference, we worked closely with each principal to finalize placement decisions. After several rounds of rearrangements, we were able to submit a request for final internship placement to the school district.

It is important to note that in the past, the district decided upon final internship placements, and the University program had limited, if any, input. Thus, at this point, in an effort to formalize our partnership and confirm our collaborative requests, both the college and an administrator at each school site submitted a list to the district with agreed upon placement requests. Once the collaborating teachers' qualifications were all approved by the school district, we received final confirmation.

#### Findings and Reflections

This paper reports on our continuing efforts to improve partnership school structures by sharing a space across two different programs. As we look back at our initial foray into collaborative partnerships across program and school contexts, we recognize many promising elements of our reform efforts. In this section, we will share five of those promising findings and our collective reflections that we believe were critical in achieving such improvement.

#### Final Internship Placement

As a result of continuous communication with partnership school administrators and the school district, we mutually decided upon the final internship placements with intentionality. As university faculty, we finally felt we had a voice and a sense of agency in the final internship placement process and could

improve our interns' overall experiences. For instance, in the previous school year, 28 ECE final interns were placed in a total of seventeen different schools geographically located all across the district. This year, in contrast, 21 out of 24 (87.5%) interns were placed within the five partnership schools with the remaining three placed in two additional schools, resulting in a total of seven different schools as final internship placement sites. Additionally, eight out of the 21 (38%) remained within a year-long internship in their current placements, and all but two (93%) were placed in the grade level that they requested. This also is a significant increase from the previous years when only 33% were placed in their requested grade level.

For the MAT program, in the previous years, the MAT final interns were also placed throughout the district with no other MAT intern at their school site. Additionally there was little attention to preferred grade level requests – in fact, many students commented that they wondered if their requests were even considered at all. This year, however, sixteen out of 28 (57%) interns remained in our partnership schools for final internship, with eleven of the 16 (69%) staying in the initial placement. A number of factors that contributed to the remaining students not being in the partnership sites includes the following: one MAT student deferred her internship to the fall semester, two received paid teaching positions in the district, three opted for another county, and six were placed in the district at large due to lack of clinically trained teachers remaining in the partnership school sites.

### Internship Supervision

Such intentional placements also reshaped the supervision, particularly for the final internship. First of all, from the university supervision perspective, final internship supervisors could focus their work in significantly fewer schools, which in turn enabled them to build more substantive

relationships and provide more context-based support. Secondly, from the school and collaborating teachers' perspectives, having a group of interns meant having a stronger connection with the college, particularly through the university supervisor. This continuity encouraged the collaborating teachers to view themselves as an integral part of the college whose mission is to prepare the next generation of teachers. For instance, collaborating teachers were invited to the internship seminar and co-conducted teacher inquiry projects with their interns. Lastly, from the interns' perspectives, being placed in a school where the collaborative partnership culture is present has allowed interns to feel supported and connected to the school culture during their final internship. This also enhanced the intern's comfort level with their school and collaborating teacher, which in turn allowed them to explore new strategies during their final internship.

These changes also increased the presence of university faculty and supervisors at the partnership schools. Because supervisors were focused on one or two school sites, more attention could be paid to partnership development. By having the time to invest in extended drop-in visits, supervisors could work with children, with collaborating teachers, with interns, and truly be seen as a partner, rather than as an outsider. In one case, a faculty invited the collaborating teachers to participate in on-site, bi-weekly seminars with the interns. They served as experts on topics of interest and participated in shared readings related to the specific needs of the school alongside the interns. Because of richer engagement in the school context, supervisors also developed a more thorough understanding of the collaborating teachers' styles and may use this knowledge in future placement decisions.

### Communication and Relationship

Additionally, by having sustained relationships and connection with the collaborating



teachers, some of the decision-making occurred in a more organic and less bureaucratic fashion. For instance, when we surveyed the partnership schools to gauge collaborating teachers' interest in and eligibility for hosting a final intern, we started the conversation with the principals. Although earlier conversations with the administrators had included discussion of an option for a year-long internship placement, one principal was hesitant to move forward to ask the collaborating teachers for the full academic year because she thought the teachers would resist given the pressures of upcoming standardized testing and teacher evaluations.

However, when the university supervisor individually approached the collaborating teachers, she received instant buy-in from nearly all of the eligible teachers. Teachers noted the benefits for the children of having an intern in the room who has gotten to know the children since the beginning of the year, observed the class progress over time, and become familiar with the teacher's approach to instruction. The collaborating teachers also found personal satisfaction in developing their roles as mentors and watching the interns transform into a creative and confident colleagues as the year progressed. It made sense to them to sustain continuity for the benefit of the children, the intern, and the collaborating teacher.

This feedback was particularly rewarding for us to hear because it was a clear indicator that the collaborating teacher, who is a key player in this partnership, saw the value of this approach. At the same time, one collaborating teacher expressed her desire to withdraw from the final intern mentorship due to other commitments that would limit her engagement. It was inspiring that a trusting relationship existed for her to communicate with us without the burden of administrative power. In the end, the university supervisor gathered the collaborating teachers' decisions and brought them to the principal, who then was pleased to approve the placements. This process served as a prime example of powerful bottom-up

decision-making based on healthy relationships among the collaborating teacher, intern, and the university supervisor, rather than a top-down communication from school or district administrators.

### Year-long Internship

When we first proposed the year-long internship idea, we were met with enthusiasm from all principals, collaborating teachers, and interns. The prospect of seeing a school year from start to finish was exciting for the interns. Collaborating teachers relished the idea of sustained collaboration for a full year and expressed excitement about the positive impact on their learning and on their student outcomes. Moreover, principals were thrilled at the possibilities of having a stronger employment pool of interns who had already spent one full year on their campus. From an administrative hiring perspective, this translated to potential first year teachers who were (1) acculturated to their school and community context, (2) familiar with and engaged in their school's community of professional practice, and (3) already mentored in curriculum implementation aligned with their school's mission and goals.

There always have been interns hired by their internship placements every year. In the case of the ECE program, Shelly, Terra, and Triton each hired one of our final interns last year. Given that the principals are always looking for strong interns to hire for possible positions as new teaching staff, and now we have increased the number of interns completing a year-long internship, the employment trend certainly would appear to be on the upswing. For instance, although hiring for the new school year is not underway at this time, at least one ECE and two MAT final interns were offered positions at their current placements prior to the end of the internship - a highly unusual practice. Moreover, three ECE final interns were identified by the partnership

school principals as their candidates for new hires.

### Training for Collaborating Teachers

Lastly, the training opportunities for the collaborating teachers were made available in a more meaningful way. The Clinical Education training is a requirement for collaborating teachers to host a final intern. The training was traditionally offered by the school district through three day, face-to-face sessions, typically scheduled during the school break. The schedule was not flexible for the participants, and all the requirements to fulfill the training had to be completed within those three days, which caused some dialogue about the purpose and quality of the training. During the collaborative partnership efforts, with agreement from the school district, we were able to offer the Clinical Education training in an online format taught by one of the faculty members in our own department. The online delivery allowed collaborating teachers to get the necessary information with significantly increased flexibility. The instructor was familiar with the ongoing partnership efforts and the needs of the collaborating teachers, and was in continuous communication with us to support this endeavor (i.e., adjustments to some of the requirement due dates).

### The Work Continues. . .

As we conclude the first year of our collaborative efforts, we cannot help but think about where we go next. In this section, we reflect upon a number of challenges emerged that will guide our next steps as we continue to build our collaboration across programs and with schools.

### Challenges

As always, time and communication have been the biggest challenges in this experience. As program coordinators, it took time

to navigate the communication layers among key players (interns, collaborating teachers, principals, university faculty and staff, district personnel) in the partnership. Since we believed it is critical for both program coordinators to be fully aware of the work and to represent a harmonious voice from the university, we touched base with each other before communicating with partnership school principals. In one particular incident there was a miscommunication problem when we were reviewing collaborating teachers' qualifications, and a school district administrator was included in one of the communication chains. We were attempting to clarify district policies in effect, and the district administrator was trying to confirm how the written policy was operationalized. However, the principal of one of the partnership schools perceived that we did not trust her articulation of the policy and instead brought the issue to the district level. Although the incident was resolved through follow-up communications, it was a poignant example how much time and delicate care is needed when navigating multiple lines of communication within the partnership.

Time also became a factor in terms of the timeline necessary for finalizing internship placements for the fall and spring semesters. We needed to get the names of the collaborating teachers early to provide them to our interns prior to the start of school. Invariably, teachers move schools, sections are dropped, and changes are made in grade levels in the weeks prior to start of the new academic year. These realities required flexible approaches and constant communication with administrators. In addition, the timeline for final internship placements was in mid-September, only a few weeks after our students began their placement. As such we had to ascertain fairly quickly from the collaborating teacher/intern dyads their preferences for spring. A tight timeline again became a factor in December when we received our confirmation of final placements. In some cases, teachers did not

complete the Clinical Education training as anticipated, and last minute moves had to be made. This necessitated navigating layers of bureaucracy both at the university and district level. We had to be in constant communication with principals to make sure we were receiving consistent placement information.

Another concern we are anticipating is the issue of possible school fatigue. While we are optimistic that the schools will embrace our partnership and all of the advantages of having large numbers of interns on site, we are concerned with maintaining a long-lasting mutually beneficial relationship. We are particularly concerned about the ECE program, which has a Level 2 internship when all the interns are placed in Kindergarten classrooms. While this internship structure is based on early childhood research (NAECTE, 2008) that kindergarten teaching and learning experiences are essential and critical, this requirement causes an overlapping demand of kindergarten classrooms within the partnership schools. If we add some elementary interns who prefer to have kindergarten as their final internship grade, the challenge intensifies.

We believe that collaborating teachers hosting interns benefit professionally from engagement in the teacher education process, and that their children also benefit. However, we are aware that hosting an intern requires a shift in how classroom instruction is approached. Our emphasis on co-teaching, if exercised with fidelity, has amazing potential, but it is a change, nevertheless, and will take time for teachers to adjust (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010). In addition, we cannot overlook that hosting an intern comes with additional responsibilities that can be time consuming. As such we are aware of the possibility of overburdening particular teachers or grade levels and want to avoid this. As one remedy to this challenge, the ECE program partnered with two more schools just for the Level 2 kindergarten internship placements. The possibility of having a full partnership with these new two schools is

being examined as we go through this exploratory process.

A final challenge was completely unanticipated. The nature of the two programs – ECE and MAT – draws upon different populations of students. ECE interns are typically in their early twenties and are working on their Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood. MAT interns' ages range from early twenties and up. In many cases, these students are career switchers and have had at minimum 2–3 years in another profession. The differences in levels of maturity, just by the very nature of their life experiences, were at times evident in the 'real world' of elementary schools. MAT students were closer in age to many of the teachers, and as such were readily able to connect with the teachers. Their work experiences prior to pursuing a graduate degree also led to a different level of maturity in terms of the 'work expectations' of a professional position. At times, the ECE interns expressed concern with being compared to the MAT interns, and felt like they were less favored by the school administrators. In fact, in one case, a principal suggested that a collaborating teacher would host a final intern, but only if it was an MAT intern.

Nonetheless, our department data suggest that graduates of both programs are highly sought after candidates for teaching positions by the school districts, approaching nearly 90% rate of employment upon graduation, with no major difference between the two programs. Although some level of competitiveness might enhance interns' motivation for growth, we do not intend to encourage any unnecessary tension between the two groups of interns. This challenge made us think deeper how we should embrace the collaborative learning atmosphere among our interns. How could we encourage them to see this cross-program shared partnership as a collaboration opportunity rather than a competitive contest? How could we have them focus on individual strengths and learn to identify the assets of others instead of striving to be classified as

better than their peers? We also wondered how the ECE interns' self-perceptions and self-competence levels might differ when compared by grade levels? In order to ensure this shared partnership becomes a positive learning experience for both programs' interns, this last unexpected challenge is worthy of more conversation among all stakeholders.

### Thoughts for the Next Step

Our first and most pressing goal is to explore strategies for improving our matching dilemma. We ultimately hope to be able to assign an intern to a school, and more particularly to a collaborating teacher, so as to maximize the quality of fit and to enhance the learning experience for all parties. One approach may be to make more efficient use of dispositional data. At the end of each semester in our programs, a dispositional assessment is completed by the university supervisor or faculty, collaborating teacher, as well as by the interns. By looking at these longitudinal triangulated data, the program coordinators may better understand each intern prior to this upper level field placement.

To better identify the assets of the collaborating teachers, we are developing a system of data collection to be completed by the interns, university supervisors, and faculty to document each collaborating teachers' strengths. Such information will be used by university faculty to make data-driven placement decisions that offer the best possible match between an intern and a collaborating teacher. Finally, the very nature of the partnerships creates a context within which we can really get to know the teachers. In the end, this may be our most powerful tool for matching interns and collaborating teachers.

In addition, the idea of 'co-teaching' became more salient, especially in response to our unanticipated challenge described above. While the concept of co-teaching is often introduced in integrating special education and general education instruction, we are

interested in exploring the possibilities across our two programs (Bacharach et al., 2010). While there is some overlap in terms of certification, general strengths for Early Childhood Education students lie in teaching primary grades (K through 2<sup>nd</sup>) and Elementary Education students in intermediate grades (3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup>). Early in the process of our collaboration, we envisioned engaging the interns in grade level exchanges, but realized that was a bit too much to implement during our first shared partnership year. The plans for exchanging grade level expertise across programs and co-teaching could be excellent mechanisms, maximizing the strengths of interns who are already in the same school site.

As we reflect on this collaborative efforts, we are thinking forward about our next steps in connection with the PDS framework. When identifying developmental guidelines of PDS partnership, NCATE (2001) recognizes the importance of building a strong foundation based on collective interests, mutual commitment, and trust. We emphasized these outcomes from the inception of our work and revisited them throughout the process. We also found that our initial focus is already aligned with a few core tenets of NAPDS (2008), such as a shared responsibility for teacher preparation, engagement in professional development by all stakeholders, and inquiry into practice as a means for continuous improvement.

As we understand that we are still in the early stages of this collaborative partnership and working toward the PDS model, we are aware that continuous and simultaneous renewal of the goals and priorities is essential. We feel certain, nonetheless, that collaboration within and between partners who are willing to learn from and with each other will sustain our work. <sup>SUP</sup>

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**Heejeong Sophia Han** is Assistant Professor and Undergraduate Program Coordinator of Early Childhood Education program at the University of South Florida. Her research interests include strengthening early childhood pre-service teacher education through integration of clinical experiences and coursework.



**Audra K. Parker** is Associate Professor and Coordinator of Elementary Education program at George Mason University. Her research interests include elementary teachers preparation and innovations in teacher education.

**Ilene R. Berson** is Professor and Program Leader of Early Childhood Education program at the University of South Florida. Her research includes international collaborative studies on reform initiatives in early childhood.