

## **Early Field Experience Innovations to Increase Positive Impact on K–12 Students**

**Anny Fritzen Case, Ph.D.  
John Traynor, Ph.D.**

**Gonzaga University**

### **Abstract**

This paper describes several innovations to an early field experience emerging from a community, school, and university partnership focused on a middle school serving diverse students from low-income neighborhoods. With the primary goal of utilizing teaching candidates to provide direct academic, social, and instructional support to the middle school students, university faculty and middle school educators worked in collaboration to simultaneously provide rich professional learning experiences for the preservice teachers. Preliminary assessment of the model suggests promising practices of clustering, hybrid roles of university and school-based educators, and expanding contexts for field experiences beyond the traditional classroom.

***Keywords:*** field experience, middle school partnerships

## **Case and Traynor**

The clinical component of learning to teach, whether in the form of observations, practicums, or student teaching, has long been considered an essential pillar of teacher preparation, and our field has placed considerable attention on identifying the most effective ways to craft these crucial field experiences. In the current political environment, however, external mandates on classroom teachers and schools have in some cases discouraged their involvement in preservice teacher preparation. For example, with test scores tied to evaluations, some teachers are reticent to turn over their students to novice teachers. More commonly, teachers and administrators feel stretched too thin and without time and energy to host preservice teachers or engage in partnerships with teacher preparation programs. Yet without access to field placements, mentor teachers, and K–12 partnerships, teacher preparation programs (TPPs) are eviscerated. At the same time, with diminished involvement with teacher education, K–12 schools also stand to lose valuable human and intellectual resources.

In short, K–12 schools and teacher preparation programs share a symbiotic relationship—one worth cultivating and preserving. The many challenges notwithstanding, the current educational landscape also presents new opportunities to re-imagine K–12/TPP relationships such that teacher education programs “engage ever more closely with schools in a mutual transformation agenda, with all of the struggle and messiness that implies” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 302). In this article, I describe one university-based TPP’s ongoing attempts to do just that. Our experience suggests that the struggle and messiness is real, but so is the positive potential of field experiences intentionally re-designed to provide direct academic and social support for K–12 students, contribute to the larger goals and missions of the school, energize classroom teachers, and provide varied, intentional, and powerful professional learning experiences for preservice teacher candidates.

### **Learning to Teach in the Field**

Field-based or clinical elements of teacher preparation have long been acknowledged as central to the work of teacher preparation

## Early Field Experience Innovations

(Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zeichner & Bier, 2015). However, simply gaining experience in classrooms or schools does not ensure that candidates will acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to effectively and equitably teach diverse learners and professionally engage with colleagues, families, and the community. Accordingly, researchers have identified several elements of effective field experience as well as new and promising directions.

First, candidates need extensive time in classrooms with purposeful supervision and mentoring (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Prior to the culminating student teaching experience, preservice teachers should participate in carefully designed field experiences early and often throughout the course of their training (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012). In addition to extensive time in classrooms, the context of those classrooms also matters. Ideally, candidates would be placed in classrooms where they are exposed to strong models of pedagogy and professionalism (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Moreover, preservice teachers need well-structured experience in schools that represent such diversity to be prepared with the skill, vision, and commitment to teach well the children they will encounter – many of whom live in poverty, come from a variety of cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds, and embody a range of specific learning needs and characteristics (Lavadenz & Hollins, 2015; Pohan, Ward, Kouzekanani, & Boatright, 2009). Finally, a close linkage between teacher education coursework and fieldwork can contribute greatly to candidates' learning and professional growth (Zeichner, 2010). While the literature is quite clear and consistent on the features of well-structured field experiences, in many cases achieving these recommendations will require a “radical overhaul of the status quo” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 8). In the same way that learning to teach is highly complex, situated, and involves multiple stakeholders, so is designing and enacting truly high quality, transformative field experiences.

In addition to the gold standard of extensive, supervised experience in diverse classrooms with strong models of teaching, several new directions for clinical practice have been proposed. These recommendations invite teacher educators to consider new ways

## Case and Traynor

of framing the school and community partnerships essential to field experience. Traditionally, knowledge construction and sharing related to the theory and research of education has been located primarily in higher education while K–12 schools have been positioned as the sites where the “practical” aspects of teaching get worked out (Zeichner, 2010). As an alternative to the traditional construction of separate, but related spheres of influence on preservice teachers, Zeichner (2010) proposes the creation of “hybrid spaces...where academic and practitioner knowledge and knowledge that exists in communities come together in new less hierarchical ways in the service of teacher learning” (p. 480). This assumes a greater degree of dialogue between schools and higher education. It also invites college/university-based teacher educators to spend more time in schools and school-based educators to spend more time on campus. Zeichner argues that “this shift toward more democratic and inclusive ways of working with schools and communities is necessary for colleges and universities to fulfill their mission in the education of teachers” (p. 480).

This shift also has the potential to facilitate another opportunity within field experiences that remains largely untapped: prioritizing the impact of preservice clinical experience on K–12 student learning (Hollins, 2015). Historically, field experiences have been viewed as primarily for teacher candidate learning—a place for them to “try out” teaching. However, the combination of recent policy mandates that intend to link teacher preparation to student learning outcomes and a renewed focus on ensuring that schools meet the needs of *all* children, has drawn attention to the possibility—and the imperative—that preservice teachers legitimately add value to the classrooms where they are placed. One way preservice teachers are being productively utilized is through co-teaching models. Such models tend to occur in student teaching experiences and are characterized by the cooperating teacher and the student teacher teaming up to provide two streams of instruction and support for K–12 students. Co-teaching stands in contrast to traditional models in which student teachers spend much of their time engaged in solo teaching with the cooperating teacher peripherally engaged

## Early Field Experience Innovations

in the background, or vice versa. In addition to providing more intentional support for the student teacher (in contrast to the “sink or swim” mentality), research on co-teaching also suggests direct benefits to the K–12 students by virtue of having two educators in the room instead of just one (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010).

A shared focus on K–12 student learning and development both enables and is enabled by more egalitarian and collaborative relationships among university/college-based teacher educators and school-based educators. This focus on students involves facilitating high quality instruction, but it also extends to other aspects of the profession of teaching, including engaging families and communities. As a result, teacher education programs are increasingly involving candidates in community-based field experiences located both inside and outside of schools. The potential of community-based field experiences includes helping preservice teachers gain a more holistic view of children, to recognize the important intersection of home, school, and community assets, and in some cases, to also refine pedagogical practices (Brayko, 2013; McDonald et al., 2011).

In order to achieve these aspirations of quality, field-based teacher preparation and high-functioning university/school partnerships are essential. University and school partnerships are long standing traditions in both the preparation of teachers and in the work of providing additional supports to K–12 students through collaboration initiatives (Bell, Brandon, & Weinholt, 2007). These partnerships are anchored in a reciprocal relationship whereby the teaching candidates provide additional direct academic, social and instructional support to K–12 students while simultaneously operating in a rich learning environment that helps with the growth and development of preservice teachers, and are often referred to as Professional Development Schools (PDS). The National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) “...serves as an advocate for the educational community that is dedicated to promoting the continuous development of collaborative school/higher education/community relationships...” (National Association for Professional Development Schools,

## **Case and Traynor**

2016). A component part of this advocacy is the publication and advancement of nine essential elements of the work of Professional Development Schools. While components of all nine NAPDS elements exist in this project, three of the high-leverage elements stand out. In particular, elements 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 practice by all participants) and 8 (work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings) are critically important.

### **Context, Institutions, and Brief History**

Two years ago, the convergence of circumstances, funding, and overlapping needs positioned our teacher preparation program to innovate along the lines recommended in the literature described above. In particular, a community/school/university partnership invited us to craft a relationship with a local middle school that was closer to an egalitarian, negotiated, hybrid space Zeichner (2010) advocates. By co-constructing an early field experience that was first focused on what the middle school wanted and needed to better support their students, we took up Hollins' (2015) challenge to prioritize K–12 student learning as an important outcome of our teacher preparation efforts. Another request of the school was that our TPP help support after-school programs overseen by a community organization to provide wrap-around services and enrichment activities for the middle school students. Thus, we also expanded our candidates' experience with community organizations advocated by McDonald, et al. (2011). One aspect of the partnership that is still emerging is the use of data to evaluate the innovations. The grant that is helping to fund this work has led to the development of a data tool (housed by the district) titled the "Progress Tracker." Like an early warning system, this tool will determine progress trends in the areas of attendance, behavior and academics. In the future, these data will be used to conduct a more thorough analysis of the impact the project may have had on students.

In response to the newly resourced and re-imagined partnership

## Early Field Experience Innovations

with Perry Middle School (a pseudonym), “a radical overhaul” along the lines of what Darling-Hammond (2006) advocated has taken place in the curriculum, pedagogy, structure, and mediation of this early field experience. With the markedly different structure of the field experience that was co-constructed and overseen in collaboration with the principal, literacy coach, and teachers at the middle school, our roles as teacher educators and course instructors have also changed dramatically. The project is a work in progress with much still to be learned, but two years into it we have discovered several promising innovations related to the design of early field experiences. In the next section, I offer a brief history of the project followed by a description and analysis of three key innovations: clustering, co-teaching, and after-school programs.

Five years ago, we had a conventional secondary education program. Teacher candidates took foundational coursework followed by two semesters of field experiences and additional teaching methods courses, culminating in a semester-long student teaching placement. While there were attempts to connect university-based courses to field experiences, the scope and quality of that connection varied depending on the professor, the candidate, and the placement. Like other similar TPPs, we were affected by the larger, shifting context of teacher education. State and outside accreditation demands sapped considerable energy of faculty and prompted new layers of assessment and alignment across the program. The downturn in the economy brought new pressures to our institution and following national trends, we experienced a decline in enrollment as fewer college students chose to enter the teaching profession.

A few miles down the street, Perry Middle School was grappling with intensive school improvement plans imposed by the state as they struggled under the triple burden of inadequate resources, new curriculum standards and the associated high-stakes assessments, and the overwhelming needs of their students—many of whom lived in poverty. Located adjacent to a park in the heart of an older, residential neighborhood, Perry Middle School serves approximately 600 students in grades seven and eight. The student

## **Case and Traynor**

body is comprised of about 60% of students who identify as White, 12% as Hispanic, and the remainder are evenly distributed across other racial/ethnic subgroups. 83% of Perry students are on free and reduced lunch, 21% have been classified for special education services, and 5% are English Language Learners. For several years, faculty, staff, and administrators have been working very hard to create a culture that supports their school goal for every child to progress, without making excuses or exceptions. To this end, the school was an early adopter in the district of a nationally known framework to prepare students for college. They also have focused considerable energy on bringing students to grade level in reading and math through the support of instructional coaches, new curriculum, and collaborative teams. Because Perry students scored in the bottom 5% of the state on math and reading assessments, the school was required to participate in a school improvement plan with oversight from the state.

Despite the challenges faced by our teacher preparation program and the middle school, there was also cause for optimism. Both schools had a cadre of determined and skillful faculty, staff, and administrators. The middle schoolers were bright, energetic, and capable. The community was committed to supporting the students and their families and the educators serving them. The university mission inspired and supported community outreach and solidarity with the poor and marginalized of society. Another critical asset was a newly created community-school-university partnership funded by local philanthropic organizations. The purpose of the grant was to provide additional individual, social, and academic support to middle-school students whose records of school attendance, grades, and behavior suggested that they were at risk of dropping out of high school. Informed by research and the grant's focus on creating new avenues of support for middle schoolers by bringing together the collective resources and energies of the schools, community organizations, and the university, our TPP gained new resources and a rare opportunity to innovate how we structured early field experiences.

The early field experience that is the focus of this article is



## Early Field Experience Innovations

linked to the introductory secondary education course in planning, instruction, and assessment (PIA). I taught this one-semester course for secondary candidates across the content areas (most of whom are sophomores). The class introduces standards-based curriculum, lesson planning, the basics of formative and summative assessment, and several common instructional approaches (e.g. direct instruction, text-based instruction, inquiry-based instruction, and cooperative learning). Alongside the PIA course, candidates typically enroll simultaneously in a course taught by my colleague titled, “Teaching in the Middle School” that focuses on adolescent development, middle school reform, and the social context of education, particularly the effects of trauma and poverty. The field experience linked to the PIA and middle school courses is the first classroom-based field experience for most candidates. One year prior to the grant, I had begun placing all the candidates in PIA at Perry and the course was scheduled such that all of them were at the middle school at the same time, though in different classrooms. Having already built relationships with Perry administrators and some of the teachers, we were poised to expand and innovate our presence at the school when the grant resources became available.

The configuration of the field experience underwent multiple iterations over the course of several semesters. Each of these iterations was organically conceived in conversation with colleagues at Perry in response to what we had learned the prior semester and was guided by two key questions: (a) How can the candidates be utilized to provide the maximum academic and social support for the middle school students? and, (b) What types of structures, experiences, and mediation are developmentally appropriate for an early field experience and are most likely to lay a strong foundation for future professional growth? Knowing that we wanted to improve both preservice teacher learning and K–12 student learning, we began experimenting with alternative models. The grant’s focus on middle school student support prompted our gaze to become even more fixed on how we could provide academic and social support to the students. Instead of imposing our curriculum of teacher preparation on the schools, we started with the school’s agenda and

## Case and Traynor

then creatively considered together how our teacher preparation goals could be woven in. As a result of these conversations among university-based teacher educators and Perry administrators and faculty, the following three key innovations were made to the field experience: (a) a shift from one candidate in a classroom to **clustering** with multiple candidates in a classroom at the same time, (b) the roles of school-based educators and university-based teacher educators evolved from distinct to **hybrid roles**, with the university teacher educator on-site at the middle school with her students and Perry's instructional coach regularly debriefing and teaching the preservice teachers, and, (c) candidates' gained experience in **expanded contexts** moving beyond the traditional classroom setting to involvement in other school-related events within and outside the school day, including after-school programs overseen by community organizations.

### Clustering

In early versions of this work, one candidate was placed in one classroom for one or two class periods and taught two lessons observed by a university supervisor over the course of the semester. The candidate's role was largely observational with occasional opportunities to teach and/or work directly with students. While hopefully gaining some valuable professional insight, his/her impact on the middle school (MS) students was typically quite minimal. By responding first to the question of how 10-20 university students could positively support the middle-schoolers, we recognized that this potentially was largely going untapped. Through dialogue with the instructional coach at Perry, we decided to focus on a particular group of MS students and saturate those classrooms. The instructional coach purposefully selected a teacher working with a group of students whose test scores indicated significant academic risk. The hope was that a consistent presence of college students could be motivating and supportive. Additionally, because the PIA class was taught both fall and spring semesters, we were positioned to provide nearly a full year of support.

The positive influence of the candidates on MS students seemed

## Early Field Experience Innovations

to be rooted in the relationships they built and the decreased adult/child ratio which allowed the candidates to offer “just in time” individualized support and accountability. Clustering seemed to work best when candidates were assigned to the same group of students for the entire semester. With 5–7 adults in the room, it was very difficult for a MS student to fly under the radar. Knowing that twice a week there would be additional adults in the room, the classroom teachers were encouraged to organize lessons using cooperative learning and other effective instructional models such as a readers and writers workshop that they may have been hesitant to try without the additional support. To further evaluate the impact of clustering on MS students, we are collecting data related to academic growth, attendance, behavior, and non-academic growth indicators. While this evaluation is still underway, our initial observation and the sense of Perry teachers is that the MS students in the classrooms where the preservice teachers are clustered are more engaged in the instruction and benefit from the individualized attention.

In addition to providing support to MS students and their teachers, preliminary assessment suggests that clustering can also be an effective model for professional learning. The shared experience in the same classroom provided opportunities for candidates to collaborate, collectively reflect on their experiences, and enter into teaching as a team sport rather than an individual one. Forging this mindset early on creates a foundation for teachers who are comfortable with making their practice public and engaging colleagues with teaching challenges and successes. It also provided a safe space for candidates to try out teaching and to learn from each other. Additionally, assigning candidates to work with a small group of students afforded rich professional learning as they could get to know a few students well and observe them over time. Focusing on a small group of students rather than 30 also appropriately broke down the complexity of making sense of what’s going on in a classroom for a novice teacher. Because they were forging relationships with a small group of students, candidates seemed to become more invested in and more curious about “their” students’

## Case and Traynor

learning and well-being.

Clustering also opened up (and required) a new set of professional skills for candidates to develop. For example, extended work with small groups of students required candidates to regularly engage in instructional conversations with their students. Candidates needed to learn to ask open-ended questions, elicit and build on student responses, and to check for understanding—all of which are essential to strong teaching, but a marked departure from both casual conversation and traditional IRE (initiate-respond-evaluate) patterns of classroom discourse. Another essential professional skill that quickly came to the forefront was the ability to motivate students reluctant to participate in learning activities. Each of these professional skills, including leading instructional conversations, checking for understanding, and motivating students, had been a part of the PIA course prior to these field experience innovations. However, they had largely been experienced and practiced more superficially through either observation or isolated whole-class teaching events. Clustering required candidates to practice and reflect on these essential skills repeatedly, providing sufficient practice that they could experience both failure and success and see the situational and individual nuance embedded in deploying them.

While the advantages of clustering have thus far outweighed the disadvantages, there are challenges with this model. First, the success of clustering is largely dependent on the classroom teacher enacting instruction that takes advantage of having extra adults in the room. If the classroom teacher was giving a lecture-based lesson, for instance, or the students were taking a test, the candidates easily became bored and felt extraneous. Clear communication between the instructional coach, the teachers, and the professor was necessary to ensure that candidates were actively contributing, not passively observing. Second, clustering meant that not all candidates would be teaching in their endorsement area (i.e. math candidates were teaching English and vice versa). Because this was an early field experience focusing on general pedagogical skills that transfer to any subject area, the professional learning was still

## Early Field Experience Innovations

relevant but I had to explicitly “sell” candidates on the value of teaching outside of their areas of expertise. We also arranged for candidates to spend several class periods over the course of the semester observing in their content areas.

### Hybrid Roles

When I first began teaching the PIA course, I taught on campus and wove conversations about field experiences into our class discussions. Now, the course and I have moved entirely to Perry and my role has changed dramatically. After experimenting with a few different configurations, our last two semesters were configured as follows: We were at Perry for the first three periods of their school day. During the first period, half the class was clustered in a classroom with the classroom teacher and often, the literacy coach. The other half of the class met with me and held a modified version of the university course. During the second period, the groups were reversed. In the third period, all the candidates and I met together for a debriefing session, most often with the literacy coach. There were variations on this model scattered throughout the semester. For example, when candidates team-taught lessons, the other candidates observed them teach. On other occasions, everyone assisted with student writing conferences or observed one of the classroom teachers, or the literacy coach give a demonstration lesson. The schedule was also adjusted to allow time for me to observe and work with candidates clustered in classrooms and for the candidates to observe in their endorsement areas.

While the candidates were having rich learning experiences, the three hour per week PIA course contact time was cut down to one hour per week. Additionally, whereas I had originally been the primary teacher educator, now the candidates were working with and for at least two other school-based educators. Because one of our central goals was to provide direct academic, social, and instructional support to the MS students, everything we did in the PIA course had to be directly linked to what was going on at Perry, and that was constantly changing. To adapt, I moved most of the PIA course content to online modules that the candidates

## **Case and Traynor**

completed outside of class, making the course essentially a “flipped classroom.” In addition, I met regularly with Marie, the literacy coach at Perry, to plan. This collaboration was essential. Initially, Marie and I collaborated to merge the objectives of the PIA course with the curriculum and goals of the middle school classrooms. As the project progressed, our collaboration increasingly informed the middle-school instruction, as well. Marie would make suggestions for what the candidates needed to know, do, and understand and I would similarly make recommendations for how the middle school lessons might be organized to support both student and candidate learning. Because Marie led the debriefing sessions, candidates came to view her as their instructor as much as I was.

The benefits of our collaboration were plentiful. I was energized by working hands-on with children in schools and the “real world” experience kept me grounded and relevant in how I taught my university courses. In similar fashion, Marie and the classroom teachers reported that working with the teaching candidates also provided new energy, insight, and perspective into their work. Of course, there are logistical, philosophical, and relational challenges in this level of collaboration, and it is time-consuming and humbling. However, candidates in the PIA course no longer complain about a disconnect between what is taught in university courses and what they experience in K–12 schools. They seem to see the theory and practice of teaching as one complex entity rather than as separate constructs.

### **Expanding Contexts**

Because the grant involves community organizations and because we (university faculty and teaching candidates) have become so invested in and a part of the work at Perry, several new opportunities arose for candidates to both contribute and gain valuable professional experience. For example, during a testing period when the school needed additional people to help students operate the computers, facilitate bathroom breaks, and offer encouragement, the candidates were invited to help. They could experience first-hand how middle school students respond to high-stakes,

## **Early Field Experience Innovations**

standardized testing and how schools organize these events. On other occasions, candidates were invited to attend early morning faculty meetings and collaboration team meetings. Candidates typically don't get to experience these aspects of the culture of teaching until student teaching, but at Perry they were introduced to them early on. Beyond the school walls, candidates engaged in another type of community involvement by participating in a neighborhood asset-mapping project (Kretzmann, McKnight, & Puntenney, 2005). For this project, they walked the streets within Perry's school boundaries looking for community-based resources that could contribute to the well-being of Perry students and families. Documenting the resources in a neighborhood known more for its lack of resources helped candidates better understand Perry students' out-of-school environment and to leverage these resources in their work with students and teachers.

Beyond these types of professional experiences, several candidates participated in after-school programming sponsored by both the school and community-based organizations. When we asked the administrators at Perry what they needed, one of their primary desires was increased enrichment activities, especially for students who had to participate in literacy or math interventions instead of electives. In response, candidates organized an after-school book club and a drama club. In the summer, university students who worked at Perry during the academic year assisted with summer school and another group of PIA candidates are organizing a mentoring program to support the Perry students they worked with in their classrooms as they transition to high school. Each of these projects offer a greater degree of professional autonomy than the regular field experience, but because they were linked to the same Perry context and many of the same students, the candidates seemed to be able and willing to rise to the challenge.

### **Discussion and Next Steps**

At this point, we are optimistic that our TPP's investment in Perry Middle School and Perry's investment in our candidates and program has allowed both institutions to begin to collaboratively

## Case and Traynor

engage in the sort of “mutual transformation agenda” Linda Darling-Hammond may have envisioned. By focusing first on how this early field experience might positively affect K–12 students, the quality of our teacher preparation has improved. Recognizing the need to substantiate and/or challenge our initial hunches, we are collecting written reflections and teaching evaluations from candidates who have participated in the project during the past two years. In the meantime, data from course evaluations indicate that the university students feel better prepared and more engaged in their professional development. During the first two semesters, some students wrote comments expressing that they felt confused and overwhelmed by the “messiness” of the project’s evolution. However, as the structure of the project has stabilized, their feedback has been positive with the majority of students ranking the course as a 6 or 7 on a seven-point scale. Moreover, university supervisors mentoring candidates in later field experiences report that the candidates coming out of the Perry experience seem more confident, committed, and have a stronger skill set than those who participated in a traditional early field experience. As professors, we have also observed new levels of professional efficacy, competence, and investment emerge among the candidates participating in the new model. We hypothesize that part of this possible sense of efficacy may be rooted in the model’s structure that places candidates in concentric layers of professional learning communities including the classroom clustering, the circle of peers in the PIA class, and then reaching to the larger conversations with Marie and the cooperating teachers. Some similar findings have been observed in a study of pairs of preservice teachers working with one cooperating teacher (Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009). However, future research is necessary to add texture and substance to our initial interpretation of this experience.

From the perspective of faculty and administrators at Perry, this model also seems to be viewed positively. Thus far, we only have anecdotal evidence to support this assertion, but the ongoing allocation of resources to the project indicates that they value the work. For example, Mary’s (the instructional coach) involvement



## Early Field Experience Innovations

and collaboration has become a portion of her regular workload. Additionally, teachers who have hosted candidates in prior semesters continue to invite new groups in their classrooms and informally report that they are professionally rejuvenated by the additional support and energy of the university students. In addition to the evaluation plan that is required by grant funders, we are planning to collect and analyze one classroom-based assessment per month from each class participating in the project and compare the outcomes to students with the same teacher and same course, but without the bi-weekly presence of university teaching candidates.

While the critical stakeholders at the university, the school, and the community are largely supportive and optimistic about these early field experienced innovations, there is much still to be learned. As we move forward with conducting formal research to describe how the consistent presence of the teaching candidates might be affecting MS student academic growth and well-being, we suspect that much of the benefit may be intangible, but we are also hopeful that students are learning more than they would have without the additional support. That has yet to be empirically documented. It will be interesting, for example, to learn if the presence of multiple preservice teachers in one classroom yields additional or different benefits than those identified with co-teaching models.

We also continue to grapple with how best to describe and assess candidate learning, particularly in an ever-changing context that seems to demand ongoing improvisation in response to whatever is happening at the moment. Additionally, we recognize that this type of intensive partnership work can be vulnerable to changing personnel, funding, or other circumstances. It is a challenge to build sustainable structures that go beyond current personal/professional relationships and presently-available resources. It can also be difficult to figure out how to align the differing schedules, calendars, institutional priorities, and cultures that characterize universities and K–12 schools. Yet even if the structures are in place to sustain this work, it is very time and labor intensive. Finally, this model demands that the traditional borders between university-based teacher educators and K–12 faculty and administrator colleagues be

## Case and Traynor

broken down as they venture into this hybrid space. The resulting fluid and changing roles can be both empowering and disconcerting (Cook-Sather, 2006). Yet relinquishing and adding facets of our work drives effective, mutually beneficial partnerships (Martin, Snow, & Torrez, 2011; Sandholz & Finan, 1998).

Both the promising and challenging aspects of this example of an intensive early field experience enacted in close collaboration with the school-based stakeholders resonate with descriptions of similar projects at other TPPs. In many ways, our story is a familiar one. However, the project described in this article also offers two possibilities infrequently discussed in the professional literature. First, clustering candidates with a major goal of providing academic and social support to students during early field experiences is a logical extension/variation of co-teaching models, but one that has rarely been reported on. This structure is also ripe for further exploring what brand new teaching candidates are poised to both learn and contribute in the context of a field experience. Another aspect for further exploration is the incorporation of non-conventional sites for early preservice teacher learning such as extended learning opportunities before and after school, exposure to what teachers do outside of regular classroom instruction (i.e. faculty meetings, testing, etc.), and community-based initiatives. While preservice teachers may have opportunities to participate in these other contexts, the opportunities often seem to occur primarily in student teaching (the culminating field experience) or detached from traditional teacher preparation coursework.

Despite the complexities of the work, like others, we see promising potential in teacher preparation programs asking first, “What do K–12 teachers and students want and need?” and secondly, “How can responding to these wants/needs be leveraged to provide strong preservice teacher preparation?” Indeed, the reciprocal nature of the early field experience innovations described in this paper seemed to be at the heart of any positive outcomes. As one candidate wrote about her experience at Perry, “I learned the power of not only your roles as a teacher and teaching your students, but also to remember to take a step back and see how your students have the

## Early Field Experience Innovations

power to teach you.” In short, the middle school, Perry teachers, students, staff, and administrators provided a vivid, living curriculum for learning to teach.

### References

- Bacharach, N., Heck, T. W., & Dahlberg, K. (2010). Changing the face of student teaching through coteaching. *Action in Teacher Education, 32*(1), 3-14.
- Bell, C., Brandon, L., & Weinhold, M. W. (2007). New directions: The evolution of professional development relationships. *School-University Partnerships: The Journal of the National Association for Professional Development Schools, 1*(1), 45-49.
- Brayko, K. (2013). Community-based placements as contexts for disciplinary learning a study of literacy teacher education outside of school. *Journal of Teacher Education, 64*(1), 47-59.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2006). The “constant changing of myself”: Revising roles in undergraduate teacher preparation. *The Teacher Educator, 41*(3), 187-206.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). Constructing 21st-century teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 57*(3), 300-314.
- Goodnough, K., Osmond, P., Dibbon, D., Glassman, M., & Stevens, K. (2009). Exploring a triad model of student teaching: Pre-service teacher and cooperating teacher perceptions. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 25*(2), 285-296.
- Hollins, E. R. (2015). Preface. In E. R. Hollins (Ed.), *Rethinking field experiences in preservice teacher preparation: Meeting new challenges for accountability* (pp. ix-xv). New York: Routledge.
- Kretzmann, J. P., McKnight, J., & Punttenney, D. (2005). *Discovering community power: A guide to mobilizing local assets and your organization's capacity*. Asset-Based Community Development Institute, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University.
- Lavadenz, M., & Hollins, E. R. (2015, March). Urban schools as a context for learning teaching. In E.R. Hollins (Ed.), *Rethinking Field Experiences in Preservice Teacher Preparation: Meeting*

## Case and Traynor

*New Challenges for Accountability* (pp. 1-14). New York: Routledge.

- Martin, S. D., Snow, J. L., & Torrez, C. A. F. (2011). Navigating the terrain of third space: Tensions with/in relationships in school-university partnerships. *Journal of Teacher Education, 62*(3), 299-311.
- McDonald, M., Tyson, K., Brayko, K., Bowman, M., Delport, J., & Shimomura, F. (2011). Innovation and impact in teacher education: Community-based organizations as field placements for preservice teachers. *Teachers College Record, 113*(8), 1668-1700.
- National Association for Professional Development Schools. (2016). Vision/Purpose/History. Retrieved from: <http://napds.org/visionpurposehistory/>
- National Association for Professional Development Schools. (2008). What it means to be a professional development school: A statement by the Executive Council and Board of Directors of the National Association for Professional Development Schools. Retrieved from: <http://napds.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Nine-Essentials.pdf>
- Pohan, C. A., Ward, M., Kouzekanani, K., & Boatright, C. (2009). The Impact of Field Placement Sites on Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching Diverse Students. *School-University Partnerships, 3*(1), 43-53.
- Ronfeldt, M., & Reininger, M. (2012). More or better student teaching? *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28*(8), 1091-1106.
- Sandholtz, J. H., & Finan, E. C. (1998). Blurring the boundaries to promote school-university partnerships. *Journal of Teacher Education, 49*(1), 13-26.
- Zeichner, K. (2010). Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in college-and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(1-2), 89-99.
- Zeichner, K., & Bier, M. (2015). Opportunities and pitfalls in the turn toward clinical experience in US teacher education. In E. R. Hollins (Ed.), *Rethinking field experiences in preservice*

## Early Field Experience Innovations

*teacher preparation: Meeting new challenges for accountability* (pp. 20-46).

• • •

Anny Fritzen Case is an assistant professor at Gonzaga University where she teaches courses in secondary education, discipline specific literacy, and second language literacy. A former middle and high school ESL teacher, she enjoys spending much of her professional time and energy working alongside her students in local schools. Her research interests include field-based secondary teacher preparation and immigrant and refugee education.

John Traynor is an associate professor in the Department of Teacher Education at Gonzaga University where he teaches courses in foundations of education and middle level education. John is active as an organizer in the community around child and youth issues through partnership efforts with K–12 schools, higher education and community-based organizations. His research interests include school-community partnerships and place-based teacher education.