

Chapter 36

Using a Literacy–Based Classroom Partnership to Prepare Teacher Candidates for the edTPA

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ABSTRACT

This chapter chronicles the progression of one university's efforts to create authentic learning experiences and performance-based assessments for teacher candidates through an established school-university partnership. The chapter focuses on one particular professional development school (PDS) initiative: an ongoing classroom partnership between Bradley University's ETE 313: Methods of Literacy I course and kindergarten through second grade classrooms at neighboring Whittier Primary School. Opening and closing with vignettes illustrating Bradley's ETE 313/Whittier classroom partnership, the chapter presents detailed descriptions of two different professors' efforts to provide authentic learning experiences and prepare teacher candidates for state licensure, including successful completion of the Education Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA), over four years' time. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the evolving classroom partnership in terms of student learning outcomes, the need for ongoing curricular modifications, and strategies for sustaining classroom partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

Kylie checked her bag once more to make sure she had everything she needed. Today she would meet William, her first grade student, for the first time. She had spent at least an hour last night reviewing the phonics and fluency assessments she would administer. "It really helped that we practiced together in class on Tuesday," she thought. Walking the short distance from her dorm to the school, Kylie rehearsed

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how she would introduce herself. She hoped there would be time leftover so that she and William could read a book together. She had brought a few with her just in case. After checking in at the school's main office, Kylie followed the numbered classrooms down the hall to her destination. Outside one classroom, a colorful bulletin board asserted, Good Readers Ask Questions.

As she entered Room 103 through the open doorway, the first grade classroom bustled with activity. Some of her fellow teacher candidates had already seated themselves next to their first grade students. A few student-teacher pairs were deep in conversation. Kylie noticed a little girl showing off her drawing of a dolphin. "How old are you?" she overheard a different student ask. Kylie's university professor greeted her warmly before introducing her to Mrs. Faber, the first grade teacher whose students her university class would be working with all semester. "Kylie, this is William," said Mrs. Faber, gesturing toward a wiry little boy wearing an over-sized Chicago Bears football jersey. When he looked up at her, she could see that one of his front teeth was missing. "Hi, William, my name is Miss Kylie," she said pleasantly, just as she had rehearsed. "I'm going to be your teacher today."

This description of Kylie's first day working with William is drawn from the actual experiences of teacher candidates and first grade students participating in an ongoing classroom partnership through the Bradley Professional Development School (PDS) Partnership. Funded by the William T. Kemper Foundation-Commerce Bank, Trustee since 1995, the Bradley PDS Partnership promotes collaboration between Bradley University's College of Education and Health Sciences and eight schools in Peoria, Illinois (Bradley University, 2014a). The partnership is guided by five goals:

1. Support student learning and achievement.
2. Prepare aspiring professionals in education and health sciences.
3. Provide lifelong learning experiences and leadership opportunities.
4. Promote best practices in teaching, learning, and leadership through professional development and action research.
5. Support the health and well-being of students, their families, and the professionals who work with them.

Projects coordinated through the Bradley PDS Partnership include classroom partnerships such as Kylie's, as well as clinical experiences, field trips, guest speakers, special events, and professional development opportunities. In a letter to the project's funding agency, Superintendent Dr. Grenita Lathan wrote, "The students of Peoria Public Schools have benefited greatly from the implementation of numerous initiatives made possible because of the Kemper Project" (personal communication, October 31, 2014).

Whittier Primary School, located one block from Bradley's campus, has been a Bradley professional development school (PDS) since 2006. Whittier Principal Doug Atkins, explains, "Our school's interests and proximity to the university's campus make it very convenient to make great things happen." The school serves 405 students in pre-kindergarten through fourth grade (Illinois Interactive Report Card [IIRC], 2013). Whittier's student population is 46% black, 38% white, 9% multi-racial, 4% Hispanic, and less than 2% American Indian or Asian. Sixty-seven percent of Whittier students are eligible for free or reduced lunch according to federal guidelines, 21% are chronically truant, and 4% are homeless. Fourteen percent of Whittier students have individual education plans (IEPs), and 2% receive English Language Learner (ELL) services. The school reports a student mobility rate of 31%.

Like most primary schools, Whittier places great emphasis on developing students' literacy skills, particularly learning to read. So, in August 2010, when newly-hired Bradley University professor Dr. Peter

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