

Chapter 4

From Collaborative Inquiry to Critical, Project-Based Clinical Experiences: Strengthening Partnerships Through Field-Based Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Unprecedented and long-overdue attention has recently been given to the role of field-based clinical experiences in teacher preparation. Traditional models of university coursework disconnected from real world field-based clinical experiences serve neither prospective teachers nor PreK-12 students. This chapter presents a broader notion of field-based teacher preparation structures occurring in school-university partnership contexts and professional development schools, with the authors drawing from data of four field-based experiences, which fall along a continuum of partnership, from three teacher education programs at two universities. These partnerships illustrate a developmental framework for building mutually beneficial relationships that enhance the engagement of all stakeholders and acknowledge the need for differentiation in teacher education practice. A pathways orientation to school-university partnerships/PDSs and a project-based clinical approach offer chances to develop mutually beneficial learning opportunities for PreK-12 students and teacher candidates.

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INTRODUCTION

Policymakers, organizations, and teacher educators have recently given unprecedented and long-overdue attention to the role of clinical experiences in teacher preparation (AACTE, 2011, 2018; ATE, 2015). Yet current policy and practice cries for enhanced clinical practice are impacted by challenging financial and political realities for universities and PK-12 schools, as well as by the fact that field-based and partnership efforts operate across these distinct institutions, which have similar but not absolutely aligned missions (Dennis, Burns, Tricarico, Van Ingen, Jacobs, & Davis, 2017; Martin, Snow, & Franklin Torrez, 2011). Fortunately, the demands for earlier and more robust fieldwork alongside increasingly intentional and mutually beneficial collaborations with PK-12 sites seem to have been answered almost before they were made with the structures provided by school-university partnerships and professional development schools (PDSs) (Many, Fisher, Ogletree, & Taylor, 2012; Ipkeze, Broikou, Hildenbrand, & Gladstone-Brown, 2012).

Yet, if the promises of field-based teacher education efforts are going to be realized, those in the educator preparation field operating in school-university partnerships need not a single model of collaboration but multiple pathways to building and strengthening partnerships. The goal of this chapter is to share a broader notion of field-based teacher preparation structures occurring in school-university partnership contexts and PDSs, with the authors drawing from data of four field-based experiences—which fall along a continuum of partnership—from three teacher education programs at three universities. These illustrate frameworks for building and sustaining mutually beneficial relationships that enhance the engagement of all stakeholders and acknowledge the need for differentiation and flexibility in teacher education practice. This continuum provides a menu of means through which partnership-oriented, field-based teacher education efforts might be strengthened.

While the PDS model has existed as a lofty ideal since it was first formulated and enacted in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the authors of this chapter posit that this archetype has both inspired and deterred teacher education practitioners from engaging in authentic school-university partnership efforts and rich field-based teacher education efforts (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008). University-based teacher educators operating on the ground of educator preparation programs have long recognized the dramatic shift in university- and school-based teacher educator roles, the substantial financial resources, and the tremendous faculty time required to enact the PDS principles (Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2016). To illustrate these PDS features, in this chapter the authors describe two structures: 1) “partner,” “clinical practice, and “collaborative inquiry” examples implemented in an elementary education program, and; 2) a “critical, project-based” clinical experience occurring in three secondary education programs. The elementary education examples are detailed as cases to illustrate partnership practices, and the secondary education examples include more abbreviated information about these partnership practices but also integrate summary research analyses of these cases. Ultimately, the authors attempt to present a set of doors, rather than a single portal, through which others might strengthen these PDS- and school-university partnership-based structures and enhance teacher candidates’ preparation (Note: We use the terms “teacher candidate,” “preservice teacher,” “future teacher,” and “field hours student” interchangeably, to describe university students in educator preparation programs in semesters prior to the culminating student teaching internship).

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