

Chapter 5

Affordances of a Cyclical and Content-Specific Model of Collaborative Mentoring

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ABSTRACT

One of the challenges of field-based teacher education is the perennial divide between university courses and field experiences. Collaborative mentoring is proposed as an approach to bridge this divide. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the affordances that a content-specific model of collaborative mentoring provides for achieving greater coherence within teacher education programs and nurturing stronger systems of partnerships between universities and schools. The chapter reports on research examining the benefits and challenges reported by teacher candidates, mentor teachers, and clinical educators who participated in the model.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6249-8.ch005

INTRODUCTION

In traditional teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates take a series of education courses, often with field experience components, which culminates with student teaching. This approach - a theory to practice model (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999) - is the prevailing paradigm in teacher preparation. This approach to teacher preparation is problematic because of the lack of connection between the university-based coursework and student teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2006a; Zeichner, 2010). Many institutions have embraced calls for increased clinical experiences (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2010) and adopted a practice-based approach to teacher education centering on the development of core teaching practices that are essential for successful classroom teaching and learning (Forzani, 2014; Zeichner, 2012). Yet, simply increasing teacher candidates' time in school without the necessary concomitant mentoring, support structure, and connections to university coursework limits teacher candidates' abilities to systematically learn from extended clinical experiences. Limited interactions and communications with mentors, university faculty, or clinical educators (also known as clinical supervisors) further constrain the mentoring process and teacher candidates' abilities to develop and enact core practices to promote student learning (Henning, Gut, & Beam, 2015).

Recently, the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE, 2018) emphasized the need for stronger partnerships between teacher preparation programs and the local school districts where candidates complete their field experiences. According to the National Association of Professional Development Schools (NAPDS), effective partnerships and high-quality clinical practice are central to the development of the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary for teacher candidates to demonstrate positive impact on P-12 student learning and development (NAPDS, 2008). Strong, effective partnerships are mutually beneficial: Partners share the responsibility for promoting teacher candidate learning through explicitly designed, complementary, and well-articulated experiences and expectations (Darling-Hammond, 2006b; NAPDS, 2008) and partnerships promote the professional growth of mentors in whose classrooms teacher candidates are placed. Effective partnerships necessitate the involvement of high-quality clinical educators, those who are responsible for observing and evaluating teacher candidates' practice in the mentors' classrooms, and clear communication between partners. Moreover, exemplary teacher preparation programs include clinical experiences that are carefully coordinated with coursework, involve expert clinical faculty in mentoring teacher candidates, and result in candidates who are more successful at managing the complex educational tasks of educating P-12 students (Zeichner & Conklin, 2005).

To maximize the impact of clinical experiences on teacher candidates' learning, a new content-specific model of mentoring was developed and implemented. Model features were explicitly designed to nurture stronger school-university partnerships. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the Cyclical and Content-specific Model of Collaborative Mentoring and share findings regarding the benefits and challenges that teacher candidates, mentor teachers, and clinical educators identified through their participation in the model.

BACKGROUND

A clinical model of teacher education is one that is "fully grounded in clinical practice and interwoven with academic content and professional courses" (NCATE, 2010, p.ii). Several key features characterize

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