

# **A FIVE YEAR STUDY of FIELD BASED PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIPS TO PREPARE NEW ELEMENTARY TEACHERS**

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## **A FIVE YEAR STUDY of FIELD BASED PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIPS TO PREPARE NEW ELEMENTARY TEACHERS**

**Sally R. Beisser**

This five-year study reveals positive impact of a teaching partnership between a team of elementary teachers as pedagogical partners and a university professor at a Midwest private university. Together they offered instruction of a curriculum and pedagogy methods course to teacher education students. Qualitative data analysis, using ATLAS.ti 5.2, from 385 pages of single spaced reflective journaling by 170 pre-service teachers collected from multiple sections of this course over a five year period of time, suggests high levels of self reported efficacy. Responses indicated that students reported efficacy in: classroom management and discipline (23% of students), instructional design (22%), value of partnerships in the field (16%), personal discoveries (11%), views of teacher presentations (9%), community building (7%), planning process (6%), and other miscellaneous insights (6%). This descriptive study concludes that a university's partnering with teachers in the field is a desirable method of preparing new elementary teachers.

### **Introduction**

Teacher preparation programs that are innovative and intense may produce teachers who feel better prepared, stay in teaching longer, and are rated as more effective (Andrew, 1990; Andrew & Schwab, 1995). Teachers' views of pre-professional preparation varied with some programs graduating teachers who "felt markedly better prepared." The extent to which teachers felt "better prepared" when they entered the profession was significantly correlated with their sense of teaching efficacy, sense of responsibility for student learning, and their plans to remain in teaching (Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow, 2002, p. 287).

Teacher education knowledge base, skills, and dispositions, outlined in the 10 Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Standards (INTASC, 1992), summarize important expectations in teacher education. Specifically, INTASC Standards nine and ten ensure that pre-service teachers become a part of "learning communities" and "agencies." However, building learning communities and establishing field-based connections with agencies are not easily accomplished through traditional pedagogical methods such as lecture delivery, text readings, or whole-class discussion, even if these are augmented by interactive dialogue. While dialogue is an effective instructive device, one in which the role of the instructor is to provide-scaffolding (Wenger, 1998), pre-service teachers seldom experience meaningful dialogue with classroom teachers or principals as part of their preparation. In fact, for most pre-service teachers, contact with field-based teachers is most common during practicum experiences prior to student teaching. In addition, these relationships are generally not collaborative in nature (Connor & Huey, 1998; Connor & Killmer, 1999, 2001; Carini & Kuh, 2003; Moore, 2003).

Collaboration among university faculty, pre-service teachers, and teachers in the field, allows access to different domains of expertise, opportunities for exchange of existing knowledge, or creation of new knowledge for all participants (Wegner, 1986). In addition, collaborative opportunities foster the creation and or development of identity within the teaching community (Wenger, 1998). In particular, collaborative field-based experiences (Oates, 2001; Power & Perry, 2002) are imperative if new teachers are to continue in the profession beyond the first five

years of experience (Wong, 1998). Engagement with field-based educators as pedagogical partners in teacher preparation can be an innovative way to link theory to practice and “better prepare” future teachers. Thus, if teacher education majors are to build an authentic repertoire of practical teaching strategies to transform their own beliefs and practices into their own effective pedagogy (Agee, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991), intentionally planned collaborative experiences must be a part of the teacher education process.

### *Methodology*

The goal of this five-year research study was to analyze the impact of a one-semester, field based curriculum and pedagogy course designed in a unique way to include elementary teachers, as pedagogical partners in instruction and collaboration. The curriculum and pedagogy course, offered to pre-service and in-service teachers, is regularly offered as part of the required teacher education professional methods course of study.

1. Do pre-service teachers view themselves as well prepared (i.e., efficacious) for student teaching or future classroom practice as a result of participation in a pedagogical partnership (i.e., instruction and collaboration) with “real” teachers in the field?
2. Do practicing teachers participating in this study view their own practice differently as a result of a pedagogical partnership with teacher education majors and their professor?

### *Developing the Pedagogical Partnership*

Selection of the partnership school was based on the need for a site geographically close to the university campus for the convenience of students’ class schedules. Additionally, the high percentage of minority children attending this K-5 urban mathematics and science magnet school, created a desirable student population for pre-service teachers in this program to learn from professionals who are eager to invite them into their urban setting as pedagogical partners.

Selection of partnership teachers resulted from an initial faculty meeting during which the researcher described the teacher education project as a study that required assistance of practicing teachers. Moreover, results from a pre-service teacher questionnaire (Appendix A) administered prior to the course indicated that students wanted to learn from or collaborate with practicing teachers on the following: “classroom management, discipline, curriculum planning, and pragmatic ideas for a successful classroom.” Therefore, teachers interested in participating in the study should have an interest in exploring these topics. Following a faculty presentation and meetings with the school principal, the researcher established a screening procedure for interested teacher applicants (Appendix B). A collaborative team composed of the researcher, the principal, and two university students in teacher education selected three teachers to participate in the study.

Planning sessions between the selected teachers and the researcher determined which topics each teacher would address. Each of the three teachers agreed to prepare and teach one session in collaboration with the researcher, one three-hour class on a pre-selected topic each semester (i.e., twice per school year) while a substitute teacher managed his/her classroom. The teachers were given copies of the course syllabus, textbooks, readings as resource materials. Class meetings were held on site in the elementary multi-purpose room or science lab. Scheduling the meetings

required attention to both university and district calendars to balance academic schedules and on site visits.

Participating teachers made the text readings meaningful by sharing current experiences. Such immediate applications made concepts “came alive” for the university students. Each session included hands-on activities, connections to a “real” classroom, and collaborative dialogue between pre-service teachers and practicing teachers. For example, during one session focusing on classroom management (Orlich, Harder, Callahan, & Gibson, 2001; Arends, 2004), basic concepts were explained, then immediately observed, as pre-service teachers dispersed to various elementary classrooms in the building to identify multiple management strategies. Students, then, returned to debrief their observations with the teacher. The unique learning atmosphere allowed the students opportunities to ask questions, consider the applicability of the text material, and ultimately make up their **own** minds about what is considered best practice in classroom management. Further, participating teachers gained insights on the concepts and theories they operationalized on a daily basis. Thus, the study’s objectives for both pre-service and practicing teachers were addressed.

The membership of the team of teachers in the partnership changed very little during the five years the study took place. One teacher left to teach in Japan, then returned to the building and to the partnership, eager to share perspectives on international teaching. Another teacher was so committed to the partnership that she conducted her sessions with the university students, even while undergoing chemotherapy for cancer. Her commitment (and sadly, her subsequent death) were powerful life lessons for all participants. Another teacher had a baby, but scheduled her presentations around her maternity leave during the course of the study, two teachers joined the original three—one remains active in the pedagogical partnership, and the other has transferred to an administrative position in the district. During the five years of the study, four of the five original teacher-participants completed, or are currently in the process of finishing masters degrees in education.

#### *Data Collection*

Data were collected over a five-year time span from eight semesters of instruction in the curriculum and pedagogy course. Data sources included students’ journal entries and focus group responses. At the end of each on site presentation, students were asked to write responses to open-ended questions in their journals. All journal reflections, were sent at the end of each semester to a Digital Dropbox©, an electronic online depository administered by Blackboard© (1997-2207) web based instructional delivery software. Approximately 385 single spaced pages of reflexive journaling detailing 1,991 journal entries were submitted by students in multiple course sections. As a method of member checking (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), students shared and compared collective insights that were subsequently shared with the elementary teachers in the partnership. The teachers reported feeling amazed or surprised that their remarks had been important to a class of 20 to 25 college students.

A student focus group interview was held fall 2002 with one section of students taking part in the study. The purpose was to clarify initial impact of the structure and success of the partnership from the perspective of the teacher education students. Focus group discussion questions (Appendix C) were designed by two undergraduate research assistants, who wrote out their responses independently first and then discuss their responses with the other students. Group

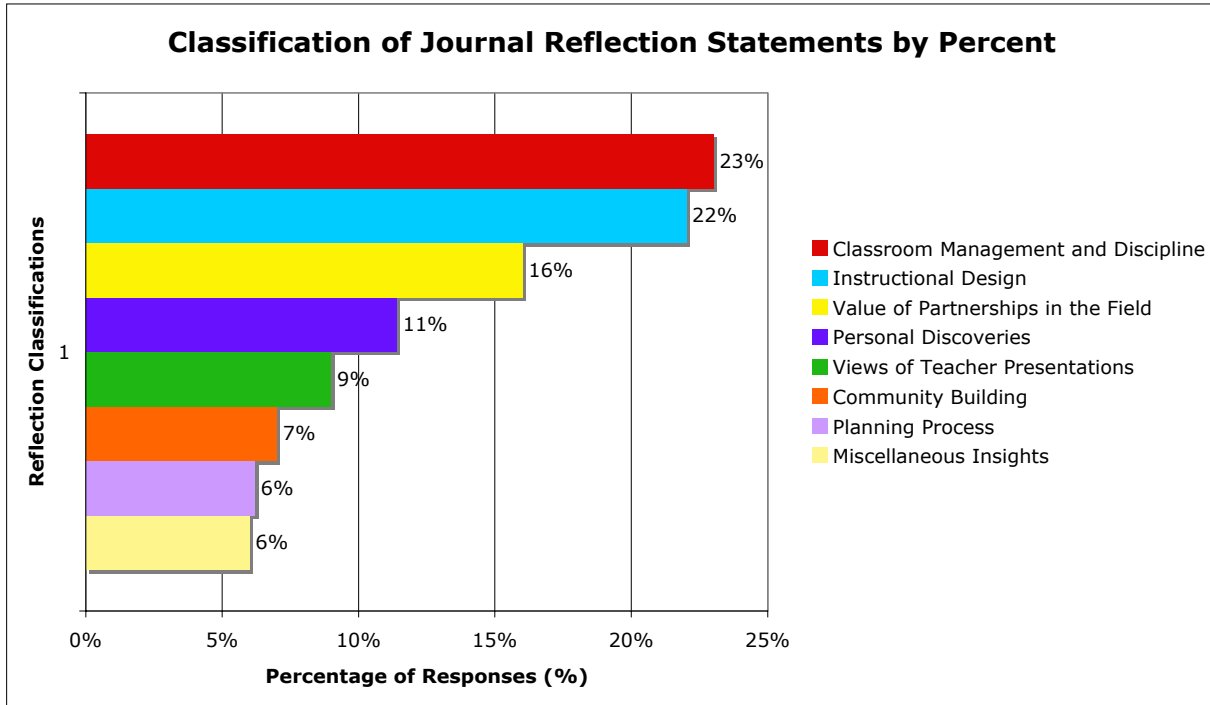
responses were taped and transcribed by another set of students. In addition, two focus groups of the pedagogical partnership teachers were held at the beginning and the end of this five-year project using questions developed by the researchers (Appendix D). The researcher facilitated each of the three focus groups, comprised of 6-7 members in each group, with students assisting in the process. Transcripts from the focus groups resulted in 40 pages of transcriptions analyzed by the researcher. Confidentiality was maintained for both students and classroom teachers. All project participants were in compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol from the university to withdraw at any time and to receive results of this study.

### *Data Analysis*

Analysis of data was a collaborative process with current methods students forming an analysis team to read hundreds of pages of archived journal reflection data and focus group transcriptions in order for initial themes to emerge through a codification scheme, representing themes and insights from these data. The author contracted with the Research Institute for Studies in Education (RISE) at Iowa State University to conduct a final qualitative analysis for the Pedagogical Partnership project. The analysis consisted of a two-step review process. Each step of the review process provided descriptive information that assisted in the identification process of themes from the journal entries of students enrolled in the Curriculum and Pedagogy course. For the first step of the analysis process, the researcher read the journal entries and developed a list of preliminary codes. After completing the first review, the researcher uploaded the entries into ATLAS.ti 5.2, a qualitative analysis software program that is designed to assist in the coding process for qualitative research. Once entries were uploaded in the program, the researcher completed a second review of the journal entries, while using ATLAS.ti 5.2 to electronically record the codes assigned to the various journal entries. After completing the second round of analysis, the list of codes from each set of journal entries were arranged in summative reflection classifications (Appendix E). Data were topic sorted, color coded, summarized through percentage of reflection classifications, and reported through frequent or representative journal entries through student quotations. Percentages of responses were rounded to the nearest whole percent.

### *Results*

Results from qualitative data coding (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) from the percentage of total responses through five years of student journal reflections, revealed student reported efficacy in classroom management and discipline (23%), instructional design (22%), value of partnerships in the field (16%), personal discoveries (11%), views of teacher presentations (9%), community building (7%), planning process (6%) and miscellaneous insights (6%). Students expressed that they felt equipped for challenges they anticipated, such as classroom management and discipline, and had become confident with current curriculum and instructional design. Insightful comments indicate students valued field-based collaboration. It seems clear that teacher education students learned from the teachers and, reciprocally, the teachers learned from the pedagogical process. From the analysis of data from ATLAS.ti 5.2 total percentage of all student responses converged in the following reflection classifications, with a discussion of each to follow (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Classification of journal reflection statements by percent.**

### *Discussion of Reflection Classifications*

#### *Classroom management and discipline*

Coding for reflections on management and discipline (23%) included reflections on the importance of creating a classroom that is governed or structured by a plan, specific examples of how to create and implement such a plan, the impact of a behavior plan, relevance of room design, or types of disciplinary approaches used by teachers. Many journal entries summarized students' future vision of their classroom as expressed in this quote, "the teacher's presentation on classroom management pushed to me think and reflect on how I envision my classroom running, the atmosphere I want to create to promote learning and individual character, as well as the role that my students and myself will have in developing a positive academic/social environment."

Other students were captivated by how to manage the daily routines, such as this observation by Amanda, "Mrs. S. provided examples of the different routines in her classroom that allow her to be more organized such as attendance, lunch count, bathroom use, or lining up. Her reading books are categorized by reading level or themes, making it easier for children to choose their own books. She sends home 'Friday folders' that contain papers that the students' parents need to receive. To monitor appropriate and inappropriate behavior, she implemented the stoplight idea (green-yellow-red) with clothespins, but has modified it to an ice cream cone to better relate to her students. She has file cabinets full of projects, supplementary activities for books, and lesson plans. All of her ideas and routines are models for us, as prospective teachers, to look at in planning our own classrooms."

Nearly every student reflected on the pencil jars from Mrs. H. in her 2<sup>nd</sup> grade room. “The teacher created ‘happy’ and ‘sad’ pencil jars. If students had a pencil that was dull or broken, they would put it in the sad jar and they could pick up another pencil from the happy jar. This has helped stop the distraction of sharpening pencils. I’ll use this great management idea!” At recess the students took turns staying with Mrs. H. to sharpen the community jar of dull, unhappy pencils. Students admired her many practical ideas for keeping the focus on learning.

Joe’s reflection stated, “Mrs. H. did not have a specified behavior plan the first years of her teaching, but she has now implemented a plan in her classroom. I thought about these implications from a teacher’s perspective as well as from a student’s perspective. Behavior plans are needed in the classroom - they provide consistency, act as a guide to the classroom rules/boundaries, and create a sense of equality among the students. The teacher uses a behavior chart with clips to monitor student actions - this is a very public way to assist students to monitor their behavior, as well as creates a situation(s) that may potentially label students. For example, the child who frequently makes poor behavioral decisions, unintentionally develops a reputation among his/her peers as a problem; always getting into trouble. These thoughts provided me with the idea that a similar system could be easily done in a more private manner such as cards taped to the students’ individual desks.”

These reflections provide two ways for teacher education students to interpret observations of classroom management. In the first instance, the example might be replicated. In the second, the student engaged in critical reflection (Surbeck, Park Han, & Moyer, 1991) inviting future thought and action where the new teacher would vary the discipline technique. Anne summarized, “Have students help create classroom rules and help set consequences when the rules they have created are broken. By deciding their own boundaries, students are more likely to follow rules....that will prevent problems before they start. When students feel they are part of the process, they accept responsibility for their actions and are more likely to respect the teacher and fellow classmates.” This was a relief to many college students, whose primary concern was the challenge of discipline and classroom management.

### *Instructional design*

Coding for reflections on instructional design (22%), the other major response category, included student comments on the different types of instructional approaches used by the teachers, the differences between expert and novice teachers, and the importance of participating in reflective activities with regard to instruction. Tim thinks instruction is predicated on routines and monitoring progress. “Not only are routines essential for the students to feel comfortable learning, they are essential for the teacher. Keeping a routine will help teachers organize instruction. Journal keeping, checklists, organizing student work, and keeping track of student progress will help me stay organized and better handle unexpected situations.” Students learned from expert teachers about models of teaching. Liz says, “I learned the most effective strategies for ‘read alouds’ from Mr. G. that I have ever seen! It was amazing how active the kids became once they were allowed to ‘own’ the discussion of the book. The most important thing was that students should be challenged-but not over the top-so they will be encouraged to answer questions by using higher level thinking. Something that is stressed over and over again in class....BUT how to get kids to actually do that is another story. Now I know!”

Anne’s powerful reflection states, “Inquiry teaching requires a high degree of interaction between the students, teachers, materials, content, and environment. Students and teachers need to feel

comfortable and confident to question what they learn, experience, read, write, and discover. Being able to manipulate, and interact with the materials, content, and learning environment encourage a deeper learning and understanding. Inquiry teaching requires active learning. Inquiry teaching does not need to follow one set model. Guided inductive inquiry, unguided inductive inquiry, problem-based inquiry, and discovery learning are all models of inquiry learning.” She continues, “All of these models require teachers to act as questioners, motivators, and encouragers. When students begin to reflect through inquiry, there are three important steps. Students first need to infer meaning, synthesize, and determine importance of the ideas they are learning. Teachers can use a multitude of strategies to promote thinking. Students can further learning through making connections to their own experiences and prior learning. They can formulate questions they wish to be answered. Creating sensory images, such as drawings, can help them construct knowledge. By drawing inferences from what they have learned, students create their own understanding and synthesize meaning. Finally, solving problems helps students master the steps to higher level thinking.” This novice teacher has articulately expressed the art of pedagogy learned from the voices of experience.

#### *Value of Partnerships in the Field*

Coding for reflections on the value of the pedagogical partnerships in the field (16%) included comments focusing on the collaborative experience, the on site visits, and the presentations by the team of teachers. Dena said, “I found all of our speakers were fun and I enjoyed the overall experience. I love going to King Elementary and my experiences there will help me to be a better teacher. I learned many new strategies and systems that I will use in my own room. Hearing firsthand experiences taught me a lot. I’ve gained many new insights and ideas.” Dena, in fact, continued in the building as a volunteer for the Boys and Girls Club, completed student teaching at this school, and was well respected in the building. Marcia writes, “The teacher’s presentations were helpful and interesting. It is helpful to hear from different teachers and to be able to connect with their classes. The experiences we are getting at King Elementary will help me to be a better teacher and to be more prepared to meet student’s needs.” Interestingly, multiple students shared that the Pedagogical Partnership caused them to focus, not just their own competencies as a teacher, but on the achievement of their students. As Tiffany said it, “The teachers made me ask myself, not how am I doing, but how are THEY [the kids] doing!” Many students reflected in ways similar to this. “Overall, the pedagogy experiences have been so helpful. I enjoyed knowing about the **reality** of the school day. I enjoyed observing real classrooms to see the students and teachers in action. This helped me tremendously!” Erin said, “I have truly gained more wisdom.” And countless students simply wrote, “Thank you.”

#### *Personal discoveries*

Coding for reflections on personal discoveries (11%) concentrated on the experience for the students, their personal voice, and their professional growth that resulted from the partnership. Audrey, who student taught in Australia, states, “I realized experiences from the Pedagogical Partnership are applicable to teaching in another culture. I was excited by the idea that I could apply information about planning, designing instructions, management techniques, critical thinking, inquiry teaching, and higher-level thinking during my student teaching abroad.” Frankly, teaching strategies are universal (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000).



Another student learned the impact of one's attitude as Tia reflected, "What I enjoyed most about Mrs. B. was her attitude. Being a member of her audience, I could feel her passion and dedication to her work. She truly cares about what she does and her students. When she came into the room, it seemed like things just lit up. I am sure her classroom has the same feel. I discovered the power of personal energy. I want to convey that."

Others learned that it is OK to make mistakes. Barb writes, "I learned that teachers who never make mistakes and never make changes are the ones who are not going to improve in their teaching abilities. I realize I will make mistakes and can learn from them." One student wrote, "I realize that I am the type of person who is afraid to take chances or risks. I have to overcome this trait. No, I will overcome this."

Many students discovered that they did not have to be perfect their first year of teaching and to know they would accumulate materials for activity hubs, centers, book tubs, and bulletin boards. Colleen says, "Why do I expect I'll have everything these teachers have developed during MY first year of teaching? It takes time. They all made us understand they remembered what it was like to be a first year teacher, once upon a time." As George Washington Carver once said, "I know of nothing more inspiring than that of making discoveries for ones self," (Great Quotes, 1994, p. 38). Students were making important discoveries about teaching and learning.

#### *Views of Teacher Presentations*

Coding for reflections on views of teacher presentations (9%) were centered on the general lessons about their experiences such as the teacher's approach to instruction and lesson planning. Jenna says, "I incorporated Mrs. H.'s strategies into my classroom management plan. My favorite idea was her looks like/sounds like chart. These descriptors will really help students understand what these rules mean. I thought it was so neat when she told us about how her students become excited to see if they can be so quiet 'you can hear a pin drop' while working at their seats."

Katie S. reports, "The thing that I will remember from Mrs. B.s' talk is that not all students fit what she called "norms of middle class society." I think it is important to realize that some students come from complex families or where certain behaviors are considered acceptable." Brett said, "I remember being really overwhelmed after hearing Mrs. H. talk. There were so many things that were involved in her classroom management plan and even though they were all really great ideas, it just seemed like so much. But, once I sat down to write my own classroom management plan, I found that everything had a purpose or reason behind it and did need to be included. I think that she made some important points about discipline during her presentation as well. She talked about taking into consideration the home life of your students when they misbehave. I think that it is easy to forget that children can have bad days or be going through rough times just as adults can. As teachers, we need to remind ourselves of that and make adjustments accordingly.

Many students liked Mr. G.'s literacy focus. This reflection states, "When responding to answers, the teacher should simply acknowledge correct answers with a brief affirmation. Therefore, kids don't always look for a 'good job' after an answer. Students should engage in think-pair-share, buzz grouping, or use a beach ball for answers. This is more interesting then just sitting around answering questions. Good questions are why? How come? I wonder?" Mr. G. distinguished between "thick and thin" questions. "Thin questions only require yes or no and

don't really challenge student to think. Thick questions inspire students to make connections and determine what is important and use sensory images to provide responses to their readings."

Another student shared, "Of the three teachers that spoke, I absolutely loved Mrs. O's presentation. She talked about how to manage your time during your first year of teaching. I loved her suggestions on how to establish routines early on in the school year, starting with day one. I have worked with young children before and understood just what she was talking about when she said, 'repeat, repeat, repeat.' She described herself as a 'perfectionist' and I am exactly the same way. I can see myself doing some of the same things that she does in my own classroom. I really enjoyed her 'Sub Tub' and know that I will use that idea when I begin teaching. Because she was a new teacher she talked about the interviewing process sharing potential questions when applying for a teaching job, as well as the things *not* to do when going for that interview. I appreciated her honesty and personal stories about it. Her personal stories about mistakes she made, will hopefully keep me from making those same mistakes."

### *Community building*

Coding for reflections on community building (7%) captured the importance and impact of cultivating relationships with the teachers, parents, and classroom students throughout the year. According to Brown (2001), "Participants in learning communities are empowered to explore and learn. They are not passive sponges of knowledge. Rather, they are responsible for their own learning and for the learning of their peers. Even more, they are actively engaged in scholarship of learning instead of simply the re-presentation of what is already known. The integration of a learning community suggests serious reform is necessary in the teaching of introductory education courses, such as pedagogy." Abigail reflected, "Keep the classroom environment positive. Students crave attention and by acknowledging the good and minimizing negative, teachers can encourage good behavior that is contagious. Students will increase self-esteem and team building. Group trust is essential to maintaining a working classroom." Laura observed, "The whole idea of community and working together implemented in Barnesville (Mrs. B.'s room) strengthens a classroom. I like that it [jobs and roles] distributes responsibility and power within her class." Another student wrote, "I liked Mrs. B.'s positive expectations. She set the tone and controlled the environment in her classroom. She had the same expectations for all students regardless of labels or social economic status." She left sticky notes and personal messages for her 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, sent home notes or called parents, and encouraged random acts of kindness within the class. Kids were mutually dependent upon each other as team players. Like Mrs. B., many students said Mrs. H. emphasized the importance of being a community within the classroom, with the parents, and within the building to develop relationships with students, teachers, parents, and professional peers. Kids need to know that the class is a team and must work together in order to learn and have a strong positive environment."

### *Planning process*

Coding for reflections on planning (6%) included the significance of planning as teachers, the different components of planning, when to plan, and both the positive and negative impact of planning. As Amy B. states, "Planning is essential to effective teaching - the teacher may plan a lesson based on the curriculum, resources available, students' needs as well as students' academic abilities. It is a continuous process; teachers plan for today's learning in addition to tomorrow's learning. Effective planning promotes learning; the teacher assists the student to make connections between real world events, and student's personal lives as well as to the curriculum material.

Another student stated, “As teachers plan, students see them model important organizational skills and caring attitudes. The importance of modeling cannot be overstated - students observe the teacher model organizational skills, attitudes/interactions with others, questioning techniques, learning strategies, and the value of education.”

Jen wrote, “Planning and preparing classroom routines promotes teaching and learning, allowing both the teacher and students to use time effectively. For instance, transition times from one activity to another can be accomplished with a minimal amount of disruption to the flow of teaching/learning or it can be chaotic/disruptive demanding additional amounts of valuable time.”

Audrey learned the importance of not wasting class time. “We learned about teacher planning including models, purposes, necessities to consider when planning for the students, content and processes, time, outcomes and objectives, resources, and the teacher. We studied the instructional planning cycle with unit and lesson planning plus post lesson activities. We learned about the importance of planning! Five minutes saved a day is 25 minutes saved a week. Twenty-five minutes saved a week is 900 minutes saved in a 180-day school year.”

Elizabeth H. summarizes, “The different types of planning include planning before instruction, during instruction, and after instruction. Providing lots of details within planning books, perhaps on sticky notes helps remind the teacher of ideas that she would want to cover. The time span of planning should be for the year, grading period, unit, weekly, and daily.” While planning seems overwhelming for new teachers, one single message was echoed by many. Mrs. S. (5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher) said, “Failure to plan, is planning to fail.”

#### *Miscellaneous insights*

Coding for miscellaneous (6%) reflections encompassed all other topics including, but not limited to, teacher interests, reward systems, record keeping, emergency plans, portfolios, professional aspirations, gender issues, etc. One student stated, “Mrs. S. connected her personal interests and hobbies with real life circumstances to her classroom resulting in students having a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for learning. For example, she had her kids sewing quilts, reading Dr. Seuss books, *Flat Stanley* (Brown, 1977), and predicting NCAA basketball brackets during a March Madness unit because these were interests of her own. This promotes meaningful learning and understanding for the students.” Another student reflected, “Record keeping, whether it relates to grades, anecdotal information, and/or communication with the student/parent is a key to being a professional educator. One student said, “I have learned the importance of keeping current and accurate records from the examples the teachers developed. Not only did I find this interesting to hear, but could actually see examples provided to solidify my understanding of this point.”

Importantly, positive outcomes resulted from personal reflection, collaboration with elementary teachers as pedagogical partners, and self-reported self-efficacy as new teachers ready for the field.

#### *Impact on the Team of Teachers as Pedagogical Partners*

Space does not permit a discussion, however interesting, of the notion that all pedagogical partnership teachers reflected that the experience forced them to re-evaluate their own decisions about daily operations and to look objectively at processes that had become second nature to

them. Questions from pre-service teachers encouraged them to evaluate their own practice related to the information they presented. Teachers reflected on what they learned in college, imparted knowledge to future educators, shared evidence of change in their thinking, and continued their journey as lifelong learners, an opportunity not easily constructed within the chaos of a busy school day. Overall, teachers found this to be a validating experience in that their classroom conduct correlated with research and theory. As one teacher stated, "It gave me that pat on the back feeling. You are doing it right! It made me feel good about my teaching." One teacher remarked, "I wish I would have had this same opportunity prior to my first year teaching. I think any chance students get to collaborate with teachers who have been in the profession and have knowledge to share with them is beneficial."

### *Conclusion*

In summary, Elise, a pre-service teacher, shares these poignant reflections. "I entered the program rather uncertain of the experiences ahead of me. I sat through many lackluster guest speakers and observations over the course of my teacher preparation. These experiences usually left me unsatisfied and longing for a classroom of my own with the opportunity to transform theory into effective practice. As soon as the first [Pedagogical Partnership] teacher began her presentation, I knew this collaborative partnership would be an educational experience unlike any other. While learning about concepts and strategies of successful teaching and learning, I was moved by the examples of the master teachers. They were able to bring evidence-based findings to life by presenting the information as it truly applies to their classrooms and provided my peers and me with unique insight into the field that we would never have acquired through pointless hour-long observations.

The collaboration-based arrangement of the on site learning community provided an opportunity to communicate personally with exemplary teachers chosen for this partnership. I was able to question issues that most concern me, as I prepare to enter the field. I received explicit and direct responses from people who know. Teachers were aware of our needs and expectations and were willing to adapt their instruction to our needs.

I left the experience invigorated and more certain than ever that teaching is the profession I was meant to experience. The partnership sparked spontaneous discussion and reflection among my fellow pre-service teachers and I, as we questioned educational theory and marveled at the daily experiences of the practicing teachers. I feel that I have left this partnership with a multitude of fascinating curriculum ideas and resources. Through intimate, professional interaction with practicing teachers, I am equipped to meaningfully incorporate the experiences of the field professional into their own practice. Therefore, I am better prepared for many of the obstacles faced by first-year teachers and will successfully implement effective methods to create an engaging learning environment for my own classroom."

Importantly, both pre-service and in-service teachers were partners in discovering their own strengths and affirming self-confidence in teaching and learning. Fortunately, the project was developed with a cadre of teachers who were willing to share with university students who were willing to learn. This provided students with resources can truly engage them in meaningful ways, thereby enabling them to make a difference (Wenger, 1998) in their future classrooms and schools. This field based pedagogical partnership demonstrates one way to improve preparation of new teachers.

## About the Author

**Sally R. Beisser**, Ph.D., an Associate Professor of Education at Drake University, is going up for full professor this year. Her research interests include pedagogy, gifted education, technology, and service-learning. She teaches doctoral courses in qualitative research and ethics, masters level courses in contemporary issues, and elementary social studies methods and pedagogy in teacher education. She has over 50 publications and has presented at over 100 local, state, national, and international research and practitioner's conferences. She recently initiated an online endorsement program for teachers of gifted and talented learners that received the Iowa Distance Learning Association (IDLA) Point of Presence award and United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) recognition. She was invited to present a paper at the Oxford Round Tables at Oxford University in Oxford, England in July 2008 on the "Unintended Consequences of No Child Left Behind Mandates on Gifted Students" which was submitted for publication in the Oxford *Forum on Public Policy*.

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**Appendix A. STUDENT SURVEY: Pre-Service Student Needs and Interests**

Students: This informal survey is designed to gather feedback about how future methods courses should be organized and developed. Please take time to answer the following questions. All responses are anonymous.

1. As pre-service teachers, list issues/topics in your methods education courses that concern you the most as you consider teaching in own classroom?
2. If a current in-service teacher in the field served as a “guest professor” during 2-3 class periods through the semester, what areas would you most like him or her to address?
3. What assignments/field trips/discussions have been most beneficial in this class?
4. What improvements/changes/additions would you like to make to this class?
5. Rank the following topics 1-5 (1=of most importance/interest as a pre-service teacher)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Parent communication
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Curriculum/Planning Lessons
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Behavior/Management Issues
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom Design
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Staff Development/Administrative Support
  - \_\_\_\_\_ A topic of greater importance to you \_\_\_\_\_ (define)

Thank you for taking time to respond. Results will be compiled, analyzed and shared with students in current and future classes.

**Appendix B. TEACHER INVITATION: Pedagogical Partnership Project**

Teachers: You are invited to participate in a collaborative learning opportunity with elementary teacher education majors. Please complete the following and return to your building principal by May 17, 2002.

SELF-NOMINATION for PEDAGOGICAL PARTNERSHIP IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Name:

Grade Level:

Number of Years of Teaching Experience (total):

1. How do you feel your experiences in the classroom could benefit pre-service teachers?

2. Why do you want this opportunity to work with pre-service teachers?

3. Rank the following topics 1-5 (1=of most importance/interest as an in-service teacher)

\_\_\_\_\_ Parent communication

\_\_\_\_\_ Curriculum/Planning Lessons

\_\_\_\_\_ Behavior/Management Issues

\_\_\_\_\_ Classroom Design

\_\_\_\_\_ Staff Development/Administrative Support

\_\_\_\_\_ A topic of greater importance to you \_\_\_\_\_ (define)

Thank you for taking time to respond. Results will be compiled and analyzed by a team of three reviewers with final results considering the match of applicant interest, expertise, and availability with needs and interests of students in the teacher education program.



## Appendix C. FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS for STUDENTS

### Student Focus Group Questions Fall semester 2002

- Ice Breaker: Grab Bag Activity

Take one item from the bag (pass around bag of assorted items such as )  
Tell how this item could be a metaphor for teaching or relates to teaching?

1. How has the experience at King Elementary made a difference in your understanding of Curriculum & Pedagogy?
  2. How has the field experience at King Elementary helped you know what you need to succeed in the first five years of teaching?
  3. How has the opportunity to interact & discuss with practicing teachers caused you to examine pedagogy more critically?
  4. What do you think the teachers gain from this partnership?
  5. Has the experience at King Elementary enhanced your ability to be a reflective thinker?
  6. In what way might your experience at King Elementary affect your commitment to stay in teaching beyond the first five years?
- Final Question in last 10 minutes: (1:35-1:45 pm)
7. In a phrase, what is the greatest benefit that results from the collaborative effort between the teachers at King Elementary and the course Curriculum & Pedagogy?

## **Appendix D. FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS for TEACHERS**

### **Pedagogical Partnerships: Drake University King Elementary: Des Moines Public Schools**

Focus group meeting #1 conducted Spring 2003

Focus group meeting #2 conducted Spring 2007

- Ice Breaker: Three “adjectives” to describe you as a teacher!
  
- 8. How has the experience of teaching a class for the Drake students (in Curriculum & Pedagogy) made a difference in your own understanding of what you teach and how to teach it?
  
- 9. Has your experience with the Drake education students enhanced your ability to be a reflective thinker? If so, how?
  
- 10. Has this opportunity caused you to evaluate your own teaching more critically? If so, how?
  
- 11. How has the experience with the Drake education students influenced your perspective of pre-service teachers and the challenges they face as new teachers?
  
- 12. What do you think the Drake students gained from this pedagogical partnership?
  
- 13. Would you do this again (present to Drake students)? What would it take to influence your continuation of this partnership?
  
- 14. How has this experience enhanced your ability to articulate “what you know” about teaching as a life long learner?
  
- Final Question-watch the time:
  
- 15. In a phrase, what is the greatest benefit that results from the collaborative effort between teacher leaders, like yourself, and Drake Students?

**Appendix D. Data Distribution from Analysis of Journal Reflection: 2002 to 2007**

Coded Themes	Fall 2002		Fall 2003		Spring 2004		Fall 2004		Spring 2005		Fall 2005		Spring 2006		Fall 2006		Total	%	Rank	Reflection Classifications
		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%				
Classroom Management	59		32		9		44		32		17	18%	22	18%	172					Classroom Management
Behavior Plan/Discipline	12	23%	9	20%	1	13%	1	21%	11	16%					10	27%	460	23%	1	Behavior Plan/Discipline
Instructional	81	27%	61	29%	18	23%	66	30%	80	28%	41	44%	41	33%	36	5%	436	22%	2	Instructional Design
Planning Process	42	14%	15	7%	6	8%	25	12%	33	11%					3	0%	124	6%	7	Planning Process
Assessment of Experience Personal Views on Various Teachers'	34	11%	16		13	17%	24	11%	24	8%	7	8%	18	15%	34	5%				Assessment of Experience Personal Views on Various Teachers'
Lessons	21	7%	8	11%	18	23%	20	9%			1	1%	8	6%						Lessons
Personal (student voices)											30	10%			130	19%	228	11%	4	Personal discoveries (student voices)
Site Visits	43	14%	25	12%	2	3%	24	11%	41	14%	3	3%	16	13%	135	21%	289	16%	3	Value of Partnership Site Visits
Community Building	7	2%	3	1%	2	3%	4	2%	17	6%	21	23%	10	8%	64	9%	128	7%	6	Community Building
Miscellaneous Insights	6	2%	42	20%	8	10%	8	4%	21	7%	3	3%	9	7%	92	14%	121	6%	8	Miscellaneous Insights
Totals	305	100%	211	100%	77	100%	216	100%	289	100%	93	100%	124	100%	676	100%	1991	100%		