

School partnerships and clinical preparation at the middle level

Strong school–university partnerships foster valuable clinical experiences for preservice teacher candidates at three universities.

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The blend of practice and research at the university reaffirms my deeply held belief that worthwhile knowledge draws on both worlds. Indeed, the separation of practice from theory, of practitioners from scholars, is more often than not a divorce that is more symbolic than real. (Cuban, 1993, p. xxi)

Forty-six states and the District of Columbia require some form of specialized middle level teacher preparation leading to licensure or an endorsement (Association for Middle Level Education [AMLE], 2007), and accreditation agencies inform the practices and policies for the majority of institutions preparing middle level teacher candidates across the country. Current debates about the most efficient and effective ways to improve P–12 education include teacher preparation as the focal point (Darling-Hammond, 2010), and the Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning has highlighted the importance of school–university partnerships in preparing teachers capable of increasing student achievement (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2001; 2010). Preparing middle level teachers to improve student achievement is becoming a major priority in the larger landscape of teacher education, and concerns about the nature and quality of specialized middle level preparation permeates larger conversations about licensures and endorsements within the field of middle level education. It is critical for middle level educators to participate in these conversations to ensure that

middle school philosophy remains at the core of teacher preparation practices.

In this article, we describe how three universities approach middle level teacher preparation through partnerships and clinical experiences. We share the structures of our programs and the role of our partnerships in the clinical preparation of our candidates. We also discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by school–university partnerships and discuss both the advantages and disadvantages of engaging in such work. Finally, we will situate the implications of NCATE’s Blue Ribbon Panel Report in the historical and social context of middle level education and offer recommendations for others seeking to develop clinical experiences through school–university partnerships.

Clinical practice through partnerships

Teacher candidates often cite clinical field placements as the most powerful learning experiences of their preservice education. They tend to value field experiences over the content of teacher education courses, as the school context is very powerful and lends itself to the social nature of learning to teach. The physical divide between courses taken on college campuses and field work completed at local schools only exacerbates the disconnect teacher candidates perceive between theory and practice in teacher education.

This article reflects the following *This We Believe* characteristics: Shared Vision, Committed Leaders, Professional Development

Candidates come to our programs valuing practice over theory and the very design of our programs presents the idea and reinforces it throughout their education.

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In an effort to help candidates value both coursework and field work, institutions of teacher education need to shift from the traditional, university-based approach of teacher preparation to a clinical approach with practice-based curriculum (Ball & Forzani, 2009). The NCATE Blue Ribbon Panel report calls for teacher preparation that is clinically based and integrates the practice and pedagogy of learning to teach (NCATE, 2010). School-embedded teacher preparation provides the opportunity to guide candidates to the explicit connections between what they are learning in their coursework and what they are observing and experiencing in their field work.

Clinically-based teacher preparation is particularly important for middle level education candidates, as they need to interact with and learn from young adolescent students to value their unique developmental needs. Working in middle schools helps bridge the divide

between the theory of developmentally responsive practices for young adolescents and the actual enactment of those practices. When candidates have opportunities to participate in a school setting beyond a set number of observation hours, they are able to see the importance of creating in their classrooms learning communities that support and nurture the development of their students (Howell, 2013).

Such a shift in teacher education requires collaboration between school districts and universities as they seek to develop partnerships in which both parties share the responsibility for preparing teachers and improving the learning experiences of young adolescent students. The NCATE Blue Ribbon Panel report suggested that teacher preparation be redesigned to include more clinical experiences embedded in school-university partnerships (NCATE, 2010). Such a redesign emphasizes teaching as a practice-based profession. With school-embedded preparation, candidates will come to understand and value both the knowledge base of teaching and the opportunities to learn when and how to use that knowledge in practice. This type of redesign will not happen quickly or easily, nor should the institutions of teacher education shoulder the burden alone.

Using the NCATE Standards for Professional Development Schools (NCATE, 2001) as a guide, we highlight work from three institutions that use clinically-based approaches to middle grades teacher preparation and represent different stages of partnership development (see Figure 1). Each of our programs provides candidates authentic opportunities to blend practitioner knowledge with academic knowledge and to learn by doing in collaborative settings.

Figure 1 Examples of partnerships in middle grades teacher preparation

Integrated*	Developing*	Beginning
University of North Carolina at Charlotte The goals of the partnership are integrated into the partnering institutions. Partnership work is expected and supported, and reflects what is known about best practice.	University of Louisville Partners pursue the goals with partial institutional support.	George Fox University Beliefs, verbal commitments, plans, organization, and initial work are consistent with the goals of the partnership.

Source: NCATE (2010). Transforming Teacher Education through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers.

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC) has offered bachelor's and master's degree programs in middle level education since the 1980s. The middle grades program is guided by standards from NCATE and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and, like the other programs in the college of education, is based on the conceptual framework: *Professional Educators Transforming Lives*. This framework manifests itself across all programs, throughout coursework, and in the rich conversations and varied opportunities offered to the unit's 3,000 education students. The undergraduate middle grades program requires licensure in two concentrations selected from mathematics, science, social studies, and English language arts. Candidates within the undergraduate program complete clinical experiences in all courses and a yearlong internship, which includes a semester of student teaching divided between their two concentrations. Like all teacher candidates at UNCC, middle grades candidates submit common work samples and assessments to measure their growth and accomplishments.

UNCC offers a graduate certificate option in middle level education for those professionals who already hold a degree in an appropriate field. Their coursework ends in initial licensure in one of the four content areas and includes the opportunity to move forward into a Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) degree should the candidate wish to do so. Like their undergraduate counterparts, graduate certificate candidates complete a full semester of student teaching, unless they are already employed as classroom teachers, a possibility within the state, known as "lateral entry."

Finally, experienced teachers who hold a middle level initial license are invited to apply to a traditional Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Middle Grades, which is currently offered as a 100% online opportunity. All middle grades candidates within the M.Ed. program are required to complete a capstone action research project that spans the entire program and is based on a self-selected issue or need related to early adolescence or middle level education, as found in their individual professional situations.

No matter the level of study, all middle grades candidates work within common program goals and emerge as teacher leaders who are able to:

- Implement middle grades philosophy to its fullest intent, as described by AMLE, and assist grades 6–8 schools in these efforts.
- Engage in collaborative research on young adolescents and middle level education.
- Design and promote meaningful curriculum that is integrated, competency- and technology-based, relevant to expectations for 21st century life, and celebrates diversity.
- Employ methodologies based on young adolescents' unique needs.
- Improve practice through self-reflection, self-evaluation, and applied research.
- Operate fully from common attitudes of pervasive caring and innovative leadership.

Integrated school partnerships and clinical practices at UNC Charlotte

Candidates in teacher education programs nationwide often cite field placements as being among their most powerful learning experiences, and the College of Education at UNCC takes this aspect of its programs seriously. The unit has spent many years cultivating relationships across a network of 10 professional development school (PDS) sites and numerous other partnership schools in which most of these clinical experiences occur. These designated schools operate from a shared philosophy for teacher preparation and connect undergraduate candidates with some of the most successful practicing teachers in three local districts. Led by liaisons from both the university and the school, each formal PDS site is advised by a council of school faculty members and university candidates. Each site has strong administrative support, is bound by contractual agreements and an established work plan, operates with a small funding stream supplied through the state and the unit, and closely follows NCATE guidelines for PDS relationships (NCATE, 2001).

Among the most mature relationships in the unit's PDS network are those with two middle schools. One of those schools is Concord Middle School (CMS), a suburban school with 900 students in grades 6 through 8, the majority of whom are identified as high needs, and a staff of 70 teachers. CMS opens its doors each semester to approximately 25 university candidates who come to assist, create, and innovate while applying the

principles of middle level education they are learning in their university classes. CMS embraces on-site university coursework and regularly hosts one undergraduate middle grades course per semester: The Early Adolescent Learner in the fall and The Philosophy and Curriculum of Middle Grades Education in the spring.

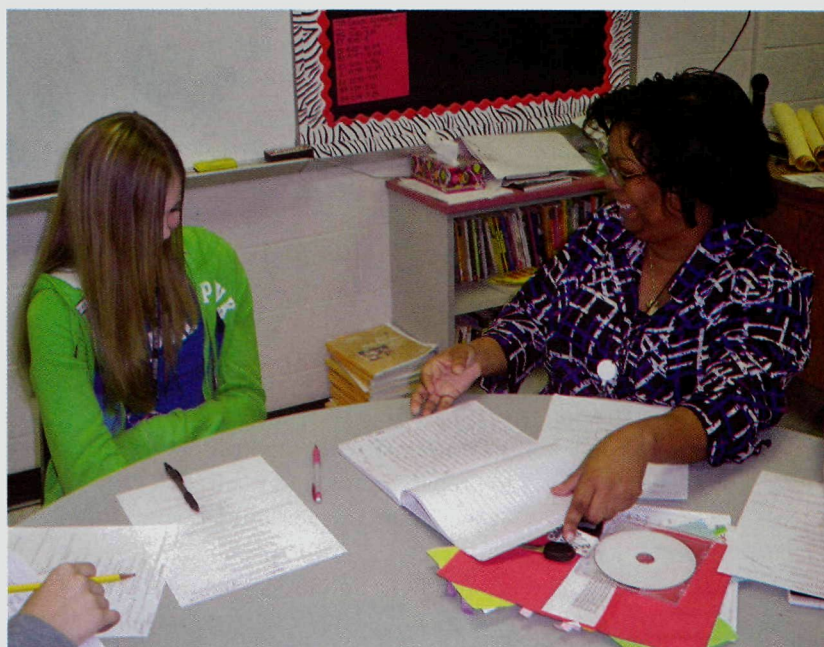
In these courses, candidates meet for a three-hour class one morning per week and then move out into assigned middle grades rooms to complete their clinical work. The clinical work includes experiences such as a shadow study of a middle grades teacher; a case study of a young adolescent; a scavenger hunt for legal issues, counselor advice, and other topics not always covered in coursework; observations for specific things like gender differences and questioning skills; teaching and tutoring; designing instructional bulletin boards; interviewing students about the adolescent world; attending dances and ball games to observe young teens in social settings; and generally exploring the world of the young adolescent one semester and the life of a middle grades teacher the second.

In addition, CMS has served as an off-campus class meeting site for three past cohorts of candidates, who gathered in the media center twice weekly for coursework in the M.Ed. program, which was offered in a distance education format. The teachers in the M.Ed. program came from different local districts, and many of them opened their classrooms to undergraduate candidates for their initial clinical work and later for yearlong internships. This provided solid topics for discussion on the realistic and rigorous preparation of undergraduate candidates for employment within middle grades schools and provided a strong connection between undergraduate and graduate programs at UNCC.

The relationship with CMS is truly two-way. The university's middle grades faculty employ a "give back" attitude, often engaging in professional development and other service activities at CMS. One recent example was a large National Writing Project grant that was implemented across both of the PDS middle schools and two other partner schools. Spanning an intense three years, the grant brought innovative ideas, salary stipends, materials and resources, and other benefits to the CMS faculty and students, and it ended with the establishment of a Writing Professional Learning Community that now provides ongoing leadership for the school in the field of literacy.

Benefits and challenges

As illustrated by the program at UNCC, there are many clear benefits to strong and established partnerships: extra hands in the classroom, ready access to program faculty, academic courses taught on-site with real-world application just a hallway away, master teachers who become change agents within the building through action research and professional development, extra funding for the school, parent education, university assistance with special projects, and a positive impact on the achievement of both university teacher candidates and middle grades students.



A preservice teacher candidate provides feedback on a writing assignment in a middle grades language arts class. photo by J. L. Wilson

Likewise, though, there are ongoing challenges with school–university partnerships. CMS, with its 17-year PDS history, found itself at a point of saturation. Having a partner school host a great many clinical students, interns, and student teachers may appear ideal, but after many years, it also may mean that the same teachers open their doors every semester to preservice teachers who, often, are new to pedagogy and need a great deal of guidance. This situation put demands on many CMS teachers—a situation compounded by the added stress of high-stakes testing (Can I really afford to turn my class

over to a student teacher?) and the very intense three-year grant project mentioned earlier. One CMS teacher laughed while candidly saying, “Hey Jeanneine, we love you, but sometimes we just wish you’d go away.” Her comment was understandable to me because I, too, was saturated. After scaling back for one year, we are once again ready to fly ahead, reenergized and recommitted. Sometimes you just need to give yourself permission to take a break. A strong relationship will not only withstand a break, it will thrive because of it.

All told, and considering the advantages and challenges, the result is an authentic partnership and learning community between the program and school in which candidates report that they understand much more about middle grades education and young adolescents than they would through coursework alone. CMS faculty and staff consider the university’s candidates members of the school team, creating a rich climate of genuine caring, collaboration, and trust—everyone is a valued member of the learning community.

University of Louisville

Teacher education at the University of Louisville (UL) is based on a developmental teacher preparation model, grounded in the College of Education and Human Development’s (CEHD) conceptual framework *Ideas to Action* (see <http://louisville.edu/ideastoaction>), and strives to prepare candidates to meet all of the Kentucky Teacher Standards for initial certification (see <http://www.kyepsb.net/documents/EduPrep/Kentuckyteacherstandards.doc>). The Middle Grades Teacher Preparation Program (MGTPP) includes both bachelor of science (B.S.) and master of arts in teaching (M.A.T.) degrees that lead to certification to teach grades 5–9 in one or more of four content areas: mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies. Consistent with a developmental approach to teacher preparation, the MGTPP includes four phases of experiences with local schools that build on the previous phases and increase in complexity and responsibility.

Partnerships

Since the University of Louisville was chartered in 1798, it has been charged with the mission of not only providing a quality education for the region’s citizens but to act as a societal agent of change—one focused on community enrichment and improvement. (UL, 2012)

Partnerships at UL have developed from this mission and were formalized through the Signature Partnership Initiative (SPI) established by the president of UL in 2002. This initiative is a university-wide effort to work with various community partners—drawing upon the expertise and energy of faculty, staff, and students from *every school and college* of UL—to enhance the quality of life and economic opportunities for residents of West Louisville, the community in which UL is located.

One of the first programs of the SPI focused on five schools in West Louisville and sought to help students perform to the best of their abilities and to reduce and eliminate barriers to learning. Urban Middle School (UMS, a pseudonym) was one of the schools selected, and the relationship with this school was formalized in the spring of 2007 with a meeting involving faculty members of CEHD, SPI representatives, and the school administration. Within six months of that meeting, UMS was designated the lowest-performing middle school in the state, and a full restructuring of the school’s administration and teaching staff caused drastic changes to the opportunities afforded by the partnership. The SPI provided the foundation and stability to help the partnership survive this experience.

While still developing, the partnership with Urban Middle School offers many opportunities to provide authentic, school-embedded teacher preparation coursework for candidates seeking middle grades certification. The candidates from the program complete a number of field experience hours in the classrooms of the middle school, and teacher education courses are taught on-site in a dedicated classroom space. As the partnership continues to grow, the faculty and students from UL build relationships with the classroom teachers, school staff, administration, and students. No formal vision or mission statement has been articulated, but it is the hope of both partners to fully develop a clinical setting that benefits *all* stakeholders and improves the middle school students’ educational experiences and achievement.

Developing school partnerships and clinical practices at UL

Based on the categories in Figure 1, current clinical practices at the University of Louisville would be considered “developing,” as the CEHD and the SPI schools are still working to establish a shared understanding of the goals and expectations of each

partner (NCATE, 2010). While the partnership is still developing, it has provided the opportunity for candidates in the MGTPP to engage in powerful learning through clinical experiences and school-embedded coursework, which are major components of this partnership.

The MGTPP is the only program within the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at UL that includes a school-embedded course sequence for preservice candidates. During phase two of the program, candidates enroll in two courses that are taught at the SPI middle school. The courses meet once per week for a full day and include a number of experiences within the school beyond the regular scheduled class time. These courses focus on young adolescent development, curriculum and assessment at the middle level, classroom management, learning communities, and middle school philosophy.

Because the courses are school-embedded, the candidates have the opportunity to see theory in action each class session. Each class begins with a 30- to 40-minute lecture focused on the reading or homework assignment from the previous night and previews a set of focus questions for the day. Candidates are then dismissed to a classroom where they spend 60 to 90 minutes observing the classroom teacher or working with a small group of middle grades students, all while they reflect on the focus questions for the day. After their observation time, they return to our classroom where we spend the last 30 to 45 minutes debriefing the experiences and discussing the focus questions. Students consistently make connections between the readings and course assignments and their observation experiences in the classrooms. One candidate wrote about such a connection in an exit slip about the day's observations.

My most powerful learning experience today was when I walked in the seventh grade classroom and began to notice just how physically different all the students were. I actually saw the reading on variations in students physical development come to life before my eyes. One boy had huge hands and feet but could not have been more than five feet tall. There were two girls working in a group, and one looked like she could have been eight years old, and the other could have been 20. If we had not read and talked about this for today, I am not sure I would have ever noticed that and understood the significance of it. It is so cool to see what I am reading in real life.

Benefits and challenges

As the teacher candidates and I work at the school, we are acknowledged as participants within the school community and not as mere spectators. We participate in all school functions that occur during our time there: we attend assemblies, assist with learning checks, observe fire and tornado drills, eat lunch with students, and participate in team meetings. These experiences allow the candidates to observe in real time the activities of middle school teachers and young adolescent students. While our relationship with UMS is still developing, the work with UMS is an amazing opportunity for teacher candidates to learn about teaching, learning, and school life in the middle grades.

The challenges faced by our clinical partnership with UMS are mainly those associated with any new partnership. First, the level of trust between the individuals involved is such that each party engages cautiously. For example, during the first year of the school-embedded coursework, it was important for me to filter everything through the principal (e.g, schedules, e-mail messages, changes in topic, task lists). As we entered the second year, I was given a bit more freedom in communicating with the teachers about the expectations and responsibilities of the students. I did not have to have the approval of the principal for the schedule or arrangement of field placements and was allowed to e-mail the participating teachers freely. I still made sure I communicated everything to the various administrators, but it was not required. As we move into the third year, we hope to incorporate more opportunities for co-teaching experiences between the university and school faculty as a way of modeling best practices and collaboration.

A second challenge I face as an instructor involves the negotiation of time with the school-embedded structure of the on-site course and clinical experiences and the university regulations regarding contact time with students. Each of my courses is two and a half hours long. The university does not allow me to require more than 10 additional hours beyond the regular class session without requiring students to enroll in an additional credit hour of field experience. Given the administrative demand to reduce the credit hours required of students, adding one credit hour is out of the question. This means I have to make a choice between scheduling instructional time with my teacher candidates and allocating time for them to be in the classroom with the middle grades

teachers and students. Both experiences are critical to their education as future teachers. This dilemma has forced me to make tough choices about what information to cover in class and what information to give them to read on their own. While the challenges to building a mature partnership seem daunting, the advantages and opportunities of the partnership make the work worth it.



Preservice teacher candidates engage with middle grades students in a professional development school (PDS). photo by J. L. Wilson

George Fox University

Think critically, transform practice, and promote justice is the conceptual framework that guides programs in the school of education at George Fox University (GFU), a liberal arts university in Oregon with an enrollment of 3,500. Middle grades teacher preparation occurs within the Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) program, which is divided into three formats—M.A.T. Full-time (3 semesters), M.A.T. in Your Community (4 semesters), and M.A.T. @ Night (5 semesters). While the formats of the programs differ in organizational structure, a common goal is the development of teacher leaders, teacher scholars, and advocates for justice. Members of the GFU faculty believe that learning to teach is more than acquiring knowledge and decontextualized skills; it is an ever-evolving, transformative process of becoming (Britzman, 2003). Candidates are assigned to a cohort

with the intention of building community and providing support through the often-challenging journey of becoming a teacher.

Clinical practice is a central component of the GFU M.A.T. program. In addition to taking courses, candidates engage in three clinical experiences. The first practicum occurs at a community agency or an international site and is focused on building relationship and broadening understanding of diverse perspectives. Candidates are placed in local schools for the additional clinical experiences; with P–12 student learning at the center, a co-teaching model is emphasized with a gradual release of responsibility to the candidate. In compliance with licensure requirements, candidates complete two work samples—one in each school placement. These performance assessments provide evidence of a candidate’s ability to plan, implement, assess, and reflect on instruction and student learning.

Clinical placements have been made through loose partnerships between the university and local school districts. Placement requests are sent to schools or districts, as determined by the location of the candidate’s home, a specific request of the candidate, or a specialized placement need (e.g., an ESOL placement). Cooperating teachers invite candidates into their classrooms, where they provide mentoring and support during the student teaching experience. University supervisors are assigned to individual candidates and serve as liaisons between the school and GFU; they complete formal observations and provide evaluative feedback to the candidate. With limited communication between the school and university, cooperating teachers and university professors often rely on generalizations of the other’s reality as they assist the candidate in synthesizing theory and practice.

The need for change

Concurrent with a national call for stronger clinical partnerships in teacher preparation (NCATE, 2010), faculty in the GFU Full-time program recognized the need to facilitate greater coherence between the university classroom and the clinical experience. Although every term of the program includes clinical experience, faculty detected a need for greater scaffolding—especially during the candidates’ part-time student teaching. During their time in the classroom, candidates often had experiences that challenged existing theories, provided new perspectives on teaching

and learning, and necessitated a new way of viewing the classroom. Faculty felt that additional support would assist candidates through this disequilibrium and aid their professional growth. Although GFU supervisors completed observations, they were infrequent and evaluative in nature; candidates often perceived a limited relationship to their supervisors and felt anxiety from the pressure to perform well. Faculty supervisors desired to shift their primary role from evaluator to mentor.

Another need focused on creating a more holistic approach to the work sample. Cooperating teachers provided the topic and the opportunity to implement the work sample, professors taught and evaluated the written document, and supervisors evaluated the candidates' teaching. For some, the transformational potential of the work sample assignment decreased as it became an exercise to understand and meet the expectations of three different individuals in positions of authority.

Beginning school partnerships and clinical practices at GFU

To address the identified challenges, M.A.T. faculty developed and piloted a community of practice model of group supervision. The 31 candidates in the program were divided into six cluster groups. Each cluster was assigned a supervisor who agreed to meet regularly with the candidates, mentor the five to six candidates during the term, and engage in their own learning within a collaborative community of GFU supervisors. The mentoring would occur in the GFU classroom and in the clinical placement. Additionally, supervisors taught and evaluated the work sample and evaluated the teaching of the unit.

To provide greater scaffolding and support, supervisors assumed a coaching role and provided small-group and individual guidance regarding pedagogical strategies, differentiation, assessment, and other areas of practice. This coaching occurred throughout the 16-week term. Every other week, supervisors met with their clusters in the university classroom for one hour. Familiar with strengths and challenges of clinical settings, supervisors were able to provide specific affirmations and to direct conversations to relevant dilemmas. The candidates in the cluster group were also able to support and encourage one another in powerful ways; one group of middle level candidates extended their community of practice by meeting every Friday in their placement

school to continue to support, encourage, and learn from one another.

The supervisors met bi-weekly to discuss the process, as a way to grow professionally, and to speak with a common voice when working with candidates. Supervisors exchanged stories, brainstormed challenges, shared their different perspectives, and laughed together. Through dialogue, the supervisors realized nuanced differences in interpretation of educational concepts and worked toward shared language. Sharing ideas and approaches provided innovation for individuals and created synergy within the group.

Benefits and challenges

The Blue Ribbon Report (NCATE, 2010) stated that we must provide opportunities for candidates to “develop and study their practice and the practice of their mentors and more experienced colleagues, use what they know, and improve their performance in schools and classrooms under the tutelage of expert clinical educators” (p. 3). The new GFU supervision model allowed for more focused support and personalized instruction for the teacher candidates in the field and in the university classroom. Supervisors noted the power of observing cooperating teachers with the candidate. One supervisor stated,

The student and I sat side by side and watched her CT [coaching teacher] teach this morning. I pointed out to the student and also wrote on my observation sheet some of the management strategies and techniques the CT was using. I further pointed out how much content and information this teacher worked into everything she did. She was very good. When I spoke with the student later today, she mentioned how helpful our time together had been and how much she had noticed during the afternoon session, which she said she would have missed had we not had our conversation. (GFU faculty member, personal communication, September 15, 2011).

This type of support made explicit the multiple decisions teachers make that are often undetected by a novice candidate.

Through survey data, candidates expressed appreciation for many aspects of the new model. Themes included a positive relationship between the candidate and supervisor, coaching that led to professional growth, and a sense of continuity between the university and clinical classrooms—especially regarding the work

sample. One candidate stated, “[My supervisor] helped me reframe my way of looking at teaching and working with a CT.” Another explained, “It was so helpful to have my supervisor guide me, support me, teach me, observe me and grade my work sample. She really knew what I was going through, my classroom environment, and how my work sample was progressing.” Yet another candidate said, “[My supervisor] kept me going when it seemed that no one else was understanding where I was coming from.”

Although feedback regarding the new model was overwhelmingly positive, the experience was not without challenges. Most supervisors experienced logistical issues that accompany working with candidates in two or three buildings; this limited the time they could be in a school and required travel time. Other notable challenges arose from developing the model as we lived it, nuanced differences in language, and assessing candidate perceptions. One candidate stated, “I feel like each of us had different expectations, needs, and requirements from our different supervisors. This was difficult because different supervisors required different things in [the work sample].” The supervisors realized the critical importance of common language, clear boundaries between roles, and consistency in expectations.

Next steps

This model is in the early stages of development and has thus far concentrated on changes that are within university control: an increased focus on the clinical experience, shared and intentional learning related to effective coaching/supervision, and having supervisors in the clinical environment with teacher candidates for longer periods of time. These changes have provided stronger scaffolding and support for teacher candidates. While the community of practice cluster model has the potential to grow into a powerful response to identified needs, it cannot be called a joint venture yet. The next steps include: collaboration with administrators and teachers at clinical sites to develop true partnerships, as recommended by the Blue Ribbon Panel report (NCATE, 2010); conversations between university and school personnel to discuss beliefs and develop a common vision; and, from the discussions, develop collaborative goals and strategic plans to broaden the vision around needs and interests of all stakeholder groups.

Developing partnerships for learning

In this the article, we briefly described the clinical practices offered through school–university partnerships in three middle grades teacher preparation programs. Through our different experiences, we have each learned lessons that may guide others seeking to develop a school-university partnership. The following recommendations are intended to help both schools and universities take an informed approach to the work of educating teachers at all levels through clinically based practices.

- Middle schools and universities need to go into the process having done their homework—having read everything and having thought through each possible situation. Will this relationship (and it is truly a relationship) meet the needs of both university candidates and the school’s teachers and students? If yes, plunge in. If not, consider another partner.
- Do not underestimate the amount of time this will take. You are building multifaceted, complex layers of relationships: unit to school, professor(s) to teachers, candidates to students, administration to administration, and all configurations in between. It is absolutely worth it, but it is very time consuming and bears an emotional cost that most do not anticipate. The groundwork will take at least two years, but the rewards can span an entire career.
- Consider this a legal venture. Draw up a contract that specifies expectations and each party’s commitment (unit and school) and have an agreement of termination. Use them when you need to. On many levels, this is a business arrangement.
- What can professors give back to the school? Without an answer to this question, the work quickly becomes very one-sided. Can you offer professional development? New teacher support? Grant work and salary stipends? On-site courses toward a master’s degree? Funding for the general school budget? On-campus opportunities such as reduced tuition or free registration for a local conference? Co-authorship in publications or conference presentations?

The three examples provided illustrate how teacher preparation programs link theory and practice in clinical settings, which is a major goal of teacher education. For the middle level movement, in particular, clinical links

between university programs and strong schools are critical. Considering the current climate of educational reform, it is even more critical for collaborative partnerships between universities and schools to work simultaneously in all directions and include all stakeholders in planning, implementing, teaching within, assessing, and evaluating programs to be successful. It is only through this strong professional network of schools and universities that middle level education can continue to thrive and be successful in the 21st century. It is also through these partnerships that we can ensure powerful and meaningful educational experiences for young adolescent students.

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