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ABSTRACT

This paper challenges the traditional teacher autonomy model, which assumes that classroom teachers are isolated practitioners charged with teaching classrooms of students independently for most of the school day. It asserts that the realities of modern schools have changed, and teachers are often not as isolated as they once were. Salisbury University, Maryland, began to consolidate internship placements in designated Professional Development School (PDS) sites in the late 1990s, resulting in heavy intern traffic and additional concerns. Discussions among principals, PDS representatives, mentors, and university faculty led to the creation of an internship experience in which preservice teachers developed skills of coordinated planning, curriculum integration, differentiated instruction, and collaborative teaching. In one PDS county, a collaborative teaching model was developed featuring continuous instructional involvement by both intern and mentor throughout the placement. The model defines has interns and mentors assume two instructional roles alternately: lead teacher and support teacher. Successful internships incorporate such strategies as interns and mentors providing parallel instruction to separate groups, organizing cooperative learning structures and sharing in monitoring, and using flex groups for tiered instruction. PDS benefits include: improved teacher-student ratios, easier transitions for interns to the lead teaching role, and enhanced professional development for mentors. (SM)

Re-thinking the Mentoring Role in PDS Classrooms

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The Tradition

Student teaching internships at Salisbury University and elsewhere followed a familiar pattern through the years: mentors were expected to gradually reduce their instructional involvement over the course of a placement, turning over more and more of the teaching to interns. Indeed, the student teaching handbook used by the SU Department of Education for years described a process of incremental mentor withdrawal, with the goal of having the intern achieve "full autonomy" in the classroom by about the sixth week of a placement. The mentor would review and approve plans generated by the intern, supply feedback on lessons and classroom management, but attempt to stay hands-off as much as possible.

This autonomy model was predicated on the assumption that the classroom teacher is fundamentally an isolated practitioner charged with teaching a classroom of students independently for most of the school day, hence the need to prepare student teachers for a solitary role. University supervisors and cooperating have traditionally heaped praise on interns who could "take over the full class" in as short a time as possible.

Challenging the Autonomous Teacher Assumption

The autonomy objective may have worked effectively in the past, but the assumptions it rested on were flawed. The realities of modern schools have changed, and teachers are often not as isolated as they once were. Inclusion brings professionals and paraprofessionals into classrooms on a regular basis.

Reading specialists are frequently present to buttress instruction in coordination with classroom teachers. Anxious principals and supervisors hire teachers under a variety of labels to interface with classroom teachers as they seek higher scores on state and local assessments. Educational technology plays a growing role. ***No Child Left Behind*** provisions require paraprofessionals to spend most of their time in classrooms working actively with students and teachers. Many schools are blessed with willing and capable volunteers. In sum, classroom teachers are not just solo artists; instead, they must become leaders of instructional ensembles, ready to harmonize and orchestrate the collaborative potential of multiple resources.

The PDS movement hit Salisbury University and its regional school partners full force in the late 90's. We began to consolidate internship placements in designated PDS sites, resulting in heavy student intern traffic and additional concerns. Principals worried about the effect of PDS on test scores if interns took over classrooms for weeks at a time. Many teachers were ambivalent about sharing their classrooms with interns semester after semester for fear that instructional continuity or classroom management might suffer. Given the high-stakes expectations on local schools for student achievement, turning over several classrooms to novice teacher-candidates for extended periods was, at best, an imprudent risk. Accordingly, the old assumptions about preparing teachers and the role of the mentoring teacher needed close examination. Discussions among principals, mentors, PDS reps, and University faculty led us to craft an internship experience built on new assumptions: rather than striving for competence as a solo practitioner, pre-service teachers would be well-served to develop skills of coordinated planning, curriculum integration, differentiated instruction and collaborative teaching.

A New PDS Model: Collaborative Internships

About 5 years ago, several mentors in the Worcester County PDS partnership began to experiment with a new approach based on these assumptions. Working with SU faculty and PDS internship supervisors, teachers and interns developed workable approaches that seemed to lead to a win-win solution to the essential question: *can we improve student achievement in local schools while simultaneously grooming a better prepared next generation of teachers?*

What has evolved is a collaborative teaching model featuring **continuous instructional involvement by both intern and mentor** throughout the placement. Planning is a joint effort, characterized by brainstorming and ambitious lesson designs. The roles of lead teacher and support teacher are traded, with the intern gradually assuming the lead role for much of the teaching day. A wide array of co-teaching strategies -- outlined below -- may be employed to maximize student-teacher interaction and to facilitate differentiated instruction. Feedback is exchanged mutually and reflection stems from conversations between fully invested parties. We have also discovered that interns assimilate classroom management strategies more efficiently and tend to attempt more ambitious lessons under this model than in the previous arrangement. Because of mentor scaffolding and professional investment, prudent risk-taking is encouraged and it often results in impressive "showcase" lessons.

The collaborative approach has had the added effect of reducing school concerns about potential setbacks in student achievement due to an intern's inexperience. Principals welcome co-teaching interns because they know that there will be a value-added impact in the classroom. Top-flight teachers are eager to host interns because they know they do not have to relinquish their students for weeks at a time; indeed, many mentors have come to believe that they can be more effective with an intern than when they teach alone. Parents have accepted the heavy traffic of SU interns in PDS sites without complaint and have frequently expressed support for the increased attention given to students and the impressive projects undertaken in classrooms with interns.

Lead Teacher and Support Teacher Roles

The model defines two instructional roles that interns and mentors may assume alternately: lead teacher and support teacher. Initially, the mentor serves as the lead teacher, with principal responsibility for instruction and as the primary voice in the classroom. At this stage, the intern plays the role of support teacher under the direction of the lead teacher/mentor. Support roles may include modeling instructional assignments, assisting individual students, scaffolding small groups, and monitoring student work. As the intern supports instruction and becomes familiar with students and

classroom routines, the mentor models collaborative teaching -- articulating specific roles for the intern and other support personnel.

In subsequent weeks, the intern assumes lead-teacher responsibility for more and more of the instructional day, with the mentor moving accordingly into the support teacher role. The mentor remains actively involved in instruction throughout the internship, and may use the support role to focus on instructional challenges that would not be addressable without a collaborating colleague. Inevitably, the mentor's support role will occasionally cause him or her to leave the classroom, thus allowing the intern the opportunity to experience the dynamic of handling a class of students on his or her own. Throughout the experience, interns learn to orchestrate instruction for the entire class, including the coordination of roles for volunteers, aides, assistants, resource teachers and technology. In an optimally functioning internship, interns and mentors will collaborate on ambitious and productive learning experiences for students that the mentor might not consider tackling on his or her own.

A Typical Collaborative Progression

While the timetable for each intern will vary based on many factors, a typical 8-week placement is characterized by a pattern like this:

Week 1: Intern in support role while learning students and routines. Intern assumes lead role for short instructional periods (homework review, reading a story, traveling to specials, etc.)

Week 2: Intern assumes lead role for 2nd or 3rd iteration of a lesson.

Weeks 3-6: Intern and mentor share lead role frequently while employing a variety of co-teaching instructional strategies.

Weeks 7-8: Intern in lead role for most of the day, with mentor frequently out of room working with individual students or small groups. Interns develop and teach "showcase lessons" for their portfolios featuring collaboration, differentiation of instruction, and the integration of technology.

Co-Teaching Strategies for Interns and Mentors

While there is no fixed formula or timetable for collaborative roles in all settings, successful internships have incorporated a number of strategies and patterns of interaction, including:

- Lead teacher provides instruction while support teacher "**grazes**" among students to monitor and provide assistance as needed with individual students.
- Intern and mentor provide **parallel instruction** to separate groups.
- Support teacher **pulls** out an individual or small group for instruction or access to special resources.
- Mentor and intern **tag team** the lead teacher role through various phases of a lesson.
- Mentor and intern **alternate lead teacher** role for consecutive classes.
- Lead teacher conducts class while support teacher holds **1-on-1 conferences** with students.
- Both teachers organize **cooperative learning structures** and share in monitoring.
- Lead teacher and support teacher engage in **joint "think-alouds"** during instruction by talking through problem-solving strategies.
- Intern and mentor use **flex groups for tiered instruction.**
- Intern and mentor create **learning centers or stations**, including ambitious uses of technology.
- Mentor **assumes the role of an ideal student** and scaffolds intern's instruction.

Benefits of Collaborative Model

Through nearly 5 years of implementation, experimentation and review of the collaborative model in the Worcester County PDS, a number of benefits have been identified:

- Improved teacher-student ratio assures more attention to academic and classroom management challenges, with teachers reporting consistently that fewer kids "fall through the cracks."
- Differentiated instruction increases, as does time spent in small-group reading instruction.
- Teachers report that "thinking time" during a co-taught lesson leads

to better on-the-fly decision-making.

- School system and parental concerns about the impact of numerous novice interns in PDS sites have been allayed.
- Interns seem to experience a less traumatic transition to a lead role in terms of classroom because of mentor modeling and scaffolding.
- Ongoing involvement of mentors encourages interns to attempt ambitious instructional strategies.
- Interns learn to coordinate and maximize the use of all available human and technological resources.
- Collaborative planning, feedback and reflection provide enhanced professional development experience for mentors.
- Interns' ambitious showcase lessons provide positive public relations for schools as well as career development boost for teacher-candidates.
- PDS carrying capacity is increased, as more top-flight teachers agree to host interns regularly.
- The school district's new faculty recruitment effort benefits by having candidates in the pipeline who are well versed in the district's planning priorities and instructional strategies.

Mentor Training

The implementation of a collaborative model is not automatic. While many veteran teachers have been eager to embrace the approach, change has come slowly in some classrooms. We have distributed resource materials, conducted workshops and even developed a 3-credit graduate course on collaborative teaching and mentoring. As one PDS internship supervisor said recently, "some people get it, some don't." Every semester we find more eager mentors, including some who completed internships 3 or 4 years ago under the model.

For more information about this model or training strategies, contact Dr. Conners at Salisbury University at kjconners@salisbury.edu or 410-546-2988. Ms. Adamchak can be reached through Stephen Decatur Middle School at 410-641-2846.

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