The Growth of the Shared Supervision Model

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ABSTRACT: In the 2007–2008 academic year, with an emphasis on three of the nine ''Essentials'' of a Professional Development School as delineated in NAPDS' policy statement, ''What It Means to Be a Professional Development School,'' the shared supervision model between a public college in the northeastern United States and a public school district began. This article provides a synopsis of the model's implementation, explanation of its growth over a four-year period, and essential questions regarding its future.

NAPDS Essentials Addressed: #2/A school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community; #4/A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; #9/Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures

> "Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning."
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> —Albert Einstein

Impetus and Background

In the 2007–2008 academic year the fourteen year-old Professional Development School (PDS) network at our public college in the Northeast still sustained its original mission. It continued to provide professional development to nineteen school districts that are members of the network and to place School of Education teacher candidates within this network for observation and participation in classrooms during their sophomore year and for clinical experiences during their junior, senior, and graduate-level years. In this traditional model, for senior student teaching placements, students are placed in elementary or early childhood classrooms in a variety of schools.

Typically, we do not place many student teachers in the same school. Each pre-service teacher is assigned to work with a college faculty member or adjunct supervisor who may or may not be supervising other pre-service teachers in the same school. The college supervisor makes six visits to observe the student teacher during the semester. The cooperating teacher in the classroom plays a supportive mentoring role while the student teacher gradually assumes the classroom and teaching responsibilities. This was the model that was in place for many years with one of our local school districts.

However, in 2007 the dean of the School of Education received a request from the superintendent of this school district for a more rigorous partnership with the college. The superintendent wanted more of a focus on enhancing the professional development

of the district's elementary school teachers (pre K through 3rd grade) in early childhood pedagogy and practice (Eberly, Joshi & Galen, 2009). In subsequent dialogues between all stakeholders—including the superintendent, the principal, vice-principal, curriculum directors of the district, the dean, the elementary and early childhood education department chairperson, and college early childhood faculty—the concept of the "shared" supervision model emerged.

This model was designed not just to benefit student teachers, but also to acknowledge the professional skills of the cooperating teachers and ultimately to impact the quality of education of the children in the classrooms where these pre-service teachers and veteran mentor teachers met. The creation of this new model relied strongly on research findings substantiating the importance of an upfront investment of time and energy to develop and maintain relationships among PDS stakeholders (Breault & Breault, 2010; Buzza, Kotsopoulos, Mueller, & Johnston, 2010; Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008). As a result of this initial meeting a decision was reached to pilot the new supervision model gradually, over a period of years, and eventually develop a PDS model that would assist teachers in broadening their expertise in early childhood while simultaneously improving their mentoring skills.

Six Elements of "Shared Supervision"

The "Shared Supervision" model became our first step in this development of our PDS partnership. It concentrated on three of the nine "Essentials" in NAPDS' policy statement, "What It Means to Be a Professional Development School" (NAPDS, 2008). We chose to focus on three essentials. We first concentrated on Essential #2, which suggests that PDSs are characterized by "a school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community." We also focused on Essential #4, which highlights that the institutions involved in a PDS should have "a shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants." Finally, we considered Essential #9, which indicates that PDSs should have "dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures" (NAPDS, 2008; Brindley, Lessen, & Field, 2008).

As in many other teacher preparation programs around the United States, the culminating clinical experience of our curriculum is a semester-long student teaching internship. In our Shared Supervision model this experience became the focal point of change, with the assumption that through it we would highlight best classroom teaching, teacher education, and mentoring practices. This new relationship was innovative in six key ways. First, instead of the college supervisor conducting six supervision visits consisting of formal observations and utilizing the college's evaluation rubric and follow-up conferences during the fourteen weeks of student teaching, three supervision visits were the responsibility of the cooperating teacher, while the other three supervision visits remained the responsibility of the college faculty. The last supervision visit was a joint endeavor where the college faculty supervisor and the cooperating teacher both observed and gave feedback to the teacher candidate.

Secondly, in this new model our on-site meetings between the college faculty supervisors and the cooperating teachers were interspersed throughout the student teaching semester. At the first of these, held before student teaching began each semester, college faculty supervisors explained the college's evaluation rubric and shared the related assignments student teachers were to complete in their field site as part of their evening, now on-site, capstone course. Three subsequent meetings addressed cooperating teachers' and college faculty supervisors' concerns about this model and provided the space for the identification of solutions agreeable to all

parties. Some of the issues that were discussed were pre-service teachers' communications with parents and families, the nature of the student teaching responsibilities, and observation schedules. These meetings were open to the administrators in the building, who provided further input and support.

The third feature of the Shared Supervision model was that the cooperating teachers were invited to guest teach in a meeting of the capstone course which was now held at the field site instead of at its previous location on the college campus. The college faculty supervisors co-taught the course, and many cooperating teachers accepted the invitation to co-teach. The fourth aspect of the model—which was provided to all cooperating teachers, and not just those participating in this co-teaching effort—was a 150% increase in these mentors' stipends. We justified this increase as compensation for these veteran teachers' completion of the three additional supervisory observations and participation in the four partnerships meetings.

A fifth new element of our Shared Supervision model was a novel role for the college faculty supervisors, who now were expected to serve as "professors-in-residence." In this new role, they not only worked with cooperating teachers and student teachers but also assisted, as invited by school administration, with the host school faculty's overall professional growth, including increasing its awareness of students' and their families' cultural diversity. For example, the college supervisors organized a workshop for the entire school faculty where a panel of parents from different ethnicities representative of the student population was invited to share their beliefs about children's education.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in what we termed "Phase Two" of our program revision process, was cooperating teachers' enrollment as members of a cohort of 27 in an on-site Master of Education Program in Early Childhood Education with an emphasis on developmentally appropriate practices and mentoring and supervision. The impetus for this new program actually included two key objectives, emerging from the needs of both constituent institutions—the school district's need for expanding the knowledge base of its early childhood teachers, and the College's need for cultivating qualified mentors for their teacher candidates. The master's program was thus developed with a focus on mentoring and supervision with a special concentration on developmentally appropriate practice as outlined in *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8* (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). We recognized that the potential benefits of the master's program were not limited to the participating teachers and the college; these teachers' improved practices would also promote a positive academic learning environment for the students in their classrooms. Upon completion of the program, these teachers would not only be excellent "master" mentors for the college's teacher candidates, but might also serve as models for their building peers.

The master's program was designed to include both easy delivery of its content and ready accessibility for its teacher clients. It was offered via a cohort model over the span of three and a half years, with one course (of ten total for 30 credits) every academic semester. It is important to note that the summer course was condensed, ending at the beginning of teachers' summer break and not encroaching on their vacation time. Each course in the program was offered on the school's site each week during after school hours.

The cohort model better enabled the university faculty to consider the needs and backgrounds of the teachers and to design the content of the courses accordingly. The sequence and delivery of the courses were deliberately designed to promote spiral learning, as introduced by Bruner in his theory of instruction (Bruner, 1966), to build a community of learners over time, and to strengthen inter-subjectivity (i.e., "mutual understanding

that is achieved between people in communication") (Rogoff, 1990, p. 67) between the teachers and the college faculty teaching the courses. The college faculty who were involved in this new model of our PDS partnership from the beginning were well versed with the mission and goals of the program, and taught approximately eighty percent of the courses in the Master's program.

Success of the Masters Program in Strengthening the Shared Supervision Model

The benefits of the addition of the M.Ed. program to our Shared Supervision PDS model have been seen amongst all partnership constituents, from the teachers and their elementary students, to the school itself, to the college faculty and the pre-service teachers in our program. Perhaps the most obvious advantage was to the school's teachers, who benefitted from having a convenient on-site master's program that was tailored to their particular needs. When surveyed, one teacher noted that one of the strengths of this program was that "projects that were done from grad class were applied to district curriculum work." Because we—the authors of this article—had served as both the college faculty supervisors and professors-in-residence, we had worked with the teachers and the school prior to the development of the M.Ed. program. Thus, we had an intimate understanding of their strengths and the areas in which they would benefit from additional learning, and we were thus able to incorporate that knowledge into the program.

We gathered anonymous written evaluations of the M.Ed. from members of the inaugural cohort as they completed the program, hoping to gather information about teachers' perspectives on the benefits of such a program. We highlight several of the most important comments here, which we believe are representative of participants' responses. One teacher wrote, "To have a masters program dropped into your lap – how could you not take advantage of it?" Another spoke of the cohort model, writing, "Going through as a group was beneficial because we were able to start professional conversations and make changes to our curriculum/teaching practices based upon our class discussions and new information." Similarly, another teacher commented, "It brought me closer to my peers and allowed for more professional discussions stemming from what we learned or read in class." Yet another teacher participant stated that an advantage was "collaboration with colleagues rather than classmates from other school districts." A few teachers also noted that strength of this PDS model was building a rapport with the professors "since they worked with us regularly over the last few years."

There were also distinct financial benefits for these teachers in the form of reduced tuition costs; since this was a cohort model the college and district had agreed to a contracted number of students per course, thus guaranteeing tuition income for the college. Additionally, the master's program strengthened these teachers' resumes and allowed them to advance on the district's pay scale. Following completion of the degree, the teachers met the requirements for the State's Supervision Certificate, which offered them the choice of moving into administration and greater financial compensation and a unique set of professional rewards.

Since all the M.Ed. cohort members continued to teach in the district after receiving their advanced degrees, the two schools in which the cohort members teach have benefitted from a large group of teachers with current, cutting-edge knowledge in their field, which in turn favorably affects their students and the students' families. For example, these teachers now have a better understanding of how family culture influences the children and their attitudes toward learning and can expand the ways they involve parents and families in their classrooms.

Further evidence of improved practice in the school was the discussions that these teachers led in their Professional Learning Communities based on the books, readings, and speakers encountered in the graduate coursework.

Due to this program's overarching focus on mentoring and supervision, the schools also now have increased numbers of trained teachers to serve as mentors to new teachers, to strengthen the existing teaching and support staff, and to guide student teachers. As one teacher noted, this program "assured that student teachers received similar instruction in best practices." This common knowledge of best practices promotes the quality of our program's student teaching experiences across classrooms and cooperating teachers. Thus, both the district's schools and the college's teacher candidates profit.

As an institution, the college has also benefitted. It now has a pool of particularly competent advanced degree mentors for pre-service teachers in both early program field placements and culminating student teaching experiences. Our current and future undergraduate and graduate students now can work with teachers who are not only experts in their field, but who also have a new repertoire of supervision skills and mentoring strategies to support these pre-service teachers' development.

For us as college faculty, the benefits of such a program are immeasurable. These on-site teaching experiences have offered us numerous insights into current classroom practices, taking us from the four walls of our college classrooms back into preschool and elementary classrooms. We have added to our banks of anecdotes and examples that we now use in our instruction and we have been reminded of the unique challenges of teaching young children—something we did not recognize we needed, given the fact that all three of us had spent considerable time in classrooms teaching prior to moving into our university positions. It is important for education faculty to remember what it is like in the "real world" and to blend theory and practice in our academic lives. Lastly, the model provided us with fertile new terrain upon which we could continue our research related to PDSs, teaching, curricula, and children.

Review of Connection to NAPDS Essentials

Throughout our article, we have addressed three of the nine NAPDS Essentials. The first guideline we have highlighted was Essential #2, "A school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community" (NAPDS, 2008). As an example of this Essential in our model, the student teachers not only attended faculty meetings but also participated in grade-specific Professional Learning Communities that focus on curriculum enhancement and professional development. Another example of this Essential in practice is a task expected of student teachers: to interview and collate data about the roles and responsibilities of specialists in the school, such as social workers, psychologists, learning consultants, guidance counselors, instructional technology specialists, curriculum support specialists, teachers of integrated preschool for children with autism, and others.

The second principle that we addressed through this model was Essential #4, "A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants" (NAPDS, 2008). An example of innovative practice was the introduction of unit blocks, a staple in a quality early childhood classroom, preceded by a workshop highlighting the importance of integrating unit blocks in the curriculum. Reflective practice by all participants, as per this Essential, was evident at the meetings held once a month where cooperating teachers, administrators, and college faculty engaged in on-going reflection about the effectiveness of the model and its impact on student teachers and children in the class-

rooms. Probably what is most telling about the success of our PDS is that when a change of administration took place in our partner school this year, the teachers strongly advocated for continuation of our Shared Supervision Model. We have sustained the support of both the school's administration and faculty and of our own college's administration, demonstrating this shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants.

The last guiding ideal we addressed through this model was Essential # 9, "Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures." Reward structures included additional remuneration for the cooperating teachers for participating in the Shared Supervision model, reduced tuition for graduate classes in the master's program, step salary increases post degree, and free in-house professional development opportunities provided by college faculty.

So What's Next?

As the Einstein quote with which we opened this article reminds us, we are aware that we cannot stop challenging what seems like a new, ideal model. In terms of future directions for our partnership, a few questions come to mind. We wonder about adapting aspects of this PDS model for use throughout the standard student teacher/cooperating teacher model in use by others in our college. We consider how we might assure that the progress in mentoring exhibited by the M.Ed. cohort will not be lost. We are currently conducting a feasibility study of how this model might be replicated in other school districts with other branches of our PDS partnerships. Additionally, we will continue to closely monitor the quality of mentoring that is provided by these newly-minted master teachers, attempting to track the impact they and their new knowledge are having on the college students—the future teachers—working with them in their PDS classrooms. SUP

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