

Co-Teaching a New Pedagogical Practice for Pre-Service Teachers

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Introduction

The PDS Partnership between the University of Central Florida and Friendship Elementary School, a Title 1 school in Volusia County, focused on the National Association for Professional Development Schools' (PDS) "Essentials" in order to establish a shared vision of success for pre-service teachers. Key leaders from both the school and the university utilized their knowledge about co-teaching and created a vision for this unique partnership. This vision developed into a program involving high expectations for mentor teachers, teacher candidates, and early field learners (EFLs). The purpose of this partnership was to improve the academic achievement among our population of students of low socio-economic means. In this article we briefly detail how we have attempted to address all nine of the NAPDS Essentials.

Context

Located in central Florida, the university is the second largest provider of teachers for the state. Volusia County, which has nearly 100 schools and a large student population of 62,306, is located about 40 miles east of Orlando, Florida. Friendship Elementary, which is situated near a regional campus, is a residency site for the university for hands-on training and teaching. Friendship is comprised of approximately 500 students in grades PreK-5 with 77% of those

students receiving free or reduced lunch. The Hispanic population at Friendship is nearly 43%, while 16% qualify for Exceptional Student Education (ESE), and 13% are English Language Learners (ELL).

Collaboration is defined as a recursive process where two or more entities work together for a common goal or shared vision. If you were to ask the collaborating parties—the University of Central Florida (UCF), Friendship Elementary, and Volusia County Schools (VCS)—what our vision was a little over a year ago, we would have stated, “to simply develop a partnership to support teacher candidates.” We did not realize the impact of the 2011 NAPDS Conference on our thinking. Our official PDS partnership began just one month before the conference and with that beginning came many uncertainties regarding expectations for the partnership. However, after attending a session on co-teaching we immediately connected with a common goal and mission for our partnership. Upon our return from New Orleans in 2011, we set out to create multiple teaching and learning experiences for teacher candidates and mentor teachers using the co-teaching approach in a yearlong internship placement. We developed a plan to implement the co-teaching program with two outcomes in mind: 1) to improve teacher preparation and 2) to increase student achievement at Friendship Elementary.

Professional development was a critical issue from the very beginning of our journey. After returning home from the NAPDS in New Orleans in 2011, the team knew we wanted to implement the co-teaching model for our

teacher candidates and mentor teachers, so Lenora Forsythe and Dr. Vicky Cardullo designed a full-day workshop hosted during the summer on co-teaching for invited candidates and the mentors. The nature of the professional development set the tone for the journey as Vicky and Lenora co-taught the workshop the first year and then gave that responsibility to the mentor teachers since they had first-hand experience of what the model should be like. During our professional development, we initiated speed dating, graffiti wall, personality temperaments, and provided multiple opportunities for candidates and mentors to interact. We allowed mentor and candidate input on placement assignments, further increasing buy-in to the model.

The Evolution of Our PDS

The goal of a teacher preparation program is to develop teachers that can effectively prepare students for the 21st century (Darling-Hammond, 1994). In the fall of 2011, we collaborated to establish opportunities for teacher candidates to work collaboratively with a mentor teacher in a yearlong, co-teaching placement at Friendship Elementary. Teacher candidates gained experiences with students from a Title I school in the areas of classroom management, parent teacher conferences, data analysis, intervention programs, and discussions of student performance within Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). In addition, teacher candidates were treated as part of the faculty and offered solutions, provided interventions, and worked on a common goal to support student learning. This co-teaching program afforded teacher candidates the opportunity to work with a school that has a diverse population. This setting has provided candidates with a rich and diverse teaching and learning experience. We believe this experience will prepare them to meet the needs of their future students and families as they begin teaching.

Recognizing the need for a strong teacher preparation program that develops teacher candidates that can effectively prepare students

for the 21st century, our Steering Committee created the following mission statement:

The Professional Development School Partnership between Friendship Elementary and the University of Central Florida (UCF) is dedicated to promoting academic excellence through a reflective collaboration of mentor teachers, teacher candidates, students, and families.

To further support our partnership, we also follow the Consortium's (Volusia County School District, Friendship Elementary, and University of Central Florida) mission statement:

The Professional Development School Partnership between Volusia County School District and the University of Central Florida is dedicated to supporting a diverse community of learners at all levels of educational development. Through mutual trust, respect, and shared decision-making, emphasis will be placed on professional growth, effective instructional practices, and mentoring.

We often refer to the relationship between UCF and Friendship as a "marriage." This union began when Maria Martoral, principal of Friendship; Lenora Forsythe, reading coach and site liaison; and Dr. Vicky Cardullo, university faculty and liaison became a PDS in February 2011. At that time, there was one other PDS in place between the University and VCS, which provided a strong framework for our partnership. Following their framework and knowledge gained at NAPDS, a Steering Committee was created in the spring of 2011 to develop goals and direction for the partnership. This committee allowed for communication among all parties: the principal, faculty from the university, teacher candidates, and mentor teachers. It also provided an avenue to address concerns, reflect on and adjust on current practice, and develop new ideas.

In addition to the co-teaching model for internship, Friendship and UCF saw a need for early learning experiences for pre-service teachers, so a residency program was initiated in the first year. It was important that a faculty member

from the university was visible on the Friendship Elementary campus. After meeting with district personnel and our collaborating partners, a classroom was set up for the university to host class on the elementary campus. The on-campus experiences for pre-service teachers allowed early exposure to classroom procedures and management through early field involvement prior to internships. With this class happening at Friendship, early field learners gained experiences working one on one to diagnose reading deficiencies in low performing students, sharing their findings with the classroom teacher, as well as in a parent/teacher conference. In traditional settings, these activities do not typically happen until the first or second internships.

Our Second PDS National Conference

In an effort to support the need for PDS schools, representatives from Friendship and the University presented at the NAPDS conference in Las Vegas in 2012. Our presentation, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Nuts and Bolts of a Yearlong Co-Teaching Internship Residency Pilot Program*, allowed us to reflect as a collaborative group on what we set out to do in the beginning of the year. This presentation helped us explore some of the trials and tribulations of the implementation of a yearlong, co-taught internship model. We were also very excited to share the “nuts and bolts” of the development of this collaborative partnership, which led to a residency program. Our journey looked at the process of implementing a co-teaching program and how the relationship evolved from “speed dating” to professional development, and then to collaboration in the classroom.

This partnership was strong from the very beginning and the need for information to be dispersed to other programs became evident. Therefore, the group began to submit articles for publication: *Co-Teaching a Framework for Elementary Education Teacher Preparation Programs: Answering the Call for Reform* (Cardullo & Forsythe, forthcoming) as well as *Sharing about Impact and Visibility of a UCF College of Education Co-teaching Model for Teacher Preparation* (Cardullo, 2012). Additionally, in the short year of

implementation the team presented at a School Board Meeting, a graduate forum, and at a School and Community Partnership Meeting.

Wanting to take on a more active role in the PDS, Dr. Vicky Cardullo and Lenora Forsythe both assumed leadership roles in the University of Central Florida School and Community Partnership (UCF/SCP) in August 2012. Dr. Vicky Cardullo was the Chair of the UCF/SCP and Lenora Forsythe is currently serving on the Clinical Experiences Executive Council. Since the beginning of the partnership, Maria Martoral, Lenora Forsythe, and Vicky Cardullo became active, contributing members of the VCS consortium and collaborate frequently with the Volusia County School Partnership.

Visibility and Impact

Visibility and impact were identified early on as important pieces to both parties of the partnership. From the beginning, UCF teacher candidates became involved in faculty meetings and PLCs. Teacher candidates and early field learners (EFLs) were visible and familiar on Friendship’s campus. Monthly Steering Meetings provided a “voice” for all members of the partnership. Our Steering Meeting agendas were generated according to the needs of the teacher candidates and mentor teachers. Early on, we established titles for those participating in our program. We felt it was important to identify our participants as mentor teachers and teacher candidates. These terms made the roles easier to identify and more formal to parents, students, teachers, and other stakeholders. Teacher candidates are visible from the very beginning. They participate in “Meet the Teacher,” Open House, Family Nights, etc.

When fourth and fifth grade teachers shared concerns in PLCs regarding their students’ progress in math, the Steering Committee took that information to create a math intervention program in which teacher candidates planned and delivered instruction to help increase student achievement in math. Friendship also sought teacher candidate assistance for maternity leaves and multi-grade classrooms. In

all of these experiences, both student achievement and teacher candidate development were monitored.

As the partnership expanded, visibility increased as Lenora Forsythe (Reading Coach at Friendship) took on the role of adjunct professor for UCF in the fall of 2012. With her experiences of working with current teachers, EFLs, and teacher candidates, teaching a foundations course in reading helped solidify consistency for everyone involved. Students currently enrolled in this foundations course will be EFLs next semester. This seemed like a perfect “next step” to the partnership. Because of the common goal to prepare these UCF students for the upcoming experiences, Lenora and Vicky have had many discussions about instruction and direction of student learning.

In the spring of 2012, the university wanted to gain better understanding of data that is available to classroom teachers and how our candidates become exposed and prepared to use it. Seeing a need, Dr. Vicky Cardullo brought an idea back to her partnership school and asked if they would be interested in presenting their Data Portals to the faculty in the College of Education. Knowing that this is a reciprocal relationship, Lenora formed a team of experts and they presented information on Data Portals to the UCF Faculty. Learning experiences are reciprocal and we have established an environment of mutual respect among participants.

Organizational Structure

As our partnership grew, we discovered that we needed to listen to the candidates as they voiced concerns or jubilation in our monthly Steering Committee meetings. We heard that teacher candidates needed more than just a “visit” to other grade levels. Simultaneously, teachers were sharing concerns regarding student progress in math in grades 3–5. The committee developed a plan for “Walk to Intervention” for math. Candidates co-teaching in a first grade class started to work with fifth graders during thirty-minute block of time each day. This assisted both the university by assuring exposure to various grade levels, and Friendship Elementary

by increasing student achievement in math. As one candidate shared, “I would rather have a successful yearlong placement in one grade level because I can transfer all that I have learned to any classroom once I receive a job.” She went on to say, “It is not the amount of classrooms you are exposed to, it is the quality of the classroom experience that counts” (4th grade teacher candidate). There are still issues that continually arise (e.g., same placement for the entire year, same school, same grade, and alone time). As a strategic partnership, we are continually evaluating and trying to implement innovative ideas to close these gaps.

Commitment to Shared Resources

Throughout the year, the PDS partnership has recognized the importance of shared resources. The School Board of Volusia County allotted classroom space for the residency of an educator (Dr. Vicky Cardullo) to teach university coursework weekly on the Friendship Campus. At this time, teacher candidates and EFLs have spent approximately 6,940 hours on campus. If you were to multiply that for the hourly rate of a substitute teacher (\$20.25), that would equate to about \$124,000.00 dollars in added value to the school system. One principal shared with the parents of students in a co-taught classroom that they had received a “BOGO,” meaning their tax dollars paid for one teacher, and they get another teacher (candidate) free!

Many members of the partnership have collaboratively written grants. Eric Holland, Math and Science Coach at Friendship, wrote and received a \$1,000 grant from the UCF/SCP for the purchase of iPad styluses, headphones, and apps. Reading Coach Lenora Forsythe wrote and received a \$2,000 grant for Kagan materials through The Morgridge International Reading Center of the University of Central Florida. Both Eric and Lenora highlighted the impact of these grants at the UCF/SCP Gala in May 2012. Additionally, Lydia Rosenberg, a fourth grade teacher, received a \$500 technology grant for the purchase of Kindles to for use with small group reading instruction. Kappa Delta Pi, an International Honor Society located on the

UCF regional campus, funded this grant. In total, the UCF and Friendship partnership secured over \$3,500 in actual funding from collaborating partners through grant writing. In addition, mentor teachers received Certificates of Participation (COPs) from the university for each junior and senior teacher candidate they prepare. These COPs may be used toward graduate studies at UCF or any state university in Florida. The financial contribution of COPs from UCF will be valued at more than \$24,000 for the 2012-13 school year.

Thirty percent of classroom teachers at Friendship have Clinical Education Training. This has given sixteen teacher candidates the opportunity to learn through the co-teaching model for internship. Currently 50% of the classroom teachers have a master's degree and several teachers are taking advantage of COPs to work toward additional coursework/ degrees.

The importance of this partnership goes beyond the classroom. The principal of Friendship, Maria Martoral, used funds to provide travel for a classroom teacher and the reading coach to participate in the NAPDS conference presentation in 2012. The university sponsored the university contact and the principal for this same conference. This opportunity allowed the partnership to be exposed to current practices displayed throughout the nation of the NAPDS and to share resources and ideas amongst colleagues working toward the same goal: development of a stronger teacher preparation program that develops teacher candidates who can effectively prepare students for the 21st century.

Ongoing and Reciprocal Professional Development Opportunities

The collaborative PDS partnership created multiple teaching and learning experiences for teacher candidates: e.g., they work directly with mentor teachers, coaches, and administration; they analyze student data through Professional Learning Communities, attend all faculty meetings, parent teacher conferences, Steering Committee meetings, Open House, and even participate in morning supervision.

The teacher candidate and mentor teacher also review cumulative folders, set-up the classroom, and order supplies, and materials needed for the start-up of the school year. As the school year started for the elementary school, visibility of university students increased, (the university usually starts classes about two weeks after the public schools). Candidates choose to start the year during pre-planning so they can implement what the co-teaching pairs had been planning collaboratively throughout the summer. They began the school year working side by side, as they set up the room and planned instruction.

Unlike traditional internship models, our teacher candidates are present the first week of elementary school. During this time, they see their mentor teachers establish procedures and routines for successful classroom management. As the school year progresses, partners work together to create groups based on student data, attend parent conferences to discuss findings and implications from data analysis, attend grade-level data articulations, and vertical articulation meetings. Because this is a full year of internship placement, it is important to explain that teacher candidates were in the classroom only two days per week for the first half of this study, with a full week of placement at week seven and week fourteen (August-December). From January to May, teacher candidates are in the classroom for the entire day, five days a week (January-June).

We are learning that the experiences a Title I school offers are by far some of the best for beginning teachers, yet previous placements typically happened at sites where teacher candidates were not exposed to high-need, diverse populations. The principal stated in a semi-structured interview, "There is a greater positive presence of adults; you [the university] are a visual element for the parents and a positive influence on the students. A college education is a possibility for the first time for some of these children" (Cardullo, 2012). Data trends showed gains in several areas of math and science and gains across classrooms that have a co-teacher in first grade and third grade.

These experiences have shaped the candidacy of our teacher candidates. Bacharach, Washut-Heck, and Dahlberg (2010) state the practice of the traditional internship is outdated: candidates observing from afar and gradually assuming responsibility is no longer an unquestioned practice. As alternative placements are being implemented in response to the call to transform teacher education through clinical practice (NCATE, 2010) programs, we need to remember the words of NCATE: there should be rigorous accountability; purposeful placement in high needs schools and selection of teacher mentors for teacher candidates should be carefully aligned. These elements helped us to fortify strong learning experiences for the teacher candidates as they move into the 21st century of teaching and learning.

Professional development has a different look and feel at Friendship—it is ongoing. Mentor teachers continually model and train candidates on new initiatives mandated by the state and county. Teachers often attend workshops and invite candidates to join them side by side in the training (space permitting). If they cannot attend, the mentor teacher will come back to campus and initiate the training with their candidate.

Teacher candidates are also encouraged to present professional development throughout the year. Currently, we have a teacher candidate who initiated a reader's workshop and is now working with the entire grade-level team to implement this format across all reading blocks. This partnership has nurtured learning and growth through the reflective-collaborative partnership on the Friendship campus as well as on the UCF campus. As the new teacher evaluation began to unfold, the university realized many districts had different elements and frameworks. Because of the strong partnership in Volusia County, key district personnel came to a UCF/SCP meeting to sit on a panel of experts to present their district's framework. Professional development is different at our PDS. It is collaborative and reciprocal allowing all stakeholders to have a vested interest in the partnership.

Innovation and Reflection

One of this partnership's most innovative and reflective practices is the implementation of co-teaching. It is extremely important to remember the state of our classrooms these days. The pressure of high-stakes testing and changes to the teacher evaluation system that will eventually impact teacher salary has many teachers turned off to the idea of hosting a candidate. In traditional models, the mentor "hands the class over" to the candidate for several weeks at a time. In today's classrooms, teachers cannot take that risk. The use of co-teaching gives us more flexibility with the format of internship. Mentors and candidates share the classroom, and weave the different co-teaching models throughout their days in order to meet the needs of all. As mentioned, Friendship's high-needs population creates the optimal environment for co-teaching because it maximizes the time we have with our students. Under the co-teaching model, we are able to take advantage of every moment; we actually double the number of professionals in a classroom. This allowed more opportunities to differentiate, intervene, remediate, and enrich our students.

Communication and Collaboration

We are proud to share that the teacher candidates who graduated in May 2012–2013 that participated in the yearlong placement have all been hired with the exception of two who chose not to seek employment at this time. In a job market that is cutting positions, it is encouraging to know that our candidates are standing apart from all of the other applicants. Principals have approached Maria Martoral and commented on the preparedness of the first year teachers from our program. Not only are they successful in their first year of teaching, they also interviewed well and came with much knowledge of the systems in place. We attribute this to their preparation through the co-teaching model and the support of their mentor. The year-long, co-taught teacher residency program is unique as it includes an early field learning component. Candidates who begin at Friendship as EFLs will actually spend

a year and a half on campus. This on-site opportunity for EFLs allows access to the lowest 10%, ESE, and ELL student population at this school. Classes are held on-site once a week for approximately nine weeks. EFLs attend class and immediately have the opportunity to “try out” their new learning in the classroom setting. The remaining five classes are held on the UCF regional campus. Often UCF students continue to visit the classroom on their own after the course or internship placement has ended. This also gives the EFLs some prior knowledge and experience at Friendship, which helps them decide if placement at this site is for them.

This partnership has made both UCF faculty and teacher candidates very visible in the school community and classrooms. When asked how “we,” the university, have impacted their school the principal replied, “You are everywhere—morning duty, dismissal, small groups, walk-throughs, behavior monitoring, PLCs, Problem Solving Team meetings, and parent conferences. There is a greater positive presence of adults; you are a visual element for the parents and a positive influence on the students.”

Our Vision

Upon reflection of our journey, we are most proud of our vision. As a group, we thought “outside of the box” and tried to envision what elements would help to fortify strong learning experiences for teacher candidates as they move into the 21st century of teaching and learning. The synergy that was created because of a session at the NAPDS conference sparked an interest in both the university and the school and the model was developed. The infancy of our relationship did not hinder our vision; it actually helped to strengthen our needs and focus. The Nine Essentials were the foundation for our vision along with careful alignment of FEAPs and NCATE accreditation. ^{SUP}

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