Faculty-in-Residence: A Model to Enhance Rural Partnerships

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ABSTRACT: To enhance partnerships in two rural schools, our college of education initiated a faculty-in-residence program. A group of faculty members visited two other colleges of education with established faculty-in-residence programs to learn from others and to discern a direction for our own work. Two teacher educators, each at a different partner school, expanded roles to become faculty-in-residence. These teacher educators and the leader of the faculty-in-residence initiative engaged in a self-study to focus on the implementation of this program and how the faculty-in-residence experienced and interpreted this effort. Findings relate to the factors of responsiveness, relationships, and impact. The rural locus of these partnerships is fundamental to all aspects of the faculty-in-residence initiative, underlining the importance of context.

NAPDS Essentials: 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; 8. Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings

Our college of education has a partnership network comprised in large part by rural, high-poverty schools. While there has been recent and necessary attention to urban contexts of education, it is also worthwhile to explore rural contexts of education. The Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP; CAEP Accreditation Standards, 2013) and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education's Clinical Practice Commission (AACTE, 2018) advocate for clinical partnerships. As a response to large-scale and local factors, our college initiated a faculty-in-residence (FIR) program in an effort to build relationships and partnerships across distance and differences.

The purposes of this paper are: to provide an in-depth explanation of this partnership as a way to document the creation of this new program; and to focus on the implementation of the FIR program in two partner schools and how these efforts were experienced and interpreted by the two university teacher educators who participated as faculty-in-residence. Much of what came from this study relates to the unique assets and challenges of working within rural schools and settings. The ultimate goals of researching the implementation of the FIR program are not only to use what we learned in the first year to refine this initiative for subsequent years to improve school-university partnerships, but also to explore the broader issue of strengthening partnerships between university-based teacher education and local schools in a rural context.

Related Literature

Faculty-in-residence programs are rooted in research on effective professional development. Effective professional development is embedded in practice, is interactive, and is sustained over time (DeMonte, 2013; DuFour, 2004; Gulandhussein, 2013; McBier et al., 2012). Traditional approaches to professional development, by contrast, are often disconnected from the daily realities of classrooms and schools; this professional development may be short in duration or inadequately supported (DeMonte, 2013; DuFour, 2004; Gulandhussein, 2013; McBier et al., 2012). Professional development that is instead integrated into the school day and directly connected to daily practice can provide opportunities for educators to collaborate and reflect on their practice. By integrating teacher educators into school communities, a FIR program can offer a way for the college and K-12 partners to collaborate on the design and implementation of activities and opportunities that positively impact students' learning and overall development. A faculty-in-residence program enhances a college of education's ability to respond to new professional development demands resulting from the implementation of state-based professional evaluation measures and the need to assist with the induction process for new teachers—with a view to impact on student learning. The specific context of this model for professional development is our network of partner schools in rural communities.

There are all types of rural contexts, but research has identified some common themes and issues (e.g., Moffa & McHenry-Sorba, 2018). For example, scholars of rural education have emphasized the importance of understanding rural contexts without applying deficit perspectives (White & Kline, 2012). Accordingly, our college's broader perspective on rural partnerships is grounded in an asset-based perspective. It is critical that teacher candidates in our college (regardless of their own rural, suburban, or urban backgrounds) experience placements in rural

schools to understand affordances and complexities, and to work against possible pre-conceived notions of what a rural school is or is not. Burton et al. (2013) observed that many studies portrayed a "one-dimensional characterization" of rural teachers (p. 8).

More troubling, many studies they analyzed cast rural contexts as "problems": teachers were positioned as "problems" themselves or as facing "problems" of rural schools. A helpful perspective, Azano and Stewart (2015) examined how their teacher preparation program could provide teacher candidates with "meaningful experiences" in rural schools so that candidates "have had thoughtful preparation, understand the benefits and challenges of teaching in a rural community, and can be effective and find personal and professional success and *stay* in rural schools" (p. 8, emphasis in original). Factors related to rural education are known to those engaged in rural contexts (often in forms of tacit knowledge), but Burton et al. (2013) noted that less than a fifth of studies in their narrative analysis had been published in general education journals. Concerns and issues in rural schools merit a broader audience.

Within our college's expansive partner network are several rural schools and districts in a range of diverse, close-knit communities where schools are often the heart of the community (Rural Schools Collaborative, n.d.; White & Kline, 2012). Additionally, many of these schools serve populations that include a significant percentage of low-income families and communities. As of 2013, according to the Southern Education Foundation (Suitts, 2015), low-income students are a majority in public schools in twenty-one states—including ours.

Additionally, our FIR initiative reflects three of the Essentials of the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS; Brindley et al., 2008): (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 practices by all participants; and (8) work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings. Enhanced student learning was an ultimate goal of this initiative, and we also focused efforts toward the preparation of teacher candidates for rural schools. As Easley and colleagues (2017, p. 47) noted, the "collaborative demands" for teacher preparation programs are "uncommon" compared to many other university programs since teacher educators include both university-based educators and school-based educators. The NAPDS Essentials evident in our initiative reflect shared commitments. The purpose of this research was to explore our experiences initiating a FIR program so that we could share our story and to revise and refine our practices.

Framework

Three perspectives from the literature guided this work. First was a perspective centered on FIR as a model for professional development. Second was a self-study perspective (Samaras, 2011) focused on the experiences of teacher educators engaged in this work. In their guidelines for autobiographical self-study in education, Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) included the ideas that self-study promote "insight and interpretation" (p. 16), center on "problems and issues that make someone an educator," and has an obligation to "improve the learning situation not only for the self but for the other" (p. 17). Such a self-study perspective focuses on reflection and insight for the purpose of benefitting a broader context (cf. Kleine et al., 2018). Third was a perspective of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991); each site for the FIR provided a locus for learning for all stakeholders. Situated learning refers to an idea that learning happens through authentic contexts among a community of practice. In their conceptual framework, Burns and Badiali (2018) argued that clinical pedagogy "requires sophisticated intellectual activity that is situated in practice and in the dynamic contexts of classroom spaces" (p. 431). The FIR initiative allowed us to reflect critically on many topics related to our school-university partnerships through a situated, self-study lens. For our purposes, the context for this learning was each school site. The rural context of this initiative undergirded these three perspectives.

Planning for a Faculty-in-Residence Program

The idea for a FIR initiative originated with Michelle. She convened a group of faculty members in the college from a variety of programs to discuss the viability of a FIR program for schools in our rural network. Funding through a college innovation grant allowed members of this group to visit two other colleges of education, both also in the Southeast, with established FIR programs. Faculty who participated in these site visits learned from colleagues at these other institutions about timelines, expectations, roles, responsibilities, and a range of other factors related to their own FIR programs. Lessons from these visits were incorporated into plans to launch a FIR initiative that we hoped would be responsive to our partner schools while aligned with goals and initiatives already in place in the college.

An important difference between the FIR programs at the institutions visited and ours was the location of each of these other colleges in metropolitan areas. The structures, procedures, and administrative features from these programs were invaluable to the formation of our initiative. However, the unique challenges of doing this work across spread-out, small, close-knit rural communities separated our context from those we visited for advance guidance, insight, and preparation.

The larger FIR group in the college decided to pilot a new program at two school sites. Catherine and Amanda were invited to participate based on previous involvement at different partner schools. In each case, the FIR program was positioned as an enhancement of the partnership the college already had in place with each school; it was an extension of the context for situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The schools were Magnolia Elementary School and Dogwood Middle School (both pseudonyms).

Each teacher educator, along with the college's director of field experiences, met with administrators at each school to discuss the concept of a FIR program and to ascertain the school's interest in augmenting the partnership in such a manner. Each school was positive and receptive to the idea; the context of each school is described below. The teacher educators embarked on their work as FIR the following semester. At each school, focus areas for the FIR were developed in concert with administrators and teachers.

Each FIR spent part or all of two days per week at the school. Throughout the experience, each FIR maintained a reflective log; the larger FIR group also continued to meet to keep focused on the goals of the FIR initiative and to hear and discuss updates on progress at each site. Time at each school site was spent in endeavors such as: supervising teacher candidates, meeting with teachers, and observing and spending time in classrooms. These efforts were parts of our partnership with each school. While each FIR spent most of the time with teachers or teacher candidates, the ultimate goal was supporting student success. This is a common goal for different initiatives among school and university partners (cf. Borda et al., 2018).

Method

A descriptive case study approach (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009) is appropriate to documenting the implementation of the FIR initiative through two teacher educators, each in a partner school. Each case is defined as the teacher educator who worked as a FIR in the context of both the school and the college, consistent with our perspective of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and self-study (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Samaras, 2011). Because of our focus on the implementation of the FIR initiative and the experiences of two teacher educators engaged in the initiative, data collection and analysis centered on the two teacher educators in order to provide a descriptive, holistic (Merriam, 2009) documentation of how the FIR experienced the program. The reception of the work among the two schools is also critical to our evaluation of this project but was not the specific focus of the research aspect of the work. We briefly present the contexts of the two schools involved with our FIR program.

Magnolia Elementary Schools is one of several elementary schools in its district. Students who attend Magnolia come from a small town and its environs. While the community is rural, it is not too far from a larger city where many parents work. The school has approximately 700 students in grades Pre-K through 5; Magnolia is a Title I school. Catherine supervised teacher candidates at Magnolia prior to initiating a FIR effort there.

Dogwood Middle School is outside a small town and is the only public middle school in its county. The school includes grades 6-8 and enrolls approximately 550 students; Dogwood is a Title I school. Many of the students' parents and family members work in agriculture. Amanda supervised teacher candidates at Dogwood prior to initiating a FIR effort there.

Shared in common between these two schools is their participation in our partner network, in keeping with NAPDS Essential 8. Personnel in each district collaborated with the college in terms of teacher preparation. Catherine and Amanda both had roles at the respective schools related to the preparation of future educators, in keeping with NAPDS Essential 2. The initiative itself was developed by people from the college along with people at each school site, following the idea of a shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice in NAPDS Essential 4. Having introduced the two schools and the context of our rural network, we present the findings in such a way as to document the story of our FIR program.

Data related to our documentation of the FIR initiative included the reflective journal maintained by each FIR. At the end of the semester, we participated in a semi-structured interview, where Michelle posed questions for Catherine and Amanda to discuss. Interview questions were designed to assess insight and interpretation of the initiative, reflection on its potential opportunities and challenges, and recommendations for sustaining a FIR program, in accordance with the purposes of the research. These questions were:

1. How would you define a faculty-in-residence program?
2. What are your experiences of its benefits? Drawbacks?
3. Based on your experiences, what structures or procedures do you think need to be in place to support school-university partnerships like this? What changes would you make to ensure continued or to expand the success of this project in the upcoming academic year?

Probes to each question allowed Catherine and Amanda to clarify responses, to make connections between the two sites, and to elaborate on various details. This interview was recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The goal of data analysis was to understand the development and implementation of a FIR initiative in order to (1) be able to share the story with others and (2) to reflect on and refine our own practice (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Analysis of the data started with our discussing emergent themes after the interview. These themes became descriptive codes (Maxwell, 2005) for analysis. Each FIR then reviewed her own reflective journal for instances that aligned with these codes as well as any other critical incidents (Erlandson et al., 1993) not captured by the original codes. From here, substantive codes (Maxwell, 2005) were established for analysis of the data.

Findings

Through the review of the literature, we learned that effective professional development is sustained over time, is interactive, and is embedded in practice (DeMonte, 2013; DuFour, 2004; Gulandhussein, 2013; McBier et al., 2012). Through site visits by our larger FIR team to other colleges of education with FIR programs, we learned the importance of relationships and how much time is needed to forge and nurture these relationships.

Since Catherine and Amanda had each previously worked in their assigned schools, we believed that the relationships they already had built would provide a strong foundation for a FIR pilot program. We quickly realized that building trust and common understanding with school partners required more time and attention. During our site visits during the planning stages, team members had witnessed fully functioning and well-established FIR programs with various initiatives in their partner schools. What we did not see was the long, slow, deliberate process of relationship building that is the fundamental and necessary foundation of a successful FIR initiative. We underestimated the length of time needed to enter into a FIR program. This underestimation resulted in minimal impact in our first months establishing these sites for FIR. However, we documented important lessons learned.

While our findings mirror challenges and issues documented in the literature and through our visits to other institutions with established FIR programs, our analysis of the data also illuminated the rural realities of school-university partnerships such as ours. Each FIR operated in a school within our college's rural network. Teacher candidates in our initial certification programs are told that they can expect to drive up to seventy miles one way from campus to reach their practicum sites. The wide radius of our network of partner schools offers both affordances and challenges with respect to the FIR initiative.

Affordances included the small size of each school, increasing the ability of each FIR to be in multiple classrooms and build relationships with many teachers there. These schools were each in smaller communities where each school enjoyed strong community support. Additionally, many teachers, administrators, and other school personnel were alumni/ae of our university and had personal affiliations with campus.

Challenges included the close-knit nature of many communities. While these strong communities provided belonging and support for students and teachers in each school, each FIR was less of an insider by comparison. This was not deliberate or malicious on the part of anyone at either school. Rather, this was a reflection of many of the teachers living and working in their communities where they often had multiple thick relationships with students and their families in and beyond the classroom and school, and where there were many local funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005).

We organize our findings into three main categories in keeping with the purpose of the research and the goals of the analysis to share our story and to revise and refine our practices. Each FIR identified these common elements in her school context.

Responsiveness

When the original group was convened to design a FIR program for our college and our partner network, we learned from colleagues at two other institutions that each FIR needed to be responsive to the particular context and to embed the initiative in daily practice. For both FIR, this included a focus on the preparation of future teachers through field supervision and careful coordination with supervising teachers. Catherine also planned to work with teachers more deliberately on the topic of supervision, while Amanda aimed to focus more on curriculum and how to support teachers and prepare teacher candidates with curriculum.

What exactly that impact should be necessarily varied from school to school. For each FIR, responsiveness as a FIR meant working with teachers to support teacher candidates in their planning, teaching, and assessment as well as their overall professionalism and developing identities as teachers. This work included conversations and other communications with teachers, observations, and conferences along with the teacher candidates. At Magnolia, Catherine also designed a professional development series for teachers in order to support teacher candidates and, ultimately, elementary students. Topics for sessions were designed as a four-part series titled, Mentoring Support for Teacher Candidates. Sample topics include the following: development of a teacher candidate, cognitive coaching, interventions for teacher candidates, and identifying support structures. With a similar ultimate focus on student learning, Amanda worked primarily with teachers in one grade level in order to experience the curriculum across content areas and from a student perspective. She attended grade-level planning meetings, observed classes across content areas, and mentored teacher candidates working with that team.

Relationships

In our interview, we discussed how we defined a FIR program. Amanda noted that a FIR was realized "in the form of a person" (i.e., Catherine and Amanda), and Catherine noted that a FIR can be a "liaison" between a school and the college so that different individuals in either location can "have a say" in efforts to improve education and educational endeavors at the school. In this way, a FIR is situated (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the context of each school site. We also discussed how important it was for each FIR to become "integrated" into each school context. While Catherine and Amanda emphasized that the FIR was not supposed to be a sort of administrative oversight of teachers or be top-down from the college to the schools, each also focused on ways to make an "impact" in order to "directly impact" teachers and students at the school, in addition to the teacher candidates.

Despite a focus on collaboration, both FIR maintained an "outsider" status at their respective school. Professional relationships deepened and expanded. However, common understanding about the nature of the FIR role at each school remained nascent at best. Here the unique challenges of establishing school-university partnerships in rural contexts is salient. Prior to the FIR initiative, Catherine and Amanda had previously been involved at their respective schools, yet this level of engagement did not guarantee easy entry into the close-knit teacher communities at these rural schools. A theme in Amanda's reflective journal was a goal to keep expanding time

spent at the school to continue to foster relationships. The larger FIR group had stressed the importance of relationships based on their research of existing FIR projects.

As our FIR initiative was planned, we believed a year-long implementation would provide the time needed for effective, rich relationships to emerge and grow. In some ways, though, a year was too short a time, and this is a reminder of the ways in which we must keep a focus on relationships—building relationships but also sustaining and expanding relationships—at the core of any school-university partnership. We diligently researched the structures and protocols of successful FIR initiatives and used these to design our FIR project. We did not approach relationship-building with the same focus or dedication of resources, and, as a result, the level of impact and integration we hoped for was not achieved within the timeframe of the pilot initiative.

Impact

The impact of each FIR related to the ways that each positioned herself and was positioned at each school. Since Catherine and Amanda initially met many teachers in the context of supervising teacher candidates, the FIR work became an extension of teacher preparation for rural schools. This previous involvement at each school facilitated the pilot FIR initiative. In each case, impact as FIR centered on teacher candidates although the specific focus varied from curriculum for Amanda to supervision of teacher candidates for Catherine. These efforts allowed us to provide more meaningful experiences in rural schools for our teacher candidates, in accordance with the recommendation in Azano and Stewart (2015).

For example, at Magnolia Elementary School, Catherine was able to work one-on-one with teacher candidates completing their final field experience. One particular teacher candidate struggled with classroom management. She was able to conference with the teacher candidate, plan and assist the teacher candidate in the classroom, and observe and provide immediate feedback. At Dogwood Middle School, Amanda spent time with a team of teachers that included a recent program graduate and a current teacher candidate. This experience allowed her to get additional insights on teacher induction practices within the school. Conversations with the teacher candidate focused on ways for the teacher candidate to collaborate more with other teachers to plan meaningful curriculum for her students. Being part of many team meetings also afforded Amanda a chance to learn more about topics like planning expectations and extra-curricular activities within the school.

Discussion

Across the findings, we highlight the importance of our rural contexts in forging and sustaining the FIR initiative as a means to enhance rural partnerships. The impacts of the rural settings manifested themselves in different ways. On a surface level, it just took longer to get to the schools from campus since each school was in a different county from the college, reached by two-lane state highways and local roads with lower speed limits. As noted, each FIR spent time at each school—this time was significant compared to the time spent at other partner schools for supervision or other matters, but insignificant compared with the time the students and teachers (and even teacher candidates) spent together at each school. While each FIR tried to streamline different efforts through each partner school, each also had additional responsibilities such as teaching other courses on campus and supervising teacher candidates at other schools. The rural context was critical in understanding challenges and drawbacks associated with the FIR initiative, but also critical in framing benefits and in understanding the potential for continual impact through long-term sustained endeavors with teachers and teacher candidates at each school. Through the pilot FIR initiative, each FIR recognized areas for continued efforts related to the focus areas of supervision of teacher candidates and curriculum.

The findings related to responsiveness, relationships, and impact grow from our framework of self-study (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Samaras, 2011) and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in terms of the roles that each FIR enacted at each school site. These findings also offer goal areas for future development of this and related initiatives. One goal area is an increased focus on the importance of continuing relationships with school partners. Additionally, we will develop other forms of support for faculty who take on a role as a FIR; these forms of support may include flexibility with schedules and re-assignment of some service responsibilities, for example, to facilitate each FIR spending more time at their respective school. Also, we will engage school partners in more structured conversations about mutual expectations for FIR initiatives to sustain relationships and maintain focus on student learning. We also recognize two background factors of time and rural contexts that offer challenges, but also affordances. The main limitation of this work is its focus on the FIR themselves to determine impact of the initiative. It is also critical to engage our school partners in ongoing conversation and innovation, and this is part of our partnership work. The specific focus of this project was understanding the initiative through the teacher educators who acted as FIR.

Implications

This work is significant because it traces the implementation of a new type of initiative: a FIR initiative in two rural schools. In keeping with NAPDS Essentials, this initiative reflected: a school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community; and work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings. Specifically, this research extends the conversation on school-university partnerships, and it expands on previous research in rural schools on the unique yet varied considerations of working in

small, rural schools. Through this work, we have turned more attention to the nature of school-university partnerships in rural sites, and how these require investments of time and relationships in order to be responsive to the needs of each rural school, its teachers and students, and teacher candidates preparing for careers in such schools. SUP

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