

A Reflective Faculty-in-Residence Model in a K-8 Lab School: Lessons Learned from the First Two Years of a Bidirectional Initiative

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ABSTRACT: The Faculty-in-Residence (FIR) initiative bridges resources of a regional university, its College of Education, and a K-8 partnership school in ways that enhance children’s learning and well-being. A core commitment undergirding the FIR role is the recognition that blurred boundaries, collaborative relationships, and the reimagination of how professional knowledge and resources can intersect, can create a richer learning environment. With the focus on a positive impact for students, the FIR work may include areas such as classroom pedagogy, school leadership, wrap-around services, and family and community engagement. This work informs the preparation of educators, practitioners, and community services professionals, creating rich possibilities that may not have existed when those spaces operated in isolation. This article provides perspective from both university faculty and K-8 classroom teachers on the challenges and opportunities presented by the reflective approach of a bidirectional FIR model.

PDS Essential #8: “Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings”

In 2016, the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) collaborated with New Hanover County Schools (NHCS) to open a lab school. Sponsored by the North Carolina Lab School Initiative (NC General Statutes), the legislation set to “re-define and strengthen university partnerships with public schools, improve student outcomes, and provide high quality teacher and principal training” (UNC System, n.d., para. 3). The work resulted in a full re-design of a school where careful planning, collaboration, and implementation occurred between UNCW (not just the college of education), NHCS, and community stakeholders. The school selected for redesign and implementation was D.C. Virgo Preparatory Academy (DCVPA). Located in downtown Wilmington, the academy operated since 1965 as a district public middle school and continued throughout the time of the redesign process. In July, 2018, D.C. Virgo Preparatory Academy re-opened as a K-8 lab school, operated by the university in conjunction with the NC Lab School Initiative.

While much could be written in terms of school restructuring, organizational leadership, field experience efforts, curricular innovations, and professional development initiatives, the present paper examines an important feature of the restructuring effort, the UNCW Faculty-in-Residence (FIR) model. The UNCW FIR model represents a bidirectional approach to how school-university partnerships intersect and accomplish relevant work that mutually challenges and benefits both sides of the collaborative effort. “Faculty in residence” is used in many professions and professional contexts. In the context of our work at DC Virgo, we frame the faculty in residence as a reflection of Zeichner and colleague’s application of “horizontal expertise” “hybrid spaces” and “boundary crossing” educators. (Zeichner et al., 2015). Yet, defining the role of a FIR varies and a “relative dearth of published research about their work” (Healea et al., 2015, p. 474) confounds a basic understanding.

Thus, the architects of the UNCW FIR model had to draw upon the existing literature involving school-university partner-

ships that include models of embedded leadership or teaching applications pursued by faculty in school settings; for example, drawing upon the fourth and fifth recommendations of the Holmes Group (1995) which were “connect schools of education to the schools” and “make schools a better place for practicing teachers to work and learn” (pp. 14-15). The K-12 school system and a university operate as distinct organizations, but “fundamentally both have the same broad goal: the education of students,” and thus we pondered, “How can these two entities work together to promote, foster, and support this goal?” (Farah, 2019, p. 74).

What is Faculty in Residence? – A Review

The three components of the university professor’s role comprise of research, teaching, and service; individual institutions often place emphasis on either research or teaching in proportion to the university’s Carnegie Classification (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2018). In theory, the concept of a FIR offers a formidable counterbalance to these contemporary roles, responsibilities, and trends in higher education (Healea et al., 2015). The residency provides an opportunity for the FIR to focus their work within the three components to yield a direct contribution to a school, its surrounding community, and the university of scholars and developing teachers.

The school and local community benefit from the expertise, experience, and research interests that the resident assimilates into the realities of the educational context. In turn, the resident benefits from opportunities involving professional development, teacher and school leadership preparation, community outreach, and research. The school’s teachers and administrators likewise reciprocate at the university level, serving as guest speakers or co-researchers, invigorating classroom instruction at both levels.

A key aspect of a FIR model is that it can improve the profession. As Ginsberg and Rhodes (2003) observed, university faculty working in partner schools can inform and reform teacher preparation models. The authors note that faculty rewards and incentives, load credit, and recognition of the work is important for universities to consider. This work underpins the belief that collaboration among schools and universities will improve “both teacher education and learning for all students” (Ginsberg & Rhodes, 2003, p. 151). Allen and colleagues (2013) describe a Partnerships in Teaching Excellence program designed to improve teacher education through a competitive selection process, scholarship incentives, a clinical model of an “open door” team inquiry approach, and a close working relationship between a university coordinator, an experienced mentor teacher supporting 3-5 on-site pre-service teachers, and intense professional learning based on a cognitive coaching model.

Causton-Theoharis and colleagues (2011) describe a Schools of Promise (SOP) approach, whereby a partnership between a research university and a large urban school district involved a “multi-year commitment by university faculty to work closely with three targeted elementary schools that have elected to re-

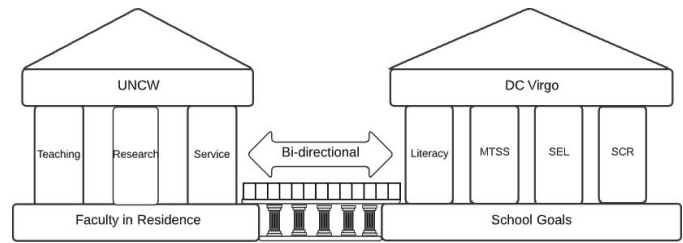


Figure 1. The UNCW-DCVPA Faculty-in-Residence Model

examine their current school practices, restructure their service delivery model, and become more inclusive in all areas of school practice” (p. 193). Participating schools were selected based on staff survey responses indicating desired participation in the SOP model, as it involved restructuring services and teaching configurations and intense on-site professional development.

Engaging in partnerships between schools and universities can be challenging work, for as Day et al. (2021) note, “they do so in contexts of externally initiated policies. . .which often make new demands on their time and practices, and which may challenge existing values, purposes and practices” (p. 9). McIntyre et al. (2018) note the importance of a “truly mutually beneficial environment for the PDS” (p. 10) that results from teachers, university faculty, and pre-service teachers working closely to ultimately benefit the students.

The UNCW FIR Model

The UNCW FIR initiative functions as a “bridge” that connects the resources of Watson College of Education and the greater university to D.C. Virgo Preparatory Academy (see Figure 1). Through the bidirectional relationship, the FIR provides support for DC Virgo’s multi-year school goals of literacy, multi-tiered systems of support, social-emotional learning, and school-community relationships, while DC Virgo provides an authentic and dynamic environment for the FIR to engage in activities related to research, service, and educator preparation (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011). Another feature of the bidirectional relationship involves cultivating a space for planned and serendipitous collaborations among faculty, teachers, administrators, and community stakeholders. As a result, the FIR plays a pivotal role in facilitating relationships that enhance learning and progress in many college, school, and community settings (Ginsberg & Rhodes, 2003).

The FIR position has flexibility in its design. At times, the FIR has worked directly with children. In other cases, the FIR has worked with teacher development, parent engagement, and service providers. As stipulated by the legislation, the partnership informs teacher preparation, and thus the FIR serves as a liaison between the lab school classroom, school, and the college of education. In all cases, the focus is the creation of a collaborative “good” for children. The specific activities and strategies of a FIR have been tailored to an identified need or opportunity based at D.C. Virgo, intersected with the knowledge

and experience of the university colleague, as well as opportunities for bridging back to teacher preparation.

The work of the FIR has served to enhance the knowledge base in the particular focus area, including scholarship, and it has informed professional practice. Applications from interested university faculty members were reviewed by a panel of school and university colleagues (representing UNCW and D.C. Virgo). Once selected, the UNCW faculty member was provided a course release to compensate the effort. Specifically, the work committed to FIR was considered one course equivalent which allowed consistent time dedicated to the effort throughout each semester. The progress was reviewed by the panel throughout the course of the semester-long commitment.

This paper overviews three applications from the first two years of this school-university partnership. These FIR applications include elementary instruction support, academic intervention and applied learning, and middle grades inquiry-based instruction. These three applications offer insights from university faculty and the K-8 teachers in working together to support students.

Application 1: Elementary Instructional Support

The first application of the Faculty-in-Residence model involved UNCW's Dr. Kathy Fox, who leveraged resources and expertise to help strengthen elementary education at the school and provide teacher support in the early transition from a 6-8 to a K-8 school. Fox had expertise in family literacy; thus the parent-community engagement aspect of the school restructuring was of interest. Fox had been a member of the design team before the opening of the school, and thus she was able to meet with teachers and administrators for an informal needs assessment for her role at the school. One identified need was for the school to be a sanctuary, or safe place, for parents, caregivers, and community members to meet, and Fox helped create a space that served as a community room.

Dr. Fox was able to solicit volunteers, and donations to refit the room with new rugs, a new stove, coffee maker, books, and games for family check out. Refurbished furniture from the university surplus was brought in to provide soft areas for small group seating. A childcare corner was set up so that parents with small children could attend meetings. Over one hundred parents were welcomed in the space between Open House, Kindergarten registration, Back-to-School Night, and parent workshops. Fox and Principal Sabrina Hill-Black distributed a parent/caregiver survey during these meetings to solicit input on what parents and caregivers wanted from engagement opportunities at the school. Importantly, parents and caregivers were asked what expertise they could share with other parents, caregivers, and teachers.

Over the first six months, Fox and Hill-Black facilitated three parent and caregiver workshops. Fox first led a discussion on working with children on homework, encouraging goal setting, working collaboratively, and communicating with the classroom teacher with homework questions. A hands-on activity of making playdough showed how objects and ingredients in the

home could serve as math and literacy support. Plans were made for a parent participant in the first workshop to lead a second session on preparing a meal, which the parent's 2nd-grade son was co-taught. Additional workshop ideas were planned, including how to hold an affordable birthday party in the home and how to fashion a popular hairstyle. Materials were purchased for the workshops by a university mini-grant that Dr. Fox had obtained.

Her second role was teacher support. During the semester, she spent two and a half days a week at the school, primarily in the Kindergarten classroom, but serving as a support for school-wide events and daily lunch, dismissals, and playground duties. She met with teachers regularly and attended professional development days as a participant and university liaison. Two professional development needs emerged that Dr. Fox co-led with teachers and administrators: a school-wide Critical Friends protocol based on the work of Bambino (2002) and the school-wide Teacher Talks.

The Critical Friends protocols allowed teachers to present a critical question regarding student academic needs, share work samples across grade levels K-8, and problem-solve as a K-8 team. One example was, "How do I get children to attend to another child when reading in a small group?" The FIR and teacher circulated work samples, and the audience engaged by examining the work, discussing, and coming up with recommendations. By co-leading the sessions with three classroom teachers, the FIR shared responsibility for teaching the ongoing sessions to them.

Similarly, Teacher Talks were co-led by the principal and university math and literacy support personnel. Teachers were given release time to attend their 1-hour Teacher Talk session. They were asked to prepare for three questions: "1.) Looking at your class list, what children are doing well and in what areas? 2.) What children are you concerned about, and in what areas? and 3.) How can we support you both in academics and in other engagements, such as field trips, speakers, extracurricular support?" Notes were taken and the Teacher Talk team met to design strategies to support student and classroom needs.

The bidirectional results from Dr. Fox's efforts have led to presentations and publications. Importantly the experiences continue to inform her teaching in teacher preparation classes. She has continued to work with the lab school teachers and administration and serves on a community engagement committee. She has maintained relationships with teachers at the school, hosting teachers as guest speakers in undergraduate and graduate courses, co-presenting with two lab school teachers at professional development sessions on the university campus, and hosting a K-5 literacy-based field trip to campus.

Application 2: Academic Intervention and Applied Learning

The second FIR approached the role as an opportunity to engage in applied learning, conduct academic intervention research, and provide professional development. Pre-service

special education teachers and applied behavior analysis minor students completed field experience requirements at D.C. Virgo. During the 2019-2020 academic year, Dr. Laura Jennings, the D.C. Virgo assistant principal and Ms. Erica Swanton Derushia, the D.C. Virgo special education teacher, collaborated with UNCW's Dr. Jim Stocker to conduct research and assist in the supervision of undergraduate students delivering intensive academic intervention to K-5 students. Explicit decoding and fluency-building activities for reading included letter recognition, letter-sound recognition, letter writing, word reading fluency, and sentence reading fluency. In mathematics, a similar structure of learning activities occurred with a focus on additive fact families and the commutative property.

Jennings and Derushia helped facilitate the program by developing a schedule for Dr. Stocker's students, assisting in the implementation stages of the program, and actively engaged in conversations regarding data and decision-making. Both attended Stocker's class to share a meal and speak with his students about the student population and needs at D.C. Virgo and gain more technical information about the intervention process. Ms. Derushia attended Stocker's class on several occasions to engage in follow-up discussions regarding student progress and intervention modification. Each played a pivotal role in the teacher education process and growth in student achievement.

Approximately 36 elementary students benefited from the one-on-one tutoring experience during the intervention block. Results from curriculum-based measurements indicate the kindergarten class ($n = 16$) achieved an aggregate gain of 25 percentile points in letter recognition fluency from 15 days of intervention while second through fifth grade students ($n = 14$) achieved an aggregate gain of 10 percentile points on word reading fluency from 11-12 weeks of intervention. Students receiving the math fact family fluency intervention surpassed the robust measure of weekly growth with gains of over 1.2 digits correct per week. Data and learning outcomes from the intervention continue to translate into peer-reviewed publications and assist in the school's progress monitoring and decision-making process.

It is important to note that the rapport between the undergraduate and D.C. Virgo students grew beyond academics. Pictures, videos, and stories of their shared experience paint a picture of how success and commitment to a child's education can yield a deep bond and lasting memories. Many undergraduates went above and beyond to do "something special" for the elementary students. For example, one pre-service teacher who volunteers for a local *paws4people* organization brought in assistance dogs for a visit. As an extension of the program, two undergraduate students participated in an independent study for two additional semesters and graduated as distinguished undergraduate scholars. Stocker and colleagues continue to share findings from the intervention and collaborative process through publications and presentations.

Application 3: Middle Grades Inquiry-Focused Instruction

A third application emerged organically from a conversation between university faculty and Virgo teachers. Dr. Jeremy Hilburn entered the partnership with the idea of helping middle grades social studies teachers in whatever way they wanted to partner. From initial conversations, Hilburn worked with middle grades teacher Ms. Karla Nobles on inquiry-focused instruction. In particular, the teachers wanted to master the new C3 framework. Throughout the FIR, the teachers made major strides in inquiry-based instruction and developed important products for their future practice, such as converting all the social studies standards into compelling questions and creating a 20-day unit to serve as a model for inquiry instruction moving forward.

Although the primary focus on the FIR was inquiry instruction, multiple other benefits emerged from the partnership. Hilburn served as a guest teacher on two occasions and helped brainstorm and facilitate a "Medieval Fair" special project. The FIR also served a social networking function, such as connecting Ms. Nobles to university resources (e.g., Virtual Reality hardware; introductions to Environmental Sciences faculty). As a result of the work emerging from the FIR partnerships, Hilburn has co-authored publications and is publishing with two of the teachers at the school.

The university students were also beneficiaries of the experience. For example, Dr. Hilburn asked Ms. Nobles which social studies units they would most benefit from more resources or lesson ideas (e.g., post-WWII US; Ancient Greece). Then, he had social studies methods students design units on these topics. This assignment provided the Virgo teachers with innovative lesson plans and resources, and it made the university assignment more authentic and impactful for the university students as well. As Ms. Nobles observed, the university students were her "back-up singers" in developing these units.

Discussion

These three applications of the Faculty-in-Residence model show the bidirectional promise of an intentional school-university partnership. This bidirectional work has stated goals from the outset for multiple members of the team. In the case of the FIR, planning how the work would affect students at all ranks was built into the design. Learning from one setting was shared back and forth to the other—from university classroom to elementary or middle grades classroom and back again. The three faculty members highlighted here have maintained relationships with the school and continue to involve their university students with the experience. Likewise, the faculty at D.C. Virgo continue as important resources for the university and scholarly community. The close partnership has opened additional opportunities to collaborate.

For example, Dr. Fox collaborated with the sixth grade to display the students' writing and artwork from the unit in the education building on campus. The university librarian connected with the sixth-grade team to have research ready to explore primary sources on historic toys. The sixth grade students walked across campus, ate lunch alongside university students and faculty members, and used library resources, which for the majority of them was the first time they had been on the university campus, despite being only 4 miles from their school.

Perhaps the most important of the event was the students' participation as members of the UNCW campus. Ms. Kemeka Sidbury, one of the two 6th grade teachers, noted the importance of providing learners with meaningful opportunities outside of the classroom setting. When D.C. Virgo teachers and UNCW faculty worked together collaboratively, the lasting impact was noticeable. For example, Dr. Stocker provided data showing increased reading and math fluency in the elementary students he and his students worked with. Ongoing use of university faculty and school staff co-led discussions have continued, and the community room is still open for visitors. Additionally, designing field trips to campus helped build grade-level consistency that teachers and students could look forward to each year. As Mann et al. (2020) note, collaboration can lead to more excellent reflection on instructional design making over time.

Conclusion

The FIR model is anchored in the hard work that comes with regular time on the ground, intentional and reflective planning, and willingness to bend traditional structures to benefit the greater good of the classroom needs. In its first two years of existence, the lab school withstood three hurricanes and a pandemic, redefining the "normal" modality of education. The university-school partnership model was tested, yet not broken, from Hurricane Florence forcing a four-week closure in the fall of 2018 to the year-long 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic disruption. The anchor of collaboration, including the robust Faculty-in-Residence model, enabled a tight-knit ethos of bidirectional partnership to build upon the common languages and shared strategies that emerged from the FIR approach, and this work is sustained in an ongoing, multi-year approach (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011).

Moving forward, the D.C. Virgo school leadership identified key areas for new Faculty-in-Residence partners to focus on, including blended/flipped instruction to help the school adjust to the pandemic-influenced context on online learning and a focus on instructional and racial equity in teaching and learning to better focus on the "why" and the "who" that centers our work. The influence of the FIR model will continue to strengthen the partnership to benefit the K-8 students, university students, teachers, and university faculty through this collaborative work. ^{SUP}

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