

# From Year-long Internship to PDS: Working Together to Build Better Teachers

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**ABSTRACT:** The partnership between Kennesaw State University and Marietta Middle School, a 2012 recipient of the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) "Award for Exemplary Professional Development School Achievement," began as a year-long internship (YLI) program for teacher candidates in middle grades education at KSU. During the pilot year, the goals included the following four objectives: 1) identify excellent classroom teachers willing to mentor a pre-service teacher (intern) for the entire academic year; 2) critique, guide, and mentor interns using best practice unit design; 3) create a model for interns to observe and critique each others' teaching; and 4) develop this partnership into a PDS relationship using the "Nine Essentials" of NAPDS (NAPDS, 2008). As the YLI developed into a formalized PDS, the goal was to create a Professional Learning Community (PLC) that would enhance the learning of both in-service and pre-service teachers. Co-teaching, goal setting, and communication became the foci of professional development sessions for all participants.

Often, at our university, a student teacher is assigned to a classroom through a random process and is supervised by a university supervisor, often an adjunct instructor, who observes the student teacher a few times per semester, noting strengths and weaknesses of the one-period lesson, and then grants the candidate a final grade at the end of the semester. A peculiar practice, at best! It seems that the classroom teacher, especially if very carefully and intentionally selected, would be more aware of the overall strengths and weaknesses and should therefore be active, responsible, and accountable for the development of the pre-service teacher.

It was based on this sentiment that the partnership between Marietta Middle School (MMS) and Kennesaw State University's (KSU) Department of Middle Grades Educa-

tion (MGE) was born. In an effort to provide pre-service teacher candidates with meaningful student teaching experiences which emulate, as closely as possible, the demands of first-year teaching while providing continual mentoring, co-teaching, and support, an MGE faculty member and a teacher at MMS worked collaboratively to develop a year-long internship model. Piloted during the 2008-2009 school year, the goals of this program included the following objectives:

1. Identify excellent classroom teachers willing to mentor a pre-service teacher (intern) for the entire academic year
2. Critique, guide, and mentor interns using best practice unit design
3. Create a model for interns to observe and critique each others' teaching; and

4. Develop this partnership into a PDS relationship using the "Nine Essentials" (NAPDS, 2008)

## Professional Learning Community

As a Professional Development School (PDS), the mission of the partnership between the Kennesaw State University Department of Middle Grades Education (MGE) and Marietta Middle School (MMS) is to create a Professional Learning Community (PLC) for in-service and pre-service teachers through a year-long internship (YLI) model. The Nine Essentials of NAPDS, which require transparency, collaboration, research-based best practice initiatives, and constant analysis of and reflection on teaching, guide and define our partnership, thereby meeting the needs of our ever-changing, diverse, middle school student population.

The purpose of the partnership is to provide interns an intentional and focused field experience, and allow classroom teachers more leadership opportunities and more autonomy in the evaluation and supervision of student teachers. It was decided that MGE pre-service teacher candidates who volunteer to participate in the YLI would be placed with outstanding classroom teachers at MMS for their TOSS semester in the fall. TOSS (Teaching of Special Subjects) is the methods block at KSU. During TOSS interns split their time between the on-campus methods courses and the MMS classroom for about half of the semester and then report to the middle school full-time for the remainder of the fall semester and the following spring, which is the student teaching semester.

Building a Professional Learning Community (PLC) through a YLI became the mission of the partnership because we recognize this model would enhance the learning of both the pre-service and in-service teachers, and therefore be broader in its outreach and scope than the focus of our

individual institutions. Interns participate in the co-teaching professional development sessions with their mentor teachers that typically occur after school or on professional duty days. Interns are also invited to participate in workshops for newly hired faculty, which include preparing for parent-teacher conferences.

Additionally, seminars for interns are held at MMS on a regular basis to support their learning in such areas as classroom management, differentiation, and working with students who are English language learners. One such seminar for interns and mentor teachers (MTs) that occurs early in the year-long experience concentrates on communication skills. As interns are in schools and participating as colleagues with in-service teachers, it is vital to share with them that they do, indeed, have valuable ideas and fresh perspectives, but it is also vital to coach them on how to communicate those ideas effectively in team meetings. A lot of time is spent discussing communication strategies and expectations with various people in the building.

Also, regular seminars are held to give interns an opportunity to transfer what they are learning about classroom management in their on-campus course to what they are seeing and experiencing in the middle school classrooms. MTs and interns also participate together in a reflection and goal-setting session between the fall and spring semesters. This meeting allows interns to identify their strengths and weaknesses as well as their goals for the student teaching semester. They also have an opportunity to communicate to their MTs what exactly they need from them to achieve those goals. Likewise, the MT identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the intern and communicates what specifically the intern should focus on during student teaching.

This mid-semester meeting, in particular, is unique to the YLI and is an invaluable experience for everyone involved. It provides an opportunity for joint reflection on the co-

teaching relationship and it helps establish expectations for the spring (student teaching) semester. This is not something that is possible with traditional one-semester student teachers who do not learn of their field placement assignment or meet their supervising teacher until January.

## Research Findings

Given that "some of the most powerful influences on the development of teacher efficacy are mastery experiences during student teaching and the induction year" (Hoy, 2000, p. 2), the year-long interns are given the (Ohio State) Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) - Long Form in August, December, and May (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The authors note the strong relationships between teachers' persistence, commitment, enthusiasm, instructional behaviors, and their teacher efficacy beliefs. In an effort to glean very preliminary evidence, their scale results were compared with randomly selected student teachers completing their field experience in the traditional format, meaning that they began that experience in mid-January, at the beginning of the university's spring semester.

### Analysis Based on Scale Factors and Subscale Factors

Independent t-tests were conducted to examine our hypotheses that year-long mean TSES scores were significantly larger than traditional group mean scores based on time periods and subscales. Initial (August) differences in means between the year-long and traditional groups were not significant; but there were significant differences between group means at the midyear (December) and year-end (May) time periods. These differences were noted with total mean scores and subscale mean scores. Exact statistics for each comparison are noted in Table 1.

These comparisons are also shown graphically in Figures 1 and 2.

Both pre-service teachers and in-service teachers benefit greatly by participating in this YLI, which ultimately means the middle school students benefit. This has been evidenced quantitatively in comparison data of the TSES and qualitatively through conversations and interviews with interns and mentor teachers. One veteran teacher compared working with a YLI intern to having a traditional student teacher in his classroom in this way:

In the past I have always accepted "student teachers" into my class. The stay would be just long enough for me to start the process of slightly knowing the person and their tendencies. Their stay, although welcomed, became more of a mid-school year intrusion or an "organized disruption." The students never really got the chance to interact with the person before they were to actually be taught by him/her. This initiative has been just the opposite. The interns are here the whole year, which allows them time to get acclimated to the supervising teacher and the students alike. The interns are also able to see the full operations of the school, parent conferences, field trips, open house, PTA meetings, etc.

Many professions require internships or have training positions for newcomers. In education, however, a first year teacher is all too often provided textbooks and then expected to "go teach" with little support or guidance, and with expectations similar to those of a veteran teacher. Pre-service teachers need substantially more time in schools, in the role as teacher, to fully comprehend what the profession entails. Although classroom management may be taught at most colleges of education, pre-service teachers consistently list this element of teaching as a weakness and often state they do not receive enough training in that area. They often do not they lack classroom management knowledge; they lack the experience to fully understand and implement what is taught to

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of TSES Total and Factor Scale Scores and Independent t-test Values for Between Group Comparisons

Group Statistics and Independent t-test Values	Program Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Beginning Year TSES Scale $t(38) = 0.35, p < .73$	Traditional	20	153.2000	27.11302	6.06266
Beginning Engagement Sub Scale $t(38) = 0.14, p < .89$	Year-long	20	150.0500	29.47162	6.59005
Beginning Management SubScale $t(38) = -0.21, p < .84$	Traditional	20	50.9000	8.68695	1.94246
Beginning Strategies SubScale $t(38) = 1.10, p < .28$	Year-long	20	50.5000	9.61085	2.14905
Mid Year TSES Scale $t(50) = -2.59, p < .01$	Traditional	20	50.0000	11.20620	2.50578
Mid Year Engagement SubScale $t(50) = -2.03, p < .05$	Year-long	20	50.7500	11.68839	2.61360
Mid Year Management SubScale $t(50) = -2.71, p < .01$	Traditional	20	52.3000	9.18867	2.05465
Mid Year Strategies SubScale $t(50) = -2.08, p < .04$	Year-long	20	48.8000	10.91884	2.44153
Year-End TSES Scale $t(38) = 0.35, p < .727$	Traditional	26	165.0769	20.33307	3.98764
Year-End Engagement SubScale $t(42) = -2.14, p < .04$	Year-long	26	178.3846	16.46591	3.22923
Year-End Management SubScale $t(42) = -2.09, p < .04$	Traditional	26	53.1923	6.98581	1.37003
Year-End Strategies SubScale $t(42) = -1.34, p < .18$	Year-long	26	56.8077	5.83794	1.14491
	Traditional	26	55.6154	8.05519	1.57975
	Year-long	26	61.1538	6.64345	1.30289
	Traditional	26	56.2692	7.42190	1.45555
	Year-long	26	60.4231	6.96375	1.36570
	Traditional	18	177.1667	19.95657	4.70381
	Year-long	26	188.4231	15.04440	2.95045
	Traditional	18	56.6667	5.91111	1.39326
	Year-long	26	60.9231	6.17040	1.21012
	Traditional	18	59.8333	7.91313	1.86514
	Year-long	26	64.0385	5.45146	1.06912
	Traditional	18	60.6667	8.10954	1.91144
	Year-long	26	63.4615	5.40541	1.06009

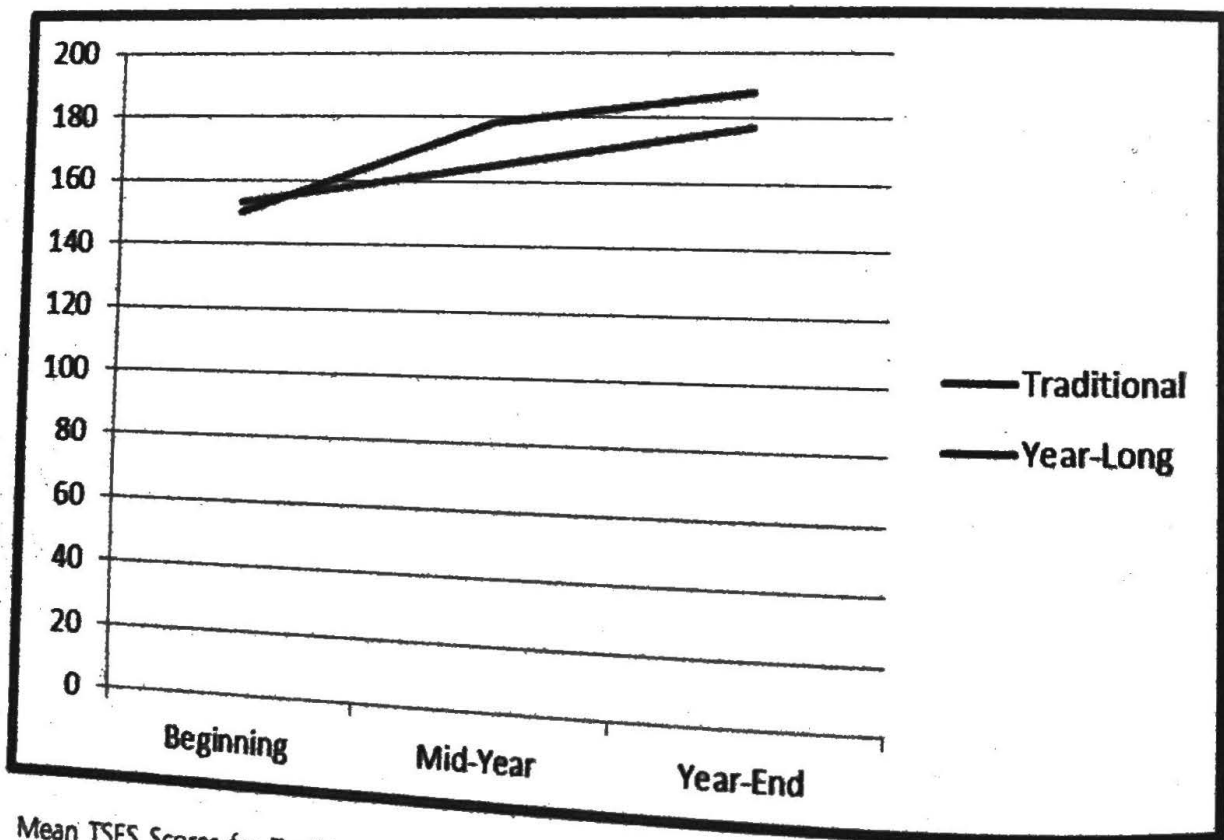


Figure 1. Mean TSES Scores for Traditional and Year-Long Pre-Service Teachers Across Senior Year Clinical Experiences. Significant Differences Exist Between Traditional and Year-Long Mean Scores at Mid-Year and Year-End

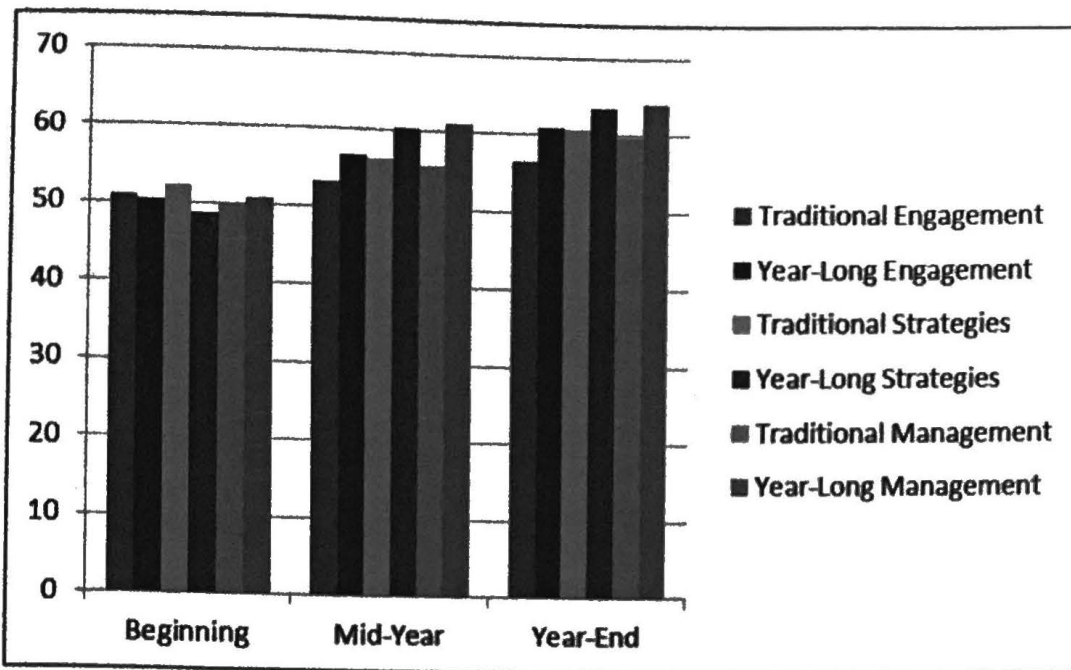


Figure 2. Mean TSES Subscale Scores (For Engagement, Strategies, Management) For Traditional and Year-Long Pre-Service Teachers Across Senior Year Clinical Experiences. Significant Differences Exist For All Between Group Means at Mid-Year and Year-End.

them in the classroom management courses. According to one YLI,

... [T]he one word that summarizes all of the many benefits of the year-long internship is TIME. As a year-long intern, I have had the time in one classroom with one mentor to thoroughly and completely become a practicing professional educator. Time has provided [my MT] and I an opportunity to know and understand each other so that we can work as a symbiotic team. Time has provided me an opportunity to take the textbook knowledge I've learned from my [college] courses and turn it into practical use in a classroom. The knowledge we amass in college classes can only take us so far without experiencing the roller coaster of a middle school classroom. Time has provided my students an opportunity to get to know and trust me in a stable environment. Students need to trust adults so that a learning environment can be created; my students especially

need stable adult figures in their lives to support them in all facets of adolescence, including education. The year-long internship ends up being a win for all parties involved ..."

Interestingly, some pre-service teachers, prior to experiencing full-time teaching responsibilities, rate themselves quite high on the classroom management section of the Teacher's Sense of Self Efficacy scale, only to rate themselves significantly lower when the same scale is administered mid-year. Year-long interns, however, rate themselves higher at the end of the student teaching semester, as compared to traditional one-semester student teachers, which shows that they leave KSU more ready to have a successful first year teaching experience, which ultimately is our greatest accomplishment!

## Conclusion

The innovation of this PDS partnership is the YLI. Since its inception, the goal of the YLI has been to replicate, to the extent possible, a

first year-teaching experience, but one with the support and guidance of a selected mentor teacher. It is through the YLI that pre-service teachers have time to experience what they learn in the KSU classroom—that teaching is all about building relationships! Teaching middle school—and particularly middle schools in diverse, urban settings—is (or should be) a calling, not just a job. This YLI experience gives teacher candidates an opportunity to discover if they are truly called to such an environment, and administrators with whom we work claim that they are more confident when they hire a YLI that they are hiring someone who really knows what they are getting into and feel that over time this experience will reduce the turnover these administrators typically experience in their schools. One administrator explained that it is a way “to grow our own” meaning that we are training teachers who know they want to be there, which will eventually provide much needed stability in the schools. <sup>SUP</sup>

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