

In Partnership:
Classroom Teachers and University Professors
Working Together To Prepare Future Teachers

Cathy Pohan
San Diego State University

“This learning opportunity translates into better prepared teachers and validates quality teaching techniques.”
—Judith Hunsberger, Director, Clearview Elementary School Charter

Teacher education in California is currently under attack. Politicians and the general public have lost confidence in the entire educational system. While some critics argue that too many credential courses are required, the majority seem to criticize Colleges of Education for simply failing to produce quality teachers. Interestingly, in California the system of higher education and its corresponding departments of teacher preparation are as diverse as the students they serve. For example, within the 23 California State University (CSU) campuses, programs vary tremendously from the traditional, university-based model to the site-based, school-university partnership model. Within the range of programs offered at the various universities in California, even the number of courses required to complete credential requirements varies tremendously. Yet, when evaluating teacher preparation in California (cf. California State University Systemwide Study, 2001), the critics often fail to disaggregate their data, falling victim to a common mistake of lumping the effective with the not so effective. The problem with this approach is that it misrepresents the reality of diverse programs, it leads to inaccurate or insufficient conclusions and, ultimately, it may impede progress. But perhaps what is most disappointing is the fact that some very promising approaches to teacher preparation go unrecognized in such a climate.

One question asked by both teacher educators and critics of education is, *How do we ensure that the next generation of teachers will be adequately prepared to face the challenges of teaching in the 21st Century?* In a recent U.S. government report (1998) entitled “Promising Practices: New Ways to Improve Teacher Quality,” professional development schools (PDSs) were identified as one of the most promising efforts to improve teacher education programs. Recently, Marsha Levine (2002) suggested that such collaborative partnerships “bridge the gap between university and school — between theory and practice — to promote student and teacher learning” (p. 65). Although, PDSs come in all shapes and sizes, with varying levels of collaboration between school and university, two common threads running through all such partnerships are a commitment to collaborative decision-making regarding the curriculum and the development of authentic and meaningful learning experiences for teacher candidates (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2000). Recent studies indicate that graduates of professional development schools learn better and outperform peers who have graduated from traditional teacher preparation programs (Houston, Hollis, Clay, Ligons, & Roff, 1999; Teitel, 2001). In this article, I describe how one school-university partnership, for which I am the university liaison, is working collaboratively to prepare high caliber teachers. I subsequently provide evaluative evidence from program graduates and district personnel to support the value and effectiveness of this unique teacher preparation program.

Background Information

Teacher Preparation at San Diego State University

The preservice teacher preparation program at San Diego State University (SDSU) is a fifth-year, two-semester program. If one were to survey the variety of programs offered in the SDSU Department of Education, s/he would find that a range of school-university partnerships has existed since the 1980s. Together, the programs at SDSU represent many years of collaborative efforts that have brought university and school personnel together in the preparation of new teachers.

The Partnership:

Chula Vista Elementary School District/Clearview Elementary School Charter and San Diego State University

The partnership between SDSU and the Chula Vista Elementary School District (CVESD) has successfully been underway since 1990; in 1998 I became the university liaison. CVESD serves a culturally and

linguistically diverse student population (61.1% Latino, 21.9% Caucasian, 7% Filipino, 5% African American, 3.5% Asian, and 1.5% other). As such, the field experiences we are able to provide to our preservice teachers, together with the focused course work, help future teachers develop the skills and dispositions essential for working effectively with ethnically and linguistically diverse students.

For the past eleven years, university and district personnel have maintained a substantial level of collaboration with very limited resources (e.g., money, release time for meetings). Perhaps the most tangible evidence we have to exemplify the level of ongoing district-level support for the continuation of this teacher preparation model is the dedicated classroom space for SDSU classes at one of the local school sites, Clearview Elementary School Charter. As for the university, as liaison I am given three units of assigned time per semester to coordinate the partnership. However, since the inception of this partnership, all other university professors have worked without assigned time to deliver methods courses on-site at the school, model effective strategies in K-6 classrooms, and work collaboratively with classroom teachers to design effective and appropriate curriculum and field-based experiences for our preservice. Beyond the experiences provided at Clearview, we also collaborate with school administrators and classroom teachers across the district to ensure that our students have an opportunity to observe promising practices and gain hands-on experiences in a variety of schools serving culturally, linguistically and economically diverse students. Certainly, open lines of communication have been essential to our success. Whether it be the placement of student teachers, identifying essential content knowledge and pedagogical skills for preservice and practicing teachers, or designing special experiences to increase K-6 student achievement, collaborative decision-making between the university instructional team and the district advisory committee has been the linchpin of this program.

Methods

Participants

Graduates. Each year graduates of the program are asked to evaluate the effectiveness of various elements of the program. Data gathered from graduates over the past four years (n=113) have been used for the purposes of this study.

District personnel. Teacher-Presenters and the Director at Clearview (n=11) were invited to participate in this study. Seventy-two percent of the faculty chose to participate.

Instruments

Graduates. At the end of each semester, graduates are given a series of open-ended questions regarding the effectiveness of the student teaching seminar (which includes the shared expertise sessions described later in this article). A sample question is as follows: *What were the strengths of this course/professor?* In addition, throughout the course of the program, students submit reflective logs and/or “quick writes” highlighting various aspects of their experiences. Data gathered from these sources have been used in this study.

District personnel. Teacher-presenters and the Director of Clearview were asked what they “believe and/or think about Shared Expertise as part of the teacher preparation program (i.e., benefits).” Data gathered through this survey has also been used in this study.

Innovative and Promising Practices in the Partnership

As with many traditional teacher preparation programs, our university professors meet with the preservice teachers on a regular basis. Through a series of courses, professors have the future teachers investigate educational theory and current research to lay a foundation for understanding how young people (a) develop (i.e., physically, socially, emotionally, cognitively, and morally); (b) learn new concepts; and (c) make connections within and across various domains. With the goal of helping new teachers understand the importance of using students’ prior knowledge and/or misconceptions to guide instruction, professors share their own research to demonstrate why assessment is the first step in the instructional planning cycle. For example, our math and science professors share their own classroom research (e.g., K-6 student interviews; videos of students explaining their mathematical solutions or scientific understandings) and then have the preservice teachers conduct similar student interviews, reflect upon the interviewee’s understandings or misconceptions, and make recommendations for future instruction. As an instructional team, we want our students to become reflective practitioners who use assessment as a compass for instructional planning. Beyond setting this critical foundation, we believe that the role of the university professors is to introduce preservice teachers to current research on promising practices. In addition to the coursework required for a preliminary teaching credential in California and special on-site experiences with children (e.g., tutoring, community building exercises, and conducting assessments), students in the CVESD/SDSU partnership have had the opportunity to learn from experienced classroom teachers through a series of 10 one-hour workshops which we refer to as “Shared

Expertise.” We believe this component of the program is critical because at the same time that it allows preservice teachers to access the pedagogical understandings and skills of veteran teachers, it elevates the professional status of our practicing teachers.

Shared Expertise Sessions

Throughout the history of our partnership, a variety of topics have been included in these sessions. Some of the more typical sessions include: Standards-Based, Integrated Curriculum Development; Student-Generated Rubrics; Strategies for English Language Learners; Directed Drawing; Teaching Physical Education; Art, Music, and Drama across the Curriculum; Micro-Societies; Working Effectively with Parents; Classroom Management Strategies; and Landing the Job. The following student quotes extracted from various evaluative surveys summarize what graduates of our program have had to say about these sessions:

- ◆ *Topics were practical and relevant.*
- ◆ *The teacher seminars were all interesting. Each brought useful information . . . I enjoyed the outside speakers.*
- ◆ *Panels and shared expertise sessions were great . . . I have grown tremendously these last 2 semesters. I feel prepared to teach.*
- ◆ *Shared expertise provided us with concrete, practical strategies and advice.*

Power teaching/complex instruction. Ms. Linda Marion, a curriculum specialist (and former 6th grade teacher at Clearview), helped our future teachers create units of instruction utilizing a technique referred to as “Power Teaching” (Marion & Steele, 1996). In this session, our student teachers learned about a management system for integrating curriculum and helping K-6 students (a) develop deep and enduring understandings and (b) make important connections among and between disciplines. After explaining each component of the system and showing examples of her sixth grade students’ work, she had the preservice teachers experience a power teaching lesson by using a piece of expository text on whales that would be appropriate for 2nd or 3rd graders. Some typical student teacher comments are as follows:

- ◆ *Very informative. I learned how to differentiate activities and meet the needs of students within a thematic unit. 20Actually, it really sunk in when I saw this plan inside the classroom. I was overwhelmed by how well it worked.*

◆ *Ms. Marion brought together various aspects of language arts and social studies into a cohesive unit. I think learning across the curriculum helps students better understand concepts.*

◆ *This was a valuable session in that it was about a specific instructional method, with step-by-step instructions . . . This augmented our methods courses by providing one way to implement/apply what we've learned in a classroom setting.*

This past year's cohort of preservice teachers observed one of the previous year's graduates, who is now a first-year teacher in the district, demonstrate and then debrief a power teaching/complex instruction lesson in her 6th grade classroom. Our students commented over and over again about how powerful it was to see that a first-year teacher could actually implement this method effectively. Moreover, several candidates indicated a high level of efficacy and a willingness to try this technique in their own classrooms.

Standards-based instructional planning. We have drawn on the experience of teachers by having them share their expertise about planning standards-based instruction and developing student-teacher generated rubrics for assessment. In these sessions, the teachers built on what students learned in their educational psychology class by providing examples of how they have used backward mapping to design a standards-based curriculum for their particular grade level. They showed our preservice teachers examples of specific standards and the accompanying rubrics for assessment. Under the tutelage of these teachers, our preservice teachers were provided with some practice in (a) clarifying the big idea or enduring understandings (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) associated with a particular standard; (b) identifying evaluative evidence for determining if students have met the standard; (c) brainstorming appropriate learning activities for the students; and (d) developing a grading rubric for the assessment of that standard. The comments of student teachers supported the usefulness of this shared expertise session:

◆ *This session has prepared me to be a better teacher because it gives the lessons purpose in a way that is clear to the students.*

◆ *Now that I have actually seen examples and understand rubrics, I can actually see myself implementing this system in upper grades.*

◆ *Helpful to see how Ms. Gannon and Ms. Rabine implemented the techniques in their own classrooms.*

Another goal of the shared expertise sessions has been to provide our future teachers with additional information and strategies regarding topics that are only touched upon in the two-semester credential pro-

gram. Art, music, drama and physical education have gotten little, if any, real attention in the public schools. This void has been even more pronounced in the overall program of teacher preparation in California. Through our partnership with Clearview, however, we have been able to initiate dialogue, prompt student teachers to think about the arts and physical education, and provide preservice teachers with specific strategies for addressing these disciplines in the curriculum.

Directed drawing. An example of one program used at Clearview to help youngsters learn drawing skills (e.g., perspective and space) and develop the confidence to draw, paint, and work with various mediums of art is “Directed Drawing.” Ms. Kristen Merghart has taught this technique to our candidates by having them participate in directed drawing lessons that she does with her first graders. In this session, our candidates were provided with a blank piece of white butcher paper, a pencil, and three different colored crayons. This year, under Kristen’s direction, our student teachers drew Arthur, the main character in many books that are treasured by her students. The result for many insecure artists (myself included) was astounding. Here is what some of our teacher candidates had to say about the session on “directed drawing.”

◆ *Absolutely fabulous! Personally, I have **no** artistic ability. Up until now, I never really wanted to engage in it [art]. After this shared expertise session, I want to learn more about it. I need art in the class and having directed drawing expertise will definitely help me.*

◆ *I’m not very artistic so Ms. Merghart made me believe that I am truly an artist. She helped me to see that it is a lot easier than it seems.*

◆ *Loved it! I am not an artist so it is wonderful to know how to teach drawing to students.*

From the comments above, one can easily see that our student teachers value the expertise brought to them by classroom teachers. In many ways, these classroom teachers have been able to help our preservice teachers make important connections between the methods courses and planning for real life in the classroom. Even though our university professors have shared specific examples of classroom applications, in the eyes of the preservice teachers, there seems to be a higher level of credibility for the ideas and practices shared by current classroom teachers. Indeed, our future teachers have taken the knowledge and experiences acquired through “shared expertise” and applied it in their assignments for both methods courses and their student teaching placements.

District Teachers Join Instructional Team

Another critical feature of the SDSU/CVESD partnership has been that some of the methods instructors and supervisors were current or retired personnel from the district. In addition to the shared expertise sessions, having other district personnel involved in the preparation of future teachers potentially increased student learning and the likelihood that our student teachers would transfer the pedagogical and content knowledge into their own classroom practices (Levine, 2002). Clearly, having an instructional team made up of professors who remain current on educational theory, research and licensure requirements, as well as district personnel who can extend student learning by providing examples of classroom applications is significantly different than the traditional preparation model delivered on a university campus.

One excellent example of what can be done through a school-university partnership is how we have been able to offer a required course in educational technology on-site at Clearview. Since Clearview is an internationally recognized model technology school, it did not make sense to send our student teachers back to the SDSU campus for this course. Instead, as the university liaison, I was able to arrange for a team of classroom teachers from Clearview (the lead instructors for a district-wide technology institute every summer) to offer this course on-site at the charter school. After the challenge of trying to work around institutional policy, we were able to formulate an agreement whereby the university paid Clearview the cost of hiring one adjunct faculty member. The charter then used this money to hire substitute teachers so the team members could be released to teach the 45-hour course. As a result, our student teachers had the opportunity to participate in hands-on experiences using technology in the classroom and subsequently work with the 4th-6th graders on their classroom projects using technology. Comments from student teachers indicated that (a) they feel extremely prepared to integrate technology into daily lessons and (b) the practical experiences prepared them to effectively answer interview questions regarding technology in the classroom. Although there are many benefits to this model, we ran into some challenges trying to balance instruction with hands-on experience during school hours (e.g., use of computers in classrooms since there is not a computer lab at Clearview). As a result, we've hired Mr. Jim Dieckmann, Clearview's media specialist, as an adjunct professor and offered the main instructional component of the course after school hours.

Delivering our methods courses on-site at Clearview opened the door for university professors to collaborate with Mr. Dieckmann as we

attempted to integrate technology across the university program and courses. One exciting example of this opportunity is how our science instructor, Dr. Randy Yerick, worked with Jim to provide the students with meaningful and authentic examples of, and experiences with, using technology (e.g., webquests, the fiber optic link and electron microscope, and imovies) to help K-6 students developed deeper, enduring understandings of scientific concepts. Within this site-based delivery model, we have been able to provide our future teachers with hands-on experiences in 4th - 6th grades during school hours. The results have been quite impressive. But the learnings and supports provided by this partnership have not been limited to the year students are in the preservice program. Mr. Jim Dieckmann shared the following powerful story with me:

As you know, Ms. Curtis (a graduate of last year's program) is currently a long-term substitute in 5th grade at Clearview. I am helping her with her science instruction and planning for use of the fiber optic connection to the SDSU electron microscope. After talking with her, she requested any video that I had of previous sessions that would help her visualize how the process works. I gave her two videos, one of them was the "Learn and Live" video that I present in shared expertise and the technology course. . . . When I spoke with her yesterday, she was enthusiastic about recalling that she had seen the video last year, and indicated that seeing it again really helped her to understand the process of guiding students into scientific investigations and the uses of technology to support that learning. Her level of confidence has risen greatly because her previous experience in the program had been tapped into through the real world setting of planning instruction for her "own" class.

Shared Expertise: The Perspective of Classroom Teachers

Freiberg (2002) argues that "without access to the pedagogical skills of veteran teachers, many new teachers are unprepared to face the challenges of the classroom" (p. 56). Participating teachers from Clearview, as well as other district personnel, believe that these sessions have helped the preservice teachers see the relationships among educational theory, research and classroom practice. Mrs. Shelly Magnan, a third-grade teacher at Clearview, says the following about Shared Expertise:

Shared expertise sessions provide some of the 'extra' teaching that there is no time for in the regular block of classes. Students come away with many ideas and plans they can use right away in the classroom. . . . I wish I had had the opportunity to be involved in Shared Expertise Sessions when I was a student teacher. I think the relevant, short, information-filled sessions are motivating.

Ms. Kristen Merghart, a first-grade teacher at Clearview offers the following thoughts:

I thought it was a great experience from both sides. As a student teacher, I loved the ideas and all the great information. I loved having specific people I could talk to on particular subjects and it was a wonderful way to get myself prepared for my own teaching . . . As a teacher-presenter, I have enjoyed showing student teachers how to take what they thought impossible and simplify it to an attainable goal. It has been very rewarding for me!

Mr. John Stencil, a sixth- grade teacher, comments:

The groups of student teachers that I have worked with always have been openly appreciative of the ideas shared regarding integrating movement and dance into their curriculum. They participated with enthusiasm and followed through by trying to add a few new ideas regarding movement into their own teaching. Some even remarked later about improvement in classroom social behavior and attendance.

Two other teacher-participants went on to say that these sessions had benefits for them as well. Ms. Erin Gannon, a fourth-grade teacher says, “I really enjoy the chance to interact with the student teachers. They are so enthusiastic and fresh. It is always interesting to hear their perspectives and watch them absorb all the year has to offer them.” Additionally, “shared expertise is very valuable because it gives presenters a chance to share something they love and feel is very important to their students and classrooms. It also creates a great climate at Clearview . . . it benefits all involved,” (Mrs. Meg Rabine, second-grade).

In addition to the foundation set by university professors, these sessions contributed greatly to the professional development of our student teachers. But beyond the benefits to our preservice teachers, the ongoing professional exchange between experienced teachers and our student teachers has helped to produce what Johnson and Kardos (2002) refer to as an “integrated professional culture” at Clearview. Teamwork and camaraderie are the hallmarks of such a culture and certainly evidence themselves on this campus. The notion, and subsequent practice, of sharing expertise extends beyond the walls of Room 502 (the SDSU classroom) at Clearview. Indeed, like a pebble thrown into a pond, the effects of shared expertise are felt throughout the entire school and district.

In addition to the evaluative comments of the preservice and practicing teachers, the words of Mrs. Sheila LeCompte, Clearview’s Coordinator of Professional Development and a district support provider for the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program, as well as Ms. Judith Hunsburger, the Director of Clearview, provide

evidence that this school-university partnership in teacher preparation is making a difference in the quality of preparation of future teachers and the ongoing professional development of practicing teachers by helping to create an “integrated professional culture” at Clearview.

Mrs. Sheila LeCompte offers the following critique:

As a support provider for new teachers, I know this [shared expertise] broadens the experiences for your student teachers. The new teachers I work with often have a narrow base of experience with only one or two master teachers and no other exposure to practices and ideas. . . . However, the topics offered in shared expertise go beyond the specific content-centered classes in the credential program. You are to be commended for maintaining this valuable, practical component for your students. . . . In general, I believe ‘Shared Expertise’ is one of the richest options you offer as part of a ‘high performing learning community.’

Mrs. Judith Hunsberger says:

As director of the school, I see many advantages of the school-university partnership. Preservice teachers . . . receive information about topics typically not covered in their program or as an extension to what has been presented in the methods courses.

For those teachers who present shared expertise sessions, the recognition for having knowledge to share is immeasurable. I often hear from staff members who have presented how great they feel to not only give back to the profession, but how rewarding it is to help shape the future teachers in a small way. . . . It is rewarding for me when a staff member with relatively few years of teaching experience conducts a shared expertise session and then reports how honored they feel to have been chosen as a presenter.

Overall, as partners in this site-based teacher preparation program, I see how both preservice teachers as well as our own staff members gain from the experience—the concept alone is unique. Our staff members see the value of the program and ask to attend when their colleagues present in order to further their own professional development. This learning opportunity translates into better prepared teachers and validates quality teaching techniques.

Discussion

In spite of all the criticism aimed at public education and teacher preparation, I can honestly say that my involvement in the CVESD/SDSU partnership makes me proud to be in education today. Each day brings me in contact with deeply committed teachers who are working in some very challenging situations. Beyond what I believe continues to be a journey in my own professional growth, this partnership has resulted in many significant relationships between SDSU and public schools in Chula

Vista, affirmed the professional expertise of practicing teachers and provided future preservice teachers with real-world contexts for learning (U.S. Government, 1998; Levine, 2002). Solicited and unsolicited feedback from graduates of our program, as well as district personnel, reinforces the fact that teachers exit from this program with a high level of teaching efficacy and the pedagogical knowledge and skills necessary for successful entry into the profession.

Yet after five years, I am struggling to maintain the level of passion and energy that first led me into school-university partnership work. Indeed, I am fast becoming discouraged by the lack of tangible institutional support needed to develop and maintain the kinds of activities and programs that are consistent with an excellent and sustainable professional development school. I suppose I find myself in good company because a large number of Colleges of Education and public schools have failed to sustain meaningful, collaborative partnerships (Campoy, 2000). With the recent budget crisis in California, my hope for increased support and the institutionalization (i.e., the allocation of needed resources) for professional development school/partnership programs is further diminished.

In response to colleagues, politicians, and citizens who continue to purport that Colleges of Education are failing to produce qualified teachers, I challenge them to resist the temptation to over-generalize survey findings, particularly when the researchers are still establishing the reliability and validity of the survey itself (cf. CSU Systemwide Pilot Study, 2001). When analyzing teacher preparation in a state as large and diverse as California, these critics must look for more descriptive, programmatic data such as is provided in this article. The question of how to best prepare teachers for the challenges of today's classroom seems to be, at least partially, answered through school-university partnerships (Levine, 2002; U.S. Government, 1998). Indeed, it is well-documented that school-university collaborative efforts result in better qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Houston, et al., 1999; Levine, 2002; NCATE, 2000; Teitel, 2001). Therefore, perhaps the more important question before us is whether it is possible to develop and sustain quality models of teacher education without adequate and long-term allocation of public resources. History tells us the answer to that question is "no" (Campoy, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1994). As such, if we really hope to produce better qualified teachers, educational administrators and politicians alike must stop paying lip-service to the concept of university-school collaboration and show by their actions that they truly believe in such promising practices.

References

- California State University (2001). California State University Systemwide Evaluation of Teacher Preparation Programs (Pilot Study). Report prepared by the Teacher Education Program Evaluation and Assurance Unit, Office of the Chancellor, November, 2001.
- Campoy, R. W. (2000). *A professional development school partnership: Conflict and collaboration*. London, UK: Bergin & Garvey.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1994). *Professional development schools: Schools for a developing profession*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Freiberg, H. J. (2002). Essential skills for new teachers. *Educational Leadership*, 59 (6), 56-60.
- Houston, W. R., Hollis, L. Y., Clay, D., Ligons, C. M. & Roff, L. (1999). Effects of collaboration on urban teacher education programs and professional development schools. In D. Byrd & J. McIntyre (Eds.), *Research on professional development schools: Teacher education yearbook VII* (pp. 29-45). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Johnson, S. M. & Kardos, S. M. (2002). Keeping new teachers in mind. *Educational Leadership*, 59 (6), 12-16.
- Levine, M. (2002). Why invest in professional development schools? *Educational Leadership*, 59 (6), 65-67.
- Marion, L. & Steele, E. (1996). *Power teaching for the 21st century: A management system for integrating curriculum* (2nd ed.). Authors.
- National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (2000). Draft standards for identifying and supporting quality professional development schools. Washington, DC: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.
- Tietel, L. (2001). How professional development schools make a difference: A review of research. Washington, DC: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.
- U. S. Government. (1998). *Promising practices: New ways to improve teacher quality*. Retrieved January 10, 2001, from www.ed.gov/pubs/PromPractice/chapter3.html.
- Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.