



## Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

Volume 38

Issue 1 *September/October 1997*

Article 3

10-1-1997

# PDS Collaboration in the Design and Delivery of a Reading and Language Arts Methods Course

Mary Alice Barksdale-Ladd  
*University of South Florida*

Janet Isenhardt  
*Central Elementary School*

Anita Nedeff  
*Central Elementary School*

Ruth Oaks  
*Central Elementary School*

Sarah Steele  
*Professional Development Schools*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons)

 Part of the [Education Commons](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons)

### Recommended Citation

Barksdale-Ladd, M., Isenhardt, J., Nedeff, A., Oaks, R., & Steele, S. (1997). PDS Collaboration in the Design and Delivery of a Reading and Language Arts Methods Course. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 38 (1). Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons/vol38/iss1/3](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol38/iss1/3)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [maira.bundza@wmich.edu](mailto:maira.bundza@wmich.edu).





## **PDS Collaboration in the Design and Delivery of a Reading and Language Arts Methods Course**

**Mary Alice Barksdale-Ladd  
Janet Isenhardt  
Anita Nedeff  
Ruth Oaks  
Sarah Steele**

*This paper describes the study of a site-based, six-credit hour, integrated course in reading and language arts methods designed to tie theory and practice for university students in a Professional Development School. A multidimensional approach to data collection and analysis used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Findings demonstrate that the collaboratively taught course had a positive impact upon involved teachers, university students, children in the school, and members of the team who developed the course.*

The integration of theory and practice has long been accepted as a major goal of teacher education. Yet, it remains common for teacher education students to point out that their most meaningful learning of classroom practices occurs when engaged in field experiences, and is unrelated to the context of university courses (Richardson, 1996). If educational reform efforts are to succeed, teacher training must become a valuable, meaningful, memorable experience with the power to effectively tie theory to practice in the minds of preservice teachers. Substantive changes are needed in which field experiences become opportunities for students to apply theories introduced in methods courses systematically and reflectively (Hoffman, Reed, and Rosenbluth, 1997).

Collaboration between universities and public schools has been cited as essential to successful educational reform. To achieve this goal, the

establishment of Professional Development Schools (PDS's) has been recommended. PDS's are expected to be sites where the gap between theory and practice will be bridged (The Holmes Group, 1986). The establishment of PDS's means that significant change is expected on the parts of both PDS teachers and university faculty (Goodlad, 1988). Teachers and university faculty are expected to collaborate for the purpose of gaining shared knowledge, professional growth and the development of new, improved methods of providing instruction for children. In addition, collaboration between teachers and university faculty is expected to lead to changes in the ways in which prospective teachers are trained (Goodlad, 1988). Creating and implementing new structures in PDS's involve a slow process, and there is no limit to the kinds of PDS models which can effectively support teacher preparation (Hoffman, Reed, and Rosenbluth, 1997). This paper describes a site-based, six credit hour, integrated course in reading and language arts methods designed to tie theory to practice for university students in a PDS.

### **Context of the Study**

West Virginia University has engaged in a major teacher education restructuring effort called the Benedum Project. As a part of the project, West Virginia University established six Professional Development Schools, one of which was Central Elementary. Anita, a Chapter 1 teacher at Central, and Mary Alice, at that time a professor at West Virginia University, decided to work together to create a collaborative relationship. They hoped to establish an environment in which issues of power and control could be dealt with effectively and teachers and university faculty could begin to develop high levels of trust. They formed a group called the "Literacy Discussion Group" (LDG) composed of West Virginia University instructors, Central Elementary teachers and principal. During the first year of work, the group made great strides in building trust, learning to collaborate, and developing shared understandings of literacy development and children's literacy learning (Barksdale-Ladd, Isenhardt, Nedeff, Oaks, and Steele, 1995).

Since that time, the group has worked on a variety of collaborative projects. One of these was an integrated undergraduate reading and language arts methods course taught at the school site. The idea for the on-site course began to develop when Mary Alice was teaching the course on campus and Anita was supervising some of her interns. At a weekly LDG group meeting, Anita asked the question, "Don't you teach these students the writing process?"

Mary Alice was stunned. She explained that she had spent a month focusing primarily upon the writing process and its integration into reading and the content areas in elementary classrooms. She modeled every step of the writing process for her students, then involved them in writing process activities. As a group they published a book. She worked hard to make it explicit to her students that she was modeling for them ways in which she would expect them to work with children in teaching writing. After Mary Alice's detailed description, Anita asked, "Well, why don't they know it? Why can't they use it with the children here?"

The LDG began considering explanations for the fact that the reading and language arts students were unable to use what they had learned in the course when placed in instructional setting with children. A generally accepted explanation was that the undergraduates needed more immediate opportunities for application, and that immediate feedback was needed in order for students to refine and improve their applications of instructional strategies. In response to the problem, the LDG began to develop plans for redesigning the course and delivering it at Central Elementary, with attention to: (a) providing immediate opportunities for practice with children and feedback from professors and teachers, and (b) matching course content to classroom experiences.

The following semester, the on-site course was piloted for the first time. Class sessions were held at Central on Mondays and Wednesdays when the library was available, but it was unavailable on Fridays. Friday classes met at the university. On Mondays and Wednesdays, the class met

for two hours in the library at Central, and then the students in the course worked for one hour with groups of children in Grades 1, 3, 5 and 6.

Of twenty-one class sessions held in the school, Mary Alice had major responsibility for instruction of seven sessions. On the other fourteen days, teachers in the school, the principal, and members of the LDG had major teaching responsibilities. The topics covered by these participants included: (1) modeling and conducting reading think-alouds with children; (2) modeling and conducting writing think-alouds with children; (3) the WORM project (a school-side "Students as Authors" project); (4) the basal reading approach; (5) surviving the elementary teacher education program; (6) whole language theory and methods; (7) children's literature and the West Virginia Children's Book Award; (8) literature-based reading instruction and cooperative learning; (9) being a beginning teacher and learning to manage; (10) behavior management, teaching and school life; (11) book talks; (12) using a peer mediation teams to facilitate solutions to student problems; (13) working with poor readers and special education students; and (14) working with second language learners. One full morning was used for classroom observation. To make it possible for the elementary classroom teachers to teach sessions to the college students, Mary Alice taught their classes.

In order to study the impact of the course, the following research questions were developed: (1) What were the effects on the elementary school teachers who taught the course?; (2) What were the effects of the site-based course upon the students enrolled in the course, as compared with a more traditional university-based course? Third, what were the effects of the course upon the children of Central Elementary? And fourth, what were the effects of the course upon the LDG?

## **Design**

### **Procedures and Participants**

Because of the nature of the research questions and the fact that four groups were being studied (the teachers at the school, the university students in the site-based course [as compared with a university-based group],

the students in the school, and the members of the LDG), we employed a multidimensional approach to data collection and analysis. Both quantitative and qualitative measures were used, calling for a complex design. In introducing the research design, each participant group and the methodology/ies used for the group are discussed separately.

Teachers: Instruments and Participation. There were a total of nine teachers at Central Elementary. There was one teacher for each grade level at K-6th grades. There was also a Chapter I teacher and a Special Education teacher for the hearing impaired. The kindergarten teacher taught a half-day program in the afternoons. Because the Reading/Language Arts course was taught in the mornings, the kindergarten teacher was not involved and did not participate in the study. The second and fourth-grade teachers chose not to participate in the course, or the study. Thus, the goal was to collect data from six of the nine teachers in the school. To study teacher perceptions of the course at Central and possible effects of the course upon the teacher concerns and beliefs, we used three sources for data collection.

First, to look at effects of the course upon teacher concerns, pre-post course data were collected using the Stages of Concern (SOC) instrument developed by Hall, George, and Rutherford (1977). During the first and last weeks of the course we asked each teacher in the school to respond to the SOC. The SOC measures attitudes toward innovation, and can be adapted to examine differing types of innovations. It contains 35 items, with a 0 to 7 response range for each item and is reliable with a coefficient alpha of .91 (Reed, 1990). There are seven stages of concern and 5 items for each stage. The seven stages are: (1) awareness of the innovation; (2) concerns about informational aspects of the innovation; (3) concerns about the personal affects of the innovation; (4) management concerns related to the innovation; (5) concerns about the consequences of the innovation; (6) concerns about collaboration with others related to the innovation; and, (7) concerns which involve refocusing and refinement of the innovation. The basic philosophy underlying the SOC is that, when introduced to an innovation, immediate concerns are self-oriented and

personal. Once people become comfortable with an innovation from a personal perspective, the focus of concern begins to center upon managing the innovation, the effects of the innovation, and working with others related to the innovation. When these concerns have been settled, the final stage of concern is upon refinement of the innovation and decision making regarding further use of the innovation (Hall, George, and Rutherford, 1977). Five teachers completed both pre and post SOC instruments.

Second, to examine teacher perceptions regarding the on-site collaborative approach to the course, each teacher was asked to respond in writing to 5 open ended questions regarding the collaborative approach to teaching the reading and language arts course in the school. In the pre-course condition, questions were as follows: (1) How do you perceive your role in working with the university students?; (2) What do you hope to learn or gain from Reading/Language Arts at Central?; (3) Do you perceive the teaching of Reading/Language Arts at Central as valuable to you? How?; (4) Do you perceive the teaching of Reading/Language Arts at Central as valuable to the university students? Why? In the post-course condition, the questions were worded in the past tense. Six teachers responded to both pre and post open-ended questions.

Third, to examine possible effects of the on-site course upon teacher beliefs, each teacher was asked to complete The Propositional Inventory (Duffy and Metheny, 1979) at the beginning and end of the semester. The Propositional Inventory is a 45 item questionnaire with a 5 point Likert scale. The neutral or undecided choice was eliminated and the instrument was administered using a 4 point Likert scale. Responses are divided into two categories of content-centered beliefs and student-centered beliefs (Duffy and Metheny, 1979; Isenhardt, 1994). Percentage scores representing numbers of items within each category were calculated for each teacher, pre and post. (Percentages do not equal 100% because they were calculated comparing numbers of indicators to numbers of possible responses within each category. There were more items in the student-centered than the content-centered category.) Four teachers completed pre and post Propositional Inventories.

Reading/Language Arts Students: Instruments and Participation. To examine the effects of the course upon the students, we chose to compare the site-based students with students in a more traditional university-based course. While Mary Alice taught the course at Central Elementary, Janet taught the same course on campus. Janet was, at the time, in the final semester of a doctoral program with Mary Alice as her advisor. Janet and Mary Alice had worked very closely together for four years. They had previously developed the syllabus for the course collaboratively and taught it in a similar manner, from a holistic, literature-based perspective. They considered themselves equally experienced in, comfortable with, and knowledgeable about the teaching of the integrated reading and language arts course.

Both Janet and Mary Alice used basically the same syllabus used in previous semesters. Both sections of the course had the same textbooks, and both required the development of portfolios containing the same components as the major course assignment. The major difference in the teaching of the two sections of the course was that Mary Alice's section was taught collaboratively with the teachers at Central Elementary and her students' field experience was provided at Central. Janet's section was taught on campus two mornings per week, and her students were given individual field experience assignments in classrooms throughout the local school district on one morning per week. Thus, Janet's students had three continuous hours in which to work in classrooms once per week, and Mary Alice's students had two one-hour opportunities to work with small groups of children each week. It should be noted that Janet's field experience day was on Friday. There was a great deal of snow and bad weather during the semester, with numerous snow days falling on Fridays; thus Janet's students had fewer field experience days than planned. Because Janet's students had three hours per week in their internships, as opposed to two hours per week for Mary Alice's students, the two student groups spent almost exactly the same amounts of time in classrooms with children.

To compare effects of the site-based and university-based models for the course upon beliefs about reading and reading instruction we



collected two sets of data. In the first week, students completed the pre data set of The Propositional Inventory (Duffy and Metheny, 1979). Then we collected the post data sets during the last weeks of the course for 13 of Janet's and 19 of Mary Alice's students.

Second, as a qualitative measure of effects, students in both sections provided written responses to open-ended questions during the first and last weeks of the course. In the pre condition, the students responded to the following three questions: (1) What are some of your expectations for this course?; (2) What concerns do you have about your field experience?; and, (3) What are some differences between whole language instruction and basal reading instruction? This third question measured prior knowledge, as both topics would be dealt with in the course and the question would be posed again at the end of the course. In the post condition, the following six questions were posed: (1) What are some ways in which Reading/Language Arts met your expectations?; (2) What are some ways in which Reading/Language Arts did not meet your expectations?; (3) Tell us some valuable experiences you had with teacher/s in your field placement.; (4) What were some of the most valuable aspects of the field placement for you?; (5) What were some of the least valuable aspects of the field experience for you?; and, (6) What are some differences between whole language instruction and basal reading instruction? Pre and post responses involved 12 of Janet's and 18 of Mary Alice's students.

Children: Instruments and Participation. To examine the effects of the course upon the children of Central Elementary, the third and fifth-graders completed a questionnaire containing open-ended questions. The third and fifth-grades were selected for participation in the study in order to gather data from both early and upper elementary children. The questionnaire was administered after the university students worked with the children on the last day of the course. The questions were: (1) Did you like having the university students working with our class?; (2) Tell a few things you liked about the small group work you did with your university student; (3) If there was anything you did not like about working with the university students, please write about it; (4) What did

you do with the university student that you probably would not have done with your teacher?; (5) Do you think it was a good idea for university students to come to Central School to have their class? Why?; (6) What should we change if we have the university students at Central next year?; and, (7) Anything else? Fifteen third-graders and 11 fifth-graders responded to the questionnaire.

The Literacy Discussion Group. The LDG felt that it was important to look at the effects upon them of teaching the course in the school. Our examination of these effects was qualitative. Field notes from our weekly meetings from the beginning of the project through the summer after the courses were taught comprised this data source.

## Analysis

Teachers. Due to the small numbers of teachers participating in the study, we did not conduct statistical analyses of the quantitative teacher data. For the SOC results, we converted raw scores for each of the seven stages for each teacher to percentile values. Pre and post percentile values were compared to examine changes in stages of concern.

We analyzed teachers' written responses to the open-ended questionnaire qualitatively. Researchers read teachers' responses independently to identify categories. We met to compare categories and reached agreement on a limited set of themes. Then we reread the teacher responses for instances of the themes and checked examples of themes with one other. Pre and post course themes for the teachers were compared.

For teachers' responses to The Propositional Inventory, raw scores were converted to percentages of totals for (a) content-centered responses or (b) student-centered responses. For each teacher, we compared pre to post content-centered and student-centered responses to determine whether or not changes had occurred.

Reading/Language Arts Students. Researchers determined raw scores for responses to The Propositional Inventory and used paired t-tests

to compare content-centered beliefs and student-centered beliefs from pre to post course across the two student groups. We determined qualitatively the responses to the open-ended questionnaire as described previously (regarding teachers' written responses). Themes for the two groups were compared from pre and post course.

Children. For the third and fifth-grade groups for each question, we compiled responses and examined results qualitatively, in the manner previously explained.

Literacy Discussion Group. Taking a phenomenological approach (Hycner, 1985), we analyzed field notes to identify concerns, perceptions and beliefs of individual group members. The members of the research team repeatedly read the field notes, identifying the central themes which we discussed during each meeting and noted the focus of concerns, perceptions and beliefs among the LDG members. Having elicited themes from each set of field notes, we made comparisons across the semester identifying changes in focus.

## **Results**

### **Teachers**

Stages of Concern. Table 1 displays results of our analysis of pre and post scores for the Stages of Concern instrument. Teacher 4 differed from the other four teachers in that, after the course had been taught, she had an increased level of concern related to her awareness of the reading and language arts course being taught at her school, and decreased levels of concern in all of the other areas. This reflected a teacher still questioning her role and how the teaching of the course in the school would affect her and her students.

Based on the data collected from the other four teachers, one can conclude that across the semester there were decreased or equal levels of concern related to awareness of the course, information about the course, personal effects of the course, and the management of the course. There was a trend toward increased levels of concern over the consequences of

the course, and refocusing and refining of the course. There was no trend regarding concerns about collaboration.

Table 1

Percentile Values and Direction of Changes in Stages of Concern

	<u>Awareness</u>	<u>Informational</u>	<u>Personal</u>	<u>Refocusing</u>
<u>Teacher 1</u>				
Pre	86	90	80	57
Post	89 =	66 D	55 D	65I
<u>Teacher 2</u>				
Pre	46	95	52	96
Post	10 D	95 =	52 =	98I
<u>Teacher 3</u>				
Pre	10	97	91	81
Post	10 =	88 D	57 D	97I
<u>Teacher 4</u>				
Pre	93	69	52	26
Post	94 I	40 D	5 D	20D
<u>Teacher 5</u>				
Pre	96	99	92	10
Post	29 D	99 =	95 I	60I
	<u>Management</u>	<u>Consequences</u>	<u>Collaboration</u>	
<u>Teacher 1</u>				
Pre	69	16	19	
Post	52 D	33 I	22 I	
<u>Teacher 2</u>				
Pre	2	33	99	
Post	2 =	82 I	93 D	
<u>Teacher 3</u>				
Pre	9	96	99	
Post	7 D	96 =	95 D	
<u>Teacher 4</u>				
Pre	65	16	48	
Post	43 D	8 D	31 D	
<u>Teacher 5</u>				
Pre	95	21	28	
Post	85 D	33 I	97 I	

Note. I represents an increase in level of concern from pre to post. D represents a decrease in level of concern from pre to post. = represents no change in level of concern from pre to post.

Open -Ended Questions. Qualitative analyses of teachers' responses to open-ended questions during the first week of the course identified the following themes: (1) teachers felt they had a lot to offer the reading and language arts students; (2) teachers were confident that they would learn new techniques from the students, and possibly from listening to sections of class lectures; and (3) teachers felt that the children would benefit from working with the students.

In teachers' written responses at the end of the course, resultant themes confirmed that teachers had enjoyed having opportunities to teach the reading and language arts students and had learned some new techniques from the students. Teachers also noted that it was good for university students to spend so much time in their school, "to become a part of the school family," and to develop understandings of the day-to-day workings of a school. One teacher indicated that the site-based course made it possible for students to immediately apply what they learned in the course to real situations with children, and to see how teachers in a real school applied knowledge and research about reading and language arts to their own teaching.

Five of the six teachers were enthusiastic about the responses of children to their work with the university students. For example, one teacher said, "Their small group work was excellent. The activities presented were always age appropriate." One of the teachers had some concerns about the work of the university students with her children. She commented that some of her children with behavior problems became bored, and felt that the time segment of two hours per week was too extensive. She explained, "I really can't spare my students for that long."

Propositional Inventory. Table 2 displays results of our analysis of pre and post scores for The Propositional Inventory. Because differences in teacher responses to The Propositional Inventory were so slight from pre to post, we concluded that there were no effects upon the beliefs of these teachers as a result of being involved in teaching the site-based reading and language arts course.

**Students**

The Propositional Inventory. The paired t-test comparisons of pre and post scores for student responses to The Propositional Inventory are displayed in Table 3. For students in the site-based course, there were significant differences in pre to post test scores with regard to both student-centered beliefs and content-centered beliefs. There was a significant difference toward more student-centered beliefs, and less content-centered beliefs.

Table 2

Pre and Post Percentages for Teacher Responses to The Propositional Inventory

	Content-Centered Beliefs	Student-Centered Beliefs
<u>Teacher 1</u>		
Pre	57	84
Post	36	86
<u>Teacher 2</u>		
Pre	57	74
Post	61	71
<u>Teacher 3</u>		
Pre	57	74
Post	61	71
<u>Teacher 4</u>		
Pre	67	70
Post	69	70

For students in the university-based course, there was a significant difference in pre to post test scores for student-centered beliefs, but no significant difference for content-centered beliefs. That is, across the course, these students became more student-centered in their beliefs, but there was no change in their content-centered beliefs.

Open-Ended Questions. Qualitative analyses indicated that when students from the two groups responded to the questions at the beginning of the semester, their expectations for the course were very similar. They wanted to learn to teach children to read and write, and to have experiences with children. When asked about their concerns about the course, most

students said they had no concerns. Some students stated that they were scared or nervous about the course.

Table 3

**Paired t-test Comparisons for Student responses to the Propositional Inventory**

	DF	Mean	Paired t value	2-tail probability
Site-based course, content-centered beliefs	18	6.24	4.67	.0002
Site-based course, student-centered beliefs	18	-8	-4.45	.0003
University-based course, content-centered beliefs	12	4.77	4.34	.001
University-based course, student-centered beliefs	12	-.54	.43	.67

At the beginning of the course, there was a difference in the two groups with regard to knowledge of basal reading instruction and whole language. Most of Janet's students entered the course with a working knowledge of what basals were and how they were used. Janet's students reported that basal programs were skills-based and included texts and workbooks. They knew that whole language involved using authentic literature, integrating content areas, engaging children in decision making, and being child-centered. Some of their responses were sophisticated. For example, one student said, "The whole language environment allows for more kinds of interest groupings among children. The children are able to learn from each other. The children become more involved in literature, and make better use of all the language arts domains, and maintain this increased involvement." Some students in Janet's class had already formed opinions about these two methods. For instance, a student wrote, "Basal reading instruction, I feel, is based more on the children's learning level. I feel there is more of a possibility for a child to develop

intellectually using the basal reading instruction. Whole language instruction is not sufficient enough."

Mary Alice's group did not enter the course with a strong knowledge base or beliefs about basal or whole language instruction. Most students didn't respond to the question about basals and whole language, or indicated, "not sure," or "no idea." No opinions about basal and whole language instruction were offered.

The student groups had been randomly assigned at the beginning of the semester (as opposed to remaining in the course sections for which they had signed up). By chance, many more of Janet's students had previously taken a series of two early childhood courses in which concepts about basal reading and whole language instruction had been introduced. Thus, Mary Alice's students could be characterized as having entered the course with more of an "open slate" regarding basal reading and whole language instruction than Janet's students.

At the end of the semester, there were some differences in the two groups. When asked about ways in which the course met expectations, the most common theme among Mary Alice's students indicated that they had learned a lot of strategies for working with children in reading and writing. They also discussed being able to work with real children, dealing with students on different levels, feeling prepared for their final two semesters, finding direction about what kinds of teachers they wanted to become, and gaining confidence in their abilities. In Janet's group, there was not a single predominant theme related to how the course met expectations. Themes included learning methods and techniques, gaining a better understanding of how children learn to read and write, understanding different styles of teaching reading, recognizing the importance of literature in teaching reading, and appreciating the fact that they had been provided with a field experience in which they got to teach lessons on their own. When asked about ways in which the course did not meet expectations, the most common response in both groups was that "it met all expectations." Janet's students made some statements about their limited opportunities to



work with children in the schools. In both groups, comments indicated that some students wanted to teach whole classroom lessons and didn't have the chance.

One question involved the valuable experiences students might have had with the teachers in their schools. Mary Alice's students pointed out that they had not had enough contact with the teachers, but that they had received good ideas from and enjoyed the class sessions taught by the teachers. Janet's students had more positive comments about their work with the teachers, noting that the teachers had shared good ideas and advice, that they had helped students identify personal strengths and weaknesses, and that they had provided encouragement.

When asked about the most valuable aspects of the field experience, Mary Alice's students most frequently noted that in working with the children for two hours a week, they got to know them very well. They felt that they learned from working with students at differing reading levels, writing lesson plans, teaching a three-day unit to their groups, and having opportunities to "practice instead of just learning in class." For Janet's students, teaching the three-day unit became the most frequently identified valuable experience. In addition, they appreciated having opportunities for whole group instruction and tutoring, and seeing the excitement of children reading and writing.

Students were also asked to identify least valuable aspects of the field experience. Most of Mary Alice's students stated that all aspects of the field experience were valuable. Some commented that they did not get enough time to observe in the classroom, and they didn't have opportunities to get to know their teachers and receive feedback from them. The majority of Janet's students did not respond to the question. Several of Janet's students felt that the field placement should start earlier in the semester, and others noted that they did not get enough time in the field placement. Finally, on the question about basal reading instruction and whole language instruction, at the end of the semester, both groups had similar and equally sophisticated answers.

## Children

There were many similarities in the themes identified from the responses of third and fifth-graders to the open-ended questions. All fifteen third-graders, and nine of the eleven fifth-graders liked having the university students working in their classroom. When asked what they liked, the children identified kinds of activities they enjoyed including: playing games, reading books, learning about England, learning about dinosaurs, keeping a journal, talking, writing, etc.

The children were also asked what they did with university students that they wouldn't have done in their regular classroom. In answering this question, the children identified specific activities which they found to be particularly motivating or fun.

When asked if there was anything they didn't like, most children did not note any objections. Several third-graders were unhappy about the fact that one third-grade tutor brought lunch from MacDonald's to his group and took the group on a picnic at the end of the semester. A couple of fifth-graders disliked vocabulary activities such as word banks.

The children were asked if it was a good idea for university students to come to Central for their class. Again, all of the third-graders and nine of the eleven fifth-graders responded positively. The children provided a number of reasons why they thought the university students should have class in their school. Representative statements included: "they can see what it's like to be a teacher," "for them to learn what we do," "because they could learn more about us kids," "because we can learn with them," and "because they can learn from us and our teachers."

The last question for the children asked, "anything else?" Overwhelmingly, the children who responded to this inquiry issued words of thanks to the university students.

### Literacy Discussion Group

Analysis of the field notes from the LDG elicited several similar themes across group members during the semester. As the course started, members of the LDG had two primary concerns. The first was anxiety. The teachers became anxious about the sessions they would teach to the university students. They felt a great deal of pressure to do a good job in front of adult students. For instance, Ruth said, "I'm so used to working with third graders. I'm afraid I'll be nervous about the WVU students." Simultaneously, Mary Alice experienced anxiety about working with the children while relieving the teachers to work with the university students. She felt pressured to do a good job with the children, "I am an education professor. If I'm the one who teaches the teachers, don't you think I'm expected to walk in and do things well?"

A second concern, early in the semester, was with regard to the teachers who had elected not to participate in the course. Their early statements had indicated that it would be fine with them if the course was taught in the school, as long as they did not have to be involved and it did not affect them in any way. However, as the course got started, a couple of these teachers became quite critical, and somewhat hostile. All of the LDG members worried about the responses of these teachers and how they would affect the project.

As the semester proceeded, Mary Alice became frustrated for about a month during the middle of the semester. Because she worked with the children in the classrooms in order to free the teachers to work with the university students, she got the sense of "being out of control ... I don't know what's happening in my own course." Also, she found herself very frustrated with the fact that a number of the sixth-graders were not cooperative with their tutors, and she was not able to resolve some of these situations. In fact, on one day, she reached an impasse with a sixth-grade boy, and they had to go to the principal's office to solve the problem. Interestingly, this moment of humility for Mary Alice had the effect of causing some of the teachers in the school to gain greater respect and appreciation for her.

While Mary Alice was feeling frustrated and out of control, the teachers were having a very different response. They displayed great enthusiasm for teaching the university students. They were excited when their lessons with the students went well, and because of positive student responses, they felt affirmed that they had a great deal to offer preservice teachers. Their fears and anxieties about working with the university students "melted away quickly," as stated by Anita.

As the semester ended, there was the sense of fulfillment among members of the LDG. Themes from the field notes included: (a) pride in the fact that the LDG had tackled a difficult problem, designed a complex solution, and implemented it over formidable odds, and (b) appreciation that everyone in the group had gained knowledge and confidence through the experience.

Another theme indicated that members of the LDG were beginning to see tangible evidence of progress made by university students and the small groups of children with whom the students had worked. Numerous examples cited progress in specific university students, individual children, and relationships between small groups of children and their university tutors. For instance, Ruth said, "At the beginning, he [university student] tried too hard to be friends with them [the four third graders in the students' group], to be their buddy ... he finally learned that he could keep them under control, teach them, and still have a great friendship with them. I wouldn't have believed it would happen at the beginning."

The final theme determined that the LDG wanted to continue teaching the reading/language arts course in the school. As soon as the semester ended, the group began analyzing the data that were collected, identifying the weaknesses of the course as it had been taught, and designing methods of strengthening those weak aspects for the following semester.

## **Discussion**

The term "Professional Development Schools" implies a very comprehensive relationship between a school or school system and a university. Yet, the heart of Professional Development Schools is found in the day-to-day activities of school and university faculty coming together to learn and grow together for the purpose of improving teaching and learning at both school and university levels. The experience with a site-based course reported on in this paper is only one example of the result of a collaborative relationship between a school and a university.

This collaboratively designed site-based reading and language arts course had a number of effects upon the teachers in the school. For most of the teachers, by the end of the semester there were fewer concerns about how the course would affect the teachers personally, and greater concerns about how the course would affect the children and the university students. There were also increased concerns about refining and improving the course in the future. The teachers learned some new techniques for reading and language arts instruction, felt good about their ability to teach methods to the university students, and were generally enthusiastic about the work of university students with children in the school. They felt that the site-based course was valuable in that university students became a part of the school and developed understandings of day-to-day school life which would not otherwise have been developed. Further, these teachers were pleased that the relationship between university course information and school information were brought together in such a powerful and meaningful way for the university students, also benefiting the school and its students. The teachers, wanted the course to continue to be taught in their school, and wanted higher levels of ownership of the course. The course had changed the nature of the school and brought most of the teachers together in a teacher education mission.

In comparing students in the site-based and university-based courses, results showed that students in both groups became more student-centered in their beliefs over the semester. At the same time, students in the two groups had a differing focus and tone. Responses for the site-

based course were more similar than for the university-based course. This was not surprising since the site-based students had the same type of field experience in the same school while the university-based students had differing types of field experiences directed by many cooperating teachers assigned to them across a three county area.

The students in the site-based course learned to use a variety of literacy instruction strategies and experiences with children. These students enjoyed getting to know the children well by working with them twice a week, but they did not establish close relationships with the teachers in the school. The students in the university-based course tended to become close to their cooperating teachers and reported gaining valuable information through these relationships, but they did not report making gains in using literacy teaching strategies with children.

This finding leads to the question, what is more valuable? Is it more valuable to have university students develop close relationships with children and successfully apply what they have been taught in methods classes with these children? Or is it more valuable to provide opportunities for developing a close relationship between a preservice teacher and a cooperating teacher allowing the preservice teacher to learn about the profession from a more experienced peer?

Recall that prior to this project, students in a university-based course with Mary Alice were unable to apply strategies taught in their university class with children in the field, although presumably, they had good relationships with teachers in their internships such as Janet's students in this study. The site-based course provided a viable solution to this problem of applying theory to practice in that all of the students demonstrated the ability to successfully apply reading and language arts teaching strategies they were taught. It is reasonable to assume that if students learn strategies well and then have immediate opportunities to practice these strategies with children while being supervised by a group of teachers and university faculty, the strategies may be remembered and carried into inservice teaching experiences. We take the position that this type of learning

experience may be more valuable in the long run than one in which a pre-service teacher develops a relationship with a cooperating teacher, but is unable to apply strategies learned in methods classes to teaching experiences with children. Further research is needed in this area.

The children of Central Elementary were very appreciative and positive about their experiences with university students in the site-based group. They recognized that they had been provided opportunities they would not otherwise have had; they enjoyed their relationships with the university students, and they remembered learning specific information which they found interesting. Further, they recognized that it was important for the university students to have opportunities "to practice what they are learning with real kids."

For the Literacy Discussion Group, the experience of designing the course and implementing it over a semester was very fulfilling. The goals were to assure that undergraduate reading and language arts students: (1) learned theories of literacy acquisition and literacy processes; (2) learned methods of applying literacy theory to practice; and (3) demonstrated competence in the application of specific methods to literacy lessons with children. At the close of the semester, the group felt these goals had been successfully met. They felt that they had effectively tied theory to practice for one group of undergraduates in one methods course. There was recognition that the semester wasn't perfect and more work was needed; yet, all had gained confidence and knowledge.

The enthusiasm for the site-based reading/language arts methods course across all four participant groups leads us to believe that this model can lead to valuable, meaningful, and memorable experiences not just for preservice teachers, but for teachers and university faculty involved in designing and teaching site-based courses, and the children who benefit from intensive literacy lessons in small groups. This type of collaborative approach to methods courses holds promise for improving literacy learning for teachers, preservice teachers, children, and teacher educators by creating direct ties between theory and practice.

## References

- Barksdale-Ladd, M.A., Isenhardt, J., Nedeff, A., Oaks, R., & Steele, S. (1995). Learning to collaborate in a literacy discussion group. In Charles K. Kinzer and Donald J. Leu (Eds.), *Multidimensional aspects of literacy research, theory, and practice. The forty-third yearbook of the national reading conference* (pp. 306-316). Chicago IL: National Reading Association.
- Duffy, G.G., & Metheny, W. (1979). *The development of an instrument to measure teacher beliefs about reading* (Report No. CS 004 542. East Lansing MI: Michigan State University, Institute for Research on Teaching. (ERIC Document No. ED 163 433).
- Goodlad, J.I. (1988). School-university partnerships for educational renewal: Rationale and concepts. In K.A. Sirotnik and J.I. Goodlad (Eds.), *School-university partnerships in action. Concepts, case, and concerns* (pp. 3-31). NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hall, G.E., George, A.A., & Rutherford, W.L. (1977). *Measuring the stages of concern about an innovation: A manual for use of the stages of concern questionnaire*. Austin: The University of Texas.
- Hoffman, N.E., Reed, W.M., & Rosenbluth, G.S. (Eds.). (1997). *Lessons from restructuring experiences: Stories of change in professional development schools*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press.
- The Holmes Group. (1986). *Tomorrow's teachers: A report of the Holmes Group*. East Lansing MI: Author.
- Hycner, R.H. (1985). Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. *Human Studies*, 8, 279-303.
- Isenhardt, J. (1994). *Students' reading interests: Can teachers' beliefs and instructional practices have an effect?* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, West Virginia University, Morgantown.
- Reed, W. M. (1990). The effect of computer-and-writing instruction on prospective English teachers' attitudes toward and perceived uses of computers in writing instruction. *Journal of Research on Computing in Education*, 23, 3-27.
- Richardson, V. (1996a). Teacher education: Research, policy, and practice. In D.J. Leu, C.K. Kinzer, & Hinchman, K.A. (Eds.), *Literacies for the 21st century: Research and practice. Forty-fifth yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 47-58). Chicago: National Reading Conference.
- Richardson, V. (1996b). The role of attitudes and beliefs in learning to teach. In J. Sikula (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (2nd ed., pp. 102-119). NY: Macmillan.

*Mary Alice Barksdale-Ladd is a faculty member in the Department of Childhood, Language Arts, and Reading at the University of South Florida, in Tampa Florida. Anita Nedeff and Ruth Oaks are teachers at Central Elementary School, in Morgantown West Virginia. Sarah Steele is an acting coordinator for Professional Development Schools and Janet Isenhardt is a faculty member at West Virginia University, in Morgantown West Virginia.*