

Sustainability of Reforms, Both School and University Based

I. Purpose

This presentation will discuss further reform and communication efforts of a public university based teacher education program which includes a partnership between three colleges, one school district, and several new affiliated schools added this past year. The purpose of this presentation is to document the process and progress of teacher education reform within a university, given the current political and educational contexts. This includes more have grown out of a five-year grant awarded in 2009 that will end in fall of 2014.

II. Objectives

Several goals will be achieved through this presentation. Attendees will be provided with the following:

- An overall definition and explanation of the Professional Development School (PDS) model
- A summary review of the current PDS model and efforts at developing further communication
- Discussion on sustainability and implications for future reform efforts

III. Perspective/Theoretical Framework

At the national level, reform of teacher education has become central (NCATE, 2010). This is due to persistent under achievement of students in high needs schools. The current examination stemmed from a five-year grant awarded to a university and school district PDS in the southern United States to initiate and institutionalize teacher education reform. NCATE (2001) defines a Professional Development School as a school-university partnership that has five standards, including a Learning Community; Accountability and Quality Assurance; Collaboration; Equity and Diversity; and Structures, Resources and Roles.

Initial reform efforts were the development of a Professional Development School (PDS) model, which included a memorandum of understanding between a school district with high need students and the university. The PDS is a cluster of schools in a feeder pattern. It consists of five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. During the past year, the partnership has been extended to include several schools in other districts. Thus, the reform has extended beyond the initial model.

Central to the reform efforts underway is a collaborative clinical practice, which is a yearlong sequence that employs a co-teaching senior year experience for the teacher candidate and their classroom teacher, also known as a “collaborating teacher.” This practice is supported by instructional coaching (Knight, 2007) to assist collaborating teachers and student teachers in using co-teaching strategies to improve teaching, differentiation, formative and summative assessments, and classroom management. While there has been little research done on the connection between student achievement and co-teaching training and use in P-12 schools,

Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg (2010) reported that St. Cloud State University's co-teaching in student teaching program promoted increases in K-6 students' reading and math proficiencies.

The current study centers on an ethnographic approach overall, where the researchers are embedded in the process of collecting data with participants and engage in iterative reflection of the results (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). A more focused lens was used as well, which is A/r/tography (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008). This is a living, human inquiry that seeks to understand the fluidity and complexity of the interactions engaged in and observed.

IV. Methods, Techniques, Modes of Inquiry

The current grant is in its final year and it was important to capture the thinking of the classroom teachers as we move forward to sustainability of the PDS. Thus, groups of teachers attended a session at their school site, including five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

This study was designed to discover what the teachers thought should be kept in the programs and activities, what should be changed, and what should be added. Three large laminated posters were placed on a whiteboard. One was titled "Keep," one was titled "Change," and the final one was titled "Add." The teachers were asked to write their responses to these prompts on Post-it notes, which they then would place on the appropriate poster.

These anonymous data were then compiled and analyzed to uncover categories and themes. Three main categories emerged under each of the prompts (Keep, Change, and Add), which were program-based, professional development, and activities.

While the results will be condensed on a handout for the presentation, summaries will be provided here. Under the Keep category, program-based comments included: co-teaching, the year-long internship, and the courses taught at the school sites, which were co-taught by university professors and classroom teachers. The professional development theme centered on culturally relevant pedagogy and induction. In the activities section, these included Professional Learning Communities and intern involvement in school events, such as Math Bowls, Family Night, and Community Reads.

Under the Change section the following themes emerged: interns taking additional classes; eliminating professional development modules for co-teaching; more communication and consistency; and restructuring the mentoring program.

The Add category yielded results as follows: program-based notations included classes on teaching writing and classroom management for the interns, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement, and a special education component as part of the programs. The professional development category had notations such as professional development that is beneficial to classroom teachers, including ESOL, students with disabilities, instructional technology, reading for underperforming students; and the opportunity for Professional Learning Units (PLUs).

We also have percentages to report as well, but are too lengthy to describe here. The top three were co-teaching, the year-long internship, and professional development.

V. Educational Importance/Target Audience

With the call for highly and comprehensively trained teachers, especially at high need schools, the reforms implemented within this PDS can serve as a model for other teacher educators and preparation programs. As the grant that supported this work will end in fall 2014, sustainability has increasingly been built into the activities, programs, partnerships, and PDS. This includes the growth of the reforms in curriculum and instruction, the co-teaching model, and the yearlong internship.

VII. References

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