

Teacher Education and Schools

A Symbiotic Partnership

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Collaboration, professionalism, and program coherence. These are some of the main challenges of teacher-education (TE) programs. *Low student achievement, discipline problems, increasing teacher-student ratio, teacher isolation, and burnout.* These are a few of the critical problems faced by many schools today.

A Felt Need

Both TE and schools face ongoing challenges and difficulties. Though their needs and problems exist in two different locales, a single solution may help both—a partnership between teacher education and K-12 schools. Educators in both public schools¹ and Adventist institutions² have complained about the widespread failure to connect TE and schooling. The old adage, “We are never so independent as when we recognize and appreciate our dependence,” is also true about the relationship that must exist between TE and schools. Goodlad³ urges the linking of teacher education and schools through working partnerships. According to him, any TE program created or conducted without the collaboration of surrounding schools is defective.

A Typical TE Model

Teacher education is relatively new, compared to schools, which have existed for millennia. The early apprenticeship model of TE has developed into a more structured series of experiences that integrate several fields of study. A typical TE has three major components:

1. General education (liberal arts, science, and math);
2. Educational methods and foundations courses; and
3. School-based experiences carried out in elementary and secondary classrooms.⁴

Due to a lack of research, little is known about the effects of academic courses on future teaching effectiveness. Strengthening academic subject matter, lengthening the total preparation time, and integrating courses have helped improve TE programs. Suc-

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Administration building, Spicer Memorial College, Pune, India.

cessful TE programs have at least 10 characteristics (see Figure 1).

Goals of Teacher Education

Teacher education has three main goals: (1) improving practice, (2) informing the knowledge base, and (3) helping to professionalize teaching. Are TE programs achieving these goals? Experts such as Goodlad,⁵ Fullan,⁶ Joyce,⁷ and Sarason et al⁸ all say "No." They have pointed out several weaknesses of current TE programs, including a lack of coherence between theory and practice, lack of professionalism, and an inadequate knowledge base. Directly or indirectly, these problems result from insufficient collaboration with schools.

Schools often contribute to the problem, as well. Teachers are frequently assigned to content areas outside their primary field of study, without adequate training. Studies⁹ have shown that untrained teachers are less likely to plan instruction according to student ability.

It is time for TE faculty and schools to work together. Existing partnerships must be strengthened and new ones forged. A symbiotic relationship between these two educa-

tional units will improve schools and teacher training.

How to Collaborate

Teacher education and schools can cooperate in several mutually beneficial ways. First, teacher educators can use K-12 schools to enhance the professional experiences of teachers in training. Teaching requires skills that must be practiced over a period of time. Therefore, field experiences need to be emphasized.

According to the training model suggested by Joyce and Showers,¹⁰ teachers acquire their skills through a series of steps beginning with theory, then modeling and practice, followed by feedback and coaching. Pre-service teachers get to practice some skills through simulations in their college classes, using their peers as students. But they also need early and frequent opportunities for practice with actual students. Here is where the school connection becomes invaluable.

Fullan¹¹ suggests offering professional TE courses earlier. In most TE programs, field experience takes place during the last segment of college work. This arrangement has been seen as necessary because the partici-

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pating schools are often far from the college. Why not use schools in close proximity? If the college forms a partnership with several schools, student teaching can be spread over several semesters or quarters, thereby reinforcing the skills being taught.

One can expect difficulties with any new plan. Synchronizing college and K-12 class schedules will be a major challenge. The time spent in commuting between the college and school (even within a reasonable distance) will be exhausting. But we must learn from

Spicer Memorial College teacher-education students interact with students from the campus elementary school.

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other professions such as medicine, law, and business, which manage the same challenges.

Second, TE can collaborate with schools in integrating theory and practice. Connections must be made between subjects and methods, as well as TE foundation courses. Professors from the “ivory tower” must learn about actual classroom situations through meaningful interaction with the schools. The typical teacher educator has fewer than five years of experience in the “real world” of K-12 education. For many, the experience happened more than 20 years ago. More than 30 percent of teacher educators have had no previous field experience.¹² The TE faculty must interact with schools in a variety of ways to get in touch with reality.

Schools benefit from college faculty visits, too. K-12 teachers are looking for ideas and advice, and these college teachers are generally willing to help. They can serve as resource persons for classes or share their expertise during staff meetings and in-service training sessions. These interactions will reduce the discrepancy between what TE students learn and what they see being practiced by their supervising teachers. Having the first-hand experiences in K-12 schools will make the teacher educator’s instruction more relevant.

Interaction between the TE faculty and school teachers helps reduce teacher isolation, which often has its roots in teacher training. If TE faculty introduce cooperative procedures and coaching in methods classes

and encourage team teaching, especially during the early stages of the TE program, this will help develop the collegiality and support that teachers in training need for later professional interactions with colleagues.

Third, collaboration can occur in the area of research. Teacher-education faculty must be involved in generating knowledge about their areas of expertise. One way to do this is by conducting research at school sites with the assistance of teachers and student teachers. The feedback from these studies can be incorporated into school-improvement programs.

Assessment of student teaching occurs

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Spicer Memorial College students in front of the school auditorium after chapel.

Figure 1

Characteristics of Successful Teacher Development

1. Collegiality and collaboration;
2. Experimentation and risk-taking;
3. Incorporation of available knowledge bases;
4. Appropriate participant involvement in goal-setting, implementation evaluation, and decision-making;
5. Time to work on staff development and assimilate new learning;
6. Leadership and sustained administrative support;
7. Appropriate incentives and rewards;
8. Program designs built on the principles of adult learning and the change process;
9. Integration of individual goals with school and district goal; and
10. Formal placement of the program within the philosophy and organizational structure of the school and district.

From S. Loucks-Horsley, C. Harding, M. Arbuckle, L. Murray, C. Dubea, and M. Williams, cited by Michael G. Fullan, *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991), p. 292.

through classroom observation by mentor teachers and college teachers, assessment of daily lesson plans, and use of performance checklists. Professionalism among TE students is encouraged by teaching them to accept responsibility, prepare for daily teaching, be punctual, and dress appropriately. After receiving such training, student teachers are more likely to continue these actions and attitudes in their professional lives.

Although collaboration is not easy, it offers mutual benefits for teacher education and schools. A summary of these benefits is shown in Figure 2.

Collaboration: A Case Study

Spicer Memorial College is an Adventist liberal-arts college in Pune, India. Its undergraduate teacher-education program includes a four-year bachelor’s degree, a minor, a two-year diploma in elementary education, and a

Figure 2

Benefits for TE From Schools

1. Field experiences for students in teaching and research;
2. TE faculty in touch with reality, which helps connect theory and practice;
3. Program inculcates cooperation in TE students;
4. Production of knowledge base through observation and research;
5. Increased professionalism in TE; and
6. K-12 teachers work directly or indirectly with TE.

Benefits to Schools From TE

1. TE students assist K-12 teachers;
2. Increased resources and input through interaction of TE faculty with school;
3. In-service training for teachers by TE faculty;
4. Research feedback for school improvement; and
5. Reduction of teacher isolation through collaboration with TE students and college faculty.

minor in secondary education. At the graduate level, it offers Master's degrees and diplomas in elementary and secondary education. The graduate program is affiliated with Andrews University (Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.).

All graduate and undergraduate TE faculty have taught elementary or secondary school within the past 20 years. Some of them teach part time at the K-12 schools on the college campus.

The campus elementary school runs a program for nursery to standard 6, with a current enrollment of 480. The secondary school offers classes from standards 7 to 12 and has an enrollment of 272. Both are government-recognized schools.

About 80 percent of the elementary teachers and 90 percent of the secondary teachers hold Master's degrees or higher (most of them in education). Several of the teachers who have advanced degrees only in content areas

or who hold teaching degrees from outside universities take teacher-education courses at Spicer. The college administration provides for in-servicing of these teachers by allowing them to take several courses every semester.

The above situation creates a working relationship between teacher education and the schools. Student teachers work under the mentorship of resident K-12 teachers. The trainees continue to take college classes during this time. The teacher educators are able to visit and observe these trainees frequently, due to the proximity of the schools. The K-12 teachers know the methods learned and practiced by the student teachers and are supportive. In some instances, student teachers work under the mentorship of those who teach methods classes. Thus, the comfort level of student teachers is high.

Teachers in training attend regular workshops and seminars conducted collaboratively by the college and K-12 teachers. These programs generate a great deal of collegiality and professionalism. The topics for such sessions are carefully designed to suit the trainees' needs. School teachers who participate also benefit by refreshing their knowledge of these topics.

TE students, especially at the graduate level, conduct field research in schools. The

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Spicer Secondary School students.

TE faculty guide these researchers, who work in schools inside and outside Pune and abroad, since a number of TE students come from outside India. The findings are disseminated through written projects, reports, and presentations. The knowledge base produced by the studies informs the TE theorists and practitioners, as well as the schools.

Spicer TE faculty members are frequently invited to hold in-service programs at various schools. This helps expose K-12 teachers and administrators to current educational ideas and gives teacher educators an opportunity to stay in touch with schools. Such opportunities help them understand the challenges of the work place. This, in turn, informs their training of pre-service teachers and strengthens the connection between theory and practice.

The K-12 teachers on the Spicer campus are overworked, largely because of large class enrollments. The student teachers help ease the burdens of these teachers when they help teach a class or two. The K-12 teacher supervises the student teacher and provides feedback to the TE instructor. Student-teacher evaluation includes the ratings by these mentor teachers.

An added dimension of this collaboration is the practical work that all undergraduate TE students must complete. Here is an additional opportunity for student teachers to ac-

quire real-life experience as they help teachers organize the classroom, correct students' work, keep records, assist with extra-curricular activities, and so on. Using student labor saves the schools money, compared to employing teacher aides for each class.

We believe that much more can be done with such partnerships. The enrollment of our undergraduate TE program has increased 10 times within the past decade. Of course, such growth has brought in some challenges as well. Some of the TE faculty's work loads have increased, especially in the area of supervision of teaching. The schools are getting a greater flow of student teachers, which upsets some K-12 teachers. As we work to solve these problems, we remain committed to maintaining the partnership between teacher education and K-12 schools. We are on the lookout for other neighboring schools with which to collaborate. The benefits of such

symbiotic partnership far exceed the difficulties, and the future looks good! ✍

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Library, Spicer Memorial College.

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