The Impact of Relationships on School/College Partnership Success

AACTE Roundtable
Orlando, Florida
March 1, 2013

MATH-UP Faculty Investigators
Laura Roberts
Anne Marie Marshall
Harriet Fayne
Cecilia Espinosa
Maria Victoria Rodriguez
Introduction

The overarching goal of Mathematics Achievement with Teachers of High-need Urban Populations (MATH-UP), a federally and state funded Teacher Quality Project, is to effect simultaneous reform of an urban teacher preparation graduate program and low-performing urban schools. To achieve that end, an elementary teacher education program at Lehman College (City University of New York), a public, Hispanic-Serving Institution, forged a partnership with five South Bronx elementary schools, Educational Testing Service, Research for Better Schools, and a local cable network. MATH-UP involves both a course of study leading to a masters degree offered by the School of Education and a clinical residency in which candidates work in tandem with cooperating teachers who are active participants in school-based professional learning communities and engage in ongoing professional development in the areas of mathematics content and pedagogy, formative assessment, and mentoring.

Our roundtable will offer some tentative, contextualized answers to questions about whether preparing teachers for high needs urban elementary schools requires unique kinds of preparation and support structures across the teacher development continuum. Embedded throughout MATH-UP activities is the theme of collaboration: co-developed orientation and in-service sessions for program participants, “critical friend” review of program evaluation data to enhance effectiveness, and co-teaching in college and K-6 classrooms.

Mentoring

Laura Roberts, Investigator

Since the late seventies mentoring has been researched extensively in a variety of professional venues (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004). Subsequently, researchers have linked mentoring to a variety of positive outcomes. Among the various benefits associated with mentoring are increases in career satisfaction and skills related to the profession and improvements in areas of psychosocial functioning (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, E., & Lima, 2004; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993). In studies of novice teachers, researchers have found that mentoring was an effective tool for alleviating feelings of isolation and lack of support, two problems commonly reported by first year teachers (Andrews & Quinn, 2005). Furthermore, mentoring has been associated with professional learning and overall retention of both veteran and first year teachers (Gardiner, 2012; Watkins & Scott 2007).

Traditionally, mentoring entails the process of pairing together an individual with limited experience (mentee) with another who is believed to possess a particular area of expertise and
skill set (mentor). According to Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010) “mentoring is a non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationship between mentors and mentees who work towards specific professional and personal outcomes for the mentee.” Through guidance, advisement and modeling, the mentor assists the mentee in developing his/her set of professional skills and expertise (Chao, 1997; Kram, 1985). Mentoring, recognized as essential to the learning and preparation of individuals new to the teaching profession, has become common practice in many teacher induction and education programs across the country (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009).

A number of factors have been found to be linked to the positive outcomes associated with mentoring programs; among those factors is the mentor/mentee relationship. As with most relationships, that between pre-service teaching candidates and mentor teachers is often complex (Leshem, 2012). Differences in perception about roles, responsibilities and expectations of the mentoring process can leave both the mentor and mentee feeling dissatisfied with the mentoring experience. In examining mentoring relationships, researchers have found that when the mentors and mentees possess similar values, goals and perceptions they are more likely to experience satisfaction in the mentoring process. Furthermore, emotional supports provided by mentors have been found to contribute to feelings of competence and effectiveness in mentees (Greiman, Torres, Burris & Kitchel, 2007). Emotional supports in the mentoring relationships are referred to as psychosocial functions. Kitchel (2006) identified specific psychosocial functions as being essential to building a successful mentoring relationship. Among these functions are: modeling, counseling, and connecting on a personal/social level (Kitchel, Greiman, Torres & Burris, 2008; Kitchel, 2006).

Perhaps one of the most critical components of the MATH-UP program is the mentoring aspect. The formal pairing process took place over the 12 months prior to the first year of implementation, during which time program staff and faculty gathered data on program participants and the different school sites. Members of the MATH-UP team visited each of the five participating schools on a regular basis, conducting classroom observations and meeting with potential mentor teachers and building staff. The purpose of these visitations was to gain a better understanding of the climate in each of the schools, to establish rapport with the teachers, and to learn about different aspects of prospective mentors’ personalities. During the spring semester prior to implementation, pre-service teaching candidates (mentees) were observed in a graduate level class taught by the MATH-UP program’s clinical coordinator. By mid-semester, the mentees traveled as a group to each of the participating schools and had the opportunity to give feedback on their preferences for placement. Prior to the end of the spring semester (Year Two), MATH-UP staff reviewed all of the data and paired the 18 interns with mentors (Cohort One).

Research Questions:
This study aimed to answer the following questions pertaining to the mentoring relationship:

- To what degree did mentees feel that their mentors provided them with psychosocial supports (e.g. acceptance, friendship and role-modeling)? To what degree did mentors perceive that they provided such supports?

- To what extent did mentees need assistance in areas related to teacher responsibilities? Were mentors able to provide it?

- What did mentors and mentees perceive to be the benefits of participating in the mentoring relationship? Did they identify barriers to success?

**Instrumentation:**
Mentoring Relationship Questionnaire: Data were gathered using a modified version of the *Mentoring Relationship Questionnaire* (MRQ, Greiman, 2003). This particular questionnaire examines the perspectives of mentors and mentees on the following aspects of the mentoring relationship: psychosocial functions, perceived levels of support required and the extent to which support was provided. The MRQ also examines mentor/mentee perceptions of similarities to one another, overall satisfaction with the relationship and barriers to success.

**Findings:**
The initial analysis of the data gathered through the MRQ revealed that mentors and mentees shared similar perceptions of the types of support required for mentees to be successful. Specific areas, in which mentees needed the most assistance, were: assisting students with special needs, navigating school politics, conducting parent conferences, evaluating student work, implementing school policies, managing time and daily tasks, managing classroom and student behavior, motivating students, lesson planning, self-reflection and differentiated instruction. Responses related to mentor teachers’ ability to provide support in these areas indicated that disparities existed between perceptions of mentors and mentees.

Mentor/mentee responses to items pertaining to the psychosocial functions of the mentoring relationship showed similarities. Responses show that mentees believed that mentors thought highly of them as both interns and colleagues, served as role models, conveyed feelings of respect, and provided them with support and encouragement. Disparities existed between mentors and mentees in terms of the extent to which mentors shared personal experiences, were individuals that the mentee could trust and made themselves available as confidantes. Responses indicate that mentors believed they had provided these supports; interns were not entirely convinced that they had done so.
The findings in this study are consistent with other research that has identified the difficulties experienced by teachers new to the teaching profession (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Fantilli, & McDougall, 2009). While all of the mentees had received training related to the teaching profession prior to and during the internship, they still had learning gaps associated with transitioning from teacher preparation programs into the teaching profession. Mentees rated mentors as adequately prepared to provide support. However, mentors perceived themselves as more capable than did the mentees. Concerns around mentor competence have emerged in other studies, particularly when mentees indicated that they were dissatisfied with the mentoring relationship (Fantilli, & McDougall, 2009). However, in general, mentees’ responses overall on the MRQ indicated high levels of satisfaction with the mentoring process.

It appeared that mentors were not as skillful at mentoring as they perceived themselves to be. An individual’s belief about his or her ability to complete a particular task, known as self-efficacy, is typically based on what he or she understands is required in order to successfully complete the task (Bandura, 1997). Higher teacher self-efficacy is linked to positive student outcomes in terms of behaviors, attitude and achievements; it tends to foster virtues such as perseverance and resiliency, which are two necessities for dealing with challenging situations (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). So, our mentors, selected because of their reputation as teachers, may have incorrectly assumed that they were as successful with fledgling teachers as they were with their students.

Works Cited


Co-Teaching

Anne Marie Marshall & Harriet Fayne, Co-Investigators

For over thirty years, co-teaching has been employed to support inclusive practices in P-12 classrooms (Pugach & Winn, 2011; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). There are both quantitative as well as qualitative data linking positive student outcomes (Gerber & Popp, 2000; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walter-Thomas, 2002) and enhanced professional growth in teachers (Scruggs et al., 2007) to co-teaching. While less attention has been paid to co-teaching in higher education than in P-12, there is a body of case literature that describes successful pedagogical partnerships forged between regular and special teacher educators, faculty within and across disciplines (Lester & Evans, 2009), college/university faculty and practicing teachers (Buczynski & Sisserson, 2008), student teachers and mentors (Bacharach, Heck & Dahlberg, 2010), and teams of pre-service candidates (Gardiner & Robinson, 2009).

Co-teaching is first and foremost a relationship that develops between or among individuals who share responsibility for an instructional “space.” Mussanti and Pence (2010), in their qualitative study of a collaborative professional development model designed to enhance teachers’ ability to work with English Language Learners, concluded: “Even though the project was aimed at increasing teachers’ ESL pedagogical content knowledge, Co-Facilitators talked more about their emotional engagement and intersubjectivity with their partners and Guest Teachers. Relationship trumped knowledge, and in doing so, highlights the need for studying the interactional dimensions of teacher change” (p. 87). Successful co-teaching relationships are built upon shared knowledge and interdependence. Autonomy and individualism, cherished by teachers who are used to working independently, are de-emphasized in a collaborative culture.
If teacher education programs incorporate co-teaching models in courses and clinical practice settings, is it possible to whittle away at the notion that teaching is a solitary activity, a preconception that can lead to a sense of alienation and isolation in novice urban teachers? Will partnerships at the micro-level (classroom) lead to enhanced understanding and a narrowing of the theory-practice gap at the meso- (program) and macro- (institutional) levels?

In the MATH-UP program, co-teaching relationships exist between teacher interns and their mentor teachers. In addition, co-teaching relationships exist at the college level between the two instructors of MATH-UP courses. The college level co-teaching model allows instructors to teach in ways that are not possible with just one instructor. Consequently, interns are afforded richer experiences and are provided with more help due to the strengths of having two qualified instructors. Experiencing multiple co-teaching strategies as learners helps interns to understand the various co-teaching practices.

Teacher candidates in the MATH-UP program take 14 core courses, 12 of which are co-taught. These courses pair a Lehman College Faculty member with P-6 teachers, coaches, or administrators from the host schools participating in the program. Of these 12 co-taught courses, seven are co-taught by one university instructor and one classroom teacher, three are co-taught by one adjunct instructor and one classroom teacher, one is co-taught by the School of Education Dean and the MATH-UP project director, and one is co-taught be two classroom teachers. It was the goal of the co-teaching component that MATH-UP interns would learn to co-teach through explicit instruction about co-teaching models as well as through various opportunities to experience co-teaching as learners. In essence, co-taught courses were designed to model what we wanted interns to practice. By doing this, we were aiming to narrow the theory to practice gap. Research by Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) urges teacher programs to find stronger connections between theory and practice, calling for opportunities to find connections between coursework and fieldwork in efforts to support teacher candidates.

Our research aims to understand how co-taught courses affected preservice interns understandings and application of co-teaching models.

- What elements of co-teaching are necessary for successful pedagogical partnerships?
- What can we learn from the experiences of co-teaching partnerships between university faculty and practicing teachers that will help us understand co-teaching opportunities for our interns?
- Using ‘relationship trumps knowledge’ (Mussanti and Pence, 2010), as a starting assumption, what aspects of relationships are most important in co-teaching relationships?
Initial Findings: While informal communication indicated that everything was going smoothly in the co-taught courses, analysis of the data has revealed that some co-teaching relationships were functioning at a higher level than others. Initial data analysis is revealing aspects of co-teaching that may illuminate elements of co-teaching necessary for successful pedagogical partnerships. Several themes have emerged from the university/instructor data on co-teaching. For example, both groups voiced concerns about preparedness to co-teach and lack of sufficient time to co-plan. In this paper, we will focus on the relational aspects of co-teaching in Lehman courses. Here, we present three preliminary themes that have emerged. Below is an excerpt from the theme analysis from three co-teaching relationships (two of which use one university instructor as the common instructor).

Trust
+”Few conflicts, rely on one another, rewarding, I feel comfortable with joint-decision making, learning from each other, sharing responsibilities- I trust that the other is doing the work”
-“Gave him the easiest to grade, feels guarded, communicate infrequently and superficially, afraid to assign meaningful or important tasks, feels the need to ‘assign’ rather than co-plan”

Partnership and Mutual Respect
+ “Using “we” is easy, established norms for working together, acknowledging strengths in partner, feelings of inclusion, clicked, have each other back (picked up slack when one partner needed it and this was reciprocated”
-“Using ‘we’ is not natural, Communication is broken (not showing up- me not being clear about expectations, roles, speaking up), one partner having to constantly ’pick up the slack’”

Presence
+ “Regular communication in person, online, over the phone, ongoing individual and paired reflection of roles, being proactive in trying multiple strategies, understanding and reflection on how co-teaching roles impact student learning”
- “Doesn’t show up- for some of these I was notified via text the day of or the day before. This lack of physical presence exacerbates his lack of presence as a co-teacher, and lack of time with students- creates an unbalanced relationship with students, even when he was ‘there’, he just sat there”

Typically, college professors are prepared for teaching their classes alone and have worked to improve them over time. Co-teaching can be a vulnerable activity. Co-teaching can expose strengths as well as weaknesses. There may be a power differential, with one member of the team having more authority than another. In addition, accountability is likely to play a role in how the co-teaching relationship evolves (i.e., The teacher of record is ultimately responsible for student success and may be evaluated negatively if the course does not go well). One of the research goals of MATH-UP is to develop a nuanced understanding of how co-teaching is
enacted within and across settings. Our initial findings, based on self-study of teaching practices, survey data, and semi-structured interviews, indicate that co-teaching at the collegiate level stretches teacher educators and brings them closer to the lived experience of candidates and cooperating teachers.

**Works Cited**


Teacher Learning Communities
Cecilia Espinosa and Maria Victoria Rodriguez, Co-Investigators

For school reform to have a long lasting effect on teacher practice, it must include professional development that reduces teacher isolation, emphasizes teacher expertise, and promotes collaboration (Saxe, Gearheart, and Nasir, 2001; Wei, 2009). What matters is that trusting relationships (Elster, 2009) are built over time and that teachers have opportunities to engage in high quality, student-focused conversations (Reich and Bally, 2011). Changing practice is a complex process. It requires learning and unlearning (Shen, 2002). Wood (2007) argues that, “Learning communities offer opportunities not only to tap teachers’ knowledge, but to make it public, so it can be both shared and the teacher can engage with others in critical dialogue” (p. 282). In these learning communities teachers develop an identity as professionals who raise issues about their practice, inquire into possible solutions, and build knowledge together from their daily work, as well as from the professional literature (Wood, 2007; Whitford & Wood, 2010).

Teacher Learning Communities (TLC) offer participants opportunities to deepen their pedagogical understandings by engaging in collective inquiry in order to examine their daily practice, improve student learning, and construct new knowledge about teaching and learning. In these communities participants develop identities as professionals who raise issues about their practice, inquire into possible solutions, and build knowledge from their daily work.

The Teacher Learning Communities meetings in the MATH UP program are one of the professional development opportunities that cooperating teachers and prospective teachers had together during the 2011-2012 school year. During these monthly TLC meetings participants engaged in learning about the Keeping Learning on Track (KLT) strategies (http://www.nwea.org/KLT), reflecting on their application in the classroom, and planning for the continuous and effective implementation of strategies.
This presentation focuses on the preliminary data analysis of data collected during the year 2011-2012 (second year of a two-year study). For the purpose of this presentation we began to analyze audiotapes of monthly TLC sessions at two of the partner schools. A research assistant listened to all of the audiotapes and prepared summaries. We are in the process of having audiotapes transcribed; consequently, we want to emphasize that these are emerging results.

Our investigation centers on what happens when teachers, teacher candidates and college faculty in two urban schools with children with special needs and a large population of second language learners come together through a clinically rich TQP project to establish a dialogue about improving student learning through the use of formative assessments (KLT Strategies). The purpose of this study is to continue investigating what happens during the second year of participation in the TLC communities.

This presentation focuses on the following questions:

- What are the salient themes that emerge as we analyze 2011-2012 TLC data?
- What is missing in the conversations? What are areas of concern?
- How can the data inform decisions about how to improve TLC sessions?

*Initial Findings:* We found evidence that the TLC sessions provided a space for teachers to raise issues about their practice and hear one another’s struggles as they attempted to learn new ways of addressing the needs of the children they teach. In addition, these meetings provided an opportunity for interns to think about their professional identity while they participated in critical conversations about practice with seasoned teachers. The conversations were richer when teachers brought student work from their own classrooms and thought about specific strategies to meet the needs of particular children.

While KLT printed materials contain a large number of activities, they are not necessarily focused on the elementary school curriculum, specifically the early elementary school curriculum. For example, when learning about rubrics, the participants were asked to design jeans using rubrics at various levels of development. We noticed that the TLC groups had difficulty transferring the learning intentions of this activity to their daily work with elementary children. The activity with the jeans became an activity by itself rather than a vehicle for thinking about the use of appropriate rubrics and their impact on student learning.

In addition, the last two activities on the agenda (Action Planning and Summary of Learning) are scheduled to take place during the last 20 minutes of each meeting. Often by this time the meeting was over. Participants were eager to leave. Consequently, little or no time was dedicated to these two important activities. The KLT manual recommends that the three most important
activities to complete are activities two [How is it going?], four [Action Planning], and five [Summary of Learning].

We think that the Summary of Learning and Action Planning activities are excellent ways of helping teachers to make connections between KLT activities and their practice. Therefore, if the group does not give full attention to these two important components of the agenda, the potential impact on practice is not realized. Although participants may be thinking about how to employ KLT strategies on their own, we are arguing that more time should be allocated during TLC meetings to making explicit connections between the techniques discussed and how they are enacted in the classroom.

An open and thoughtful discussion about the implications and challenges as well as successes and new wonderings can only benefit everyone in the group. The place in the agenda where the participants could not only discuss but also bring evidence of how their Action Plan was implemented is in the section, “How is it Going?” If participants had brought stronger evidence of their action plans to TLC meetings, they could have taken more of an inquiry stance and engaged in action research. The TLC meetings have the potential to be a safe place where teachers and prospective teachers discuss how to address the challenges in making the KLT strategies an integral part of their daily practice. With limited sharing of action plans, the group missed the opportunity to engage in deep discussions.

Finally, there is no doubt that the TLC sessions and having the prospective teachers as interns in their classrooms on a daily basis are valued by the participants. Several of the teachers are thinking about how to maintain both aspects once the MATH-UP project is officially over. At a TLC session a teacher asked:

“**Teacher 1:** [Interrupting previous speaker] Before we move on, I have one quick one. I see that there is a lot of success with this program, with having the preservice teachers. I just wonder what is going to happen after?”

Works Cited


**Conclusion**

While there is growing consensus around the claim that collaboration is an essential ingredient in both school and teacher education reform, there are obstacles that reduce the likelihood that a collaborative culture will develop or sustain itself within schools or the academy, let alone between schools and higher education institutions. The MATH-UP project, with its emphasis on partnerships and community building, challenges the assumption that, in the present climate, teachers (and teacher educators) can or should operate autonomously and independently if we expect to achieve the ambitious goal of getting all children to realize their potential.

Time comes up either implicitly or explicitly as a variable that can facilitate or impede progress. How can we find the time to form the relationships that lead to honest, productive communication among mentors and mentees, college faculty and practitioners, and teachers within a school? Dr. Roberts shared the following astute observation in a recent email: “Interesting that time is a common thread. I wonder if there is a connection between time and perceived benefits of collaboration (personal and/or collective). In other words, most of us, miraculously, find time to participate in things if we feel that the pros of doing so outweigh the cons.” We will interrogate the notion of perceived cost/benefit ratios of various aspects of the MATH UP model as the project enters its final stage.