# Success in High-Need Schools Journal
# Volume 5, #1

*Theme:* "Innovations and Educational Leadership"

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**Introduction**

In this issue, *Success in High-Need Schools* features innovations in improving preparation of teachers for high-need schools with a focus on matters such as clinical practice, teacher and principal leadership, parent involvement, and support groups to help increase teacher retention. The articles in this issue describe how evaluation and assessment are becoming powerful tools in developing evidence-based best practices and how the expansion of college-school partnerships are helping to improve teacher preparation and retention and student learning outcomes. These advances owe much to the collaboration and sharing that ACI's *Center for Success in High-Need Schools* fosters through grant-funded projects, workshops, conferences, and monthly meetings of ACI members and school partners.

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## Publisher's Column, *by Jan Fitzsimmons, Ph.D.*

After spending a few days with my five-year-old grandson, I am always amazed at how miraculous it is that children acquire language, number sense, and scientific curiosity -- not to mention a clever sense of humor -- prior to kindergarten.  I am equally amazed at seeing how skilled, reflective, and compassionate teachers can help students grow and flourish as learners and leaders despite enormous obstacles. As with the first years of life, students' success in the first years of school depends upon a complex set of factors and experiences. We must strive to identify, share, and replicate this multiplicity of factors that have to align for students to excel.

This issue of the journal strives to do just that. The collection of articles in this issue of Success in High-Need Schools is diverse, addressing everyone from pre-service teachers to principals. The collection includes articles about teacher quality, effective school leadership, teacher leadership, parent involvement, and teacher retention. Taken individually, each article makes an important contribution to further understanding of particular programs and practices that impact and improve teaching and learning. Taken as whole, this issue provides the reader with a rich opportunity to replicate this work in his or her own setting and thus make an enduring difference.

**Ann Behren's** article, "Improving Evaluation of Clinical Practice," describes how local public and parochial schools collaborate with Quincy University to discuss and identify the knowledge and skill set that constitutes effective teaching.  The net effect creates not only a  clear set of goals for each candidate learning to teach, but also a focused continuum of expectations for good teaching -- from pre-service to in-service.

Similarly, "Preparing 21st Century Teachers for Success in High-Need Schools," by **Onuora Ngozi**, examines the quality of teacher preparation. However, Ngozi looks not only at field experiences, but at subject matter expertise, ability to use and interpret data, understanding of diverse learners, and preparation experiences in teaching in high-need schools-21st century skills. Onuora urges teacher educators to evaluate their preparation programs in terms of how well their candidates are prepared to be effective in high-need schools. The critical question Ngozi raises is, "What is the evidence?"

In "Preparing Beginning Teachers to Be Teacher Leaders," **Mary Selke** poses the question, "What is the role of leadership in pre-service teacher preparation?" She argues that pre-service teachers whose preparation programs lay a foundation for teacher leadership are more likely to reach higher levels of leadership-related efficacy in the initial phases of their careers. She describes North Carolina's lead in prescribing a formula for teacher leadership in its professional teaching standards and a program for distributing leadership in professional learning communities - the Teacher Leadership Development Academy - where graduate students lead critical conversations with undergraduates.

**Diane Brannon**, "Transforming Teacher Education Through Parent Involvement in High-Need Schools," reports that many beginning teachers complete preparation programs with little or no instruction or practice communicating with parents. At the same time, the literature reports that parent involvement is integral to student success and thus teacher success. Brannon examines how beginning teachers who lack confidence and experience in parental communications can benefit from implementing a "Family Literacy Night."  The impact of the experience is reported through pre and post surveys and reflections.

In "Designing Reflective Practice Teacher Support Groups:  What Teacher Preparation Programs Can Do to Help Support and Retain New Teachers," **Therese Wehlman** and her colleagues share a model of monthly reflective support groups that sustain new teachers.  In these groups, teachers are encouraged to ask questions, identify issues, search out evidence, interpret and evaluate arguments, and come to conclusions about their teaching practices. The study points to important principles of adult learning, including the importance of having a safe and non-judgmental place to

discuss ideas related to their practice, the opportunity to listen and learn from colleagues, to engage in problem-solving, and to learn new skills, strategies and coping mechanisms that can be immediately applied to their work -- their work place.

Additionally, **Kristine Servais and Kathleen King**, in "Yes We Can in High-Need Schools," discuss the mandate that faces leaders of high-need schools. They urge leaders to engage head, hands, and heart, and to work collaboratively through ongoing conversation and reflective questioning to close the achievement gap. Servais and King review three recent resources in the research literature to help guide these reflections.

Finally, this issue of Success in High-Need Schools has two columns -- one by **James Harrington** on Illinois state policy changes that have just been adopted to improve school principal preparation by moving the role of principal from manager to classroom leader; and a second by high-need school principal, **Ida Peterson**, who leads by example, thus embodying the spirit of the new state mandates in her school.

And now your work begins: Read, reflect, replicate, adapt and make a difference! Enjoy this issue of Success in High-Need Schools.

**Author Bio:** Jan Fitzsimmons currently serves both as Director of ACI's *Center for Success in High-Need Schools* and as Instructor and Program Administrator for North Central College's Junior/Senior Scholars Program. She has developed an urban education internship at North Central College; served on a task force and co-chaired a symposium on P-16+ service learning; and is Curriculum Director and Campus Coordinator for ACI's *College Readiness Program*. Holding a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Chicago, Fitzsimmons leads program development for ACI's *Center for Success in High-Need Schools*, including curriculum design for ACI's *Teacher Induction Academy*, *Inner-City Practicum*, and *Diversity at the Blackboard* initiatives.

## Improving Evaluation of Clinical Practice, *by Anne Behrens*

**Author Bio**

Ann K. Behrens, interim head of the Education Department at Quincy University in Quincy, IL, is director of the Master of Science in Education program and the Collaborative Academy for Teacher Training (CATT). She served as a principal at the elementary, intermediate, and junior high levels for 14 years and was a junior high choral director for 20 years. She holds a doctorate from the University of Missouri (Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, 2005).

**Abstract**

A 2008 summer action research at Quincy University investigated the differences in perceptions of those charged with evaluating student teachers and sought ways to make their observations and ensuing suggestions more meaningful to teacher candidates. Conversations about what constitutes effective teaching, what level of achievement should be ranked as acceptable, and what elements of the evaluation tools needed to be revised occurred throughout the summer. Because both university supervisors and K-12 cooperating teachers participated in this study, the conversations were enriched by multiple perspectives.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Student teachers are evaluated by their university supervisors and cooperating teachers and submit formal weekly self-evaluations. Conflicting perceptions about performance result in a lack of a clear focus about how to improve teaching. A more systematic method is needed to ensure greater agreement among the three evaluators -- university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and student teachers -- to establish realistic and specific goals.

**Background of the Study**

Quincy University (QU) collaborates with public and parochial schools in the local community through a professional development school model of teacher preparation. Through these partnerships, K-12 teachers, university instructors, and supervisors provide feedback to teacher candidates on their classroom performance as they assume increasing levels of responsibility for planning and delivering instruction. Clinical practice, the culminating activity, is assessed by using both disposition and professional teaching standard rubrics. University supervisors, cooperating teachers, and student teachers each complete the forms independently and then meet to decide jointly on a final marking. Discrepancies in marking persist in spite of detailed rubrics to guide the process. These differences can lead to powerful professional conversations when there are few areas of disagreement. If the three markings differ substantially throughout the document, however, participants become frustrated with the process of defending each mark, and the student teacher is confused by conflicting reviews of his or her performance.

Educators vary in their abilities to observe and analyze teaching segments accurately. Supervisors of teacher candidates in clinical practice differ in the experiences they bring to the task. Some are former K-12 administrators with training in supervision of instruction and many years of teacher evaluation experience. Others are former K-12 teachers with years of experience in teaching but limited experience in observing other teachers. Some are content specialists who may have limited pedagogical knowledge. The cooperating teachers in the K-12 buildings also differ in their preparation to evaluate the student teachers with whom they work. QU holds a required meeting with university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and teacher candidates prior to the beginning of each semester. Part of each meeting is devoted to examining and discussing the rubrics and forms by which teacher candidates will be evaluated. Each individual, however, sets different priorities regarding the essentials of good teaching. Two individuals watching the same teaching segment may focus on different elements of the instructional interaction. Even more significant is the fact that they may not agree on what occurred during the lesson.

**Literature Review**

Pre-service teachers face many challenges as they transition to the role of teacher in the classroom. Professional development school models of teacher preparation have helped to ease this transition somewhat. However, a common set of challenges often arise related to instructional planning, classroom management, the use of effective instructional practices, and meeting the needs of all learners (Gao, 2007). Other areas of concern frequently include assessment and establishing classroom climate (Rutherford, 2002).

Student teacher placements attempt to pair pre-service teachers with exemplary in-service teachers who will use their expertise to model good instruction and guide the student teacher toward that ideal. It is virtually impossible, however, to guarantee that each placement will result in optimal progress (Rodgers & Keil, 2007). Because of the relationship that develops between the student teacher and the co-operating teacher, some find it hard to remain objective in evaluating progress. In-service teachers receive little training in how to confer effectively with their student teachers or how to conduct extended conversations designed to support the novice teacher (Rodgers & Keil, 2007).

There are various ways of helping evaluators become more effective. One method, proposed by Siedentop and Tannehill (2000), is to have pairs of evaluators observe teaching segments so that inter-observer reliability can be computed. Training in using the evaluation forms and providing differentiated forms targeting specific elements of teaching can enhance the feedback that pre-service teachers receive (Boyce, 2003). Data from these forms should be used as the basis for productive discussions leading to growth in the area of instruction (Maher, 2007).

Never before has the accountability of schools been so closely examined (Maher, 2007). The importance of high-stakes testing has made some teachers reluctant to turn classrooms over to pre-service teachers, especially in the spring, when much of the testing occurs.

Observation of the pre-service teacher in the classroom remains the primary tool by which university supervisors evaluate progress. While important, observation captures only a snapshot of the student teaching experience and only can measure a limited set of skills (Wilkerson & Lang, 2007). A critical factor is input from the in-service teacher, who can monitor continuous progress of both the student teacher and the students in the classroom on a daily basis.

**Methods and Activities**
Participants in this study included university supervisors and K-12 cooperating teachers. The first meeting, in June, reviewed the parameters and goals of this grant. During that meeting, these collaborating professionals examined the QU assessment instruments for the professional teaching standards and teacher dispositions, the Quincy Public School (QPS) teacher evaluation forms, and the forms used by QPS administrators during observations of non-tenured teachers. A discussion on the similarities and differences between evaluating student teachers and novice teachers focused on the need to be supportive versus the need to make hard decisions for each group. Participants also discussed the process of identifying priority areas for growth and the need for specificity of feedback. Assignments for reviewing additional literature were given, and an article on teacher evaluation was distributed. Ideas for a feasible final product resulting from the research also were evaluated.

A second meeting during the summer focused specifically on giving feedback. The importance of data-driven feedback, including specific areas of strength and concern, was emphasized. Other topics discussed included the amount of feedback to give, ways to follow up on suggestions between formal visits, and the role of teacher self-assessment in the evaluation process. This meeting concluded with all participants watching a 30-minute DVD of a teaching segment and marking QU's professional standards evaluation instrument based upon that one observation. After each person had marked the evaluation tool, each item was discussed, and participants gave reasons for the markings they had chosen.

Data from other teachers in training to become principals also were collected. These master's level students observed a different teaching segment on DVD and completed a teacher evaluation form similar to the one used in the Quincy Public Schools. These teachers were free to use whatever data-gathering techniques they wished during the actual observation.

Throughout the summer, participants submitted the results of their literature search, reviewed data-gathering tools designed to give feedback on specific areas of teaching, and brainstormed ideas for training evaluators in more effective ways of providing feedback to those being observed.

A final meeting was held to plan training for all those charged with evaluating student teachers. Many of the cooperating teachers in the Quincy Public Schools also serve as mentors for first and second year QPS teachers. One of the advantages of this collaborative effort will be the continuity of vocabulary and feedback that new teachers receive if they are hired by QPS. The role of disposition assessment and its importance were discussed, as were ways to help both the exceptionally strong and the exceptionally weak teacher.

**Results of the Study**
One of the most enlightening outcomes of the study was the degree of disparity in the perceptions of experienced teachers when observing instruction. The data gathered from the participants in the supervision course revealed that an observer often will report findings that are exactly the opposite of those of another observer. This has far-reaching ramifications for those charged with improving instruction and reinforces the need to seek more uniformity in evaluation of pre-service teachers. Actual comments taken from the written narrative in teacher evaluation forms used during the observation are included in the Appendix.

When the research team viewed a similar teaching segment, they completed the evaluation forms used when evaluating pre-service teachers. These tools ask the evaluator to assign a numerical rating to each element listed. The university supervisors and those K-12 teachers who had served as cooperating teachers for Quincy University in the past were familiar with the extensive rubric which accompanied the ratings form, although it was not used during this observation. Significant differences in the numerical ratings assigned were observed as well. These ratings were not compiled but were self-reported during the extensive discussion that occurred following the activity. Participants explained their rankings, and other participants had an opportunity to counter their reasoning or change their own markings.

Another element that emerged as significant was the need for specificity of feedback, including multiple examples of how the student teacher is performing in a given area of the rubric. The use of multiple kinds of data-gathering tools should increase both the quality and the quantity of this feedback.

Based upon these data, the research team recommends development of a formal training which would be required of all university supervisors and cooperating teachers once every five years. One element of that training should include more extensive explanation of the indicators and vocabulary on the rubric, including actual examples gathered from student teaching observations in the past. Participants also would observe recorded teaching segments and discuss how they might mark the evaluation tools, in a process similar to that in which the research team engaged. In order to accommodate the schedules of the attendees, the training would be offered several times throughout the year, including during School Improvement in-service days for the Quincy Public Schools. Professional development (CPDU hours) would be available through Quincy University.

Workshop attendees also would be trained in data gathering techniques beyond the two most commonly used — observation and script taping of lessons. The use of at least one additional source of data then would be required in each pre-service placement.

Another aspect of the training would be strengthening the expectations for use of the pre-service teacher's weekly reflection statement. The written statement should be a result of discussions between the pre-service teacher and cooperating teacher, include examples from that week's teaching, and tie the teaching analysis to the previous and upcoming weeks' lesson plans.

An extended training session would give the university greater opportunities to stress the backwards design process as a tool for unit planning and as an aid in effective assessment. Clear expectations for the student teaching experience in the areas of pre- and post-assessment of the candidate, curricular expectations, and selection of the unit plan could be conveyed more easily.

The research team that was developed and that finalized this training during the fall semester will pilot it during the spring semester with university supervisors and will implement the training for cooperating teachers and any new university supervisors during the summer and fall of 2009.

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# Preparing 21st Century Teachers for Success, *by Ngozi Onoura*

**Author Bio**

**Ngozi Onuora** is an instructor in the School of Education at Millikin University. She teaches courses in educational foundations, children's literature, general elementary methods & assessment with a supervised field experience for sophomore level teacher candidates, math methods, and technology for teachers. Her background is in elementary education. She has also worked as a gifted strategist, a technology coordinator, and an administrator for comprehensive school reform and shared decision-making for Decatur Public Schools.

**Abstract**

The article examines how Millikin University's School of Education has transformed its teacher preparation program for today's teachers working in challenging school environments. Important aspects highlighted include training pre-service teachers for subject matter expertise, providing valuable field experiences, understanding the importance of differentiation in teaching, and assisting with 21st century technology skills. Given that many teachers start their careers in challenging schools, it is imperative that colleges and universities examine their teacher education programs to evaluate whether changes are necessary to better prepare pre-service teachers for the classroom. As teacher education curricula transform in this way, the results in many classrooms across the country will change for the better.

**Body**

Millikin University is a private university located in Decatur in the heart of central Illinois. Elementary education is the largest program in its College of Professional Studies. With a mission of preparing students for professional success, democratic citizenship in a global community, and a personal life of meaning and value, Millikin's teacher education program is poised to contribute positively to the teaching profession. The evaluative questions that Millikin's School of Education continually asks include: What knowledge and skills will new teachers need to be successful in the classrooms of high-need schools? Are students leaving Millikin's elementary education program prepared for the challenges they will face in high-need classrooms? If not, how can the program be changed or transformed to meet the needs of the 21st century teacher?

First, one must know how "high-need school" is defined. According to Carolyn Nelson (2004), these are schools in which at least 20% of the student population lives below the poverty line. Barnett Berry (2008) notes that many teachers enter the classroom unprepared to deal with the students they encounter in high-need schools. These teachers have general knowledge about child development but little specific knowledge regarding the beliefs, values, cultures, and learning styles of diverse student populations.

Moreover, novice teachers are not prepared to deal with ancillary issues that affect the classroom such as class size and lack of resources. In its 4th Annual Report on Teacher Quality (2005), the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) outlined five areas of expertise that teachers will need when they enter today's classrooms: 1) subject matter expertise, 2) ability to use and interpret data, 3) an understanding of diverse learners, 4) preparation in teaching in high-need schools, and 5) 21st century skills. Universities may address these five areas in a myriad of ways, but these areas are key components for any teacher education program that wants to transform its curricula.

Expertise in subject matter is the content that pre-service teachers must know and will be expected to teach if they are to effect change in student achievement, particularly in low-performing schools. Two specific areas in which students in America fall behind students in other countries are math and science. According to the DOE's 4th Annual Report on Teacher Quality (2005), teacher education programs need to focus on mastery of subject matter to ensure that new teachers will be effective in teaching those subjects in the classroom.

At Millikin, science and particularly math also are the two areas in which many pre-service teachers express the most trepidation and demonstrate the weakest academic skills. The university requires that all students take at least two math classes —algebra and quantitative reasoning. The School of Education also requires a course on math methods for elementary teachers. Similarly, the general studies requirement is three science courses: one in biological science, one in physical science, and one elective. To guarantee mastery of subject matter, Millikin's teacher education program further requires that students complete a concentration in an area such as science (biology, chemistry), social sciences (which include political science, history, economics, sociology, and psychology), math, language arts (which encompass English and communications), Spanish, or another content area of their choosing. It takes 15 credit hours to earn a concentration in a content area.

Millikin's School of Education advisors often encourage pre-service elementary teachers to complete a middle school endorsement. The state of Illinois currently requires at least 18 credit hours (of which six of those hours must be 300-level courses or above) in one content area plus two middle school theory and practice courses. Students gain a level of expertise in a content area specialty from taking this body of classes throughout their four years in the program.

Although subject matter expertise is vitally important, pre-service teachers need much more than this to be successful in high-need schools. Nelson (2004) cites one of the missing links in the teacher preparation experience as a lack of understanding of the larger context of education. Millikin starts potential teacher candidates with an educational foundations course in the freshman year. This course delves into the historical, social, political, and philosophical basis for the model of teaching and learning prevalent in our educational institutions today. It is this understanding that Nelson says can better prepare teachers for teaching in a complex environment. However, one cannot be inculcated with this knowledge during the freshman year only. It must be infused throughout the program in a way that builds upon the understandings developed in the freshman year. Millikin's School of Education addresses this by providing field experiences throughout the four years so that teacher candidates not only read about these complex learning environments, but also experience them through various internships.

Berry (2008) cites nationally board-certified teachers in Oklahoma who recommend that every teacher education program require pre-service teachers to complete at least one high-quality field experience in a high-need school. Nelson (2004) agrees with this viewpoint. It is imperative that pre-service teachers match theory and practice through real classroom experience. The old model of micro-teaching with peers is antiquated and ineffective for today's teacher candidates. Without actual classroom experience, new teachers will experience culture shock during their first years of teaching. Nelson views theory and practice as reciprocal and adds that pre-service teachers must be given opportunities to examine the ethical and moral aspects of teaching as well.

Millikin University has worked to create a premier program that prepares teachers for success in high-need schools, beginning in the freshman year when prospective teacher candidates enroll in the Educational Foundations course and have their first internship. In the foundations course, students learn educational theory and visit six to seven area schools that serve a range of students from pre-school through high school. The demographics in these schools vary as well, providing teacher candidates with a snapshot of different types of classrooms and schools. In their freshman internship, teacher candidates must complete 30 hours in a local school during the semester. This internship is not a structured field experience, and supervision is minimal. Millikin does require that all students in the Teacher Education program complete at least one structured, supervised internship in a high-need school. In actuality, due to the nature of the local school district partnering with Millikin, most of our pre-service teachers complete two or three structured field experiences in inner city high-need schools.

The first opportunity Millikin's School of Education offers for a structured and supervised field experience in a high-needs school occurs in the teacher candidate's second year through an experience called, "Sophomore Block." In the

first semester of the sophomore year, teacher candidates take a core of classes, which includes: General Elementary Methods and Assessment, Language Arts Methods, and Math Methods. During this semester, candidates take other classes that are not part of the core, including: Human Development, Children's Literature, and Technology for Teachers. Within the three core courses, the professors use four weeks of scheduled class meetings to supervise the teacher candidates in a K-6 placement within a local school. During this four-week internship, teacher candidates must collaborate with their cooperating teacher to plan lessons and practice classroom management. The faculty schedule times to observe and evaluate the teacher candidate on teaching ability, classroom management, professionalism, and relationships with students in the classroom, among other areas.

Within Decatur School District 61, about 65% of the total student population is labeled low-income (Decatur School District 61, Illinois District Report Card 2007). This means that the majority of Decatur schools are considered high-need schools. Placement of teacher candidates in these schools is a key aspect of Millikin's Teacher Education program because it provides first-hand experience with the realities of inner city schools. In fall 2008, teacher candidates interned in a high-need elementary school where they demonstrated their ability to work with diverse student populations (see Figure 1), master content germane to the elementary curriculum (see Fig. 2), and engage learners with a variety of teaching strategies (see Fig. 3). This partnership has proved to be a strong one, as many of Millikin's teacher education graduates have acquired jobs teaching in Decatur Public Schools. During the first few years in the classroom, their familiarity with the challenges faced by teachers in high-need schools increases the likelihood that they will succeed and remain in the profession.

The second opportunity for Millikin's teacher candidates to gain experience in a high-need school is during the second semester of the junior year in a similar program called, "Junior Block." Again, a core block of three courses is taught (Social Studies Methods, Science Methods, and Reading Methods) along side non-block education classes such as Creating Communities of Learners, Exceptional Child, Music Methods, Art Methods, and P.E. Methods. The same four-week format provides pre-service teachers time to hone the teaching skills they began to develop during the sophomore block field experience.

The final opportunity teacher candidates have to intern in a high-need schools is for student teaching. Teacher candidates must complete 30 hours in their assigned cooperating teacher's classroom in the semester before they begin their actual student teaching placement. This allows the teacher candidate to become familiar with the students, the classroom teacher, the curriculum, and the building culture. The semester before student teaching also is an important one because the teacher candidate gets to know the students and can work with the cooperating teacher to plan effective instruction that will best meet the students' needs. Then, when student teaching starts the last semester of the education program, the candidate enters the classroom at an advantage —already knowing the students and the cooperating teacher, already having a unit of instruction planned that differentiates instruction and considers the needs and interests of the students, and already familiar with the class, building culture, and resources available.

Lenski, Crumpler, Stallworth, & Crawford (2005) found that efforts to prepare pre-service teachers for the cultural complexity of future classrooms are inadequate. They believe that pre-service teachers need to know how to provide children with culturally relevant curriculum and instruction. They advocate using observational tools that are similar to the ones that ethnographers use to learn about new cultures. Learning to differentiate curriculum is another way to incorporate the knowledge students bring to the classroom (Nelson, 2004). Differentiation acknowledges student diversity in planning and implementing of instruction. As a pre-requisite, teachers must know and understand the student populations in their classrooms and how to provide instruction that will benefit them based on their individual needs.

Millikin's teacher candidates learn to create lessons that differentiate instruction for special learning needs, gifted and talented, students with Attention Deficit Disorder, English Language Learners, and/or cultural, gender, and religious diversity, as deemed relevant to the lesson topic. Part of the process for teacher candidates is to analyze their lessons and think about the types of students who might need lesson modifications and why differentiation is necessary for these students to be successful in meeting content area standards. In this way, the pre-service teachers are reflecting on their work and how it can affect students, rather than just blindly writing lesson plans.

The Secretary's 4th Annual Report on Teacher Quality (2005) contends that teachers need to develop expertise to select the best instructional methods and strategies for a given context through practice in providing tailored instruction to specific learning needs of individual students. The report cites the Strategic Instruction Model from the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning as developing two types of interventions for teachers to use with students in differentiating instruction: teacher-focused interventions and student-focused interventions. Teacher-focused interventions involve what the report calls a "learner friendly" way of organizing and presenting content such that students can learn and remember it. Student-focused interventions provide children with the strategies they need to acquire new information to memorize material, solve problems, and express themselves effectively in writing and on tests. Cox (2008) says that the goal of differentiated instruction is to maximize the capacity of each learner by teaching in ways that help all learners to bridge gaps in understanding and skill and help each learner to grow as much and as quickly as he or she is able.

Just as subject matter expertise, understanding the needs of diverse learners, and quality field experiences are important in preparing teachers for success in high-need schools, pre-service teachers also must be well-versed in what McPherson, Wang, Hsu, and Tsuei (2007) call "new literacies" in teacher education. The Secretary's 4th Annual Report on Teacher Quality (2005) discusses the impact that technology is having on education and the need for today's teachers to receive training to use technology to enrich learning experiences. Literacy is defined as the range of knowledge and skills for reading, writing, communicating, and critical thinking (McPherson et al, 2007). However, new literacy is defined as the use of the additional set of basic skills essential for surviving in a digital networking environment (McPherson et. al., 2007). This is one area in which the teacher education program at Millikin University can improve.

Currently, pre-service teachers leave our program with one credit hour of coursework in technology. Although some education instructors integrate technology within other courses they teach, it is not a required component of any course except the one-credit course, Technology for Teachers. Technology must be expanded to permeate across the entire program in a more purposeful way. McPherson, Wang, Hsu, and Tsuei (2007) believe that teacher education has a responsibility to integrate these new literacies effectively into the curriculum to better prepare our future teachers. The use of web-based technologies has boomed in recent years with the infiltration of blogs, wikis, online collaborations, and virtual environments. However, few teachers are entering classrooms equipped to incorporate these technologies into their teaching arsenal. In the Secretary's 4th Annual Report on Teacher Quality (2005), a national technology plan is recommended to: 1) improve the preparation of new teachers in the use of technology; 2) ensure that every teacher has the opportunity to take online learning courses; 3) improve the quality and consistency of teacher education through measurement, accountability, and increased technology resources; and 4) ensure that every teacher knows how to use data to personalize instruction. To do all of these things, the report says that a university-wide commitment is necessary and that support must begin at the highest level and permeate throughout the institution, resulting in intra-university collaborations as well as external partnerships.

In conclusion, to transform teacher education curricula for high-need schools, teacher education faculty must stay abreast of the changes and challenges occurring in schools today. Moreover, faculties must engage in constant reflection and evaluation of their current program and strategize ways to enhance and improve curricula based on

solid data. Teacher education faculty should ask questions such as: How do we know we are preparing our teachers for success in high-need schools? What evidence do we have? How do we know where our teacher program needs improvement? What are we going to do about it? Not only do teacher education programs have the responsibility to prepare the next generation of teachers well, but there is also an inherent responsibility to the next generation of students who will be taught by those graduating from our teacher education programs.

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## Preparing Beginning Teachers to Be Teachers, *by Mary Selke*

**Author Bio**
Mary Selke is a Professor of Education and Associate Dean of the College of Education at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois. Her interest in professional mentoring, induction, and teacher retention dates from her master's work in the 1980s. This interest has continued to expand through Selke's involvement in projects of the Associated Colleges of Illinois' *Center for Success in High-Need Schools*. Selke's other research interests include the implications of teacher testing and cohort culture.

**Abstract**
Preparing teachers to be teacher leaders is no longer limited to the realm of professional responsibility; it has become a professional necessity, if not a professional mandate, for school administrators as well as for teacher preparation programs. This paper features a description of the grant-funded development, implementation, and data analysis of a semester-long pilot seminar series during fall of the 2007-2008 academic year at East Carolina University. The seminar series was constructed with the dual goals of developing a dispositional awareness of leadership capacity and increasing the knowledge and skills needed to view work in schools from a leadership perspective right from the beginning. Topics addressed include: program development and implementation, MSA candidate involvement in the planning and delivery of the seminars, seminar design, and two data sources. Results indicated that pre-service teachers who are prepared in a manner that consciously and proactively establishes a foundation for the dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary for teacher leadership are more likely to reach higher levels of leadership-related efficacy during the beginning phases of their careers.

### Preparing Teacher Leaders

Preparing teachers to be teacher leaders is no longer limited to the realm of professional responsibility. It has become a professional necessity for school administrators, as well as for teacher preparation programs. In one state it has already become a professional mandate. North Carolina's newly revised Professional Teaching Standards (NCPTS, 2007) are unique among the teaching standards of the 50 states in that the first standard clearly specifies that "teachers demonstrate leadership." Five sub-standards further delineate how this is to play out in practice. Teachers: 1) lead in their classrooms, 2) demonstrate leadership in the school, 3) lead the teaching profession, 4) advocate for schools and students, and 5) demonstrate high ethical standards. Harris and Muijs (2003) emphasize that the intended outcome of teacher leadership is improved student learning and increased professional collaboration.

New conceptualizations of teacher leadership must be supported by corresponding redefinitions of leadership roles for school administrators (Foster, 2005; Rutherford, 2006; Sato, 2005) as traditional top-down models of leadership are replaced by systems in which authority is distributed within professional learning communities (Collay, 2006; Harris, 2005; Silins & Mulford, 2004). North Carolina's recently implemented School Executive Standards (NCDPI, 2008) accomplish this by calling for a new vision of school leadership whereby "the successful work of the new executive will only be realized in the creation of a culture in which leadership is distributed and encouraged with teachers…" School Executive Standards two and four strive to put vision into action by requiring that school administrators create environments that emphasize distributive leadership and teacher empowerment enabling teachers to assume leadership and decision-making roles within the school. This largely untapped potential of teachers is gaining attention, as those who prepare and mentor them are challenged to provide professional opportunities to develop teacher leadership skills (Howey, 1999; Nelson, 2004).

In response to this challenge, education professionals are beginning to include teacher leader components in teacher preparation programs (Turnbull, 2005). To be successful it is critical that professionals who prepare teachers, "revisit

assumptions about how teachers lead" (Collay, 2006, p. 134) and it is equally important to prepare teachers for the role of teacher leader beginning with their pre-service and induction years.

Will pre-service teachers who are prepared in a manner that consciously and proactively establishes a foundation for the dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary for teacher leadership be more likely to reach higher levels of leadership-related efficacy during the beginning phases of their careers? This article provides action research-based answers to this question by profiling the development, implementation, and data analysis of a semester-long pilot program designed to establish a foundation for the dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary for teacher leadership among pre-service candidates in the semester prior to student teaching.

Definitions of teacher leadership continue to evolve; for purposes of this article the working definition of teacher leadership is drawn from the Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) who define it as, "teachers who are leaders who lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved practice" (p. 5).

**Planning and Recruitment**
Planning for a New Teacher Leadership Development Academy at East Carolina University (ECU) began in Spring 2007, on receipt of leadership initiative grant funding. The director of teacher education at ECU asked program directors of all initial teacher Preparation programs to provide names of candidates scheduled to be in the second semester of their clinical internship (student teaching) semester in Spring, 2008, who were perceived by faculty members in their respective departments to exhibit potential for leadership. By September, 85 candidates had been identified. Candidates were initially notified of their nomination to participate in the New Teacher Leadership seminar series by their nominating department chairs with follow-up invitations from the pilot project coordinator. By the end of the first week in October, 29 candidates had accepted the invitation to participate in the pilot phase of the New Teacher Leadership Development Academy. Candidates from the following program areas elected to participate: Art Education (1), Early Childhood Education (2), Elementary Education (20), Family and Consumer Science Education (1), Foreign Language Education (1), Health Education (1), and Special Education (3). Master's in School Administration (MSA) Candidate.

**Involvement in Planning and Delivery**
MSA candidates in the program coordinator's section of a required master's level supervision course were involved in the planning and delivery of the seminar series. Graduate student participation in the planning phase was integrated into the course curriculum as a means to gain first-hand working knowledge of the new NC Professional Teaching Standards and of the needs of beginning teachers.

The assessment rubric for the course was designed to make out-of-class participation in the delivery of the seminars optional; an alternate project was provided for graduate students who did not wish to participate in a project outside of class contact hours. However, all graduate students in the course opted for direct involvement in preliminary out-of-class preparation for the seminars (email communication with participants, presentation material preparation) and agreed to be present at two or more of the four evening seminars to gain experience in mentoring processes relating to beginning teachers. Working with the pre-service candidates during the seminars provided many of the MSA students, most of whom were classroom teachers in May of 2007, with their first experience leading a large group of adults.

**Seminar Design**
Each of the four seminars contained six components:

1) presentation of related content and skills,
2) simulation, role-play, hands-on exploration or application,
3) individual and small group coaching,
4) self-assessment,
5) reflection and session evaluation, and
6) goal-setting.

The purpose of the seminar series was fourfold; each seminar concentrated on one of these four purposes. Dispositions, knowledge, and skills were also emphasized. Dispositions were addressed first and throughout the series as a result of the research base in teacher leadership and the prevalent belief among MSA candidates that the biggest challenge to be faced was convincing a group of candidates approaching student teaching that "teacher leader" could and should be part of their professional identities at this point in their careers. Seminar purposes, titles, and focal points were:

1. Enable participants to view themselves as teacher leaders despite pre-service beginning teacher status – "Becoming A Teacher Leader", October 10th. [Dispositions]
2. Facilitate identification of individual leadership styles with related strengths and areas of challenge – "Identifying/Developing Leadership Styles", November 7th. [Knowledge]
3. Provide opportunities to explore leadership roles through role plays, simulations, and reflections – "Leading with Parents and Colleagues", November 14th. [Skills]
4. Develop entry-level knowledge of formal leadership structures and school improvement plans – "Leading in Schools and School Districts", December 5th. [Dispositions, Knowledge, Skills]

**Example: The First Seminar – Dispositions for Teacher Leadership** The first of four seminars, "Becoming a Teacher Leader," was held October 10, 2007. The evening began with a welcome by one of the MSA candidates, followed by self-introductions, where participants planned to student teach, and who came to mind when they imagined a leader. Responses ranged from family members to professors and clinical teachers, and also included people from politics, sports, or the arts.

Debriefing the "who is a leader" introduction was followed by a quick overview of the seminar series, the purposes of the New Teacher Leadership Development Academy, and the project direc5tor's leadership quote of the evening. Pre-service teachers then participated in a MSA candidate-designed ice-breaker, "Step Forward for Leadership," loosely borrowing its rules for play from the childhood game, "Captain, May I" (see Appendix A). This activity was based on research by Dana and Yendel-Hoppy (2005) that found teachers' most powerful underlying leadership identities are rooted in childhood experiences. It was collaboratively designed by the MSA candidates to help pre-service candidates see that their experiences throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood had already begun to prepare them for leadership.

After debriefing the ice-breaker, the MSA candidates led the group in identifying and exploring four leadership styles that resulted in summarizing leadership characteristics of the four styles on 3-M posters. Following a refreshment break, participants completed human subjects release forms, giving permission to use data or quotes generated during the seminar series for research purposes. They then responded to an MSA candidate-designed survey to explore initial self-perceptions of their comfort and competence enacting skills associated with teacher leadership according to the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards (see Appendix B).

For the final activity, participants met with MSA candidates in grade level-alike groups. Conversations in the groups addressed two main questions:

1) What are your concerns as you approach the student teaching phase of your preparation program?
2) What are multiple ways in which you can address these concerns by viewing them through a lens of teacher leadership? Participants summarized their insights and responded to a prompt asking them to evaluate the first seminar on color-coded post-it notes, with which they decorated the doorframe upon leaving the room, and which the planning team collated and word-processed to assist collaborators in evaluating the first seminar and planning for the remaining three seminars.

Narrative responses from participant evaluations of the October 10 session indicated unanimous support for the opportunity to work with administrators-in-training recently in the classroom, willing to share expertise and provide non-supervisory advice, and be in positions where they will very likely have input into teacher hiring decisions in the next couple years. Beginning teachers expressed pleased surprise at discovering their potential for leadership. They also indicated that they wanted concrete examples of how to implement leadership in their teaching roles, especially when working with parents, dealing with classroom discipline, and differentiating instruction for bilingual students or students with special needs.

**Methodology and Instruments**
Data Sources There were three data sources for participants in the pilot program: 1) a standard descriptor-based survey assessment designed by the MSA candidates to assess self-perceived efficacy of beginning teachers across all five sub-standards of the first NCPTS, 2) individual growth plans developed by pre-service candidates with the mentoring assistance of MSA candidates, designed to assess descriptor-based items most frequently targeted for growth-related goals across all five sub-standards of the first NCPTS, and 3) student teaching assessment data that permitted a comparison of classroom leadership-related performance of student teachers who participated in the seminar (quasi-experimental subject sample) with the performance of student teachers who had been identified by their department faculties as possessing leadership potential but elected not to participate in the New Teacher Leadership Development Academy (control group sample). For purposes of this article, survey and growth plan data will be emphasized to assist in exploring needs of pre-service teacher and aid in the potential design and implementation of similar programs in other settings.

**Standard Descriptor-Based Survey Instruments**
This instrument was drafted by an MSA and was subsequently edited in class and by the program coordinator. The intent of the instrument was to facilitate self-assessment of beginning teacher candidates' combined competence and confidence regarding 21 descriptors drawn from the descriptors under each of the five sub-standards included in Standard #1, Teachers Demonstrate Leadership, of the NCPTS. MSA candidates talked through each of the descriptors prior to deciding how to include them in the survey. Some descriptors were used verbatim and one was added - #13 on the survey - "working with diversity (cultural, disabilities, etc.) in your classroom"- because MSA students felt strongly that this was a crucial aspect of the first sub-standard, "teachers lead in their classrooms." Other descriptors were interpreted and reworded, in keeping with the focus on identifying competence and confidence in regard to a specific set of standards-based skills. For example, one of the descriptors in the standards was "empower students." MSA candidates felt this was too vague to accurately self-assess. They replaced it with their interpretation of what this meant in terms of classroom leadership: "helping your students develop confidence, academically and socially". In like manner, MSA candidates interpreted the descriptor regarding a safe and orderly school environment, for classroom application, as "implementing classroom management and disciplinary skills". A five-point scale was chosen as a simple means to complete the survey, with potential scores ranging from zero (not competent and not confident) to four (competent and confident).

The same survey instrument was administered three times: halfway through the first seminar, toward the conclusion of the last seminar, and in May, after the completion of student teaching. Differential statistics were run to analyze

individual ratings and by-descriptor means, looking for changes, if any, in the self-perceived efficacy levels of the participants between the three administrations of the survey. (See Appendix B for a copy of the survey.) All participants were assigned a numerical code on the night of the first seminar so that surveys and all other assessment data would not need to be identified by candidate name, maintaining confidentiality, but could be easily tracked for purposes of data entry and follow-up on the last of the three survey administrations.

**Individual Growth Plans**
On the last evening of the seminar series, pre-service candidates completed a matrix that involved choosing up to five of what they thought to be the most important of the 21 descriptors drawn from the survey instrument and provided on a single-page numbered list. Instructions directed them to:

1) list the number of the descriptor chosen,
2) describe your goal for addressing that descriptor during student teaching, and
3) describe your goal for addressing that descriptor during your first year of teaching.

Copies were mailed to participants during the week after the series, and again at the end of student teaching (in the same envelope as the third and final administration of the survey). Growth plans were analyzed to ascertain which of the descriptors were chosen most frequently. Subsequent analysis will explore correlations between descriptors selected, survey results on any of the three administrations, and ratings on student teaching/clinical semester portfolio rubrics.

**Results**
*Standard Descriptor-Based Survey Instrument*
Twenty-eight participants completed the survey on the first night of the seminar series and 20 were present and completed a second administration of the survey at the final seminar (held within a week of the start of final examinations). Twelve of the 20 candidates present at the final seminar returned surveys at the completion of the student teaching semester as the result of an initial mailing the first week in May, 2008, and a follow-up mailing at the end of May. One candidate did not student teach in the Spring, 2008, semester and this subject's data were limited to the first two survey administrations, thus a 63.2% return rate.

Candidates indicated that they felt increasingly competent and confident in five areas across the academic year: helping students develop, using collaborative skills, contributing to a positive working environment, upholding ethical and moral principles, and upholding the Code of Ethics and Standards for the Professional Conduct of Educators. Additional areas of strength cited by the time of the follow-up survey in May, 2008, as well as the increase in overall mean scores for the highest-rated items across the academic year, are noted in Table One.

Results of the initial administration of the survey instrument, completed during the session on October 10, 2007, indicated that beginning teachers felt least prepared to plan school-wide professional development and use a variety of data assessments throughout the year. By the last seminar on December 5, 2007, they still expressed concerns about planning for school-wide professional development, but concerns regarding assessment had been replaced by concerns about planning for their own professional development. When they completed student teaching in May, self-assessments of participants who returned follow-up surveys had again changed, this time to reflect the greatest concern about promoting and improving the teaching profession, contributing to a positive working environment, and providing input affecting student learning as they anticipated beginning their first positions as certified teachers.
It should be noted that mean ratings on the lowest scored items in October were 2.5 and 2.7; in December both of the lowest scored items averaged 2.5. By May the lowest mean scores had risen to 3.0 and 3.2, whereas the mean of all scored item means was a 3.2 for the October and December administrations of the survey. Areas of concern were

identified in all three administrations and changed as the participants progressed through the year, but by May participants felt competent, if not yet confident, on all teacher leadership descriptors under NCPTS #1.

The increase in self-assessment survey scores across the academic year is further verified in viewing the differentials for individual participants and comparing/contrasting mean scores for all rated descriptors on the October, December, and May administrations of the survey.

*Individual Growth Plans*

Twenty participants were present on the last night of the seminar series and completed standard descriptor-based growth plans. Results are presented in Table 3. All of the descriptors were chosen as the basis for goal-setting by at least one of the candidates with two exceptions: participating in decision-making structures and processes (descriptor 16) and upholding the Code of Ethics and Standards for the Professional Conduct of Educators (descriptor 21). When we had worked with these two standards in small groups, candidates indicated that they did not yet feel qualified to engage in making decisions for a school when they were so new to their positions. This would explain why they did not set goals in this area. At the other end of the competence-confidence spectrum, candidates rated their confidence and competence very highly when completing all three administrations of the standard descriptor-based survey instrument. It is understandable that they would not set growth-related goals pertinent to this descriptor if they already felt prepared and confident in regard to this descriptor.

The most frequently cited descriptor for growth-related goals is not surprising; teachers going into their first teaching positions usually experience some trepidation in regard to classroom management and discipline. The remainder of the most frequently cited descriptors are not typical of the survival mentality that often accompanies the first year or two of teaching. For example, Kimpston (1987) describes three stages of teacher development. The first is the self-adequacy stage, where beginning teachers focus on themselves and on survival, areas such as performing well when supervisors are present, evaluations, acceptance, and respect from students and colleagues. The second is the teaching tasks stage, where induction-level teachers focus on their classes as groups, on working toward mastery of issues related to the teaching environment and on related responsibilities such as student discipline and enriching classroom schedule/materials/methodology.

The third is the teaching impact stage, where experienced teachers focus on all individual students within groups as a whole and on doing whatever it takes to increase student learning and well-being. Their related developmental tasks emphasize diagnosis, motivation, intellectual/emotional student development, and professional contributions to the school and the profession in addition to polishing personal classroom performance.

Participants set growth-related goals for the student teaching semester and the initial year of teaching that involve collaborating outside of the classroom, thinking about the working environment of the school as a whole, and routinely focusing on the learning/academic and social needs of individual students, rather than thinking of students as "the class." These goals pertain to developmental tasks associated with the third phase of teacher development. This is not typical of aspiring student teachers who usually have concerns related to the first phase of development. It is not even typical of beginning teachers, based on research into the phases of teacher development (Fuller & Brown, 1975; Kimpston, 1987; Marso & Pigge, 1994; Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 1999). However, it was typical of this sample to include growth-related goals involving developmental tasks associated with Kimpston's second and third phases of teacher development.

## Conclusions

The research question driving this study asked if pre-service teachers who are prepared in a manner that consciously and proactively establishes a foundation for the dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary for teacher leadership would be more likely to reach higher levels of leadership-related efficacy during the beginning phases of their careers.

Data from the survey that analyzed participant self-assessed levels of efficacy, operationally defined as competence and confidence, found that candidates did reach increasingly higher levels of efficacy from October to May of their final academic year. Concerns progressed from professional development and assessment data to contributing to a positive working environment and promoting or improving the profession.

Mean scores on the lowest-rated descriptors at the end of the year had risen to the level of mean scores across all items, lowest to highest, from the first two administrations of the survey. By the end of the year, all felt competent and most felt confident on all descriptors. Analysis of the mean differentials across all three administrations of the survey supported this observation.

As a caution, it needs to be noted that the greatest amount of growth occurred between the second and third administration of the survey, the latter of which assessed efficacy at the end of the semester. It is possible that the student teaching experience was a significant, if not the sole, determining variable for growth in efficacy as the participants matured as teachers. Although all but one candidate (whose mean rating did not change) showed improved efficacy scores across the academic year, without a control group it is not possible to state that preparation in teacher leadership was the determining variable for growth based solely on this data set.

Data from the individual growth plans indicate that all participants selected NCPTS #1 descriptor-based goals that focused on developmental tasks more in keeping with those of teachers already in the induction or post-induction phases of their teaching careers. This is impressive but again, without a control group, this could be a function of other variables, such as the quality of their teacher preparation program.

However, to respond to this aspect of the research question, all participating candidates in the data sets did reach high levels of efficacy by the conclusion of their student teaching experiences, as determined by results of the three administrations of the standard descriptor-based survey instrument and the level of teacher developmental phases reflected in the goals targeted on participant individual growth plans.

**Recommendations**
In light of the results from this study, despite minor limitations inherent in the data sets as previously noted, next steps would involve expanding the scope of this program, perhaps to an entire student teaching cohort of candidates, and the initiation of similar programs on other campuses or professional settings and in other states. It would be interesting to work with variables concerning self-selection v. required participation, the specific components included in the seminar series, and seminar content delivery systems such as integrating leadership preparation into existing programmatic areas if seminars are not possible or practical for large numbers of candidates.

Regardless of the logistics through which it is accomplished, the kinds of experiences designed to foster the awakening of teacher leadership dispositions, knowledge, and skills in pre-service candidates should be made available to a greater number if not all candidates. It would also be ideal to continue to develop models that involve pre-service candidates and career school administrators in delivering these experiences, a responsibility that will be inescapable considering the need to induct increasing numbers of new teachers into the national workforce and to provide a working knowledge of the teacher and administrator standards related to teacher leadership.

Education professionals are being challenged to "analyze patterns of professional socialization that support or hinder leadership, and model transformative pedagogy in educational leadership programs" (Collay, 2006, p. 134). Innovations in teacher leadership roles will require innovations in pre-service and in-service professional development

opportunities for teachers and school administrators, especially those charged with providing leadership in high need rural and urban schools.

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**Appendix A**
STEP FORWARD FOR LEADERSHIP Constructed by members of the Fall, 2007, LEED 6823 Class at ECU Step forward if…

…you have ever held a job, volunteer or paid.

…you have ever had a lemonade stand.

…you have ever worked with a reading buddy in elementary school.

…you ever saved a life.

…you ever offered good advice.

…you have served as a volunteer.

…you have ever been in charge of younger relatives.

…you have ever been a lifeguard.

…you have ever been captain of a team.

…you have ever given an oral presentation.

…you have ever dumped your ex-boyfriend/girlfriend.

…you have ever been a tutor/mentor.

…you have ever persuaded someone to give you money.

…you have ever persuaded someone to do something they really didn't want to do.

…you ever earned a scholarship.

…you have ever been a participant in a group project.

…you ever assisted someone in solving a resolution to a problem.

…you are a member of a club or Greek organization.

…you have ever sung in public.

…you have ever started a fashion trend.

…you have ever been a designated driver.

…you have ever been a waiter/waitress or worked at a fast food restaurant.

…you have ever had to stand up for yourself.

…you ever helped two friends or a group of friends work through a serious disagreement.

…you have ever been section leader in a band, choral group, or orchestra.

…you ever coached a sports team.

…you ever coached drama or members of a speech/forensics team.

…you ever been elected to office in a high school or college club.

…you have a love for children.

NOW: STEP FORWARD IF YOU ARE A TEACHER LEADER!

# Transforming Teacher Education Through Parent Involvement in High-Need Schools, *by Diana Brannon*

**Author Bio**

 Dr. Diana Brannon was a classroom teacher for 11 years before joining the faculty of Elmhurst as assistant professor of education. She is a nationally board certified teacher. Her research focuses on parent involvement and teacher education.

**Abstract**

Parent involvement is essential to a teacher's success. However, most pre-service teachers have very limited interactions with parents prior to teaching. The Connecting Home and School Family Night Literacy Project at Elmhurst College was designed to provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to work with low income parents and English Language Learners at a high-need school and to provide parents with fun and easy literacy activities they could do with their children at home. The program had a positive impact on pre-service teachers, parents, teachers, students, and the community. Data from interviews with pre-service teachers involved in this study support the need for colleges to provide activities with teachers, students, and families so that new teachers are prepared to meet the needs of all of their students.

**Body**

The need for parent involvement has become an important part of school reform. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) recognizes the need for consistent parent involvement, defining it as regular, two-way, and meaningful communication between parents and schools to ensure that parents are full partners in their children's educational experiences. It requires that:

Parents play an integral role in assisting with their children's learning;
Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their children's school;
Parents are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to      assist in the education of their children.

In their study, A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement, Henderson and Mapp (2002) synthesized the research on parent involvement, finding that:

• Students whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to earn higher grades, have better school attendance, and graduate more than students whose parents are not involved.
• Schools that encourage parent outreach report 40% higher test scores than schools with little outreach to parents.
• Programs designed to encourage parent involvement at home encourage student achievement.

Parent involvement is not only important for children and their families, but essential to a teacher's success. Unfortunately, pre-service teachers experience too few interactions with parents before they graduate. Many students graduate from education programs having interacted with parents only at school parties and one or two school-wide events, such as open house or parent/teacher conferences. These opportunities for parent interactions usually are conducted by the classroom teacher, while the pre-service teacher observes or helps out with administrative tasks. Consequently, many new teachers feel intimidated or insecure about speaking with parents of their students.

While these limited interactions provide some benefit for pre-service teachers, they fail to address the depth of interaction with parents that pre-service teachers need. Moreover, very few student teachers interact with parents from high-need schools or schools that include large populations of parents of English Language Learners (ELLs). One student explained what many pre-service teachers feel: "I haven't had any experience with working with parents of ELL or high-need students. I feel like that is definitely something I could use some experience in. There will undoubtedly come many times in my teaching career that I will need to work with the parents of ELL or high-need students, and right now I feel unprepared." Although it is commonly acknowledged that it is essential to prepare pre-service teachers to be culturally responsive, the task remains a challenge (Lenski, Crumpler, Stallworth,& Crawford, 2005).

Even though pre-service teachers understand the importance of parental involvement in their students' education, they often lack the experience or confidence to involve parents when they begin their formal teaching careers. The thought of having to deal with parents on top of the challenges posed by a new curriculum, students, administration, and colleagues can be overwhelming for new teachers if they have not had experience learning how to enlist parents to be vital partners in their children's education. As one pre-service teacher explained: "I feel that the more I learn, the more confident I will feel working with parents. There is a part of me that is a bit fearful to work with parents. I want my parents to be as involved as they can in their child's education. In order for that to happen, I will need to feel comfortable sharing my ideas."

Even though parent involvement in school is key to student success, many parents do not take advantage of the opportunity to work with their children on academics outside of school. A survey conducted by The Parent Institute (2008) found four major barriers to parent involvement: 1) lack of time; 2) lack of training; 3) lack of understanding; and 4) lack of English proficiency.

Many parents have a desire to get more involved in school but don't know how or don't have an opportunity. When asked why they attended the family reading night, parents involved in the current study explained that they desired their child's school to be an institution of learning not only for their children, but for themselves, as their comments below indicate:

- "It is important family bonding time and we can learn better and have a good time."
- "I want to get information for better developing my child's reading skill."
- "Because I'd like to learn about how to better help my children with their reading."
- "Because it is very fun and we like to interact with other families and people we know."
- "To spend time, learn and play with my son and the other families. To learn how to read better with my child and so that he can gain more knowledge about reading."
- "Because it is interesting to learn new ways to help my children to have more enjoyable reading moments."

**Program**

The Connecting Home and School Family Night Literacy Project conducted by Elmhurst College was designed to provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to work with low income and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) families of kindergarten and first grade students. The opportunities were designed to help pre-service teachers understand the importance of parent involvement, interact with families to become comfortable working with high-need populations, and gain experience in planning and implementing activities that help parents learn how to assist their children in learning at home.

These tasks were accomplished through four monthly family nights that pre-service teachers conducted with parents at their children's school. The family nights gave pre-service teachers experience in working with families in diverse settings. These types of experiences are essential to teacher education programs today, especially because beginning teachers are more likely than ever before to teach students who come from backgrounds that differ from their own (Ross & Smith, 1992). A grant from the Associated Colleges of Illinois made this program possible.

Many pre-service teachers are inexperienced in working with parents and families. Many parents are not sure how to enhance their child's learning at home and often do not have the materials to do so. The Connecting Home and School Family Night Literacy Project addressed both these issues. The family nights provided pre-service teachers with opportunities to work with families from a high-need school. Each family night lasted for 1 ½ hours. After sharing dinner and listening to a bilingual PowerPoint presentation on a reading skill featured that evening, pre-service teachers conducted activities that taught parents about a literacy related topic.

Junior and senior Elmhurst students completing an Elementary Education degree facilitated the parental involvement meetings. Elmhurst students shared what they were learning, served the community, and gained valuable hands-on experience working with low income and ELL children and their families, enabling all parties to gain fuller appreciation of the benefits of parent involvement. Pre-service teachers, interpreters, and parents interacted with the children applying what was learned. At the conclusion of each event, children and parents received a book and an at-home activity packet in English or Spanish to help reinforce what was learned and encourage families to continue working together at home.

**Sample Parent Night**
After each parent night, pre-service teachers reflected on what they had learned, shared questions, and discussed ways in which the program could be improved to better meet the needs of the population being served. Researchers have found that field experiences in diverse settings that include reflection opportunities can help prepare students to teach in urban and diverse settings (Groulx, 2001).

**Results**
Parents were as uncertain about what to expect as the pre-service teachers when the evening began. As one pre-service teacher explained:

*At first the parents were shyer and didn't want to get involved, and then they would look over their child's shoulder and be like, 'Oh, no don't do that.' They'll speak in Spanish, which is fine because you know that they are communicating, but then they started sitting next to their kids, and then they started actually helping their kids. So, I think they were uncomfortable at first or didn't know what to expect, same as we were.*
*However, as the evenings progressed, parents and preservice teachers began to relax and really enjoy the experience.*

At first I thought that they would be really hard to work with. My first impression was that they don't really spend a lot of time with their kids like they might be working a lot. So, I learned that they actually do care about their kids, and they do want to find out ways to get involved with their child's life because like when we were playing board games a lot of the parents were like, 'Oh where did you get this board game? I want to get it for my child at home.' I noticed that they want to get involved in their child's life, but they don't necessarily know how to.
The biggest thing that I learned with working with high-need families through the parent night was that I was always under the impression that high-need families are kind of the families who don't really get involved in their students' education. But, that's not true. I think that was the biggest misconception that I had before the parent nights. (Pre-Service Teacher Candidate Interviews, 2008) The pre-service participant survey results in Table 1 show that the program resulted in a significant increase in pre-service teacher comfort in working with high-need and ELL parents

and in their knowledge and confidence.

Table 1: Pre-service Teacher Feedback: Working with Parents and High-Need Families (5 point scale with 5 the highest)

| | Pre-project Response/Post-Proj. Response |
|---|---|
| I am comfortable with the thought of working with my students' parents. | 3.4/ 4.2 |
| I know how to teach any parents about their role in their child's education. | 2.6/4.0 |
| It is my responsibility to help all parents learn how to work with their children. | 4.7/4.6 |
| I understand issues related to working with high-need families. | 3.3/4.0 |
| I feel confident in my ability to communicate with my students' parents. | 3.3/3.9 |
| I feel confident in my ability to provide parents suggestions for working with their child. | 3.3/ 4.2 |
| I feel confident in my ability to involve parents in their child's education. | 3.3/ 4.1 |
| I am confident in my ability to work with ELL and high-need families. | 2.7/ 3.9 |
| I know easy ways to involve parents in their child's education. | 3.0/4.1 |
| I am comfortable with the idea of providing parent education and encouraging parent involvement when I begin teaching. | 4.1/4.4 |

The parent nights benefited everyone involved. In addition to providing pre-service teachers with wonderful opportunities to work with children and their families, the program provided the parents many ideas about nurturing their children's literacy skills. When asked on a survey, "Did you get some new ideas for working with your child tonight?", parents listed a wide variety of ways they benefited from the program:
• "I learned that I can use educational materials and still have fun and have great bonding moments with my children."
• "Now reading is more fun. My kids show a lot more interest when I read to them."
• "I'm going to do more hands-on activities since my daughter really enjoys this kind of learning."
•"All of the events have been special and we have enjoyed and taken advantage of each event. I especially appreciate that this program has motivated our family to be life-long readers" (Parent Survey, 2008).

**Conclusion**
When writing about and studying her experiences as a new teacher in a high-need school, Nelson (2004) found that teacher education programs are missing opportunities for pre-service teachers to: 1) understand the context of education on a larger scale including issues such as socio-cultural influences on teaching and learning, 2) work in a high-need school in a supervised experience, 3) reflect on their experiences in high-need schools to encourage a greater understanding of what they are encountering and experiencing, and 4) gain a deeper understanding of the role of the teacher. The Connecting Home and School Family Night Literacy Program was designed to address all of these issues.

The program had a positive impact on pre-service candidates, parents, teachers, students, and the community. The outcomes included:

• increases in pre-service teacher exposure to the economic, social, family, and ethnic issues of high-need schools,
• pre-service teacher opportunities to work with students and families at high-need schools,
• professional development for pre-service teachers at high-need schools,
• pre-service teacher involvement in encouraging literacy at school and home, and
• parent knowledge of literacy strategies to use with their young children to help address the achievement gap often seen in high-need schools, as well as children's literacy interactions with their parents or primary caregivers.

Parent involvement resulted in better prepared pre-service teachers, increased student achievement, empowered and

educated parents, and increased community involvement. It was truly a win/win situation as pre-service participants explained (Pre-Service Teacher Candidate Interview, 2008):

• I am just more confident about working in a high-need school now I would have to say.  Before I was never like turned off by it, I never thought like, 'Oh I'll never do that, I am not equipped or anything,' but I just feel a lot more confident. I can do it. I've had this experience and, you know, a language barrier shouldn't be a barrier or something that holds you back from communicating with families.  It shouldn't be something to hold you back from going to high-need schools.

• Before this, I felt like working with parents was a scary concept. But after working with the parents here, it doesn't seem as overwhelming, and it seems a lot more important and a lot less scary.

• In the beginning, I was very reluctant. I was kind of nervous.  I didn't know what to expect.  And then in the end, I felt like they were like every other parent. It didn't really faze me that they were high-need parents. They still wanted to be involved with their children. They were there and sitting down with them. I didn't see that barrier as much by the end, but in the beginning I guess I thought it was going to be very different. I didn't think it was that different. These statements support the findings of Garmon (2004) who found that intercultural experiences stimulate multicultural growth because they challenge students to examine their attitudes and beliefs. The pre-service teachers involved in this program agreed that opportunities to work with parents, high-need schools, and ELL families should be part of all education programs:

• I think it would be good to require that pre-service teachers work in different high-need schools. You could give them a list of schools in our area that are considered high-need.  They would have to choose one for some of their assignments.

• You could start a program where pre-service teachers could do after-school activities like we did with these students, like help them with their homework or just kind of have a mentoring program for them. I think if you gave people opportunities — not really set it up for them, but showed them they could go to these schools and do this with them — it would kind of open people's eyes like, 'Oh, maybe we do need to go there."

A majority of teacher education programs are filled with middle-class white students who lack the background experiences and knowledge to address the inequities in education that minority students often face. Teacher education programs must address these issues with knowledge, experience, and commitment (Ross & Smith, 1992). Although the work of Ross & Smith occurred more than fifteen years ago, the "face of the American teacher" has changed little (Toppo, 2003). Adding experiences with parents and high-need populations is essential to prepare teachers who are truly highly qualified.

As Nelson (2004, p. 475) declared, "New teachers are often unsuccessful in high-need schools because, despite the best intentions, teacher credential programs fail to prepare them for success in these complicated environments. While graduates of teacher credential programs may be categorized as 'highly qualified,' they still may not possess the kind of knowledge and experiences required for success in these more challenging schools." Therefore, teacher education programs need to provide pre-service candidates with a variety of exposures to teachers, students, and families in high-need schools to ensure that they are truly "highly qualified" and prepared to meet the needs of all of their students.

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## Designing Reflective Practice Teacher Support Groups: What Teacher Preparation Programs Can Do to Help Support and Retain New Teachers, *by Therese Wehman, Diana Brannon, Lisa Burke, Judy Fiene, Daniel Jares, and Mary Jo Young*

**Author Bios**

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**Abstract**
Supporting and retaining new teachers and developing the ability of new teachers to reflect critically on their practice are important issues in education today. Teacher education programs are beginning to play a more active role in meeting the needs of their new teacher alumni. This article describes monthly Reflective Practice Teacher Support (RPTSG) groups for new teachers as they begin their careers. Project goals and steps in designing a RPTSG are outlined; key issues and daily dilemmas of new teacher group participants are identified; and actual changes in classroom teaching practices and professional behaviors due to participation in the groups are shared.

**Introduction**
Research on teacher retention rates reveals that a high percentage of teachers (40%-50%) leave the profession in the first five years after they graduate and begin their teaching careers (Ingersoll and Smith, 2004). A conservative estimate of the financial cost of teacher turnover in the United States is $2.6 billion dollars annually. It costs a district approximately $12,000 to replace a teacher. This price includes the funding a district spends on recruitment, applicant interviewing time, human resources processing, and the training of new teachers (Alliance of Excellent Education,

2005). This high cost and rate of attrition is due, in part, to inadequate support for new teachers in the field. New teachers often feel isolated from their more experienced colleagues, lack quality mentors in their schools, struggle with the limited planning time that they are allotted, and are frustrated by the lack of resources needed to run a class smoothly (Center for Quality Teaching (CQT), 2006).

Research also shows that one of the most important skills needed for new teachers is the ability to reflect upon their instructional strategies, practices, and interactions with students and colleagues. Teacher reflection in a collaborative environment has been shown to enhance professional development and planning. Teachers gain insight from sharing their knowledge and experiences with one another. This process helps many teachers confirm and hone their practices. A supportive professional community develops in an environment of nonthreatening, non-evaluative communication. Increased teacher effectiveness and teacher efficacy results in improved instruction and learning (Brookfield, 1995; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Larrivee, 2005; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Supporting and retaining new teachers and developing new teachers' ability to reflect critically on their practice are clearly two important issues in the education field today. Teacher education programs in colleges and universities are beginning to play a more active role in meeting the needs of their new teacher alumni. This article describes an innovative project designed by faculty in the Teacher Education Department at Elmhurst College. Funded in part with innovation funds available through the Associated Colleges of Illinois' (ACI) U.S. Department of Education Teacher Quality Enhancement-Partnership grant, the project offers monthly support groups to new education graduates as they begin their teaching careers. In its first year, more than 60 new teacher alumni participated in our monthly groups, and project evaluation findings from this first year also are discussed. Data are reported about expectations of group participants, key issues, and daily dilemmas that group participants struggled with; major benefits gained from attending a monthly support group; and effects that participation in a RPTSG had in changing actual teaching practices and professional behaviors of group members.

**Project Goals and Design of Reflective Practice Teacher Support**
Launching the Reflective Practice Teacher Support Group Project (RPTSG) at Elmhurst College required that our education faculty outline specific project goals, including: 1) refine the critical reflection skills of early career educators so that they could better evaluate their teaching practices; 2) enhance the professional development of early career educators by providing information on current teaching practices and strategies; 3) support our teacher education program alumni in their work in schools by providing a safe place to discuss the daily challenges of their teaching practice in a non-evaluative setting; and 4) investigate the effects that participation in a RPTSG has on changes in teaching practices and professional relationships with colleagues of group members.

To meet these four project goals, we knew we needed to design a safe environment where our alumni would be known not only to the participants in the monthly groups, but also to the faculty members who acted as support group leaders. In designing our groups, we completed five specific steps, which are described below.

**Step One: Schedule Monthly Group Meeting Dates**
All of our RPTSG seminars met for two-hour sessions, one evening a month, across the fall and spring terms of our school year. The target start date was early September, and we ended our seminars in May. Reserving meeting space on campus for five groups required coordinating our efforts with our College Events Planning Office.

**Step Two: Recruit Education Faculty to Act as Teacher Support Group Facilitators**
One faculty member from each of our five certification programs in the Education Department was recruited to facilitate our monthly seminars. The program coordinators from our Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Special Education, Secondary Education, and the Graduate Program in Early Childhood Special Education acted as

group facilitators. This ensured that our alumni group participants would know the faculty group facilitator running their group. A small stipend was paid to each of the five faculty group facilitators.

**Step Three: Recruit Alumni Teacher Participants**
A flier was created to announce the launch of the Elmhurst RPTSG program. Elmhurst In mid-July, prior to the September start-up, teacher education program graduates from the past five years (approximately 1,000 individuals) received fliers via mail or e-mail. The fliers identified faculty group facilitators and provided their contact information. Our program graduates contacted the appropriate faculty group seminar facilitator to express their intention to participate in the monthly support groups. Group membership was determined by the certification program in which each alumnus participated while attending the college. The nine monthly seminars were approved for 18 hours of Continuing Professional Development Unit (CPDU) credit by the state of Illinois so all of our alumni teachers could receive professional development credit for attending the seminars.

**Step Four: Create Learning Communities in a Safe Supportive Environment**
All five groups established their own collective authority and created the discussion agenda for each seminar session. These agendas centered on the daily dilemmas that arose in the participants' teaching practices. Critical reflection skills were taught and practiced through the use of structured discussions focused around teaching practices. These discussions provided collaborative opportunities for critical inquiry. Our alumni teachers were encouraged to ask questions, identify issues, search out evidence, interpret and evaluate arguments, and come to conclusions about their teaching practices. The new teachers were able to engage in critical self-reflection in a non-evaluative environment that was not connected with their work settings. They were able to tap the collective knowledge of college faculty and their peers. Their face-to-face live interactions provided support not available through electronic media. Our alumni laughed and even cried together on occasion.

**Step Five: Create an Evaluation Tool for the Project**
Our faculty group facilitators worked collaboratively to design an evaluation tool for the RPTSG project. We focused our evaluation on four key research questions and collected data from all of our teacher support group participants on: 1) expectations when joining the group, 2) key issues /daily dilemmas of their practice, 3) benefits of participating in these support groups, and 4) changes in actual teaching practices reported by group participants. (A copy of our group evaluation tool is Appendix 1.)

**Year One Project Evaluation Results**

*Teacher Support Group Participants*
A total of 60 teacher education program alumni participated in the launch of our Reflective Practice Teacher Support Groups: 20 alumni participated in the Elementary Education group; ten in the Early Childhood Education group: eight in the Special Education group; eight in the Secondary Education group; and 14 in the Graduate Early Childhood Special Education group. Teaching experience of participants ranged from one to four years. In all, the 60 participants were employed in 33 public school districts and four Special Education Cooperatives. Seventeen group participants were teaching in nine high-need schools. At our initial group meetings, all five faculty facilitators emphasized the importance of regular attendance for groups to be successful. Although attendance did fluctuate over the nine months due to weather conditions and teachers' various school commitments, there were core groups of alumni who attended all nine support group sessions.

**Data Collection and Analysis**
Project evaluation questionnaires were distributed at the last support group and completed by all participants in attendance. Questionnaires were mailed to absent participants. A total of 40 completed questionnaires were collected

from the 60 group participants, representing a 67% return rate. Responses to each question on the project evaluation questionnaire were summarized separately for the five teacher support groups. An aggregate total was then tallied for the total number of participant responses across each question for all five groups.

The five faculty facilitators gathered qualitative data in the form of anecdotal notes on key issues and dilemmas of practice that came up at each support group meeting. These issues and dilemmas were totaled for each group at the end of the first year. Lists of issues generated by each group were tallied across the five groups for total aggregate numbers. These represent the numbers reported in this paper.

**Results and Discussion**

The results and discussion of year one data from our participant evaluation questionnaire and anecdotal group session notes will be shared, anchored around each of four research questions that guided this study. Question 1: What were participant expectations for joining a monthly Reflective Practice Teacher Support Group? Were these expectations met?

Our alumni teacher education participants had a wide range of expectations for attending an RPSG. Table 1 highlights the most common expectations reported by respondents. The most frequently cited expectation was to receive the support of other new teachers and the faculty facilitators (N=20). Participants wanted to reconnect with faculty members, meet new teachers and engage in professional networking. They also wanted to share ideas about teaching and to have a safe, non-judgmental place to discuss issues related to their practice.

The second most frequently cited expectation was to learn new skills, strategies, and coping mechanisms to use in the classroom (N=15). Participants wanted a place to ask questions, listen to colleagues describe what they were doing in their classrooms, and learn about new research and teaching strategies. Third, our teacher participants cited their interest in engaging in problem solving around daily dilemmas that occurred in their classrooms and then applying the new ideas and suggestions provided by their colleagues to better meet the needs of the children they were serving (N=12).

All 40 respondents reported that, yes, their expectations were met by attending the monthly teacher support groups. The following are examples of alumni teacher participant comments:

"I knew my first year of teaching would be stressful, and the group would give me an outlet to express my frustrations. They would understand exactly what I am going through."

"I wanted to get feedback from my fellow teachers in a non-threatening environment, as opposed to confronting my concerns with my school administrators."

"I came because I wanted to get advice about common problems. The group offered great advice and support and exceeded my expectations."

**Conclusion**

First year data from our project does not provide any evidence to measure the impact of alumni RPTSGs on retention of teachers new to the profession. However, our research clearly suggests that important needs of new educators can be met through their alma mater providing a safe and supportive environment where dilemmas of teaching practices can be discussed. Such an environment can help reduce their sense of isolation and provide an alternative or additional form of professional mentorship. Those alumni who participated in our teacher support groups clearly engaged in collaborative reflection which research indicates should lead them to an increased sense of efficacy. The

very presence of these new teachers at our monthly gatherings is evidence that some needs were being met. It remains to be seen if these new teachers will remain in the profession and what role, if any, such support groups might play in such decisions.

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Table 1

**Expectations of Alumni Teacher Support Group Participants**

| Expectations | Number |
|---|---|
| Get support from faculty facilitators and peers | 20 |
| Learn new skills, strategies and coping mechanisms | 15 |
| Engage in problem –solving around daily dilemmas of practice | 12 |

Table 2

**Most Frequently Cited Key Issues and Daily Dilemmas of Practice**

| Issue | Number |
|---|---|
| Working with adults in programs and classrooms | 33 |
| Managing classroom behavior | 22 |
| Making job changes & expanding job roles and responsibilities | 15 |
| Curriculum / Pedagogy Issues | 14 |
| Assessment Issues | 11 |

Table 3

**Most Frequently Cited Benefits of Participation in a Teacher Support Groups**

| Benefits | Number |
|---|---|
| Gained increased knowledge of teaching practices | 35 |
| Gained increased knowledge of interpersonal communication skills and relationships | 30 |
| Gained increased emotional support and a decreased sense of isolation | 25 |

Table 4
**Key Changes in Self-Awareness and Daily Teaching Practice**
**Cited by Teacher Support Group Participants**

| Key Changes | Number |
|---|---|
| Changes noted in self –awareness achieved through self-reflection on behavior included the following:<br><br>• Increased confidence in self as a teacher<br>• Improved communication and listening skills<br>• Increased patience for others<br>• Improved ability to look at both sides of issues<br>• Improved relationships with adult colleagues and parents in the work place | 20 |
| Changes noted in actual teaching practices included the following:<br><br>• Implemented new behavioral management systems in classrooms<br>• Implemented individual adaptations to the curriculum for students<br>• Implemented RtI assessment systems in classrooms<br>• Improved the quality of IEP goals and objectives written for students | 14 |

| |
|---|
| • Improved the quality of parent –teacher conferences |

## "Yes We Can" in High-Need Schools, *by Kathleen King and Kristine Servais*

**Author Bios**

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**Abstract**
Preparing leaders to address the achievement gap in high-need schools poses a challenge for educators, high poverty schools, and our nation. School leaders must demonstrate a heightened awareness of how schools initiate the national mission whereby "the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself." (Obama, 2009). Although complex issues surround poverty and diversity, the first steps to action may not prove as elusive as we may fear. The same values and desire we bring to surmount other educational challenges can guide us in how to better understand and meet the needs of children in low socio-economic and poverty-ridden schools. It must begin with competent and caring leadership. This article reviews key resources for understanding how a new generation of school principals is making a difference in closing the achievement gap in high-need schools.

**Quote**
For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus — and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace. (Obama, 2009)

**A New Generation**
A new generation of leaders must assemble pertinent knowledge, commitment, and action to reduce the gap between our highest and lowest performing schools. Educators first must understand the deeply embedded roots of poverty associated with low performing schools and then examine their own values and commitment to changing the circumstances that trap children in a cycle of poverty. Schools need leaders who are committed to providing a learning environment that can overcome family circumstances and conquer the achievement gap found in high-need schools. What matters most in making substantive change, particularly in overcoming social and historical obstacles in high poverty schools, cannot be mandated (Fullan, 1993). Decades of deficit thinking, such as explaining the failures of economically disadvantaged children by blaming the victim, will not be overcome easily (Lyman & Villani, 2004).

Leadership development is complex and multi-dimensional. Leadership in high-need schools, more than any other school environment, must be a balance of intellect, relational skills, and action. For many leaders, this well-balanced formula results in well-informed and deliberate decision-making to impact student achievement. The research on high poverty schools supports these multi-dimensional factors and strategies needed to promote the success of principals.

Thomas Sergiovanni (2005) suggests that a symbolic representation of the multi-dimensional leader can be shown with the head, heart, and hand. The head represents intellectual knowledge; the heart represents attitudes; and the hand is the action a leader must take to benefit students and teachers. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders' (ISLCC) standards for leadership mirror these three dimensions and are used as guidelines in the preparation of future leaders (2008).

The research is clear on the vital role of principals in student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). The principal, however, must take responsibility and be accountable for the vital role of highly committed, high quality teachers as the primary means for closing the achievement gap for high poverty schools. Quality teachers who believe that all children can learn, regardless of their home environment, are the number one remedy to closing the achievement gap (Lyman & Villani, 2004). The school reform research of Robert Elmore and others goes beyond the need to counteract deficit thinking. Researchers also recognize the falsehood that failing schools are due to the failed efforts, commitments, and work ethic of teachers, administrators, and students. Too often teachers in low performing schools are working hard but not in the concentrated areas that will make significant differences in student achievement. Low performing schools must have leaders who make well-informed decisions on the type of work that will have the greatest impact on student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005).

The importance of effective leadership in high-need schools cannot be overstated. To define a starting point for leaders, however, often is a challenge. Therefore, consider the old adage: A thousand mile journey must begin with the first step. The following three resources can serve as an invaluable foundation for taking the productive and responsive first steps in serving high-need schools. Each resource provides a knowledge base, fortified by the attitudes and values needed to accompany this knowledge, ultimately leading to collaborative action.

**Resources**
The first resource, Leading Diverse Communities: A How-To Guide for Moving from Healing into Action (Brown & Maza, 2005), is a powerful starting point. It provides a workbook approach setting forth 32 principles to guide conversation and reflective practice based on the diverse experiences of participants. The second resource, Best Leadership Practices for High-Poverty Schools (Lyman & Villani, 2004), is a manual for principals and leadership teams to study and emulate the strategies and decisions of successful principals in high poverty schools. Finally, the third resource, Learning by Doing (Dufour et al., 2006), is a teacher-friendly guide for recognizing the existing culture of a school and taking action to move it closer to becoming a professional learning community with a central focus on learning for all its members. The following is a brief summary of each resource work, including strategies leaders may begin to implement to make and sustain change in closing the achievement gap.

Leading Diverse Communities: A How-To Guide for Moving from Healing into Action (Brown & Maza, 2005): This book is based on the work of the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI). Brown and Mazza offer 32 principles that provide examples of diversity, injustice, and prejudice often found in high poverty schools. An interactive workbook, Leading Diverse Communities, offers participants knowledge, collegial conversations, and reflective practice based on four themes: 1) building environments to welcome diversity; 2) healing ourselves to change the world; 3) becoming effective allies; and 4) empowering leaders to lead.

School leaders, teachers, and staff would benefit from a professional book chat about Leading Diverse Communities. Book chats have become an effective means for professional development in many schools. Participants have an opportunity to improve knowledge through the content and make connections to first-hand experiences through conversations with peers. Participants should be provided with a copy of this book and encouraged to read and respond to it as a journal of personal insights and experiences. One or more of the participants should be designated to establish a schedule of meeting times and facilitate discussions. Leading Diverse Communities provides case studies,

32 guiding principles, and opportunities to share personal experiences regarding diversity. These shared conversations of deeply important, first-hand lessons can build trust and support for leaders, teachers, and staff in working together on behalf of students in low socio-economic environments. A final activity, Assessment Worksheet for Moving from Healing into Action, (Brown & Mazza, 2005) provides a culminating reflection of growth and personal understanding for each book talk participant.

Best Leadership Practices for High-Poverty Schools (Lyman & Villani, 2004): Making a difference in high-need schools requires a special blend of characteristics that are clearly outlined in Best Leadership Practices for High-Poverty School (Lyman & Villani, 2004). After reviewing the different types of poverty and its associated needs, these authors offer two bold examples of successful principals in high-need schools. Offering an exploration of school setting, mission, programs, and culture, the text dissects those components of each individual's leadership style that have proven to have the greatest impact on students' educational success. Narratives of the leader's day, the staff's role, and the school's environmental context help transform this study into an intimate introduction to people who are making a difference. Perhaps even more vital is the comparative analysis provided of both the leadership practices employed by these leaders and the learning environments in the two schools. Lyman and Villani provide a research context for these qualitative attributes of success, organizing the research in terms of four topics: the achievement gap; successful high poverty schools; strategies of principals in high poverty schools; and beliefs of principals in successful high-poverty schools (Lyman & Villani, 2004).

The authors argue that the causes of the achievement gap may be debatable. However, clear evidence exists regarding the impact on this gap by effective teachers with high expectations rather than deficit thinking (Valverde, Scribner, & Sheilds, 2001; Wagstaff & Fusarelli, 1995) who use culturally sensitive pedagogy ( Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2002-03: Valverde & Scribner, 2001). Relying primarily on a national study of high-need schools, Dispelling the Myth (Barth et al., 1999), Lyman and Villani argue that the elements of successful high poverty schools include an emphasis on state standards, increased math and reading instruction, and an investment in professional development, parental involvement, and accountability systems for the schools' adults (Lyman & Villani, 2004).

Strategies of successful principals in high-need schools were determined from a comparative analysis of four major studies, indicating that principals need to support teachers with resources, professional development, and opportunities, while instilling clear, collaborative goals, building parental relationships, using testing strategically, and monitoring and developing standards and assessments aligned with the curriculum (Lyman & Villani, 2004).

To identify the beliefs of successful principals in high-need schools, the authors conducted a comparative analysis of four comprehensive studies to identify strongly modeled belief in students, a commitment to develop and support teachers, and a family-centered school culture (Lyman & Villani, 2004). Whether exploring how to influence beliefs and values or engender high student expectations, the authors provide a research basis for educational leadership that will illuminate the "common humanity" of which President Obama speaks.

When Best Leadership Practices for High-Poverty Schools is used for leadership development, book talk participants can benefit by pausing after reading the principal profiles in the book to reflect on their own leadership strengths. A comparison/contrast graphic can identify common strengths in connection to the portrayed principals. Aspiring educational leaders can see its relevance as they read the authors' identification of research-supported characteristics for successful leadership. The closing chapters on "Influencing Beliefs & Attitudes" and "Making a Difference" provide an opportunity for aspiring leaders to identify areas they need to develop to successfully serve the students of high needs-schools by comparing the conclusions of research to their own expertise.

Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2004): In order to apply these reflective understandings of effective schools, it is essential to establish a structure that supports collaboration and growth. Professional learning communities (PLC) provide just such an opportunity to "close the knowing-doing gap" within a school (Dufour et al, 2006). In Learning by Doing, Dufour and his fellow authors clearly outline how to assess the current professional culture within one's school and to make deliberate movement toward establishing professional learning effective understandings of effective schools, it is essential to establish a structure that supports collaboration and growth. Dufour suggests seven pragmatic principles for successful professional learning communities: 1) a focus on learning; 2) collaboration and teaming; 3) collective inquiry; 4) action orientation; 5) continuous improvement; 6) assessment of results; and 7) celebrating success (2006). The collective application of these principles is a blueprint for cultural change that will close the achievement gap. The background knowledge of PLCs and the vocabulary for building common understandings are provided as a foundation for growing collaboration. This resource then outlines how to move forward from any stage in the culture-building process while sustaining and nourishing further development. From overcoming conflict to build consensus to creating a results-oriented community, this practical workbook approach stresses the realities of a school undergoing change.

School leaders must be sensitive to the needs of adult learners, recognizing the importance of experiential and practical learning experiences that can be readily applied to the classroom. Robert Knowles (1984) provides key insights for school leaders in understanding androgogy, the nature of adult learners, and, consequently, ways to transform learning communities such as those described by Dufour. This theory of adult learning attempts to explain why adults learn differently than do other types of learners. Androgogy suggests that the best practices in adult learning provide learners with principles of high levels of involvement in planning, relevance, and pragmatic application (Knowles, 1984).

Learning by Doing is structured as a handbook for schools that strive to become professional learning communities. It provides numerous reproducible worksheets that teacher and leadership teams can use immediately. Leaders need to articulate a clear understanding of the powerful force for good that can come from empowering teachers to practice the principles of professional learning communities. This resource initially would serve as a catalyst for leadership understanding and, ultimately, as a tool for teacher leaders to employ as part of the process of building effective professional learning communities.

The same PLC principles that are improving the quality of education in K-12 settings also can foster needed improvement in leadership preparation. "When a school or district functions as a professional learning community (PLC), educators within the organization embrace high levels of learning for all students as both the reason the organization exists and the fundamental responsibility of those who work within it." (Dufour et al., 2006, p. 3). Efforts to implement PLCs have been shown to be effective in improving teaching and learning, which is vital to all socio-economic environments, particularly those with high levels of poverty.

The fundamental purpose of successful PLCs is to actualize continuous and meaningful improvement within the school. Most important in building successful PLCs are the collaboration and empowerment of all its members to continue to learn and improve learning for students. The authors of Learning by Doing emphasize how to use the tools of a PLC in the school improvement process. In summary, Learning by Doing provides the tools for school improvement. Combined with the reflective underpinnings gained from Leading Diverse Communities and the essential influence of leadership beliefs from Best Leadership Practices for High-Poverty School — leaders have a three-tiered structure to engender improvement for children in schools of poverty.

**Conclusion**

We cannot mandate what matters for leaders and teachers in high poverty schools. However, we can recruit, prepare, and support school leaders who are committed to developing schools where learning for all students is the centerpiece of the organization. Change in high poverty schools will occur with compassionate and committed leaders who have shared objectives, work in collaboration with others, and take action toward meaningful change. Leaders are needed who possess a delicate balance of head, heart, and hand (Sergiovanni, 2009).

High poverty schools will not improve through a single formula or answer, but rather through conversation and continuous reflective questioning. Lyman and Villani (2004) provide a short but effective starting point for this critical reflection: 1) What does the research about high poverty schools say, and what do we need to know more about? 2) How can belief in the ability and promise of the children be cultivated? 3) How can professional development contribute to successful high poverty schools? 4.) How can collective leadership be developed in a school? 5) How are meaningful partnerships created with families and the community? The effective school leader will use the responses to these questions as a way to address unconscious prejudices and contradictory behaviors that otherwise nourish deficit thinking and contribute to the achievement gap. Simply, school leaders have an opportunity to nourish a spirit of social justice in a school by taking action to ask reflective questions, provoke new conversations, provide book discussions, and challenge the status quo of high poverty schools.

It is no coincidence that the heart is the strongest muscle of the body. The role of the heart cannot be overemphasized in leaders whose attitudes and beliefs will model for others the actions needed truly to transform poor schools. The only blame we will find in looking back on this period of time will be for those who failed to take action.

Leadership standards established by Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) can guide the work of leaders but must be implemented alongside teachers in classrooms and in partnership with parents. The work of the principal has been described by experts in the field as one of the most challenging. This work requires courage, collaboration, and constant discernment as one reflects daily on how to maximize the use of human and other resources to foster student achievement.

Learning must begin by standing on the shoulders of those who already have achieved successes in diverse schools. Resources, such as those described in this article, can enlighten the path of each leader as they inspire others to climb together to new heights.

Future generations must be able to look back on this era and know that leaders were prepared to overcome anything that impedes children of any color or race in our country from the education they are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. President Obama reminds us of education as one of our precious constitutional freedoms. We must rise to the challenge. "Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested, we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations" (Obama, 2009).

Yes we can. We must rise to the challenge.

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# Educational Leadership and Change for the 21st Century, *by James Harrington*

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**Column**

As Illinois entered the 21st century, groups as diverse as school teachers and administrators, local business leaders, college and university faculty, and boards of education shifted their attention from classroom teaching to educational leadership as the key for improving student learning. Sparked by ongoing research, including the Commission on School Leadership and its *Blueprint for Change* (August 2006), these discussions led to the formation of a statewide task force that reported its findings in 2008.  The task force called for a stand-alone principal certificate, reconfiguration of the academic program, and a much more intensive pre-service clinical and internship experience.

Overall, the report was well received, but it was nonetheless criticized for its "cultural" gaps and failings. Schools and colleges alike objected to "outside experts" making decisions for them regarding the role of principals and reform of principal preparation programs. In response, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and Board of Higher Education (IBHE), the agencies responsible respectively for certifying the quality of school principals and the quality of programs that prepare them, established a collaborative follow-up task force.

In launching this task force, a series of discussions were held during the late spring and summer of 2008 that led to a series of research meetings attended by representatives of the pK-12 and university stakeholder groups. This ISBE-IBHE research process, completed in March 2009, culminated in a report with recommendations to the task force, as well as a resolution directing action, which was presented to the Illinois State House of Representatives. ISBE and IBHE currently are drafting rules changes and accommodations for principals and the programs that prepare them.

These changes are important and constructive. They aim to change the school culture fundamentally; potentially, they could be as disruptive as an earthquake. Principals known as strong and forceful leaders in the traditional sense will be replaced by collaborative leaders willing to share work, responsibility, and power with teachers.  The ground has shifted from the principal's traditional role as a manager to that of an instructional leader. Many current principals are trained in the earlier mode; in human terms, the changes will have painful impacts.

Research indicates a need for active leadership *in* as well as *for* classroom teaching and learning. Michael Fullan, Larry Cuban, Thomas Sergiovanni, and Andy Hargreaves (among others) have documented this trend in their writing.  (A thorough and complete source of information, research data, and continuing work may be found at http://www.edpolicyctr.ilstu.edu, the website of the Education Policy Center at Illinois State University, edited and directed by Dr. Erika Hunt.)  As a result, principal training and assessment must become more focused on curriculum, methods, and assessment of teaching and learning. Knowledge of special education law and procedures, early childhood education, and increasingly sophisticated data for decision-making will be added and/or emphasized in preparation programs.

An extended, focused, and more intense internship will be required in principal preparation. Mentoring and updated knowledge and skills will be required for recertification. A new website{http://www.illinoisschoolleader.org), which was constructed for IBHE by Michelle Seelback and Robert Hall, has been created for the study and dissemination of information regarding the update process

The challenge faced both by programs and principals will be to balance new demands with content and skills already required for preparation of principals. Finance and budget, facilities management, personnel administration, educational law, and other "management" functions are necessary to provide an effective teaching and learning atmosphere. Even if new emphases supplant them as a primary focus, they will remain vital in principal preparation.

The new "best practices" will be determined by research. Current demands from ISBE and IBHE, the community, and business groups are focused on student learning. No longer can a principal blame staff, funding, parenting, and others for students' failure to learn. Harry Truman's "buck" will now stop at the principal's door. Principals are now expected to solve these problems within the existing context of school and community. Best practices must be developed, based on research in order to create sustainable programs in schools that produce effective teaching and high levels of learning. Action and research through collaboration are viewed as the means toward this end.

Colleges and universities are expected to *partner* with schools in this process. Principal preparation is to be linked directly with schools and districts, i.e., to the actual work of principal leadership. These efforts must be at once theoretical and pragmatic, active and reflective, research and school-based. The process of preparation and school-based leadership must be simultaneously performed, not simply operated in parallel. Preparation programs must be intensive and engaged (participative). Demands for accountability and assessment will rest on the university as well as the school and principal. These partnerships will have to extend beyond the managerial agreements that open doors and make space available to colleges, allowing for internships and clinical experiences. Colleges and schools will share responsibility for achieving positive results.

Among all the educational changes now occurring, I believe that the *cultural* change in the role of principals to be the most dramatic. The shift from manager to instructional leader is difficult and will present painful and often unfair challenges for principals. Principals believed to be highly successful leaders will be required to adapt their practices to satisfy the new policies. For many the changes will be abrupt and painful.

At the same time, clear mandates are being placed on universities to ensure that their programs be accountable for preparing principals who are effective leaders. Fulfilling these demands will be costly in time, staffing, and other resources. Small, part-time principal preparation programs and large programs lacking a personal connection to candidates and schools are at greatest risk due to today's demands for instructional leadership resulting in improved teaching and learning in schools. Change has arrived!

The most recent time line for implementation is as follows:

2010: Colleges and universities may begin to submit redesigned principal preparation programs for State Teacher Certification Board review (STCB).

2011: All programs that expect to continue to operate must have submitted and received approval for their redesigned programs.

2013:  First candidates may complete new programs (and receive their "Principal" endorsement).

2014:  (February) Final candidates in the old general administration certification (GADM) pipeline must have received certification; no more GADM after this date.

# Leading by Example: How to Close the Achievement Gap and Retain Good Teachers, *by Ida Peterson*

Effective school leaders have a vision of their schools' potential, an overall action plan using research-based methods, and a strong desire to make a difference. Leading by example helps to create a positive, student-centered learning environment for everyone by establishing a climate of mutual respect and discipline.

Leaders also must strive to build a strong support system. Closing the achievement gap at a low-performing school with high-need students requires a clear understanding of data-driven instruction. This provides the necessary information to build on strengths and address areas in need of systematic improvement.

On a day-to-day basis, leaders must meet their schools' managerial needs. A myriad of unexpected problems arise, many of which may create additional obstacles to bringing about academic improvement. Leaders must believe strongly that all children can learn. Every decision must be based on this philosophy.

Developing a shared vision to instill high expectations for every stakeholder is essential to closing the achievement gap. Parents, teachers, students, staff, and the community must see the potential of all students to learn and succeed. This requires a change of attitude and perspective on the part of many stakeholders and a buy-in to this vision. All adults must expect students to do their best. A high level of professionalism must be evident throughout the school. This promotes positive student attitudes toward learning and also meets students' social and emotional needs.

Attracting and retaining high quality teachers also is critical for closing the achievement gap. Leaders must provide effective development for teachers so they can continue growing professionally and improving their practice. Meeting teachers' differentiated instructional needs through coaching, peer observation, and constructive feedback should occur in a risk-free environment.

Creating professional learning communities (PLCs) is essential. Leaders must guide the PLC through discussions of student achievement and ways to improve academic performance. The PLC must have sufficient time to work effectively and must provide support to all its teacher members. It also must have the autonomy to initiate and practice innovative, educationally sound ideas.

Data-driven, differentiated, well planned, and engaging instruction must be offered to meet every student's needs. Students must understand that they have the right to a high quality education and the responsibility to achieve. Their achievement must be recognized, praised, and rewarded.

Leaders also must take responsibility for promoting communication among all stakeholders. Parents and students must be kept aware of student performance not just at report card time, but also on a regularly scheduled basis. Teachers and parents must communicate and offer mutual support.

The personal accountability of leaders is as important as that of the district. Leaders must help all stakeholders understand their responsibility to help students achieve their highest potential — not just because of district requirements, but also because they belong to a community that cares about its students and has a vested interest in their future.

Leaders bear responsibility for staff development, student achievement, parental involvement in students' educational experiences, and developing community. None of this can be accomplished, however, without the commitment of all stakeholders to work together for a common goal — to ensure the highest level of achievement for all students.