

University-school partnerships for clinical experiences: design, implementation, assessment, and data collection

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Abstract

University teacher education programs establish partnerships with P-12 schools, in part to place their teacher education candidates in a learning environment that allows candidates to work with a diverse population of learners. The purpose of this study was to examine three universities in regard to the partnerships utilized for field and clinical preparation of teacher candidates. The study addressed the types of collaboration and partnerships that have been established between university teacher preparation programs and P-12 schools, the design and implementation of field experiences and clinical practices, teacher candidate evaluation, and the collection and dissemination of field and clinical data to stakeholders.

Keywords: school partnerships, collaboration, field experiences, clinical practices, teacher candidate evaluation, professional development

INTRODUCTION

University teacher education programs establish partnerships with P-12 schools, in part to place their teacher education candidates in a learning environment that allows candidates to work with a diverse population of learners. The partnerships range from professional development schools and lab schools where teacher and university faculty work side by side as colleagues, to partner schools used only as sites for classroom observations. Each partnership should create enriching experiences for the teacher education candidate as well as the cooperating teacher and school.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Standard 3: Field Experiences and Clinical Practice, established by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), is one of six standards used to measure the effectiveness of teacher education programs. Many educators consider the field experiences and clinical practice to be the most important and most influential components of the teacher preparation programs. Standard 3 requires that teacher education programs design, implement, and evaluate field and clinical experiences to demonstrate teacher education candidates' knowledge, skills, and dispositions in teaching with P-12 learners (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008).

While designing and implementing field and clinical experience, faculty in teacher education programs place their candidates in diverse environments to provide comprehensive, hands-on, learning experiences. "Field experiences allow candidates to apply and reflect on their content, professional, and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions in a variety of settings with students and adults" (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008, p. 29). "Designed and sequenced well, field experiences and clinical practice help candidates develop the competence necessary to begin or continue careers as teachers or other school professionals. Student teaching or an internship is the culminating experience for teacher candidates" (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008, p. 32).

During these experiences, teacher education programs evaluate their candidates in the areas of teaching and interacting with P-12 learners. Various assessment instruments such as observation forms, teacher work samples, and field logs are often used to evaluate teacher candidates. Teacher education programs use various methods to collect, aggregate, and make changes to programs based upon these evaluation data.

An electronic portfolio system can track the demographics of each school site used for placement; therefore, data can be aggregated or disaggregated and used to show evidence that candidates are placed in diverse and inclusive classrooms.

[Candidates] are placed in clinical settings at grade levels and in the subjects or school roles (e.g., counselor) for which they are preparing. Candidate learning is integrated into the clinical setting. Scheduling, use of time, and resources support clinical faculty and allow candidates to participate as teachers, professional educators, and learners in the school setting. (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008, p. 33)

An important part of the university-school partnership is that the faculty of both school and university work as a team to build strong P-12 schools and to provide rich experiences for the teacher candidates. They share professional development, share expertise, and share resources.

The faculty of the school and the university make decisions together regarding the placement of teacher candidates in field and clinical experiences (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008). NCATE Standard 3 states, “The unit and its school partners design, implement, and evaluate field experiences and clinical practice so that teacher candidates and other school professionals develop and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn” (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008, p. 29).

Teacher education programs and P-12 school partnerships work well as a means to improve instruction, student achievement, and teacher preparation (Castle, Fox, & Souder, 2006). In a study conducted by Castle, Fox, and Souder (2006), data showed that PDS-based teacher preparation programs produce new teachers who are more competent in planning, instruction, management and assessment. Research has shown that mentor relationships created between the teacher education candidates and their mentor teachers during the field and clinical experiences increased the teacher education candidates’ engagement in instructional planning (Bullough et al. 2002).

Every teacher education program has its own version of field and clinical experience. Some experiences last for a relatively short time, while others stretch across a full academic year. Some institutions integrate field and clinical experiences into their course work, while others have field experiences that are not tied to specific course work. Similarly, each university has its own means of assessing students during field and clinical experiences. University supervisor observation, mentor teacher observation, teaching video analysis and reflection, and weekly observation logs are some of the different assessments teacher education programs utilize for evaluating their candidates (Mueller, et al. 2007). As multiple forms of assessment are utilized, teacher education programs struggle to find ways to collect, summarize, and aggregate these data. In recent years with technology advancement, some institutions have turned to electronic assessment systems to collect the field experience data. In the past, these systems were used for assessment data only; but, as field experience data becomes more vital for understanding how teacher candidates perform, commercial and home grown electronic assessment systems are beginning to add the capability of collecting field and clinical data. “The system must measure the effectiveness of activities and procedures, along with how they impact candidate performance. Additionally, the system must be capable of breaking out data related to specific program standards” (Gendernalik-Cooper, 2003, p. 29).

The purpose of this study was to examine the school partnerships established by three universities, specifically as those partnerships support field and clinical experiences of teacher candidates. Four key questions were addressed: 1. What types of collaboration and partnerships have been established between university teacher preparation programs and P-12 schools; 2. How are field and clinical experiences designed and implemented in each of the universities; 3. How, and by whom, are teacher candidates evaluated during field and clinical experiences; and 4. How are field and clinical experience data collected, aggregated, and disseminated to various stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

A case study methodology was used to study university-school partnerships at three universities—University of Tennessee-Knoxville, University of Louisiana-Monroe, and University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Case study is “an examination of a specific phenomenon

such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (Merriam, (1988, p. 9). The universities were purposefully selected because they provide distinct cases of university –school partnerships. Yin (1994) suggested that case study is the appropriate methodology to use when one is answering questions such as “how” or “why,” when the investigator has little control over variables, and when the phenomenon is to be studied is in real life context. Member checks and peer examination were utilized to determine validity and reliability (Merriam, 1988). For this study, a member of the research team contacted the Directors/Coordinators of Field Experiences and Clinical Practice at each university and requested that they participate in the study. The Directors/Coordinator of Field Experiences and Clinical Practice responded to structured survey questions regarding the types of collaboration and partnerships that have been established between university teacher preparation programs and P-12 schools, the design and implementation of field and clinical experiences, teacher candidate evaluation, and the collection and dissemination of field and clinical data to stakeholders. Each Director or Coordinator was asked the following questions:

1. On average how many hours of field experience are required in the undergraduate programs?
On average how many hours of clinical/internship experience are required in these programs?
2. What types of collaboration and partnerships have been established between the teacher education program and P-12 schools (i.e, community school partnership, PDS)?
3. Explain the types of activities are expected during field experience.
4. What roles do classroom mentors or supervisors play in the evaluation of teacher education candidates during field experience?
5. What roles do classroom mentors or supervisors play in the evaluation of teacher education candidates during clinical experience?
6. What field experience activities prepare candidates for successful performance in student teaching?
7. What electronic system is used to collect, aggregate and disseminate field and clinical experience data? How responsive is the system to the needs of the college, program reporting data on field experience?

RESULTS

Collaboration and Partnerships

In terms of collaboration and partnerships between the teacher education programs and P-12 schools, University of Louisiana Monroe and University of Tennessee both have strong professional development schools established. Additionally both of these schools had formalized collaborative partnerships with several schools. One of the main differences between University of Wisconsin Whitewater and the other two schools is that UWW services the entire state of Wisconsin, while ULM and UT service surrounding parishes or counties. Due to the fact that UWW services the entire state they have various levels of partnerships in 900 schools. Additionally they are proactive in creating partnerships with universities in other countries, and they have established collaborative partnership agreements with school systems in foreign countries.

Design and Implementation of Field and Clinical Experiences

The number of field experience hours in the undergraduate programs varied across the three institutions. Additionally the number of field experience hours, clinical/internship hours varied within each program at each institution. These variations are due to specificity of the programs and accreditation requirements. See Table 1. Field and Clinical Experiences.

All three institutions had similar requirements in terms of field experience requirements of candidates before students teaching. The numbers of hours varied at each institution, but the requirements in general were the same, which are listed below:

1. Become oriented to the school learning community
2. Become aware of socio-cultural context of each learning community
3. Become aware of various classroom management and organization techniques and observe various teaching-learning strategies for students from diverse backgrounds
4. Become aware of how curriculum and diverse learners influence the planning process, and how assessment and evaluation are used to inform teaching practices

Similar to the expectations of candidates during field experience, all three institutions had similar requirements of the type of activities candidates were required to conduct while doing their clinical (student teaching) practice. These activities included individual tutoring, working with small groups, teaching one or more brief lessons, observation of classes, discussions with mentoring teacher, team teaching, and reflection (an integral part of all activities), in addition to solo teaching.

Teacher Candidate Evaluation

Classrooms teachers in all three institutions play a critical role in working with teacher education candidates. Their responsibilities include, but are not limited to, tracking the type and frequency of activities, assessing the implementation of lesson plans and dispositions, completing mid-term evaluations, providing planning, support, and feedback activities, and providing suggestions to support the students' transition to internship. During clinical practice, classroom supervision plays an even more critical role in the evaluation process of the teacher education candidates. There are many similarities in the role of classroom supervisors at the three institutions. The list below provides the major responsibilities of classroom supervisors as described by Directors/Coordinators of Field Experience at the three universities.

- a. Interpret to the student teacher the school's philosophy and policies, along with any special rules and regulations that may be in effect.
- b. Assist in scheduling observations in other schools and classrooms.
- c. Encourage membership in appropriate professional organizations.
- d. Help the student teacher set goals and formulate educational philosophy.
- e. Help the student teacher develop understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses in an attempt to build a healthy self-concept.
- f. Assist the student teacher in recognizing theories in such fields as child development, psychological principles, and curriculum changes.
- g. Assess student teacher performance and professional dispositions.
- h. Evaluate student teacher portfolios.

According to the Directors/Coordinators of Field Experience at the three institutions, to have a successful experience in students teaching, engagement in analysis of structured

observations of teacher strategies and techniques, engagement in analysis of structured observations of student interaction with teachers and peers, planning and implementing full lessons, and participation in professional development seminars (i.e. dispositions, PDS, learning context, classroom routines, behavior management, instructional strategies, intern orientation) during field experience are necessary.

Collection and Dissemination of Data

Only the University of Louisiana Monroe uses an electronic system to collect field and clinical experience data. The other two institutions use paper and pencil and excel files to collect the data. The University of Louisiana Monroe uses TaskStream, a web based commercial system that allows field and clinical experience data to be recorded, searched, and shared in a variety of report formats.

DISCUSSION

The three institutions participating in the study have established a wide variety of partnerships due to various needs and circumstances. University of Louisiana Monroe and University of Tennessee have established professional development schools and collaborative partner schools. These two institutions' main focus is schools in the surrounding parishes or counties. University of Wisconsin Whitewater places teacher candidates all over the state of Wisconsin and thus has some form of partnership with 900 schools. These partnerships vary scope, degree of collaboration, and details within agreement. Additionally another focus of UWW is collaboration with public school districts in foreign countries, and they have several partnerships with them. The partnerships established by all three institutions with schools are mutually beneficial in terms of the institutions providing professional development opportunities and resources, while the public schools provide classrooms and mentors for field and clinical experience.

The design and implementation of field and clinical experience varied greatly within each program at the three institutions. Accreditation and state certification requirements were the primary reasons for the wide range of differences. With all three institutions, the field experiences were designed for teacher candidates to become oriented to the school learning community, be aware of socio-cultural context of each learning community, learn various classroom management and organization techniques, observe various teaching-learning strategies for students from diverse backgrounds and to gain knowledge, skill and disposition on how curriculum and diverse learners influence the planning process, and how assessment and evaluation are used to inform teaching practices. At the three different institutions, the implementation of field experience was conducted during professional education courses and clinical experience was implemented during student teaching.

All three institutions used similar methods to evaluate their candidates during field and clinical practice. Implementation of lesson plans, mid-term and final evaluation and portfolio were some of the common methods used by all three institutions. For both field experience and clinical practice teacher candidates were supervised by a university instructor and a classroom supervisor. The classroom supervisor acted as a mentor and guide to the students and their role increased to being a key evaluator of the teacher candidate during clinical practice.

Electronic systems of collecting, aggregating and disseminating field experience and clinical practice data has been done in various forms at all three institutions. University of Louisiana Monroe uses TaskStream to maintain field and clinical experience, while the other two institutions use excel databases to collect this information. Only recently commercial electronic systems have begun offering products to monitor field experience.



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Table 1. Field and Clinical Experiences

Institution	Undergraduate
University of Louisiana Monroe	Field experience ranges from 386 to 750 Student teaching is approximately 540 hours (one semester)
University of Tennessee	Field experience ranges from 44 to 624 hrs
University of Wisconsin Whitewater	Field Experience ranges from 112 to 194 in the undergraduate Student teaching or internship is approximately 720

