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NCE Faculty Research Residency
Building Partnerships and the Adaptive Cycles of Teaching Curriculum

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Abstract

This paper reports research on the development of ongoing partnerships in relationship to the Adaptive Cycles of Teaching. Sustained, reciprocal partnerships with K-8 schools are a vital component of the National College of Education (NCE). For the Adaptive Cycles of Teachings, it is particularly important to supporting our teacher candidates through learning the core practices. ACT model offers a mechanism for initiating, deepening, and extending partnerships. The focus on a core set of high leverage practices allows us to support both teacher candidate learning and improve student learning progressions in partner school classrooms. Building partnerships with public schools is key to providing quality field experiences for our teacher candidates, and offers valuable opportunities for creating symbiotic relationships between the college and its public school partners. The research shares the data from seven potential partner schools and the future of partnership at National Louis University.

Research Questions:

How do we build and sustain meaningful partnerships for the Adaptive Cycles of Teaching (ACT) practice-centered curriculum model.

Key background concepts/frameworks

A challenge in designing learning environments for teachers is achieving a well-coordinated balance between learning theoretical approaches to instruction, and then applying actual practical applications in the classroom. Frequently, teachers learn theory in isolation from practice, leading to difficulties in their execution in actual classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2010). A perennial problem in traditional college and university sponsored teacher education programs has been the lack of connection between university-based courses and field experiences (Bullough et al, 1997; Bullough, et al. 1999; Zeichner, 2007, 2010). The result is that beginning teachers often struggle to put knowledge gained in preparation programs into practice (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Grossman, Rust & Shulman, 2005). These struggles can persist through the initial years of practice, limiting the impact beginning teachers can have on their students' learning progress.

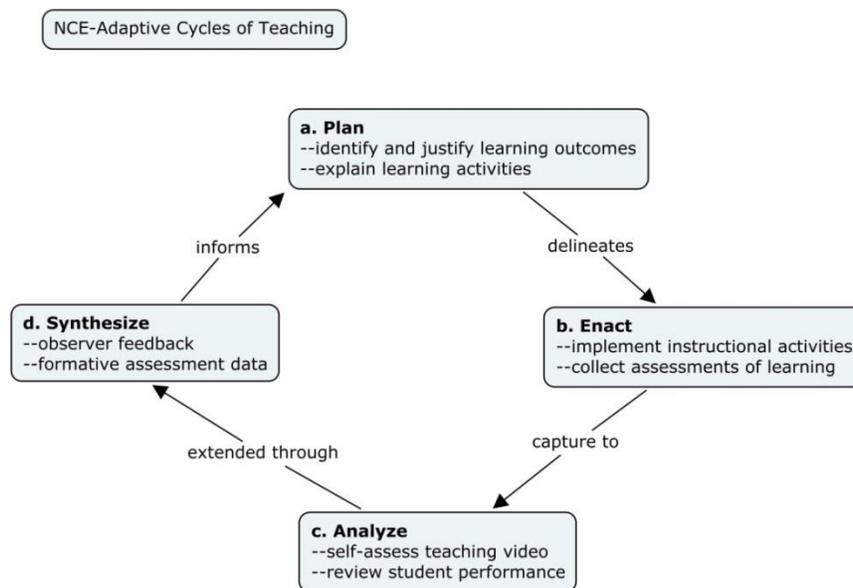
Sustained, reciprocal partnerships with K-8 schools are a vitally important component of all the National College of Education (NCE) teacher preparation programs. Building partnerships with public schools is key to providing quality field experiences for our teacher candidates, and offers valuable opportunities for creating symbiotic relationships between the college and its public school partners. According to the outcomes of The Chicago Teacher Partnership Program grant project three areas between the university and schools were valued and impacted the establishment of solid University-School Partnerships; The impact on cooperating teachers (CT),

the impact on university faculty, and the impact teacher candidate (TC). The supports that the universities provided to the cooperating teachers (CT) improved their teaching practices in the following areas improvement to their teaching practice, establishing professional learning communities and supporting them to take leadership roles in their schools. The second area of impact is that university faculty were present in the schools improving their practice for university course work, by keeping their practice current with what is going in schools and building relationships with the CT. Finally these established partnerships impacted the TCs that were doing their placements in the partner schools. The TCs had mentors in schools that were modeling best practice in their classrooms and providing a powerful model for preparing teachers. The TCs also observed their CTs invested in professional development to better their teaching practices.

Statement of the Research Problem

The NCE Adaptive Cycles of Teaching (ACT) provides a curriculum framework for novice teacher learning through lesson cycles (see figure). The intended learning outcomes of the model include:

- Capacity to explain how the components or mechanisms by which the core teaching practices impact student learning.
- Proficiency in enacting these core teaching practices.
- Habit of mind to analyze and adapt the core practices and to continually learn through teaching.



To date, the curriculum design efforts have focused on the learning needs of our teacher candidates and the roles of higher education faculty in providing feedback and support. Research also explored how the curriculum impacted teacher candidate learning and their initial success in the first year of independent teaching. (Freedman, R., Salmon, D., Degener, S. & Phillips, M., 2014; Freedman, R., Salmon, D., Degener, S. & P Phillips, M., 2015; Salmon, D., Freedman, R., Degener, & O'Connor, D., 2016).

The current research focuses on how the practice-centered ACT curriculum impacts partnerships. The model potentially offers a mechanism for initiating, deepening, and extending partnerships. The focus on a core set of high leverage core practices can potentially support in-service teachers as well as teacher candidate learning and ultimately improve student learning in partner school classrooms. This study explored how the Adaptive Cycles of Teaching (ACT) can provide a more direct focus in field placements and potentially help develop and extend formal partnerships.

Participants, Data Sources, and Analysis

Seven principals were interviewed by an NLU faculty around key questions related to: preparation, partnership, hiring and NLU graduate skill sets. The seven principals represented both urban and suburban school. The principals represented elementary schools grades K-8. The principals had varying years of experience from novice to experienced principals. Most of the principals were actively pursuing graduate degrees at NLU or other institutions of higher learning.

Data sources include a formal principal interview. Interview questions are included at the end of the article. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using grounded theory techniques to identify salient themes addressing the research question (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Each interview was coded by both researchers.

Findings

Findings are organized around the three aspects of our research questions: feedback about our past candidates, ideas about how to jointly engage in teacher preparation, and looking forward. Many of the schools engaged in the areas have informal partnerships with us and have current National Louis University (NLU) graduates in their staff. In general, the schools principals we interviewed have a strong appreciation for the philosophy of our NLU programs. They appreciate the focus of our program's curriculum and specifically the shift toward the Adaptive Cycles of Teaching.

Our second set of findings focus on feedback about our past candidates. The interviews provided us with the principal's perspective that our teacher candidates have many strengths including a strong set of instructional strategies as they begin their teaching careers. Our teacher candidates have strong literacy initiative and feel confident to implement literacy curriculum. Principals talked about an appreciation for teacher candidates who go above and beyond what is expected of them. This is the set of teachers they want to hire. Lastly, the teacher candidates are confident in their understandings about culturally responsive curriculum and feel prepared to work with a diverse set of students. Principals still see classroom management and data collection and analysis as areas where we should continue to work with teacher candidates.

As we explored ways to jointly engage in teacher preparation, some of the principals expressed a personal belief that we already have partnerships. The fact that these might be informal still

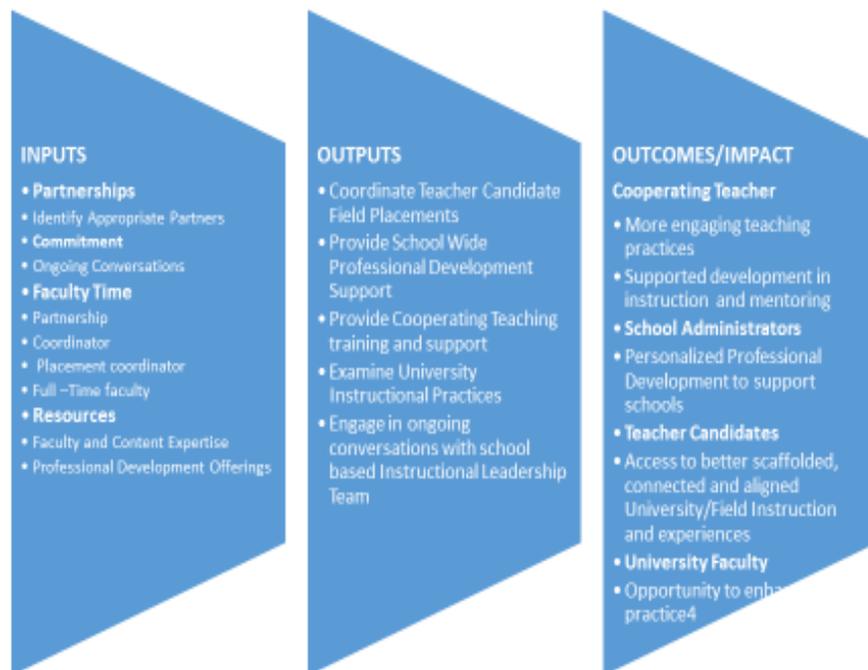
presented a feeling of connectedness and partnership. Individual schools appreciated the preparation of NLU teacher candidates. As we explored the partnership, school principals discussed how they placed our candidates with their best teachers for mentors.

Our final set of findings focused on moving forward with partnerships. Potential Partnership principals talked about wanting give and take as part of the partnership work. They wanted the opportunity to work directly with NLU faculty for their experience. They wanted specific types of staff development from NLU faculty that would be customized for them. It might be long term, short term, small group or whole school. Finally, they were interested in service learning experiences from our students as part of the work.

Summary and Implications for Teacher Education

A potential model might be developed for partnerships at NLU related to the Adaptive Cycles of Teaching. It is clear that NLU partnerships cannot be one size fits all. We learned that the group of principals that we interviewed are very interested in future partnerships and this set of schools could be used as a launching pad for partnerships. This Research Residency should be captured and used as a first step for the future of partnerships at NLU.

The chart below might be a sample of what the future in partnerships could look like.



How can NLU develop a structure for reciprocal relationships with and across partnership schools? How can NLU develop a menu of partnership opportunities to meet the needs of various schools? This Faculty Research Residency presents a great number of questions to reflect on the future of partnerships at NLU.

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Faculty Research Residency Interview Protocol

OPENING:

Thank you for meeting with me today.

NCE is looking at re-conceptualizing how we engage with schools to prepare the next generation of teachers. We are particularly interested in moving towards a more clinically based program so that classroom work becomes the driver rather than the supplemental component of learning how to teach. We are also committed to preparing the kinds of candidates that you would be really excited by, and ones that you'd want to hire.

As we move forward, we want to make sure that our work is being informed by our school partners. I'm here because we see you as a really valued partner—you've hosted student teachers, participated in XX grants, and you have insights that we think are critical to our planning.

(ASK PERMISSION TO RECORD OR TAKE NOTES)

There are three areas that we'd love your thoughts on...

- **FEEDBACK ABOUT PAST CANDIDATES**
- **IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO JOINTLY ENGAGE IN TEACHER PREPARATION**
- **LOOKING FORWARD**

FEEDBACK ABOUT PAST CANDIDATES

You've had a number of our practicum students, student teachers, graduates and the first thing we want to do is get feedback about the teacher candidates you've worked with from NCE.

What are some strengths you've seen in our STs and Graduates?

What are some weaknesses you note that you think that we might be able to address during preparation? How might we address them?

In the case of hiring, how often do you look at NLU candidates, how do you learn about them, what makes you hire them?

As we look to the future, what are some topics that you think would help us serve your district and also be on the cutting edge of teacher preparation?

IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO ENGAGE WITH TEACHER PREP

We increasingly think that we need to engage in the work of preparing teachers in a joint way so that our work is informed by what school leaders really need, making our curriculum more relevant (and skills based, core practice based), and hopefully do so in a way that also supports the schools.

How does this possibility sound to you? In what ways might you be interested in partnering with us around that idea?

In what ways would university partnership be helpful?

Are there certain topics/supports that in an ideal world we might offer you to keep your teachers growing while they support novices? (In what format?)

Cooperating teachers are a big piece of a partnership that jointly prepares teachers...

How do you currently select and support cooperating teachers? What do they need to be as effective as possible?

In what ways do you think your cooperating teachers might/do contribute to working with not only preservice teachers but also beginning teachers in your schools?

Do you believe it would be helpful to have multiple students from our various programs in your school?

LOOKING FORWARD

We are doing a core practice institute, hopefully one in Wheeling and another on our Chicago Campus. In the core practice institute, we have explored the core practices across ALL ELE programs. Some of the core practices are teaching math through problem solving, element of Balanced Literacy, Science through Inquiry. We are hoping that you will join us and also suggest cooperating teachers who might be interested in participating. It will be an opportunity for professional development as well as collaborative partnership building.

What topics might be of help to you as a principal or to your teachers?

ANYTHING ELSE?

Is there anything else you that this conversation has sparked for you in terms of partnership that you want to talk or ask about?

Is there anything else that you think would be helpful for us to know as an institution that prepared educators?

FOLLOW UP:

Thank you so much for your time, as a way of following up, we'll summarize our findings and share them with you later in the year. We'll invite you to our core practices institute and keep you informed about that work; and of course keep you posted on our continuing school partnership initiatives, and progress on our plans towards deepening our efforts towards a clinical model

