Patterns in Partnership for Elementary Reading Teacher Preparation

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Introduction

The message from accrediting agencies and subject-specific professional organizations is unmistakable: undergraduate teacher preparation candidates need earlier, more, and better field experiences before entering the profession (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986, 1990). The terms “partnership”, “school/university collaboration”, and “professional development school” have been used extensively to describe the various arrangements between colleges of education and K-12 schools designed to meet this mandate. In fact, these terms have been used so widely that they remain relatively meaningless unless the users describe fully what they do. The major purpose of this paper is to describe how Northern Kentucky University’s School of Education and Covington, Kentucky’s Independent School District have evolved an operational definition of their partnership at the elementary level. We will limit our comments to the preparation of literacy teachers, and focus primarily on what Jaquith (1994) refers to as “mid tier” field experiences just prior to student teaching.

We describe two major dimensions along which partnerships can vary. One we call Relationship Patterns due to its emphasis on how people work together. The second, we call Immersion Patterns to signal the level of involvement of teacher preparation candidates in the host school. Our conclusion from the past six years is that variations of these Relationship and Immersion Patterns are not just necessary, but also desirable to meet changing needs, resources (human and other), and situations. We hope that by describing the differing patterns we have used we can contribute to a
comprehensive picture of how schools and universities can cooperate to the mutual benefit of all participants.

Theoretical Perspective

The call for improved field experience has led many schools, ours among them, to embrace the tenets of constructivism in designing their programs. As Brooks and Brooks (1993) noted “Learning from this perspective is understood as a self-regulated process of resolving inner cognitive conflicts that often become apparent through concrete experience, collaborative discourse, and reflection” (p.vii). Explicit in NKU’s redesign of field experiences was the premise that we needed not only more experience, but examined experiences (Dewey, 1938). In fact, our college adopted the thematic statement, “The teacher is a reflective decision-maker” as an overarching principle for all coursework. Clarken (1993) emphasizes another, related principle which states that preservice teachers need to be guided through the process of connecting their studies with their hands-on experience. “It is through the professional field experiences that concepts, generalizations, or theories that are emphasized in the professional sequence are evaluated with respect to their relevance and usefulness in the real world” (Clarken, 1993, p. 5). We set out to create a program responsive to these conditions, a program that would allow our students a maximum opportunity to construct their own repertoire of best practices by melding study, observation, and direct contact with children.

Practical Application of Theory

The Holmes Group and Carnegie Forum were not the only sources of influence in our program development. NCATE, The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, has placed increasing weight on the quality of field experiences. The
standards and requirements detailed in NCATE 1995 and 1997 were instrumental in guiding our decision.

In addition, a growing literature on professional development schools revealed sources of support for this basic thrust of what we wanted to do. For instance, Herrmann and Sarracino (1993) noted how both the content of literacy courses and the sense of ownership changed as constructivist principles took root. Selke and Kueter (1994) demonstrated that professional development schools provided advantages for undergraduates as well as the already-documented benefits for teachers, professors, and public relations between schools and universities. Quisenberry, McIntyre and Byrd (1990) and McIntyre (1994) showed that “resident professors”, or full-time tenure-track university faculty involved in coursework, field supervision and liaison with the elementary school, were critical to success of preservice field experiences. With these principles in mind, a joint committee of NKU faculty and Covington school personnel met to design a program beneficial to all stakeholders.

**Context**

In order to help readers interpret our efforts and evaluate our application of the patterns we have employed, we will provide contextual information on:

A. salient demographics of Covington school district
B. NKU and its School of Education
C. Genesis of this partnership
D. Where the “Covington Experience” fits in the teacher preparation sequence for elementary major
Covington schools are officially in crisis, based on Kentucky’s accountability system. They have scored at or near the bottom in the state’s rankings of schools at elementary, middle and senior high levels. The city is the largest in northern Kentucky at approximately 25,000. There is one comprehensive high school with 1,000 students, a junior high with 500, and five elementary schools totaling 2300 students. One alternative school serves as a behavioral outlet for 100 students in grades 3 – 6. 70 % of the students are eligible for free/reduced lunch. The racial/ethnic breakdown is 75% Caucasian, 25% African American and Hispanic. There are three major government subsidized housing projects totaling 15% of the school population. The average household income is $23,000 and 40% of families with children in school are headed by a single parent. 20% of the city’s population are on welfare. In contrast to the low scores of the district overall, the high school houses an International Baccalaureate program, and one elementary school hosts a gifted and talented program for 3rd through 6th graders. Contrary to the states of many urban school systems, Covington’s elementary, physical plants are in good repair – generally bright, cheerful, up-to-date facilities.

Northern Kentucky University is a state assisted public institution with an overall population of 12,000. Approximately 8,000 are undergraduates, with about 1,000 living on campus. NKU’s mission statement emphasizes good teaching and engagement with the local community. NKU’s School of Education has 26 full-time, tenure-track faculty and serves 1150 undergraduates and 440 graduate students. The School of Education has adopted a conceptual framework for all its programs that reinforces the desirability of significant school/university relationships. Five interlocking themes of Diversity, Assessment, Intellectual Vitality, Professional Community, and Technology guide the
School’s planning and implementation. We will elaborate on these themes late as we describe the patterns we have used in the Covington program.

The genesis of the grant that initiated Covington and NKU’s partnership was Goals 2000 monies obtained by an application co-written by a Covington schools administrator and two NKU professors. The purpose of the grant was to underwrite the development of three professional development schools – one each at elementary, middle, and secondary levels. To that end, faculty and administrators from both institutions met throughout 1995 to generate ideas for enriching practicum experiences for NKU students and learning opportunities for Covington students. The secondary program began in the fall of 1995, with the first elementary version beginning in Spring 1996. Programs have been running continuously at all three levels since the Fall of 1996.

The place of the practicum experience in the overall elementary program bears some examination. Students who are accepted for admission to the School of Education have completed 48 credit hours, have a minimum GPA of 2.5, and pass several screening tests. They complete an Admissions Semester consisting of an observation/participation practicum of 60 clock hours, plus courses in computer application, human growth and development, and an introduction to the profession. Then they take the block of courses which is the focus of this paper (called Professional Semester I), and which will be described in more detail later. After Professional Semester I, students take Professional Semester II, consisting of methods courses in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. They also participate in a practicum two mornings per week for 2 hours. Finally, they complete a student teaching placement.
As we mentioned earlier, Professional Semester I is the focus of this paper. Students take course work in assessment, early childhood concepts, management, reading, and special education. At our institution, they may elect to take these courses in a traditional campus-based plus once-a-week practicum format, or they may choose the “Covington program” as it has come to be known. Roughly one quarter to one third of students taking Professional Semester I choose the Covington program.

What are the differences in these Professional Semester I offerings for the college student? First, the campus-based program offers 10 – 20 hours of contact with elementary students, only 5 – 10 of these hours are actually teaching. The Covington program offers 70 – 80 hours teaching and tutoring contact. In the campus-based program students teach for an hour on Fridays. The Covington program, depending on the variation any given semester, offers nearly total immersion in the school culture. In the least involved manifestation, college students are working with elementary children two hours a day, three days a week, for ten weeks. In the most involved version, college students are working with elementary children 2 ½ hours a day, four days a week, for 12 weeks. In this most involved version, college students are in the elementary school from day one of the semester until test week, with all of the college “chalk-talk” sessions conducted on site.

The campus-based program requires student to integrate ideas from isolated courses in order to teach on Fridays. The Covington program offers the same courses as an integrated package; class time is spent more on problem-solving and selective application of principles than it is on systematic lecture and discussion of each subject. In
the campus-based program, many assignments are done to explore the subject. In the Covington program, every assignment is directly tied to involvement in the school. Perhaps the most important difference lies in the personnel. In the campus-based program college students see five professors, some of whom supervise them in their Friday practicum. In the Covington program, their course professor(s) also observe and evaluate their teaching, and coordinate activities with elementary school personnel. In a later part of this paper, we will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our program’s variations, and at that time will expand on the differences between the traditional, campus-based program and the Covington program but the above differences should serve to underscore the dramatic contrast between the two.

**Patterns of Partnership**

Over the past five years, we have seen several types of arrangements emerge from the Covington/NKU collaboration. We will enumerate those arrangements here, then go into more detail in an attempt to show not only how they differ, but how several can coexist and even weave together to form a complex and vital relationship. It is our belief that all participants (or “stakeholders” as they are commonly called) be informed of the nature of the collaboration underway and its overall goal or goals. Only under conditions of informed participation is it possible to evaluate success of the program by rational, empirical means. Furthermore, only by examining the varieties of partnership available is it possible to determine what is most relevant and beneficial to any given organization.

As we mentioned earlier, one of the dimensions along which partnerships can vary is a Relational one. The major Relationship Patterns we have identified are:
1. Organizational. A structural, broadscope agreement between two (or more) organizations.

2. Co-teaching. A situation where a pair of professors or a professor and K-12 teacher share responsibilities for teaching teaching candidates and/or school age students.

3. Collegial. A cadre of professors and K-12 teachers teach separate areas of Expertise, essentially on an independent basis but coordinating efforts for the benefit of students.

4. Mentoring. Close and frequent teacher-candidate pairings with pre- during-post teaching support and direction from the K-12 teacher.

5. Special projects. Collaboration between a school and university class for a specific assignment – such as doing a series of read alouds or storytelling sessions, doing a miscue analysis on a class, interviewing an elementary student and writing a book for him or her.

6. Demonstration or Model sites. A school and university collaborating to produce a “best practices” school for others to observe and learn from.

The second dimension of partnership patterns involves the level of immersion of the college student in the elementary school. If one thinks of student teaching as a total immersion in the culture and activities of a school, and a one-time, hour or two visit for a special event or assignment as the least involved possibility, it will help to place our attempts on a continuum. The Immersion Patterns we have used are:

1. Total Immersion. From day one until semester’s end, college students are on-site at the local elementary school. After some early preparation days,
students are fully integrated into the culture of the school.

2. Early Preparation/Intensive Teaching/Pullback. College students spend two or three weeks on campus learning reading, assessment and management concepts, then attend the elementary school to teach several lessons per week (usually 10-11 weeks), and return to campus to do culminating activities, final reports, and exams.

3. Early Preparation/Back and Forth/Pullback. This is similar to (2) above, with the exception of the middle phase. Instead of intensive, five-day-a-week teaching, students teach three days a week (typically Tuesday through Thursday) and go back to campus on Mondays and Fridays for classes with professors.

4. The Sample Traditional Pattern. Campus-based, this pattern emphasizes all-day classes for college students on Mondays and Wednesdays, and teaching a short lesson or completing observation/assessment activities in the elementary schools on Fridays.

5. Campus Compromise. The campus-based pattern of the future (Fall 2001 implementation), this plan emphasizes two days in college classrooms alternating with two days in the field. This plan has been used for several years in the next block of courses (language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies).

Please remember that Patterns 1 through 3 all revolved around involvement in the elementary school as a priority, with university concerns taking a backseat. Patterns 4 and 5 operate on the assumption of the university’s schedule as a priority. For the past six
years, some variation of 1, 2, or 3 has been available to undergraduates in at least one section. The campus-based options still enroll two-thirds to three-quarters of undergraduates at this stage of their program.

**Evaluation of the Program’s Successes and Problems**

As we implied earlier, no program like this can remain static and still serve useful purposes to the many people involved. Each relationship and immersion pattern (and, more importantly, the concatenation of the two) has its advantages and disadvantages. We have made many changes to improve the overall experience for undergraduates and children. However, we have also made changes that reflect exigencies of the moment, including most prominently the availability of professors, cooperating teachers, and space. In order to help readers judge the strengths and weaknesses of their own efforts in comparison with ours, and to help generate ideas for future action, we will present an in-depth look at our most intensive approach, which used Immersion Pattern One and took advantage of all Relationship Patterns except number 6, The development of a Model School. We focus on this instance because it is so unusual at this early level of undergraduate preparation. It is very close to a half-time student teaching situation with a university supervisor present at all times.

To better understand the most intensive university/public school partnership approach used by NKU, we will examine the following figures. Figure 1 shows the salient data related to the program. Compared to the average for mid-tier field experiences of 45 hours (Jaquith, 1994), our students double the clock hours with elementary children. Similarly, the time commitment for university faculty is
significantly higher than on-campus professors, averaging 20 contact hours per week for a 12 credit assignment as opposed to the more typical 10 contact hours. Figures 2 and 3 provide a detailed look at undergraduates’ involvement in the program and professional preparation. Figure 2 highlights both the chronological flow of a semester’s work from Orientation through Unit Teaching and the types and numbers of experiences students have during the practicum. Figure 3 describes the many and varied activities in which practicum students participate.

- **Students receive 14 credits for coursework.**
- Students log 17 ½ hours per week for 15-week semester.
- Students are at the school Monday through Friday 8:00 – 11:30.
- Students teach in major classroom assignment approximately 6 hours/week. They help in the same classroom another 2-3 hours/week.
- Students tutor reading, writing and assorted other subjects approximately 3 hours/week.
- Total student/child contact averages 90 hours/semester.
- Main NKU faculty spends approximately 20 hours/week for 12-credit load. (With two schools, two faculty, 15 hours/week.)
- 20 Students per section may enroll each semester. Enrollment averages 17.

*Figure 1. Covington elementary partnership by the numbers.*
• **ORIENTATION:** School tour, ½ hour visits to each of the participating classrooms, presentations by administrators, specialists and teachers.

• **PREPARATION:** Approximately 2 1/2 weeks of intensive preparation in assessment, management, reading and writing pedagogy, concepts of developmental appropriateness, topics in special education.

• **ENTRY-LEVEL TEACHING:** Approximately three weeks of teaching relatively short (30-60 minutes) lessons on a specific skill, strategy or topic. 4-8 lessons.

• **MORE INVOLVED LESSONS:** Two or three weeks of longer lessons, spanning 2-3 days and covering topics or sequences that need more time. 2-3 lessons.

• **UNIT TEACHING:** Two or three weeks of teaching a thematic, integrated unit tied to one of the major performances in Kentucky’s Early Learning Profile, or similar unit organization.

• **SELF-EVALUATION:** Each lesson, each day. In conferences after being observed. Through video documentation project. In final exams and reports.

• **COMMUNITY CONTACT:** Participate in Readifest (August) or Mayfest, go on home visits or neighborhood canvassing with Family Resource Center personnel.

• **TUTORING:** ½ hour per week with 4th grader in writing, ½ hour per week with 1st grade student in reading, 2 hours per week varied subjects in the major classroom.

• **EXPOSURE TO VARIED AGES AND ABILITIES:** Students tutor a primary student and an intermediate student, work in a major-assignment classroom with a two-year age range, teach in “inclusion” settings, and make observational visits to on-site adult learning centers, infant daycare room and 3-4 year old preschool.

Figure 2. Covington elementary partnership major experiences.
- Read and take notes on seven books.
- Do an extended assessment of two children – reading tutorial and writing portfolio development.
- Do daily anecdotal logs on reading practices, assessment topics, and management.
- Complete observations of teaching styles and classroom environment in 10-12 rooms at several grade levels.
- Compile a portfolio to meet conditions of Kentucky’s New Teacher Standards.
- Draw up and revise a classroom management plan.
- Complete a video documentation project (3 tapings plus report).
- Submit lesson plans and reflections regularly (10-12 weeks).
- Develop manipulative materials for enhancing literacy lessons and submit final report.
- Participate in collaborative project investigating Kentucky’s Seven Primary Attributes.
- Submit midterms and final exams (largely take-home; given out first week of classes; designed to make students integrate book learning, direct experience, and college classroom activities.

Figure 3. Covington elementary partnership.
This program can be exhausting for the supervising professor and students. However, anonymous program evaluations reveal that fully 90% of undergraduates say it was not only rewarding but they would do it again. Many cite the intangibles, immersion in the school culture, getting to know children well, having a real idea of what day-to-day teaching is about, as their strongest reasons for favoring this approach. Just as success breeds success, authenticity breeds authenticity. The environment, and continuous presence in the school, creates genuine opportunities, both for fortuitous learning, and for flexing with less desirable situations like last-minute assemblies. This continued exposure to the real world of children in school in turn creates the opportunity for better test questions and project assignments, and of course, for better answers and completed products. For professors, the experiences offer a real setting and reality check on expectations and assignments. It can be a pleasure reading multiple papers on the same assignment prompt because each answer has uniqueness, individual voice and perspective generated from rich, differing circumstances.

Students develop sharper skills of self-evaluation due to the increased time in schools, and they have many more opportunities to refine not only their teaching practices, but also their ability to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. NKU’s School of Education claims to develop “The Teacher as a Reflective Decision Maker” and each course syllabus states that “a reflective decision maker is one who knows how to evaluate and modify teaching approaches to meet emerging student needs.” While this may be true in piecemeal fashion in other courses, the integrated block of courses offers a comprehensive setting for this reflection. Students do all of the following:
• video documentation project, in which they tape themselves at least three times, 
evaluate the tapings, and prepare a final report and showing of tape reflecting 
their growth.

• post-teaching conferences with university supervisor in which they take the lead 
in self evaluation before the supervisor offers observations.

• post-teaching and long range conferences with cooperating teachers

• daily lesson reflections

• textbook study logs focusing on response/reaction/questions

• observational notes in all courses, tied to the final exam questions

Of course, all of this takes place in a context in which students evaluate the program 
anonymously several times; cooperating teachers fill out evaluations weekly, at mid-
semester, and at the end of experience; university supervisors complete evaluations based 
on the state-mandated form; qualitative mid-term exams replace the typical memorize 
and regurgitate test; and issue-driven chalk talks replace more typical informational 
lectures. All of this leads to the selection and evaluation process of determining which 
documents best represent the student as an emerging excellent teacher according to 
Kentucky’s New Teacher Standards.

In addition to the heavy emphasis on reflection and maximizing undergraduates’ 
time in elementary classrooms, the following positive features mark this approach. This 
program:

• offers consistency and coherence for undergraduates. The same professor 
teaches nearly all course work, observes lessons, and coordinates the overall 
program.
• relies on students’ construction of meaning out of the interface of book learning, direct experience, and expert seminars in the college classroom.

• occurs early in the undergraduate career, allowing a real test of the students desire to become a teacher.

• reflects a true partnership of agendas, honoring the elementary school personnel’s needs in curriculum, scheduling, and the like rather than assuming that the school will simply adjust to the university’s decision on when they’ll be there and what they’ll do.

• serves to unleash college students’ intelligence, rather than dragging it out of them or leveling it.

• expects-demands creativity and initiative rather than making those qualities merely desirable.

• fosters an atmosphere in which the NKU School of Education’s five interrelated themes can thrive. These themes include: Diversity, as addressed through the diverse backgrounds of elementary students, the diverse perspectives of professional who teach the NKU students, and the diverse literature, materials, and strategies needed to teach youngsters at the school.; Evaluation and Assessment, both of elementary students and of self, are continuous and embedded in instruction.; Intellectual Vitality, which emanates mainly from the heady atmosphere NKU students experience when they are totally immersed in the culture of the school. Simultaneous with their course studies they are introduced to all facets of the workings of an elementary school. In addition they find that they will learn from many professionals,
with expertise in diverse areas; Professional Community is exemplified through the very nature of the program – conceived collaboratively by NKU and Covington personnel, co-taught by elementary and NKU teachers, and dependent upon daily collaborations between NKU students and cooperating teachers. Additionally, NKU students are introduced to various inservice and professional development opportunities. The Use of Technology is manifested in various ways. NKU students work with writing portfolio 4th graders in the computer lab each week. They use a variety of media in their major-assignment classrooms, and they videotape themselves at least 3 times for self-evaluation purpose.

Finally, this approach allowed for utilization of all but one of the Relationship Patterns we identified earlier. The Organizational relationship was reflected in the genesis of the partnership and in the beginning-and-ending-semester meetings among all involved parties to evaluate the latest effort and plan for the next. Co-teaching was employed to integrate the content of reading, assessment, management, and special education. This was successfully accomplished first by two professors, then by a professor and elementary teacher. Collegial relationship became more common as the university’s representation is reduced to one. Figure 4 illustrates the collaborative activities across the partnership. A host of other resource people became available to undergraduates. These resource people also augmented the Mentoring relationship of the cooperating teacher to the undergraduate. Several people provided individual support beyond their role as expert presenters and information sources. Due to the long-term availability of undergraduates in this program, many Special Projects relationships thrived. These were frequently spur-
of-the-moment helping assignments for the whole school or individual teachers, involving field trips, teaching, assessment, or making materials. They would not have been possible in infrequent, assignment-driven practicum.

- University and School District Personnel Co-Wrote the Goals 2000 grant.
- Elementary faculty steering committee and NKU professors co-planned the experiences NKU students would have.
- Two NKU professors co-taught five-course block (assessment, early childhood education, management, reading, special education, plus “practicum” course) when the program began.
- After the first semester, courses co-taught by elementary faculty and NKU faculty.
- One elementary teacher serves as on-site coordinator and liaison.
- Family Resource Center directors provide special events, training, and activities for NKU students.
- At least six elementary faculty do training for or give presentations to NKU students on: remedial reading tutoring, writing portfolio tutoring; use of computer lab; roles of school psychologist, speech therapist, principal, EBD teacher, FMD teacher.
- Seminars by Kentucky Department of Education field resource personnel.
- NKU students collaborate with cooperating teacher from elementary faculty to plan and evaluate (occasionally co-teach) lessons.
- Occasionally NKU students are paired to teach two to a room instead of singly.
- Both elementary teachers and NKU faculty evaluate NKU students’ planning, teaching and follow-up.
There are, of course, disadvantages. As was already mentioned, this program can be extremely challenging. Students need to be organized and highly motivated. Even with advance interviews and extensive printed material available, few undergraduates that elect this option are still not ready for the jump-start into the profession.

Professors find their time dominated by the program. If they have a full course load, they spend about 20 contact hours with more devoted to preparing and reading student work. As rewarding as it can be, it precluded other forms of professional life (such as writing about what one is doing). If the responsibility is shared, there is always the dilemma of splitting time between campus assignments and partnership school assignments. In addition, there can be considerable sentiment against the program by the campus-based faculty. The main complaint continues to be the larger numbers of students in campus-based sections. (For instance, if two sections of partnership program students average 15, the campus classes will have 25 rather than 20 students.)

The issue of retaining and recruiting high quality elementary faculty is major. Only spotty efforts have been made to select only the best cooperating teachers, to provide appropriate professional development, and to move schools toward model site status. Once more than one elementary school is used, the issue of how to coordinate resources becomes more complicated. In a sense, smaller is better, if smaller also means self-contained.

Many undergraduates experience disorientation and culture shock the ensuing semester when they return to a traditional, campus-based program. With the campus-based program, they are likely to experience four differing college professors, none of who supervise their teaching, in an alternating-day, teach-a-lesson-at-a-time format.
Perhaps, most disorienting, though, is the loss of ownership of their developing teaching career.

**Program Evaluation and Future Research**

In order to continue to better understand the effectiveness of the program, we believe one area that needs more data is the program’s organization. Currently, the Covington Partnership reflects a pattern much closer to Immersion Pattern 3: The Early Preparation/Back and Forth/Pullback pattern. This has allowed faculty to juggle both on-campus and partnership responsibilities, coordinate efforts among four professors, and maintain relationships in two buildings. Many of the details described in the Total Immersion pattern are still operating. It is likely, with changes in personnel, that a new pattern may emerge. Also, a small group of NKU and Covington personnel are meeting to redirect and improve the partnership arrangement originating in the Goals 2000 grant in 1995. If effected, the overall direction will be the most involved ever between the two institutions, with provisions for recruitment of future teachers, alternate curricula in general education and professional preparation, and incentives for going back to Covington for several years of teaching after graduation.

In addition to continuing further research on the organization of the program, we also felt more research was needed to determine how well prepared students felt for the next block of classes. To accomplish this goal, each semester, we have informally surveyed all of the stakeholders in this program. Questions included their perceptions about coursework and practicum experiences. The data from these surveys can be found in the appendix. Of particular interest to us was how students felt in regards to classroom confidence, assessment, developmentally appropriate practice, classroom management,
and reading instruction. The results indicate students exiting this program felt more self-assured in many areas specifically classroom management, school culture and organization, self-assessment, and reading content. Gathering more systematic, formal data relating to questions about content covered in the 390 block would help provide needed instructional information about the program.

We have also compared the mean scores on Praxis II exams of those who participated in the intensive field-based approach and those who did not. There were no measurable differences, but we relied on volunteered scores and the field-intensive group supplied their data at a much higher rate (85% to 43%) than did the traditional practicum participants. A systematic and comprehensive collection and analysis would be needed.

In addition, we collected observation data from one faculty member who taught in the intensive program and visited classrooms of students during the following semester’s practicum (language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science teaching) to observe possible differences between the intensive and traditional practicum students. While obviously not an unbiased source, this professor concluded that the intensive practicum students were more confident teachers, more child-focused than lesson-focused, better managers of climate, routines, flow, and unexpected events, more comfortable being observed and evaluated, and more capable of sustaining lessons of longer length. We believe a worthwhile hypothesis would be to investigate observations by professors who do not know the students and who do not know the differing programs from which they have participated. These observations would supply the needed information to help determine how well students are prepared after leaving this program. And finally, we gathered data from mentor teachers, host teachers, and student observations. Weekly,
mid-semester, end-of-experience evaluations of students were gathered as well as evaluations regarding the overall program. These data provide a rich base for internal changes and judgments of effectiveness.

Although we have collected the surveys and gathered student and program evaluations, we have not systematically and objectively measured the effectiveness of this approach to mid-tier field experiences versus the more traditional approach with fewer hours in the elementary classroom. We hope that the lessons learned from attending to constant change will help us to improve our offerings. With more systematic research, we hope to improve the effectiveness of the program and help prepare students for teaching in the best possible “partnership” circumstances.
References


