



Chapter 4

Improving Literacy Instruction Through University and P12 Partnerships: Using the SPICE Early Literacy Grant to Foster Literacy Instruction

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ABSTRACT

The Strategic Partnering for Integrated Comprehensive Systems in Education (SPICE Early Literacy Grant) focused on supporting authentic, meaningful, and sustainable university-school district partnerships to promote inclusive models of preparation and personnel development for educators, improving equitable access to high-quality instruction and equitable outcomes for struggling learners and funding development efforts that supported shared inquiry into common problems of practice related to improving reading results for all learners. A Midwestern university's School of Education partnered with a local low-resourced school district whose reading scores based-upon the district report card system in Ohio continue to fall below proficient. By providing Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS), training to inservice teachers and providing the theory of LETRS during teacher preparation training to preservice teacher candidates, a strong partnership takes place during the clinical field experience.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3443-7.ch004

INTRODUCTION

Poke your head into any P12 school located near a university and you will likely find a preservice teacher participating in some kind of activity within the classroom, be it observing to learn, working with a small group of students to practice a skill, or full-on teaching as a teacher candidate.

The partnership between the university teacher education department and the local P12 schools has long been recognized as vital for both institutions (Cole & Knowles, 1993; NCATE, 2010; CAEP, 2013). The teacher preparation program must partner with the local P12 schools for field and student teaching experiences. It is in the local P12 schools where preservice teachers begin to practice what is being learned in the university classroom. It is at the local school where preservice teachers work alongside experienced, mentor (inservice) teachers who guide, encourage, and model for novice preservice teachers. It is this partnership where the university site-supervisor also guides, encourages, and models high quality instructional practices with these same preservice teachers. Conversely, the local schools need the university to continue to train, develop and ready the next generation of classroom teachers to replace retiring teachers and to provide a trained, licensed workforce when additional classroom teachers are needed. Goodlad (1993) referred to this partnership as a symbiotic relationship; a relationship that has existed for years.

Perhaps the potential for another somewhat symbiotic relationship has existed, and has maybe even explored to a greater or lesser degree (Ahlgrim-Delzell et al., 2016; Fisher & Rogan, 2012; Zenkov, Shiveley, & Clark, 2016) between the university and the local schools; the scenario where the university provides professional development to the faculty of the local schools. This partnership provides two opportunities. First, the research-informed, evidence-based professional development provided to local school district inservice teachers by university faculty in the teacher preparation program based upon data-driven needs of the local schools. Second, the field experiences and student teaching opportunities in classrooms where theory to practice happens in greater ways for preservice teachers who have learned the same material as the local school faculty during professional development. It was those two types of opportunities that sparked the partnership for the Strategic Partnering for Integrated Comprehensive Systems in Education (SPICE) grant and subsequent work.

BACKGROUND

For several years the Ohio Deans Compact on Exceptional Children (Deans) has offered incentive grants to university teacher preparation programs to support the

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