Circle of Inquiry: Partnership Researchers’ Perspectives on School-University Collaborative Processes
Circle of Inquiry:
Partnership Researchers’ Perspectives on School-University Collaborative Processes

A paper presented at the annual conference of American Educational Research Association (San Diego, April 2009)

Jill Jeffery, Research Assistant,
Partnership for Teacher Excellence

Robert Tobias, Director,
Center for Research on Teaching and Learning

New York University

CRTL Research Paper Series
RP-0309-02

March 2009

Center for Research on Teaching and Learning
Department of Teaching and Learning
The Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development
New York University

© Copyright 2009 by the Center for Research on Teaching and Learning
ABSTRACT

Our paper reports on evaluation research pertaining to a large school-university partnership aimed at making teacher education more responsive to urban schools. In specific, we critically examine the processes enacted when implementing co-instructed and site-based courses at partner schools. Our analysis addresses two questions: 1) What are the perceived benefits and challenges of our site-based and co-instructed courses on pre-service development on the part of: pre-service teacher education students, university faculty, and secondary school faculty? 2) What do these findings suggest about relationships between process, context, and perceived outcomes in the site-based co-instruction model. To this end, we explore evaluation data based on multiple methods and multiple perspectives, including surveys, interviews, student course evaluations, and observations of co-instructed courses and meetings. Our ongoing monitoring of these strategies suggests that benefits are inextricably tied to context, variability, implementation processes, and the nature of collaborative relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Though educational reform literature suggests that more effective teacher preparation can be achieved when universities and the schools they serve work as partners in teacher education (Anagnostopoulos, Smith & Basmadjian, 2007; Bullough & Draper, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Patterson, 1999), there has been insufficient critical inquiry into the processes involved in realizing authentic collaboration or how such processes impact on learning. To address this gap,
we investigate collaborative processes engaged in to initiate and develop a major partnership between a large city university and 19 secondary schools in high-needs, culturally diverse urban neighborhoods. Our Partnership was launched in 2006 with grant support. Its overarching goal is to prepare teachers to teach effectively in diverse urban schools, despite the cultural mismatch between themselves and the students they teach, by putting in place new structures and processes spanning pre- and in-service teacher education. In this study, we focus on one specific instance of collaboration aimed at narrowing theory-practice gaps in pre-service teacher education. We critically examine the processes enacted when implementing a co-instructed site-based course at one partner high school. Focusing on this aspect of our Partnership efforts allows us to address two especially under-researched collaborative strategies: 1) employing schoolteachers as university course instructors and 2) holding teacher education courses on school sites.

We assume that early partnership program research should focus on processes rather than solely on outcomes (Goodlad, 1993; Maurrasse, 2002) and that the substance of innovative teacher education programs is found in "the elaboration and enactment of particular program features rather than in their mere presence or absence" (Zeichner & Conklin, 2008, p. 285). Accordingly, we collaboratively inquire into the processes, or "ongoing action/interaction/emotion taken in response to situations, or problems" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 96) we engaged in toward realizing our goal of merging theory and practice in site-based co-teaching partnerships. We examine two questions: 1) What are the perceived benefits and challenges of our Partnership model on pre-service
development on the part of: pre-service teacher education students, graduates of teacher
education programs, university faculty, and secondary school faculty? 2) What do these
findings suggest about relationships between process, context, and perceived outcomes in
the site-based co-instruction model?

Our teacher education department's signature course, Inquiries, aims to develop
deeply reflective teachers by involving pre-service educators in extensive field
experiences. In 2006, several Inquiries courses began meeting at Partner high schools.
We expanded this strategy throughout the course of the three year Partnership
implementation period so that this year (2008-2009 academic year) all but one of 20
sections of Inquiries are being co-instructed by DOE (city department of education) and
University faculty on Partner school campuses. The one exception was a course designed
for part-time students who could not meet during regular school hours. Observations for
students taking this course were arranged at an alternative high school that held classes in
the evening.

While we view our co-instructed, site-based teacher education model as being
largely successful, we are mindful of warnings that the rush to highlight program
effectiveness can, if overemphasized in the absence sufficient critical inquiry, harm
partnership reform efforts (Goodlad, 1993). And while much of the data we collected on
our model suggests it is effective in helping both DOE instructors and pre-service
teachers connect theory to practice, student course evaluation data complicate this
conclusion. With the goal of improving future practice to meet Partnership goals, we
critically examine multiple perceptions on the effectiveness our co-instructing model and the collaborative processes engaged in that impacted on these perceptions.

**REVIEW OF RESEARCH**

Though employing practicing schoolteachers as university course instructors has been identified as a means of improving the exchange of ideas between institutions, there is currently little understanding of the processes through which such exchanges might occur. In one model, selected teachers are released from their school teaching duties for short-term (1-3 year) university guest lecturer contracts, with the expectation that they will carry new insights back to the classroom when they return. Researchers in Australia (Allen & Butler-Mader, 2007; Perry, Walton & Conroy, 1998) and New Zealand (Russell & Chapman, 2001) have examined the use of this model and suggested there are many benefits as reported by participating teachers. These include improved mentoring skills, a tendency to take on leadership roles, and a greater appreciation of theory-practice connections. However, such research tells us little about the collaborative processes in which these teachers engaged or how such processes related to desirable outcomes.

Similarly, while research on mature site-based teacher education programs suggests that teachers who graduate from such programs are better prepared to teach (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007) and that such programs promote simultaneous institutional renewal (Shroyer, Yahnke, Bennett & Dunn, 2007; Trachtman, 2007), we still have a poor understanding of the processes that support these outcomes. In addition, most of such research is centered on the professional development school
(PDS) model. Site-based co-instructed courses provide a promising but largely unexamined alternative to the PDS model. Our panel addresses this gap in the research by examining the early development of a site-based instructional partnership.

Our ongoing analysis suggests that processes were highly dependent on the context in which they occurred. That is, locating our collaborative efforts at the school site, rather than the University was an important factor in our ability to bridge cultural divides and promote egalitarian relationships among institutions. However, results on the perceived impact of these collaborative efforts by pre-service teachers were highly variable. Though we are not yet able to evaluate the extent to which we have reached our ultimate partnership goal of providing a “model for urban public school teacher education across the nation,” here we provide a model of collaborative inquiry for others wishing to implement similar strategies.

**MODE OF INQUIRY**

*Data Sources*

We examine a variety of data sources representing multiple perspectives collected throughout the three-year partnership: field notes taken from 4 Inquiries class observations and 3 Inquiries team meetings during fall 2008 and spring 2009 semesters; 3 co-instructor focus groups in spring 2007 and spring 2009; 3 co-instructor surveys administered in winter 2008 and winter 2009; and spring 2007 course feedback forms from students in site-based, co-instructed, and conventional (campus-based, single instructor) teacher education courses.
Methods

We use mixed methods to analyze data from course evaluations, surveys, focus groups, and course observations. First, a grounded method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was employed to infer relationships between context, processes and outcomes. Field notes of Inquiries course observations, meetings, and focus groups were coded for challenges, benefits, and processes to identify patterns among these data sources. Second, a co-relational analysis of course feedback form ratings was conducted to compare results for co-instructed and conventional courses.

Researcher Perspectives

One of us, Bob, is an experienced program evaluator and director of the University’s Center for Research on Teaching and Learning. The other, Jill, is a doctoral student at the University and has been employed as a research scientist for the Partnership since 2006. In this role, she has been responsible for the coordination of co-instructed partnerships (recruiting, vetting, and assisting in placement of City DOE teachers as co-instructors). She also collected observation and survey data to inform efforts to improve the co-instructing model. In spring 2009, she began co-instructing a literacy course with a DOE math teacher at a Partner school. This experience provided her with deeper insight into the challenges and benefits of the model investigated in this study.
RESULTS

Challenges

Challenges of co-instructed courses. Curiously, given the literature suggesting that cultural differences between institutions present the greatest challenge to school-university partnerships, these was less prominent across data sources than were logistical challenges like finding time to meet and managing scheduling conflicts. However, there is some evidence that cultural conflicts were at least initially an issue. DOE instructors’ responses to survey and focus group questions do indicate that they often felt more like assistants than equals. The most biting feedback came in a 2008 survey in which a DOE co-instructor commented that University faculty appeared “more interested in themselves than . . . the needs of their colleagues and students.” Most cold feedback in that survey was less severe, with teachers describing the relationship as more a “taking turns” arrangement than a real collaboration. Some expressed reservations about voicing their opinions when they disagreed with University faculty; others described being undermined when grading student work; several felt they had little role to play in developing course content and leading discussions. In some cases, their responses suggest they mistakenly thought University faculty had not voluntarily engaged them as co-instructors.

University faculty admitted they found it difficult at times to “share the stage” [2009 survey], an issue that was identified in two student course evaluations as well. One, for example, commented that the University professor “seemed over possessive of the class”, another that “it’s a shame that . . . the professor was so much more dominant that the ‘assistant’ became virtually invisible” [2007 course feedback form]. Few courses
at that time were being taught on school sites. So it’s interesting to note that several DOE teachers proposed holding courses at their schools as a way of making instructional relationships more egalitarian and of capitalizing on their practical knowledge. Having a course taught on their “turf”, they suggested would both make them feel more comfortable and help University instructors gain new appreciation for their knowledge and expertise [2007 DOE focus group].

Another challenge to co-teaching involved communication. First, both University and DOE faculty expressed desire for more clarity with respect to their roles and responsibilities as co-instructors. In the 2007 focus group DOE faculty expressed the need for more information regarding the University’s teacher education program and how the course they were teaching fit into the bigger picture. Finally, they expressed a desire for more opportunities to interact with other DOE co-instructors to share co-instruction ideas and reflections (both desires similarly expressed in the 2008 survey). These communication problems continued to be addressed as Inquiries courses expanded their co-instructing partnerships and held monthly meetings to share strategies, clarify expectations, and provide other useful information regarding resources and procedures.

However, we also observed communication problems at the University’s education department meetings when the co-instruction model was discussed. In some cases, faculty not directly involved in co-instructing partnerships expressed reservations and misperceptions about the goals and processes involved in implementing the strategy. For example, some saw it as being based in an “intervention model”—rather than a two-way collaboration—in which the DOE expected the University’s teacher preparation
courses to be more responsive to their needs. In other cases, faculty expressed worries that those responsible for implementing the model were not sufficiently mindful of how it impacted on their programs and that they were not undergoing proper administrative channels when redesigning courses [9/09 committee meeting field notes]. If Partnership initiatives are to be sustained, clearer two-way communication regarding goals, expectations, and outcomes is of vital importance.

**Challenges of site-based courses.** Without question, the biggest hurdle to implementing a site-based course model is the logistical challenge it poses. This issue pervades every data source, but was particularly evident in students’ responses to course evaluation forms in spring 2007. Students often did not see the hassle of traveling to school sites as being worthwhile, complaining in several instances that the schools merely provided a space for the class rather than an opportunity to interact with school culture. Students were very clear and consistent in making this point. One, for example, reflected that “having the course off campus is a great idea and being in the school is an incredible addition to the course, but it should be utilized more for the teachers/administration/students and not just as a place to hold a class” [spring 2007 course feedback]. Several suggested that the courses be held on school sites only when there was a specific field-based activity planned; others suggested alternating between University and school sites. Clearly, students must see the relevance of holding courses at schools, an issue that was subsequently addressed and is discussed in greater detail below.
Course instructors also frequently mentioned logistical challenges; however, both university and school faculty identified differing schedules rather than transit as a problem. School and University holidays were often incompatible. As one DOE instructor explained, “the [University] schedule is so ‘set’ and my high school’s schedule changes so much that it’s hard to keep things consistent” [2009 survey]. On school holidays, University courses had no space in which to meet, resulting in lost course time, even though the scheduling conflicts were evident months in advance. At a large city University where space is scarce, a budget is needed to pay for meeting space when such conflicts occur. As one University instructor pointed out, the University saves money by having courses held off campus, and some of that savings could be directed toward this purpose [3/09 email communication].

Communication with school leaders was also frequently mentioned as a challenge to collaboration. Curiously, DOE faculty were more likely to identify their school as generated obstacles to partnership than they were the to identify the University. For example, when asked how they managed institutional culture clashes, school principals and teachers were more likely to be discussed by DOE instructors than were University personnel [spring 2009 focus group]. In one case, a school principal who had been supportive of the University’s presence was replaced by one who was not, a change that almost resulted in classes no longer being held there. The energetic efforts of a former DOE principal acting as Partnership liaison were required to sustain our work in that school. Without the support of school administration and faculty, DOE instructors worried that Inquiries classes would “wear out our welcome” in the school.
DOE teachers often acted as advocates for the University by arranging meeting space, opportunities for observation, student guest speakers, and principal involvement as guest speaker or evaluator of student projects. One DOE teacher remarked that she had “used up a lot of social capital” acting as University advocate [Inquiries meeting, 2/09]. This issue was raised repeatedly by DOE teachers in surveys, focus groups, and meetings. One DOE instructor commented:

Sometimes the staff is dismissive of the [University] students because there is no benefit for them to be observed. The staff can have up to 3 [University] students observing them weekly (this may make the teacher nervous or pressured to teach well) and in the end they don’t get any benefits from having these visitors in the classroom. [2009 survey].

Though funds were available to award teachers who engaged University students by allowing them to observe classes or acting as guest speakers, these were not seen as adequate incentive for their participation. In general, DOE instructors saw tremendous benefits of the site-based model to themselves and to NYU students, but they did not see similar benefits to their school. The difficulty of finding ways to honor teachers for their involvement and make sure that schools perceive a benefit in exchange for their considerable efforts is still being addressed.

Benefits

**Benefits of co-instructed courses.** Co-instructors and pre-service teacher education students identified many benefits of having teacher preparation courses co-instructed by a schoolteacher. The most frequently observed benefit across data sources
was linking of theory and/or policy to practice. One benefit was that DOE instructors, as discussed above, often acted as liaisons to facilitate school-based experiences. In addition, schoolteachers were aware of district-wide initiatives and how these impacted on classroom teaching. As such, they were able to link their insights to course readings. Jill had the opportunity to see this theory-practice interchange in action at a site-based Inquiries class she observed. In this class, she tallied the number of times each instructor spoke, which turned out to be precisely equal. In this pattern of exchange, a student would raise a question or make a comment on the school reform readings, the University instructor would comment on a policy or theoretical issue, and the DOE instructor would follow up with an illustration on how policy affected her teaching. One striking aspect of this exchange was the openness of the discussion. When a student asked how empowered teachers are to push back against policies they feel are detrimental to student learning, for example, the DOE instructor was very frank about her experience, reflecting that “I like to think of myself as more rebellious than I was.” When co-instructors share responsibilities evenly, as did this team, they can also provide a model for professional collaboration, one that was identified by instructors if not by students, in survey responses.

Both DOE and University instructors commented directly on theory-practice linkage in surveys, focus groups, and meetings. For instance, University instructors commented that co-teaching “allowed for opportunities to demonstrate the links between theory and practice and the need to implement practices supported by research” and for “exchange of content knowledge, fresh ideas, concrete examples from the classroom
[2007 focus group field notes]. These theory-practice connections not only benefited pre-service teachers, but also DOE instructors, one of whom was reminded of “the theory that I once studied and its relevance to my practice now.” Another found s/he was “re-enaging with the literature from a practitioner’s perspective” [2008 survey] as a result of co-instructing. The benefits to DOE instructors are reflected in 2009 survey responses in which both DOE and University instructors agreed that co-instructing “enhanced the pedagogical and/or content knowledge” of the DOE instructor. Perplexingly, DOE respondents were less likely to feel that the benefits of co-instructing extended to their secondary schools and students. However, many indirectly indicated school-wide benefits by discussing how co-instructing made them more aware of and skilled at their roles as teacher mentors. Still others explained how they were taking on leadership roles in their schools, a benefit also cited in the literature reviewed above.

Pre-service teachers also identified theory-practice connections as a benefit, commenting that the collaboration “bridged theory and practice” and provided “a very effective balance of different perspectives and teaching styles” [spring 2007 evaluation forms]. But while students generally cited more benefits that drawbacks to the co-instruction model, they nevertheless gave co-instructed courses somewhat weaker ratings (-.25 to -1.45) than they did the same conventional courses taught the previous year. Of 14 classes for which this comparison was drawn, co-instructed courses were rated slightly higher (+.06 to +.27) in only 3 instances. It is interesting to note, however, that 2 of these higher rated courses were Inquiries (as opposed to methods) courses, a discrepancy that is discussed in greater detail below.
Another potential benefit of co-instructed courses is teacher retention by way of better preparing pre-service teachers to face the realities of teaching and providing them better support once they get into the classroom. Sometimes, the benefits cited were less about linking theory to practice than about understanding “what it’s really like” to teach in city schools. In one inventive Inquiries course activity, for example, a DOE instructor shared her pay stub along with a spreadsheet of her expenses. She did so, she explained, out of concern that teachers often left the field due to disillusionment. She wanted teachers to have a clearer idea of what it meant to live in the city on a teacher’s pay. In an informal mid-term feedback form for the course, students cited this activity as the one they found most beneficial, despite their muted reactions at the time [Inquiries meeting field notes, 2/09]. Co-instruction might also help to retain DOE instructors and the teachers they mentor, since many described the benefits of participating in terms of career advancement and “feeling valued.” One instructor even explained that teaching at the University earned him/her more respect in their eyes of his/her secondary students [2008 survey]. Others commented that their University work connected them to a wider network of engaged educational professionals. For teachers whose profession is often subject to public criticism and who are prone to feeling under-appreciated, this outcome was highly valued.

**Benefits of site-based courses.** The benefits of co-instructed courses cited above are even more prominent and well articulated in data pertaining to site-based courses. As long as pre-service teachers saw the relevance of meeting on a school campus, they were willing to deal with the relative inconvenience. DOE instructors were able to not only
facilitate observations on their school sites, but also to gauge the optimal timing for these observations. For example, during a visit to an Inquiries course, Jill asked the DOE instructor when students would begin observing. He responded that while normally University students would do this earlier, his school was experiencing upheaval due to budget cuts and was “not ready” to be observed [2/09 observation field notes]. This kind of sensitivity to school needs has the potential to minimize the unwelcoming-to-outsiders aspect of school culture identified above.

One prominent theme across data sources was the potential for site-based, co-instructed courses to challenge students’ assumptions about teaching in urban schools. As one University instructor put it, the model provided “opportunities for [University] students to see real [City] schools and unpack their preconceived notions about kids, school buildings, etc.” [2009 survey]. DOE instructors similarly saw the potential for challenging perceptions:

On-site observations are in a shared environment, allowing for discussion around issues that could be seen as absolute, or easily judged. Instant, snap rulings on “good” and “bad” are often changed into questions posed, and often find responses that introduce obstacles, special circumstances, particular learning issues, and in general, more thoughtful conversation—all because we are all in the same building at the same time. We have the opportunity to find out as a group about the general student population, teaching philosophies, school and administrative structures—much more deeply. [2009 survey]
This potential for challenging perceptions through shared observations of not just teaching, but of a wider school culture and its impact on day-to-day classroom activities, adds depth to the more generic theory-practice references discussed above. This aspect of school-university integration is especially important given suggestions that unstructured or un-guided observations have the potential to reinforce negative stereotypes of urban schools and the students who attend them (Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007).

In addition, students and instructors alike expressed an appreciation for being immersed in school culture with frequent references to “the realities” of teaching. For example, words like “exposure”, “actual”, and “real” came up repeatedly in student feedback with respect to site-based courses. As one student observed, “it means so much, having actual teachers show us what to do in a class.” Another enthused that “it was great having the course off campus in a real high school and having actual HS teachers to talk to” [spring 2007 course feedback form]. Similarly, a University instructor commented, “there is a level of reality to the experience that is not evident in a campus classroom” [2009 survey]. Jill was able to observe how the school culture permeated the University courses taught there during her class observations. Walking to the school, one gets a better sense of the surrounding community and its culture. In the class, even when students were not engaged in field-based activities, the sites and sounds impinged on the classroom. High school students frequently stepped in to grab items from lockers; intercom announcements interrupted discussion; the shouts and laughter of students could be heard, giving the course a sense of connectedness to “real” school context. Again,
however, the often-cited benefits to University students were not understood to extend to the secondary schools or the students who attended them.

**Structures and Processes that Facilitate Collaboration**

This study is not meant to provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of the co-instructed, site-based model for teacher education. We realize that our Partnership is still in development phase and as such, we consider it a “work in progress.” As one of the Inquiries co-coordinators said at this year’s “launching” meeting, “we’re not there yet” [9/08 Inquiries meeting field notes]. As such, we made an effort to observe program components and instances of implementation that we viewed as being relatively successful. As such, the processes described here represent the best, most sustained efforts at implementing site-based co-instructed teacher preparation courses.

**Structures.** A few caveats are therefore necessary. First, though co-instruction partnerships were evenly dispersed among methods and Inquiries courses when we launched the Partnership in 2006, this distribution has changed as Inquiries expanded, and methods courses reduced their participation. Initially, 7 courses, including multiple content area methods courses, were co-instructed with DOE teachers. By the fall 2008 semester, only 4 methods courses were being co-instructed. In addition, Inquiries courses made up 9 of 13 co-instructed sections in fall 2008, and only Inquiries courses have been scheduled at school sites. It is useful, then, to draw comparisons between Inquiries and other co-instructed courses when discussing structures and processes that appear to facilitate institutional collaboration.
First, University instructor focus group comments, along with comments made by tenured faculty in University committee meetings, indicate a growing consensus that some courses are more appropriate for the co-instructed, site-based model than others. Specifically, it appears faculty believe that courses with clear field-based components are better suited to the model. Inquiries is such a course. Another factor that may contribute to its relative success is that Inquiries University instructors were in all but one case either doctoral students or master teachers with extensive professional development experience. As such, this group may be more comfortable “sharing the stage” with their DOE colleagues. Yet this raises the question of sustainability. If only doctoral students and clinical faculty, who have less in the way of power and longevity than do senior faculty, how can true institutional collaboration take place? And, as one senior faculty suggested during a committee meeting, it is odd to have a core course through which all pre-service teachers must pass, that is rarely taught by tenured faculty [9/08 committee meeting field notes].

In addition, Inquiries is a core course that is not content or level-specific. As such, there is more room for overlap among instructors in terms of theoretical and philosophical inclinations. For example, survey and focus group data indicate that things went well, not surprisingly, when co-instructors shared philosophies of education. There is more room for such sharing in a course with a broader focus. Conversely, methods courses with a narrower focus may be more likely to engender theoretical rifts among co-instructors. In addition, a DOE instructor may be viewed, perhaps appropriately, as not possessing sufficient content and pedagogical content knowledge to act as co-equal
instructor. Conversely, a DOE teacher co-instructing a course on what it means to teach, and to teach in a city school, is almost certainly in possession of sufficient background knowledge.

Having said that, several structures were in place that facilitated institutional collaboration for co-instructed, site-based Inquiries courses. The first, and in our view, most significant, was the connective tissue provided by those in “boundary-spanning” roles. Two University faculty, one tenured and one clinical, acted as co-coordinators as well as co-instructors for Inquiries courses. This made it possible to put in place structures such as a web-based site to house course information, resources, and feedback. Co-coordinators also instituted monthly meetings that were sometimes held at restaurants or the coordinators’ homes. When held on campus, snacks were always offered. DOE teachers often referred to these meetings as making them “feel valued” [2009 survey] as professionals. These meetings also provided opportunities to clarify roles, responsibilities, common goals, and procedures; and they allowed instructors to share instructional ideas and feedback. These are the very things that the 2007 DOE instructor focus group participants identified as lacking during the first year of implementation.

Another structure the co-coordinators put in place was an orientation that introduced pre-service teachers to the goals and rationale for the site-based model. Without the collaborative efforts of the co-coordinators, along with two highly effective Partnership liaisons who helped to negotiate site-based initiatives, it’s doubtful that the model could be sufficiently responsive to the many logistical and interpersonal challenges it presents.
The co-coordinators also presented common resources that could be flexibly used. First, a common syllabus and coursepack of readings were made available to Inquiries partners, with the understanding that each team would use them differently. These structures, along with the monthly meetings, created a sense of common endeavor and focus that facilitated smoother collaboration among individuals and institutions. Because both the syllabus and coursepack reinforced and provided a reference point for Inquiries instructional goals, they made the potentially chaotic process of co-instructing on site more manageable.

**Processes.** When asked directly in focus groups and surveys what processes they engaged in to facilitate collaboration, co-instructors did not provide any earth-shattering revelations. Most mentioned a frequent and ongoing exchange of email and phone communication before and after classes. Often, they also described lengthy meetings before and after semesters, in which they evaluated and revised syllabi. Several explained that it was important to set an agenda for the course that clarified “who is doing what” [2009 survey]. This helped them clarify roles on a class-to-class basis. Several also described a general process of “becoming more comfortable” or “becoming friends” [2009 survey] over time. During the 2009 focus group, in which both University and DOE faculty were present, they discussed “trust” and shared beliefs about teaching, or simply being “well-matched.” When asked how deliberate the process of matching was, a co-coordinator responded that choices were made based on logistics and the personal qualifications of the instructors, rather than attention to compatibility. In general, it looked as if the selection of a like-minded group of committed individuals was more
important, at least in this context, than deliberate matching. In general, co-instructors emphasized that their working relationships developed over time as they learned trust and feel comfortable with one another and learned how to negotiate respective roles and responsibilities.

One of the issues that 2007 DOE instructor focus group respondents identified as a challenge when collaborating with University faculty was grading. Specifically, they lacked clarity regarding their role as well as performance expectations. Inquiries teams addressed this issue by making rubric development a course topic. Though the team’s rubrics differed in meaningful ways, the processes they used to develop the rubrics shared two features: collaboration and transparency. One meeting [3/09] was devoted to this topic, with teams sharing ideas about collaboratively developing rubrics with students and/or making their process of rubric development transparent for students. Developing the rubrics together provided a useful lesson to pre-service teachers, facilitated mutual responsibility for grading expectations, and increased the likelihood of consistent grading between co-instructors.

Perhaps the most important process that the Inquiries co-coordinators engaged in was to present and reinforce the idea of ongoing development and renewal. The idea that the Partnership model was under constant revision was repeatedly reinforced as coordinators responded to emerging issues by making significant changes to scheduling, procedures, and course materials. The most significant Inquiries revision was to change the times at which courses met. Beginning in 2008, all site-based courses began at 2:30 to facilitate more and more meaningful interaction with teachers, students, and
administrators. This was in response to pre-service teachers’ complaints, detailed above, that there did not seem to be any point to trekking to and from the schools. Scheduling the courses at 2:30 allowed University students to observe school activities and then debrief in their Inquiries class as the school day came to a close. For part-time University students who could not attend daytime courses, an alternate course was offered during the day, with field-based activities arranged at a “day and night” alternative school.

The Inquiries team also emphasized continuing revision through an essential course goal. The co-coordinators stressed, in a variety of contexts (meetings with instructors, student orientations) the goal of challenging preconceptions. For example, at the student orientation a coordinator made it explicit that Inquiries’ goal was not to impose a specific philosophy of education on students, but to help them formulate their own through a critical inquiry into teaching and learning. Rather than just using course readings to accomplish this goal, students would compare three data sources: their own educational experiences, their field observations, and course readings. By comparing the three and interpreting one in light of the others, students would be able to challenge their preconceptions, perceptions, and the readings. This reinforced the idea of continuous growth and development.

Jill observed this goal being enacted during an Inquiries observation. In this class, University students observed the same classroom throughout the semester in cohorts of 2-3, using an observation protocol developed by the co-instructors. The protocol was designed to focus students’ observations in relation to course readings, and to help students separate empirical observations from reflections. After spending 10
minutes free writing about their observations, the students were asked to share reflections. Students expressed concerns about what they perceived as problematic interactions at the school, with one finding it “strange” when a teacher read a paragraph for a student. The DOE instructor speculated about special education requirements that might have led to this strategy.

Another pre-service teacher worried about students’ “awful” language and what she perceived as a lack of clear boundaries for students. A peer chimed in that it was “not what [she] is used to” in a school. The DOE instructor asked, “Do you want me to talk about the [school’s] model?” He was able to help students situate their observations in the context of the school’s “community building” philosophy as it related to students’ needs. He explained that while he struggled with some of the “problematic” aspects of school processes like eliminating bells and using first names, he saw them as working for some, but not all, students [11/08 Inquiries observation field notes]. This ultimately served the purpose of complicating their responses to what they were observing, even if they didn’t ultimately find the school’s model convincing. Though students’ comments were not necessarily positive, they did appear to reserve making judgments about what they were seeing, an outcome that co-instructors had worked over the semester to achieve.

**DISCUSSION**

Our investigations suggest that two main factors contribute to authentic collaboration in site-based co-instructed courses: committed and energetic coordinators and an emphasis on ongoing development. The first, a structural factor, can prove costly.
However, it seems unlikely that the benefit suggested here would be possible if not for the considerable efforts of course coordinators and institutional liaisons. Without these people in place, who will ensure that programs have the necessary balance between common endeavor and flexibility that seems so effective in Inquiries? Who would be able to diagnose and address problems as they arose? Who would make sure that DOE instructors felt valued and integrated with the University? We advise that programs seeking to implement similar models begin by ensuring that connective personnel are first put in place.

The logistical and interpersonal challenges reported here also require a commitment to ongoing development. Though we first began scheduling co-instructed courses in 2006, we are only beginning to capitalize on the potential for these institutional and interpersonal collaborations. Both types of relationships must have room to grow, and must begin with the understanding that we won’t get it right at first. But with ongoing commitment, flexibility, and the assumption that it will be a bumpy process—especially during the implementation stage—we may see the results we hoped for. That is, as stated in our Partnership goals: a “model for urban public school teacher education across the nation.”
REFERENCES


