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Dianne Fields
Shaw Middle School, Spokane, WA

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A University/K-12 Partnership That Works

Dianne Fields
Shaw Middle School
Spokane, Washington

ABSTRACT

As stated in the Turning Points 2000, Educating Adolescents for the 21st Century, the entirety of a teacher's career should be a seamless continuum of learning and development focused on student learning. Critical steps along the continuum include high-quality pre-service teacher preparation, carefully designed mentoring and induction programs. This statement only reinforces what we have been doing in a partnership between Eastern Washington University and Shaw Middle School for the past seven years. The program provides a year long experience in one school for pre-service teachers. This enables the pre-service teachers to increase their understanding of the school, its students and culture. The University provides a supervisor to work with the mentor teacher/teachers and intern to develop a seamless program from the beginning practicum level through student teaching. It is a partnership that works!

In the new millennium of teaching and learning, educators are faced with markedly different challenges from those presented to educators only a decade or two ago. While public education continues to provide students with academic skills, historical perspectives, tools for the world of work, and character education, many of the techniques of the past no longer work for youngsters in our society today. For the preparation of pre-service teachers, the university and K-12 education system must work together to provide new teachers with pedagogical skills and an understanding of young people. Studies on the developmental characteristics and educational needs of young adolescents indicate the need for specialized programs to prepare teachers for this age group. Researchers and practitioners alike say it is essential to develop a cadre of teachers grounded in the philosophy of middle school education. (Silverman, 1990). According to a national survey (Epstein and MacIver, 1990), middle grades principals want their teacher to have command of their subject area, be able to increase student motivation, and to understand early adolescence. To achieve

such goals, preservice teacher education programs must provide experiences in middle school settings. A survey (McEwin and Alexander, 1987) of American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education member institutions found that only 33% of the 504 respondents had any kind of specialized program for middle-level teacher preparation. This is where university/K-12 partnerships can make a difference for pre-service teachers. One such partnership exists between Eastern Washington University and Shaw Middle School in Spokane, Washington.

Historically, student teaching has been limited to one quarter in a K-12 classroom. The frustration for both the administration and the student teacher supervisor arose when the pre-service teacher had too little time to apply and practice the skills necessary to enter the classroom for the first time. Out of this frustration an opportunity was created to dialog, challenge, and problem solve to find a better model for a school based teacher education program.

This program is focused on extensive experience in the school. Two of the three practicum

experiences, education 201, Introduction to Education, 300, Introduction to Classroom Experience, 340, Classroom Experience must be completed in the school and then followed by student teaching. This type of practicum experience provides pre-service teachers with additional hours in the same school where they will be teacher interns. During this practicum experience the pre-service teachers are supervised by the university as well as a mentor teacher.

This field-based work provides teacher interns authentic opportunities for teaching, classroom management and discipline, monitoring student progress, communicating with parents, students, and support staff along with learning the importance of understanding the school and district culture. Additional opportunities for learning and experimenting with many of the new and varied middle school education components such as interdisciplinary teaming are present.

Shaw Middle School is a two year middle school with seventh and eighth graders. Seventy six percent of the students are receiving free or reduced lunch. Over 75% come from single family homes often living with adults who are not their biological parents. All students at Shaw are enrolled in one of four basic teams which provide not only the core requirements but bring in elective teachers as part of the team. This provides an environment of intellectual development and a caring community where students feel safe and encouraged to be successful. Being in our school over the course of a full school year provides interns with a hands-on experience while integrating the curriculum and using a variety of instructional strategies. The teacher intern is challenged to understand and apply the concepts and practices in a flexible block schedule. One example of the success of team teaching for both the students in the middle school and the teacher interns is evidenced at Thurgood Middle School in Lynn Massachusetts. Thurgood is a school similar to Shaw. By the end of their first year student suspensions dropped to 300, about half the total for the previous year, student attendance increase to more than 90%, and standardized test scores improved steadily. (Raising the Educational Achievement

of Secondary School Students - Volume 2 Profiles of Promising Practices, 1995)

To work effectively, the university places a supervisor on site one day each week. The supervisor gets to know the teacher intern at the practicum level. Once the internship reaches student teaching, the supervisor is already working collaboratively with the mentor teacher/s and building administrators. Open, honest communication can occur when the foundation of trust has been built over a period of several quarters. The mentors experience in the K-12 system is highly valued by both the university and the teacher interns. As members of an educational team, the intern, mentor teacher, and the university supervisor begin to develop strategies by exchanging ideas, and providing experiences to increase the intern's readiness to assume more teaching responsibility.

During the practicum experience the teacher intern must complete the following:

- interview informally with the assistant principal for both education 300, Introduction to Classroom Experience and 340, Classroom Experience
- meet with the mentor teacher and arrange their schedule
- complete an intern information sheet
- meet with the office staff for sign in and telephone message procedure
- complete an exit interview with the assistant principal to plan for the next experience evaluation
- plan for an observation and written recommendation

To fully understand the school and its operation, the teacher interns are expected to adhere to the same hours as the Shaw staff, attend all building meetings, maintain a professional appearance, and complete an orientation program.

In addition the interns complete the following observations:

- shadow the assistant principal for one half day
- observe the secretaries in the office for one half day
- observe in the counseling center for one half day

- observe in a special education resource room, behavior intervention room, or the developmental impaired room for one half day
- assist in the cafeteria for at least one lunch period
- observe in the media center for one half day
- attend at least one Multi-disciplinary team meeting
- observe one period in each of the special programs, SPRINT- a parent involvement program for seventh and eighth graders who are highly motivated to learn through research, observation, and interaction, DESTINY- a school within a school alternative program, ESL- English as a Second Language with students from 9 different countries who have been in the country for less than three years, MESA-math, engineering, science achievement, a program for minority students and girls
- attend at least one extra curricular activity
- gather photographs, copies of lessons, student work, observation summaries, etc. for compiling an interview portfolio

Teacher interns are expected to attend seminars over the course of the year. During the fall quarter seminars include:

- **Culture of the school** including demographics, policies and procedures, discipline and classroom management.
- **Support services** which consist of the counseling staff and the social work interns from EWU.

During winter quarter seminars will encompass:

- **School Resources** including the media center, instructional assistants, co-curricular activities, and the 21st Century HUB activities
- **Central Office** services where interns will have an opportunity to meet and ask questions of the Associate Superintendent for Educational Services, the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources, Northeast Executive Director, Middle Level Coordinator for Student Services, and the Lead Security Specialist.

During spring quarter interns have an opportunity to gain valuable employment tips and participate in mock interviews with district ad-

ministrators. The interviews are conducted using questions from the district interview question bank. At that time interns are able to present their interview portfolios and receive constructive feedback from administrators.

The benefits from this field-based teacher training partnership are far reaching. Teacher interns gain more insight into the real issues that confront teachers and administrators in education today. Teacher interns get to know the school, its students, and culture, enabling them to focus on learning targets that meet individual needs of students under their direction. Children benefit from having the opportunity to learn in smaller groups, have more individualized attention, and learn from the teacher intern who is willing and eager to try new innovative teaching strategies.

In establishing policy for U.S. education, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future examined teacher education programs and policies. Recommendations listed in its 1996 report, **What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future**, included rigorous standards for teacher preparation, initial licensure, professional development, and *providing pre-service teachers with internships* in a profession development school. (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996)

The partnership between EWU and Shaw Middle School has proved to be a great success. At Shaw, students are the primary beneficiaries. Middle school students love the individual attention from having the EWU students in the classroom. Students are often reluctant to ask questions in class. Having the EWU students assisting in the classroom provides an ideal opportunity to clarify unanswered questions. We formally evaluate the partnership by tracking attendance of Shaw students, their grades, grade promotion, and discipline referrals. The tracking of the EWU interns has been informal to this point and not easy to tabulate. Perhaps the best evaluations of the partnership program is that more Shaw teachers are becoming mentor teachers and asking for student interns as well as more EWU education students interested in middle school are requesting participation in the program. Over the past three years of our partner-

ship with Eastern Washington University the percentage of students being hired has risen to 90%. These numbers may be some what reflective of the teacher shortage. In Washington, Oregon, and Idaho our feedback from administrators has been that they still have a choice in candidates that they hire. In trying to assess the success of the Shaw EWU partnership I have asked for feedback from administrator that call me for a reference check or recommendation for an intern. Their feedback falls into three categories: the candidates depth of understanding of middle school students, in candidates interview portfolio, and their knowledge and understanding of classroom management and teaching strategies. Responses from the interns during exit interviews continues to support the value of the year long experience, seminars, and production of the portfolio. A more formal written survey or interview of the hiring administrators and newly hired teachers is needed and in the process of being designed in collaboration with Dr. Rita Seedorf, EWU supervisor. This survey will become part of the interns interview portfolio. It is a program that WORKS!

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Ms. Dianne Fields is a teacher at Shaw Middle School in Spokane, Washington, 99207.

Email: DianneFie@sd81.k12.wa.us

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