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Secondary Teacher Education Program Redesign as a Community of Practice

Patrick D. Hales
South Dakota State University, patrick.hales@sdstate.edu

Jennifer Kampmann
South Dakota State University, jennifer.kampmann@sdstate.edu

Andrew Stremmel
South Dakota State University, andrew.stremmel@sdstate.edu

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Patrick Hales
Assistant Professor

Jennifer Kampmann
Assistant Professor

Andrew Stremmel
Professor

South Dakota State University

Abstract

A recurring problem in university teacher education programs is the lack of connection between what teacher candidates do in coursework and what they practice in classroom field placements. This manuscript describes the efforts of the secondary teacher education program (STEP) faculty to redesign their coursework and field experiences into a residency program to better address the development of teacher candidates and needs of school districts. We situate and reflect upon our efforts using a Communities of Practice framework. There are implications in our redesign process for teacher education programs hoping to address similar disconnects between the university and school district experiences for teacher candidates.

Keywords: teacher education, residency, communities of practice, program redesign

Change, with all its many implications, arrived at our door when five public universities in the State of South Dakota used the power of collaboration to redesign the current models of elementary and secondary teacher preparation with the goal of better preparing teacher candidates to facilitate learning in K-12 students. The South Dakota Board of Regents (BOR), the governing body of the system of public higher education in the State of South Dakota, published a White Paper titled, *Teacher Education Redesign: A clinical residency model for teacher education in the state of South Dakota*. This paper served as the impetus for departmental changes that have contributed to the continually evolving mission and vision both of our department and teacher preparation in the state of South Dakota. The journey made by South Dakota State University in this redesign has proven to be a winding and turning road of decisions, challenges, and experiences involving wide-ranging partners and stakeholders.

The intent of the undergraduate teacher education redesign with year-long residency in the State of South Dakota is to bridge theory and practice through the delivery of a unified, clinical, co-teaching model of teacher preparation. Moving beyond the traditional one semester student teaching experience, teacher candidates are now engaging in a full year classroom experience to culminate their teacher preparation programs. While other state universities have been working on delivering year-long residencies by moving around semesters or existing coursework, South Dakota State University has redefined what a four-year, 120 credit, one-year-in-residence program looks like. This redesign includes embedded early field experiences, co-teaching, transdisciplinary curricula, and use of technology to provide deeper and more meaningful clinical experiences that we believe will result in be a more robust residency program at our university. The components of the redesign have taken place as of spring semester 2018,

particularly in the coursework and early field experiences that take place prior to the residency. The residency year for teacher candidates will occur for the first time in fall 2018.

This manuscript attempts to present rationale for our program changes toward a teacher education residency as well as to connect theoretical guidance from teacher education research, particularly Communities of Practice (CoP), and the unique approaches we have undertaken as part of the secondary teacher education program (STEP) redesign. As faculty members of that department, we believe this is important to capture because it assists our own reflection process and it has implications for approaches to change in other places where the institutional grounds are shifting.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RESIDENCY REDESIGN

There has been a growing consensus that much of what teachers need to learn must be learned in and from practice rather than in preparing for practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005). A perennial problem in traditional college- and university based teacher education programs has been the lack of connection between what students are taught in campus courses and their opportunities for learning to enact these practices in their school placements (Zeichner, 2007). Recent calls for reform in teacher education are aimed at ensuring that teacher education is relevant to classrooms of the 21st century. They encourage programs to bridge the gap between theory and practice, coursework and classroom, and preparation and induction. Year-long clinical residency models are the new standard for clinical teacher preparation. These models, patterned after models in nursing and medicine, are designed to place teacher candidates in more robust clinical experiences; reimagine coursework and pedagogy, wrapping coursework around practice; and underscoring the importance of authentic collaboration and partnership (Cibulka, 2009; Dennis, 2016).

To learn more about teacher residencies, members of the Education Discipline Council, comprising Deans and Department heads of the five state schools having teacher education programs, began examining residency programs at a number of institutions including Tufts University in Marlborough, Massachusetts, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Arizona State University, Wichita State University, Western Kentucky University, and Monmouth University in NJ.

Among our findings were that several factors played a role in the development of successful year-long residencies. First, it was important to rethink the nature of clinical practices in which school-based teacher educators (mentor teachers) were key. Mentor teachers needed recognition, training and support in order to best support teacher candidates as they navigated year-long student teaching. Second co-teaching, involving mentors and teacher candidates on a regular basis was critical to modeling and supporting practice. Third, regular opportunities to meet together to discuss practice challenges and successes were important. We found that most secondary residencies were 4+1 programs (four years of content and one year of clinical practice) and science and math based (physics, chemistry, and math); further teacher candidates earned MS degrees with certification. It was typical in most programs we examined for teacher candidates to be placed in classrooms 4 days a week (Monday through Thursday), with Fridays for instruction. Some programs included evening and summer instruction and course instruction often was provided in the schools in which candidates were placed. Technology was also used to video-record teaching in the classroom or to enable teacher candidates to be exposed to virtual teaching. Urban residency models often provided teachers a stipend for living expenses and a subsidized master's degree. Students in these programs were required to commit to serving their

school district for 1-3 years after graduation. The model is used in the Twin Cities, Richmond, Atlanta, and Pittsburgh.

In addition, after having researched year-long residencies, the third author and the Dean of the College of Education and Human Resources visited Arizona State University in 2012. Among the key takeaways from this visit that have guided our own process include the following:

- There must be a true partnership with K-12 schools

- Increasing student achievement is at heart of the model

- Successful residency requires curriculum redesign, and this includes K-12 partners

- Faculty workload redistribution is essential

- Incentives for mentor teachers were important to obtain buy-in. These did not necessarily have to be monetary, but might include opportunities to earn university credits or have access to professional development and university events (e.g., free admission to basketball games)

One of the most important things we learned from our visit and study of other residency programs was how to sell the model to K-12 partners. After all, year-long residency as an idea, though it has support from the educational research literature, was another university-led initiative that would have a major impact on schools, teachers, and children. What would be the value added for our school partners? First, there would be another person in the classroom to help facilitate student learning. Second, there must be constant communication among partners about how residency will help them (e.g., increase school achievement). A successful partnership would require multiple visits to schools to talk about residency, including meetings with school boards, parents, to maintain clear and ongoing communication. Finally, the notion that it must be

seen as a privilege and an honor to be a mentor teacher was critical. That is, rather than an extra task or burden, mentoring new professionals must be viewed as part of ongoing professional development of teachers.

THE STEP REDESIGN PROCESS

Making major changes to our secondary teacher education program (STEP) has encountered a number of obstacles, leading to a number of creative solutions. Unlike the other four regental schools that have education majors, SDSU students who want to become teachers in secondary education must major in a discipline and receive their certification through the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership (TLL) by successfully completing courses in pedagogy. Therefore, secondary education at our university is unique and there is a complex working relationship between education and content area faculty that requires close communication and collaboration. In a desire to have content faculty members more involved in this process, we invited them to discuss how best to make the four year/120 credit model a reality.

Context

There are both practical and theoretical bases for adjusting teacher education in our program. Practically speaking, South Dakota has a large geographic spread with numerous isolated schools, small schools, K-12 schools and only few pockets of urban centers. With a population of around 865,000 in a land area of 78,116 square miles, South Dakota's population density of about 11 people per square mile helps to describe the potential for isolated school districts. Add to that complexity that the population centers which comprise over one-third of the state population, Sioux Falls and Rapid City, lie opposite one another on either end of the state. This spread necessitates more mediums for collaboration and connections among school districts

and between K-12 schooling and higher education. In addition, there is a need to have teacher candidates interact with smaller and geographically isolated schools where graduating classes are regularly less than 40 students and the next school or district might be great distance away. For instance, Meade School District includes both Piedmont, SD and Opal, SD which are 106 miles apart from one another. Geographically large school districts with few schools are not uncommon in the interior, Missouri River corridor of the state. This creates issues where teacher recruitment and retention are difficult for school districts. In some cases, there might be only one teacher of any given content area in an entire district. Teacher education programs like ours, which are located within the rural Midwestern United States, must expose teacher candidates to the realities of high need, rural communities and also help to fill the need to bring highly qualified teachers to school districts within those communities.

Secondary teacher education at South Dakota State University involves a content area-focused approach which creates various benefits and challenges within this residency framework. When a student enrolls at SDSU with the intent of pursuing teacher certification, he does not enroll as an education major. Rather, students pursue content majors and then add on teacher certification within their four-year programs. For example, a student intending to become a math teacher will enroll as a math major, pursue that degree, and then add teacher certification. What this means is that these students pack in content area degrees in three years, with a few education courses, before the fourth year where they have traditionally entered into the bulk of their courses on education and student teaching. This model allows for students to become highly knowledgeable and prepared within their content areas. It also allows a fallback for students who decide to discontinue pursuing teacher certification, as they will have still earned a content area degree sans teacher certification. As a challenge, this design has forced education coursework

and the preparation within to be put off until teacher candidates enter the classroom. Feedback from teachers and administrators in the field have commented that this sometimes leads to less prepared teacher candidates. In addition, from the STEP faculty perspective, there are 23 different content areas which students might major in before pursuing teacher certification. All but two of those majors are housed in separate departments STEP faculty. This creates a difficult challenge when making changes as the number of stakeholders with varying perspectives, oversight, and experiences is large. As part of the goals of the residency redesign, we have strived to maintain that initial content focus while making moves to address these issues.

After discussions with teachers and administrators, it became evident that there also was a clear desire to have teacher candidates see the *entire* process of the school year and experience enculturation to the school in which they are placed. A full year residency in teacher education allows for extended and focused field experiences in the final year of teacher preparation that result in candidates developing a greater understanding of school culture, increased confidence in their abilities to effectively plan and implement lessons and manage classrooms, and more opportunities to bridge theory and practice by being engaged in clinical experiences.

Goals of the Redesign

A significant challenge faced by the department and our content area faculty was how to balance the need for providing adequate course content with the need to provide pedagogy and quality clinical field experiences, including a year-long residency, within four years. This essentially meant that students were to complete their degree program in three years, leaving the fourth year for residency. The questions we faced were not only how to do this in a way that did not compromise the integrity of our majors or certification program to adequately prepare teacher candidates, but also what amount of content and how much pedagogy were really

required to prepare high quality teachers. Unfortunately, there were few if any models of 4 –year residency programs to help provide answers, and the literature is bereft of data on just what (how much) content is required for teachers to be effective.

Conversations with academic advisors from other colleges and our university's Office of Academic Affairs assisted us in putting together the curriculum puzzle in order to be able to complete the course program approval processes. Changes within one program affected another, including Career and Technical Education programs such as Agricultural Education and Family Consumer Sciences Education, which had their own unique circumstances to circumnavigate (e.g., how to deal with specific courses that those students alone took, and the fact that students in these programs were placed more widely within and across state lines). However, we committed to meeting the needs of all stakeholders. We initiated pilot programs with school partners who work with teacher candidates to help us identify and discuss critical issues. These pilots provided evidence to support the program changes, yet also helped clarify challenges for placements, particularly when satisfying our mandate to complete the residency year in one site.

Conversations with stakeholders within the university and in school districts led to three primary goals for the redesign. First, we wanted to rethink teacher education as a life-long developmental process, meaning we needed to better understand the personal and professional development of our teacher candidates and their students. Second, we wanted to decrease the number of isolated and fragmented courses, many of which focuses too narrowly on lesson-planning and the technical aspects of teaching, Third, we wanted to strengthen the program by creating more integrated and meaningful field-based opportunities with school partners, primarily through the residency process.

Teacher Education as a Life-Long Process

The first goal was largely facilitated by the department head (third author) who provided opportunities to discuss the notion that learning to teach as a life-long endeavor and teaching is too complex, too completely vulnerable and contextual to be thought of as a one-time pursuit like learning to ride a bike. Because formal preservice teacher education occupies a comparatively short time in the professional lives of teachers, it is a very special time for both teacher candidates and those who teach them. While some knowledge can be gained at the university, most of what students of teaching will need to know can only be learned in the context of practice, which includes the ability to reflect on one's teaching activities. This idea was crucial because neither a lot of experience with whole class teaching (since that is what teacher candidates will be expected to do on their own their first year out), nor cramming everything we can into our courses (because we believe this is our last opportunity to give students what they need), is sufficient to preparing students to teach. In fact, a powerful curriculum for learning to teach must be oriented around intellectual and practical tasks of teaching and the contexts of teachers' work.

To bolster this, transdisciplinary curricula involving technology enables students to facilitate problem solving in meaningful learning activities in which students draw upon a variety of content knowledge and use technology to support their learning. Further technology helps to level the playing field, helping all students to learn and enhance their potential through its capacity to individualize instruction and prepare students for adaptability and life-long learning. We sought to adopt, encourage, and support central tasks of learning to teach related not only to subject matter knowledge, but also inquiry, and identity and repertoire development (Feiman-Nemser, 2012).

Coursework Goals

Research suggests there are divides between the university and the field with regard to teacher education (Zeichner, 2007). We have approached the redesign to enhance the connection between what is taught in coursework and the experiences of teacher candidates in their field experiences. Integrating and embedding course work in field experiences may provide teacher candidates with a more meaningful and authentic opportunity to learn and use pedagogical content knowledge. The focus shifts from teaching specific content and methods in a discreet fashion to facilitating learning in the classroom context. Dewey (1916) reminds us that pedagogy requires practical rather than intellectualized forms of knowledge. That is, the essence of pedagogy manifests itself in the practical moment of a concrete situation. Knowledge necessary for pedagogical action needs to be situation-specific (context sensitive) and oriented to the particular learners with whom we are concerned.

To meet coursework goals, we eliminated courses divided by isolated course "subjects" and created new courses which require integrated approaches to the concepts needed for teacher candidate development. As an example, we no longer have courses specifically for classroom management, assessment, or special education Rather, we have spread those concepts as developmental constructs across courses titled "Teaching and Learning." In Teaching and Learning I, for example, teacher candidates focus on early concepts of the classroom environment. This, among other concepts, concerns classroom management. Rather than it being the "course for classroom management," however, each subsequent course re-visits and builds upon ideas. In Teaching and Learning II, teacher candidates complete specific analyses of classroom environments as part of early field experiences to build upon that base formed in the prior coursework. Instead of a multitude of topical courses with fragmented connections, we now have five levels of Teaching and Learning courses alongside required university coursework and

a capstone course. In addition, we have designated the first three levels as "pre-residency" and the last two levels as "residency." During pre-residency, teacher candidates focus on developmental principles of teaching and learning with around 40 hours of field experience. At the end of pre-residency, teacher candidates apply for the residency. During the residency (typically semester 7 and 8), teacher candidates continue the teaching and learning coursework as well as complete a two-semester student teaching experience. During the first semester of residency, teacher candidates go into the classroom environment as a teacher a few days a week, working up to a full-time experience during the subsequent semester. Table 2 displays the five levels of teaching and learning courses with corresponding essential questions. Beyond the two-semester time commitment to the residency, we have also developed a school partnership concept to address other unique challenges.

Table 2. Redesign teaching and learning courses

Course	Essential Questions
Introduction to Teaching and Learning	What does it mean to be a teacher? What is InTASC and what to what standards are teachers held accountable?
Teaching and Learning I	What does responsive, reflective teaching look like? What are essential concepts of planning and learning environments?
Teaching and Learning II *Early field experience	How do students learn and develop? How do student needs and differences impact teaching and learning? How do teachers design engaging instruction?
Teaching and Learning III *Residency I: teacher candidates are in their placement two days per week.	How do teachers assess for student learning? What are essential components of classroom management and development? How do teachers promote critical thinking?
Teaching and Learning IV *Residency II: teacher candidates are in their placement every day.	What are professional, legal, and ethical concerns and responsibilities of teaching? How do you develop and maintain positive student-teacher relationships? How do teachers motivate students?

Residency Partnerships and Hubs

Several components of the residency redesign have been put into place to improve the collaboration between the university and the school districts, as both research (Dennis, 2016), our explorations of teacher education programs, and our conversations with local school district stakeholders reveal. For example, we encourage teacher candidates to be considered additions to classrooms rather than drains on resources. In promoting a co-teaching model, as an example, no longer does the classroom teacher relinquish control of the classroom solely to the teacher candidate for a few weeks toward the end of the student teaching semester. In co-teaching, the teacher and the teacher candidate work collaboratively to plan and deliver content to students, as a teaching team, from the beginning of the clinical experience. The benefits of co-teaching will be seen in increased K-12 student classroom performance, in comparison to the traditional model of student teaching, by allowing for smaller work groups, more individualized instruction, timelier feedback and fewer classroom disruptions. We have also partnered with districts to create partnerships called hubs. We hope to implement these hubs as ways for teacher candidates, in-service teachers, university faculty, and other stakeholders to interact by creating solutions to distance and partnerships.

We have organized regional groupings of schools involved in the residency, or hub sites, to assist districts in the geographic challenges of the residency program. For the fall semester, we will have five hubs and one virtual hub for schools and teacher candidates that are out-of-state and further distances than could drive to a geographical hub. Schools in the identified hubs have been invited to choose their level of participation in the STEP residency. The hope in creating these hubs is to create partnerships between those schools, the clinical educators, and the teacher

candidates. Through a process of clinical mentoring, we envision that university faculty and cooperating teachers, together, will better guides the study of the teaching and learning process. For example, clinical mentoring can facilitate opportunities for both teacher candidates and cooperating teachers to reflect, dialogue, and study their experiences in the classroom, examine video-recordings of each other's teaching, and address questions emerging from their practice. Reflection and inquiry are the foundation for transformative clinical practice.

Professional development resources for school district staff are offered in connection with the residency year hub model. K-12 students, teachers and administrators benefit from the university teacher candidates in their classroom that begin with the start of the district school year and end on the university term. This process allows teacher candidates to understand the time and effort necessary in establishing a classroom environment and routine as well as the ability to follow the progression through the school year.

Strong collaborative relationships between communities, schools and universities are needed to make this model viable. The residency model is not just a win for the teacher candidates; this close relationship with the university allows teachers and districts access to the most current professional development and educational resources to better meet the needs of the students in their schools. In order to reflect upon these changes, the following section orients our process across from seven principles of communities of practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND PROGRAM REDESIGN

One primary theoretical approach of this STEP residency redesign has been to support the creation of Communities of Practice in and between school districts and university classrooms. Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed the concept "Communities of Practice" wherein

members of a group with a similar goal come together to achieve that goal; from this emerged their concept of "situated learning" which suggests that these individuals teach one another through unique practice and communication in order to teach and learn with one another toward their goals. While working within a CoP framework, the challenge becomes to identify and show changed practice as well as value added from participation in the CoP (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014). To this end, we draw upon what Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) identify as the seven principles of design in an "alive" CoP. To be "alive," in this context means to be able to work together within communities to create solutions and continually grow and learn while transforming the community into its optimal form. Table 1 outlines and adapts these principles from their original description in Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002).

Table 1. Seven Principles of CoP Design

Principle	Concept
Design for evolution.	Communities of practice are organic. To learn is to change. Thus, a CoP should always be learning and changing with new information.
Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives.	The learning that takes place within a CoP involves both insider knowledge and perspectives as well as outsider. Ignoring other contexts stunts growth.
Invite different levels of participation.	The CoP acknowledges that all members have different reasons for participating. Thus, the participation of each individual will look different.
Develop both public and private community spaces.	The CoP does not exist in a vacuum. Interactions of the community take place both in private meetings as well as in public contexts.
Focus on value.	What is added by the existence of and participation in the CoP is key. The values that the community as a whole and each participant receive will change.

Combine familiarity and excitement.	There is value in tradition, but a need for change. A CoP acknowledges the need to challenge, advise, and understand.
Create a rhythm for the community.	One of the strongest indicators of aliveness. The interactions of CoP members with one another in various capacities to continue the work and conversations without abrupt stoppages. Participants feel a flow of progress.

The need to redesign opened conversations about how best to move forward, and, as a result, the need for Communities of Practice emerged. Those communities, made up of stakeholders across the university and school districts, intended to focus on various challenges including curriculum, field experiences, and implementation. A challenge that we have been managing has been to get these communities to operate as one large CoP with different levels and manifestations of participation. In the following sections, we reflect upon our steps to redesign in to a residency program using the seven principles of "alive" communities of practice as a lens.

Design for evolution

Determined not to simply reshuffle the proverbial deck of teacher-education cards, the STEP redesign focused on creating a more responsive and intentional program. We committed to offering teacher candidates early opportunities for field experiences and specific training in how to be reflective practitioners. We intended the residency experience to offer the experience of a school year with opportunities for development and collaboration with colleagues, both in-service teachers and teacher candidate colleagues. With stakeholder involvement, we considered how to "fit in" certain isolated or fragmented ideas from a dissected, micromanaged teacher education approach, such as classroom management. We steered toward threads instead of chunks. In other words, we thought about the development of the teacher across a span of time

rather than thinking that short bouts of experience would make lasting gains. The residency process requires a major shift in thinking, asking all stakeholders to continually develop and challenge themselves. Our design for evolution focused on development and sustainability.

Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives

We recognized a need to develop stronger relationships among stakeholders, as the department intended to include them all in their decision-making. We used surveys and focus groups to begin outlining essential components of a new program. Teacher educators, content specialists, K-12 administrators and practicing teachers, recent graduates, and current teacher candidates all had a voice in the redesign process and outcomes. We visited area stakeholders both on and off campus to build trust; everyone had a seat at the table. As semesters became academic years, new faculty joined the effort, bringing with them new expertise and perspectives creating opportunities for continual change. The discourse around redesign has included voices going and coming; in that way, the participation has varied yet the conversation remains rich with insight. At times, the many perspectives have muddied the water of redesign, but that has also been a necessary part of moving forward in a meaningful, evidence-based way.

Invite different levels of participation

An understanding we continue to discuss and evaluate is that a CoP allows for partners to come and go within the community as it aligns with their goals and values. Creating that with faculty, schools, and teachers has presented a challenge as we have struggled to establish our department as a resource for schools. At the university level, a variety of individuals and departments are represented in the redesign. The redesign process required multiple crosswalks, for example with the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards and program goals, before initiating curriculum changes, or redefining and sequencing

outcomes of experiences both within coursework and field components. We explored residency programs both within education and within other professional areas to identify best practices for the final year of undergraduate residency. Nursing, counseling, and athletic training programs served as models for standards-based programs that helped us understand how to meet outcomes within a university's traditional assessment system. We consulted school partners and involved them in conversations about the redesign, and in CoP fashion, the partners have engaged and disengaged as the redesign interested or concerned them. Our work moving forward will require closer collaborations with schools and in-service teachers to spur their involvement in redesign efforts.

Develop both public and private community spaces

One of our most important foci in the STEP redesign has been to re-contextualize the work of teacher education. This means involving multiple stakeholders across both the faculty and in-service teachers working with students in the field. Work has occurred both on and off the university campus. Stakeholders and CoP members have helped to envision the crosswalks, highlight experiences for new courses, provide feedback, and add new ideas as a way to participate in activities and conversation for the redesign. As a component of the residency, schools and universities would be employing shared spaces. Courses could be taught and seminars could be held at school districts. In-service teachers are invited to professional development, seminars, and conferences held on the university campus. Proposing shared spaces has helped to create an ongoing conversation about a vision for STEP. Moving forward, it will be key to continue to create shared spaces for visioning and re-visioning with stakeholders and the growing CoP in STEP.

Focus on value

Because the level of participation in the CoP and the reason for engagement is unique to each member, the take-away value also varies across the members. Our conversations about how to proceed through the STEP redesign process reflect that, as our disagreements and longest discussions often stem from those individual values and goals which differ across the department and partners. Despite that, our shared values realign us within our CoP. First, we have a definite drive to progress and to improve our ability to prepare effective teachers and to work with our in-service teacher partners. Second, we want to create more partnership opportunities within collaborating schools and the local community. Last, we continually bring our discussions back around to what is best, evidence-based practice for preparing successful teachers. When we become mired in administrative minutiae or tackling monetary and time concerns, these are values which we hope to maintain as centerpieces of the community.

Combine familiarity and excitement

Change is not easy, but it is exciting. Opportunities exist to create and to challenge the status quo. Conversations with stakeholders generally have been filled with excitement for the dialogue about making changes to teacher education in order to better develop teacher candidates. The challenge has been working around frustration brought on by change while maintaining excitement. Our university requires a content major to accompany teacher certification; this means that any change requires including many content area faculty as stakeholders. This, coupled with the many school district partners needed to make the residency work, creates a situation where multiple traditions and ways of being are questioned and negotiated. Encouraging excitement in these cases is by no means easy, but it is an important endeavor to make all voices heard and respected. The opportunity going forward with this work

is to maintain various levels of participation while fostering meaningful and exciting partnerships within our Community of Practice.

Create a rhythm for the community

As we phase out the old program and implement the new, many questions and concerns remain unanswered, requiring us to keep considering the possibilities. As the university, school districts, and education in the United States at-large are in constant flux, it has been difficult to establish routines and procedures in definite terms. New faculty provide fresh insights, and technology continues to allow for reimagining the experiences both in and out of classrooms. The current rhythm, or pattern of occurrences and changes, is a fast-paced, turbulent one; one that echoes the changing structures of both higher education and public education. In such turbulence, it has been a constant endeavor to remain on course with the goals for the redesign. We have continued to guide ourselves back toward those goals through shared visioning and planning as well as realignments with stakeholders, who all share the ideals to progress, develop partnerships, and prepare successful teachers. These shared ideals have been linchpins for forward momentum.

This process of redesign is neither clean, easy, nor linear, but it has changed, and continues to change, this program. As those changes occur, what will guide the process and let the stakeholders know what underlies all else? Communities of Practice helps to orient our past, current, and future practice. With the future of our STEP in mind, there are areas of concern to address and next steps to consider.

NEXT STEPS

There are still some remaining concerns with implementing a year-long residency from both teacher candidates and school administration. With the commitment needed for longer

albeit more meaningful clinical experiences, there is some concern over the cost associated with students spending so much time in the field. Some work has been done in securing scholarships for teachers in residence and there are continuing conversations with community partners in hub sites to offer assistance. For example, university-provided fuel cards for travel, reduced price or food, or a gift card to the local grocery might ease the financial burden. There have even been some talks about the donation of a "teacher house" for free or reduced cost of living. School administrators are concerned about the time involved for the cooperating teacher, which has led to talks of increased stipends or continuing education credits to make taking on a student teacher for a year- long experience more enticing. This is one place where customizable memoranda of understanding between the university and school districts will be necessary to create those connections between supporting the teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, and communities.

While the STEP program has assessment plans in place for accreditation, this project will need special attention as we move from the pilot program to full implementation. Noteworthy will be data collection around teacher candidate perseverance; student performance on the teacher certification examinations such as the Praxis Performance Assessment for Teachers (PPAT); student teacher evaluations; and feedback from cooperating teachers, clinical faculty, school administrators, and follow up with future employers to determine the efficacy of students in residency upon entrance into the workforce.

One additional item for future planning is to look at the most rural districts in the state, those that rarely see student teachers or university partnerships, and think about how the regental universities can provide them with the most current and innovative teaching practices. There have been preliminary discussions among members of the Education Discipline Council (EDC) on a more interconnected residency model, with coursework and supervision delivered by all five

institutions along the Missouri River corridor. This has the potential to bring residency to schools that rarely see a student teacher and connect rural schools more closely with our state university system for professional development opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The ongoing conversations around the redesign process for the secondary teacher education program, both among the university faculty and with school partners, has been satisfying, if at times frustrating. However, it has been immensely reflective and collaborative, moving us toward a more authentic partnership. In doing the work to maintain a strong Community of Practice for teacher education stakeholders, these emotions and challenges are probably necessary. Synergy to create something new requires conflicting perspectives and cooperation despite them, or as a result. The primary implication of this complex and collaborative reflection on our redesign process is the continued conversation that the clarification and challenge create as a result. We know, for example, that we must continually make clear how residency will help all of our partners as we continue to maintain common vision and share goals.

We have learned a great deal from the work of other redesign and residency programs that have shared their work through reflection; we hope that others will also learn from us. As we invite new partners, strengthen existing partnerships, and envision the possibilities of the program, we continue to find solutions through our shared values and goals.

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