

A teacher residency melds classroom theory with clinical practice

Collaboration and support for teachers, their mentors, and university-based educators is key to a preservice residency program.

By Danielle V. Dennis

Recent calls for reform position teacher residency programs as the new standard for clinical teacher preparation in the U.S. A shift to residency models changes the quantity and quality of required coursework and clinical practice. But a dearth of research on the effectiveness of such programs raises questions of scalability, particularly in light of decreasing enrollment in teacher education and tight resources for such programs (Sawchuk, 2014).

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Yet a search for answers about residency models could include the experience of the University of South Florida over the last decade. The Tampa-based campus is home to two public, Title I elementary schools, with a third located in the nearby Museum of Science and Industry. One would expect these three schools to be bustling with activity related to teacher preparation. When I arrived at USF in 2007, however, nothing could have been further from the truth. USF's undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program lacked a systematic approach to coursework, and its theory-to-practice divide was expansive. Aside from sharing Rocky the Bull as mascot with the elementary schools, there was little indication that a partnership ever existed between them. That made ours the type of program that so many recent reports have called to improve upon.

As a newly appointed assistant professor of literacy studies, I was assigned to teach coursework focused on reading assessment. I quickly learned that the majority of my elementary preservice teachers had little to no experience working one-on-one with

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data-driven approach to understanding children's abilities and instructional needs, preservice teachers create a five- to seven-minute video demonstrating key understandings of literacy, math, social studies, and special education coursework, based on field experiences that are supported by research literature from each discipline. These videos are shown in a colloquium attended by all UTRPP students and faculty. Each faculty member scores the assignment based on his or her course criteria. The assignment itself is the product of faculty collaboration in developing the expectations and rubric used to assess the videos. Faculty are in regular communication with each other throughout the semester and present the assignment together during a UTRPP seminar.

A UTRPP alumna said she:

. . . think[s] about the [Story of My Professional Learning] video all of the time. I did not realize it then, but now I see that completing that task introduced me to the ways of thinking about my children that is expected of me every day. And it showed me how important collaborating with my mentor teacher was on a daily basis because he helped me problem solve about our kids.

Coteaching

Traditionally, the student teaching experience relied on a few weeks of observation, followed by weeks of teaching, with several intense weeks of takeover, often without support (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010). In addition to coursework, UTRPP residents spend over 2,000 hours in clinical practice, nearly twice that of preservice teachers in the larger elementary education program at USF. With the shift from one semester of student teaching to two years of intensive classroom experience, we had to rethink our approach to clinical practice. In doing so, we moved to a model of coteaching. In both the first and second years of the program, residents and their mentor teachers work together to plan and implement lessons. In their meetings with university-based teacher educators, mentor teachers learn about varying models of coteaching and how to sup-

off approach to the student teaching experience.

Teaching rounds

During the first year of the program, residents engage in teaching rounds. These teaching rounds provide preservice teachers the opportunity to first observe expert practice through either live teaching or video examples and debrief these experiences with peers, faculty, and school-based teacher educators. Residents then prepare for teaching by planning with peers and with university- and school-based teacher educators. Then they practice their teaching with these same supports. They use the feedback to refine the lesson before presenting it to children, which they record and code with the support of teacher educators to receive feedback about their practice. Teaching rounds are consistent with the framework for preparing preservice teachers offered by McDonald, Kazemi, and Kavanaugh (2013), in which the authors call for a more deliberate approach to refining the pedagogy of clinical teacher preparation.

Content-focused coaching

During the second year, residents shift from teaching rounds to content-focused teaching. This shift removes the preparation support they received in the first year but maintains the feedback loop offered through video coding with a university-based teacher educator. Faculty or advanced graduate students in literacy, math, and science serve as content coaches and work with small groups of residents for one-week rotations in which the resident and coach coplan lessons that the resident implements, coaching with either the coach or mentor teacher. The resident video records the lesson, the coach and resident separately code the video based on a scaffold provided by the specific content area (literacy, math, or science), then discuss their codes and findings together. Emerging research from UTRPP's content coaching shows it as a promising practice for accelerating residents' pedagogical content knowledge and in supporting their ability to meaningfully reflect on their teaching practices (Gelfuso & Dennis, 2013).

consistent throughout the residency; the content coach rotates based on the one-week content focus at the school site. In pursuance of a UTRPP goal to deeply support residents' content knowledge development, it is essential for the coach to be a member of this team in order to address challenges presented during the content-focused coaching and to allow for consistent communication between all parties responsible for developing the resident as a professional. The content coaches and partnership resource teachers collaborate and provide mentor teachers with information and materials related to the coaching cycles, as well as to offer job-embedded professional development for mentor teachers who continue to improve their mentoring practices and their content knowledge.

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Quad-model clinical practice

Content coaches are unique to UTRPP. Because of their consistent presence at UTRPP schools, content coaches are integrated into the traditional supervision triad to create a quad model for clinical practice that includes:

- Resident;
- Mentor teacher;
- Partnership resource teacher; and
- Content coach.

The first three members of the quad remain con-

STEM PLCs

Despite a heavy emphasis on STEM subjects across the U.S., elementary teachers continue to report a lack of preparedness in science and mathematics (Weiss et al., 2001). Consistent with most elementary teacher preparation programs in Florida, UTRPP students take two mathematics courses and one science course. We find this inadequate for preparing math and science teachers so we revised our program to include a STEM professional learning community (PLC) during the residents' second year. The STEM PLC is a weekly, hour-long workshop

Such progress takes time. Developing and maintaining UTRPP requires creative use of resources from USF and HCPS and a deep commitment from all partners. Although calls for reform include residency programs as strong teacher preparation, we believe additional research on the potential for scaling up and the sustainability of these models is essential before residencies become the norm for preservice training. While we are pleased with our