

School–University Partnership: Perceptions of the Teachers

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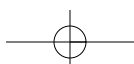
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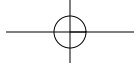
ABSTRACT: We investigated how and to what extent a school–university partnership might influence the teachers and the teaching in one school, Parkland. We interviewed 23 novice and veteran teachers, the principals, and the university liaison. The data suggest that the university structures (i.e., the practicum, the student teaching internship, the Senior Year On-Site Program, and the Teaching Fellowship Program) combined with the setting of Parkland (the strong principal, positive climate, and teachers) to provide a framework for renewal. Two engines—mentorship and classroom research—drove the school's renewal by extending professional relationships. Data suggest that a synergy exists between the structure of the program and the setting—a synergy created by the immediate assistance available to all participants, the exchange of curricular ideas, and the professional nudging that occurred among colleagues. We conclude that the principal and the knowledgeable mentor strengthened the school renewal, which resulted in a stronger professional learning community with inquiry at its center.

The No Child Left Behind Act emphasizes a need to elevate “teacher and principal quality through recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies” (Section 2113.a.3). As districts search for ways to attract and retain teachers, as well as improve the quality of their teaching, many have turned to school–university partnerships. The development and benefits of school–university partnerships have been widely studied (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, & Cook, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Goodlad, 1991; Stephens & Boldt, 2004; Wiseman & Knight, 2003) and have emphasized issues regarding participant roles (Dallmer, 2004; Epanchin & Colucci, 2002), preservice education (Florez, 2002; G. Smith & Edelen-

Smith, 2002), and inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Oja, 2003).

This study offers a unique perspective on a school–university partnership with a strong induction program as the foundation for partnership activities. Within that partnership of 22 districts, we looked closely at one school, Parkland,¹ through interviews of the teachers and principals. The question guiding our study was “How and to what extent does a school–university partnership influence teachers and teaching in one school?” The teachers’ comments narrate how the components of the partnership, and the relationships that developed therein, affected their professional community and, ultimately, their effectiveness as teachers.





Literature Review

The partnership discussed in this study is a member of the National Network for Educational Renewal (see <http://www.nnerpartnerships.org>), modeled after Goodlad's (1991) approach to simultaneous renewal and the Agenda for Education in a Democracy. Goodlad centers his 19 postulates of simultaneous renewal on the idea of parity. Schools and universities enter into a collaborative arrangement in which they are equal partners working to meet self-interests while solving common problems. His 19 postulates support and expand this concept of parity by focusing on the teacher education institution, the partner schools, and the culture of schools and teaching. Goodlad's postulates also encourage teacher educators to help teachers become leaders of change in schools through their relationships, experiences, connections between theory and practice, and successful induction of 1st-year teachers.

The partnership studied also exemplifies the nine required essentials of a professional development school as enumerated in the statement of the Executive Council and Board of Directors of the National Association for Professional Development Schools (2008; available at http://napds.org/nine_essen.html). These essentials outline nine components, including the following: a comprehensive mission that is broader in scope than that of any of the partners; the creation of a culture committed to the preparation of future educators; ongoing and reciprocal professional development; shared commitment to innovative practices; public sharing of results of investigations; an articulated agreement with the parties delineating each role and responsibility; and a structure of governance and dedicated and shared resources.

This study highlights an induction program within the larger university–school partnership. Many states and districts have created induction programs to support new teachers (Anderson, 1991; Dangel, 2006; Garrett, 1994; Gilbert, 2005; Gilles, Cramer, & Hwang Lee, 2001; Keller, 2006; McCann, Johannessen, &

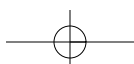
Ricca, 2005; K. Smith & Sela, 2005). Gold (1996) provides four contexts that effective teacher induction programs must acknowledge: school assignment; administrative support; pedagogy; and socialization among students, peers, and parents. Teachers placed in negative or nonnurturing school environments often have disastrous first years. By placing new teachers in supportive environments, they question their abilities less and thus find a higher sense of satisfaction in their work (Huling-Austin, 1992). An important part of the support is the principal who nurtures the new teacher, establishes the culture of the school (i.e., professional development, morale, collaboration, etc.), and provides assistance with difficult situations (Wayne, Youngs, & Fleischman, 2005; Wilkinson, 1994). Teacher induction programs support new teachers by allowing time for critical reflection, to encourage them to use theory to inform their practices (McGlamery, Fluckiger, & Edick, 2002). In addition, Gold (1996) suggests socialization that includes a community built among colleagues, students, and parents in which the new teacher becomes an active participant. This socialization is often facilitated through mentor–mentee relationships (Wang & Odell, 2002).

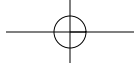
Context for the Study

The University Structures

The MU Partnership for Educational Renewal has been in existence for 14 years. Throughout this time, the partnership evolved as each entity defined, developed, and challenged its role (see <http://education.missouri.edu/orgs/mper>). Within the university's role, two distinct elements exist: first, the preservice teachers, including field students, students of the Senior Year On-Site Program (SYOSP), and interns (student teachers); and second, the Teaching Fellowship Program, a multifaceted induction program.

Practicum preservice teachers. Preservice teachers in the education department participate in field practicum experiences attached





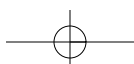
to all methods education courses. Field student experiences may include making observational visits, participating in individual tutorials, working in before- and after-school programs, offering assistance to small groups, and teaching lessons to entire classes. Field experiences allow preservice teachers opportunities to observe techniques and strategies, apply theory, and interact with teachers. In our study, approximately 35% of the teachers interviewed discussed practicum students. Field experiences are intensified during the 16-week internship (the student teaching experience), the capstone experience in the College of Education. Parkland hosts about 10 interns (student teachers) per year. Of the 23 teachers interviewed, 9 had hosted one or more interns. The SYOSP, available only in partner schools, is an on-site alternative to the traditional senior year for elementary majors. First-semester SYOSP students take courses taught by university and public school faculty at the partnership schools. Students also work in classrooms 3 days a week, experiencing the full range of grade levels. The second-semester students complete their student teaching internship at the same school, thereby providing them with a full year at one school. Thus, SYOSP students see a range of practices throughout the year—for example, new school procedures, various in-services and workshops, and collaboration and curriculum projects.

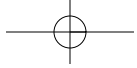
Teaching Fellowship Program. The Teaching Fellowship Program, a unique induction program, occurs in partnership schools, including Parkland. The program has four components: the school, the mentor, the liaison, and the teaching fellow (for more information, see <http://education.missouri.edu/orgs/mper/fellows/index.php>). To participate in the Teaching Fellowship Program, a school administrator must anticipate a classroom vacancy in the school for the upcoming year. The principal then selects a mentor teacher from the faculty—that is, a master teacher, who is relieved of classroom duties for a minimum of 2 years. This combination creates two openings in the school. The district continues paying the mentor her or his current salary while paying the university a salary equivalent to that of one

midrange teacher. In return, the school receives two teaching fellows, newly certificated teachers, each responsible for a classroom. The school also benefits by keeping the mentor on faculty and utilizing the mentor's expertise.

The mentor's responsibilities are divided into thirds: mentoring the teaching fellows, working on school renewal projects, and working for the university. The mentor supports and guides the teaching fellows through co-planning, finding resources, demonstrating techniques, and so on. Unlike traditional mentor programs, the Teaching Fellowship Program releases its mentors from teaching duties so that they have the flexibility to work with new teachers at the time when it is most beneficial to them, as opposed to being bound by a release schedule. Mentors negotiate their work in their school with the principal, and it may include offering workshops and in-services, securing grants, developing curriculum projects, and working with other new teachers in the building. Such work contributes to their development as teacher leaders. At the university, mentors are designated clinical faculty and so may assist in undergraduate classes, supervise student teachers, organize field experiences, and serve on university committees. Liaisons support mentors and fellows and, through their visits, provide a link between the university and the partnership school; liaisons are typically retired university faculty or principals.

The program offers a strong start to new teachers and their careers, with the assistance of intensive mentoring. Within 15 months, teaching fellows earn a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, which is essentially paid for through the program. Course work is designed to support induction. For example, the Classroom Research course, taken over two semesters, teaches fellows to use inquiry to solve an identified classroom issue. In the second summer, fellows share their findings in a capstone project presented to university faculty and guests. This presentation serves as a final examination of skills, as well as a celebration of successes. The Teaching Fellowship Program integrates university course work, supportive mentoring, and 1st-year teaching.





The program boasts a retention rate of 91% among teachers who are 8 years out of the program (Kaiser, 2004).

The preservice teachers, the SYOSP students, the interns, and the teaching fellows were all welcomed at Parkland Elementary School as important members of the children's education. Likewise, the faculty and principal were dedicated to teacher education and learning by virtue of their willingness to participate in the MU Partnership for Educational Renewal.

The Setting: Parkland Past and Current

Parkland has always been a well-respected school in a district committed to progressive ideas. Parkland has a long tradition of excellence. It was named a Blue Ribbon School in the late 1980s (one of the highest awards given by the U.S. government), and it had the distinction of having President Reagan visit. Parkland regularly hosted university field students, and it was one of the first schools to host teaching fellows and SYOSP students. Many SYOSP students moved directly into the Teaching Fellowship Program and then remained as faculty at Parkland. In addition, former fellows moved from other schools in the area to work there. Thus, the teaching force has become heavily influenced by the partnership structures.

When the principal retired, his assistant, Helen Hastings, became principal. Hastings, a veteran teacher at the school, had earned the respect of teachers, who spoke of her vision and strong instructional leadership. She developed a positive, child-centered climate that emphasized collaboration and the support of teachers.

When we conducted the study, Parkland had 903 students and 86 staff members, of whom 42 were classroom teachers. Children from Parkland were from mostly middle- to high-income professional families; however, 9% were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, and single-parent families were common. White students composed 86% of the population, whereas 13% were African Amer-

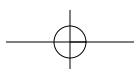
ican, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American. About 32% of the Parkland faculty were current or past teaching fellows. Parkland had a stable and knowledgeable teaching force: One person had taught for 23 years at Parkland; most had taught from 10 to 15 years; and three had taught from 5 to 10 years.

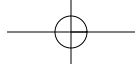
Method

Given that we were interested in how a school–university partnership influenced beginning and veteran teachers, we focused on aspects of the partnership that featured the greatest participant interactions, including practicums, internships, the SYOSP, and the Teaching Fellowship Program. This study is one part of a larger study on the Teaching Fellowship Program. The question guiding our study was “How and to what extent does a school–university partnership influence the teachers and teaching in one school?” Our focus, then, is on the teachers in the school and not on the elementary students or the university part of the partnership.

Participant Selection

Our participant selection was purposeful. From a list provided by the principal, we interviewed teachers who had been at the school before and after the partnership's inception (in numbers roughly equivalent between the two groups)—that is, current and past teaching fellows ($n = 11$) and veteran teachers of more than 5 years, including past and present mentors ($n = 12$); we also interviewed administrative personnel, including principals ($n = 2$) and the school–university liaison and program coordinator ($n = 1$). Three other individuals were asked for interviews and did not respond. Interview protocols differed per group, although similar questions were asked. We used a semistructured interview (Merriam, 1998), which allowed the interviewer to expand on the predetermined questions. A neutral interviewer, not associated with the school–university partnership, conducted the tape-recorded interviews.





Each participant was interviewed in person. The interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. After the interview, the tapes were transcribed and initial analysis began.

Data Analysis

Each transcript was coded by thought units, based on grounded theory and constant comparative methods. The use of such methods relies heavily on developing theory by measuring each incident, noting relationships, and reducing categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Three researchers collaborated for initial and subsequent coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data were manipulated using NUD*IST 5 (QSR International, Cambridge, MA) to extend the analysis and provide additional organizational support. Triangulation (Denzin, 2000) was achieved by searching for themes that occurred across groups.

In the final stage of analysis, we included the insights of two expert reviewers (also, peers)—namely, the current principal and the coordinator of the Teaching Fellowship Program—both of whom had broad and deep experiences with all the programs involved but were not directly connected to the research. They confirmed our interpretation of the data, while pointing out areas in need of further explanation.

Limitations of This Study

Interviews indicated that teachers were positive about the partnership. Although we suspect that this attitude was primarily due to the impact of the partnership, we recognize the limitations of our study. Because of our design, we interviewed about 32% of the faculty. Had we interviewed the entire faculty, we might have heard additional points of view. The three teachers who did not agree to be interviewed might have shared different experiences. The principal was positive about the partnership, and a close professional community existed at the school, so that might have made people more reluctant to make negative comments. We do report on the one incident of a teaching fellow who was overwhelmed

and the two incidents of teachers who came to the action research sharing sessions but did not believe that it greatly influenced their teaching. Because the teachers at this school saw themselves as integral members of the partnership, they may have been reluctant to criticize the program. They were, however, eager to point out the ways that it contributed to their working environment.

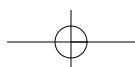
Of course, this study documents only the experience of one school in a huge partnership. Documenting the experiences of other schools with the same structures within the partnership may yield different insights. However, this study is important because it examines the perceptions of teachers who have been involved in a long-term partnership within a supportive professional context; as such, it tried to ascertain the effect that the partnership has had on them to date.

Findings

Figure 1 delineates a model of how the partnership influences teaching and teachers. This model demonstrates the structure of the university's offerings (preservice teachers, interns, SYOSP, and teaching fellows), the setting of Parkland (the positive culture, the strong principal, and the teachers), the vehicles that drive the partnership (the mentor teacher and action research), and the synergistic relationships within the partnership (exchange of curricular ideas, immediate assistance to all, and professional nudging). We explain each component in turn.

How Does This Partnership Influence Teachers?

As we examined interviews from Parkland, we identified two influential engines: the mentor relationship and the action research. These mechanisms exist in all schools that have the Teaching Fellowship Program. However, the principals and teachers at Parkland used these structures in ways that allowed the greatest flexibility and that leveraged the most resources from the school



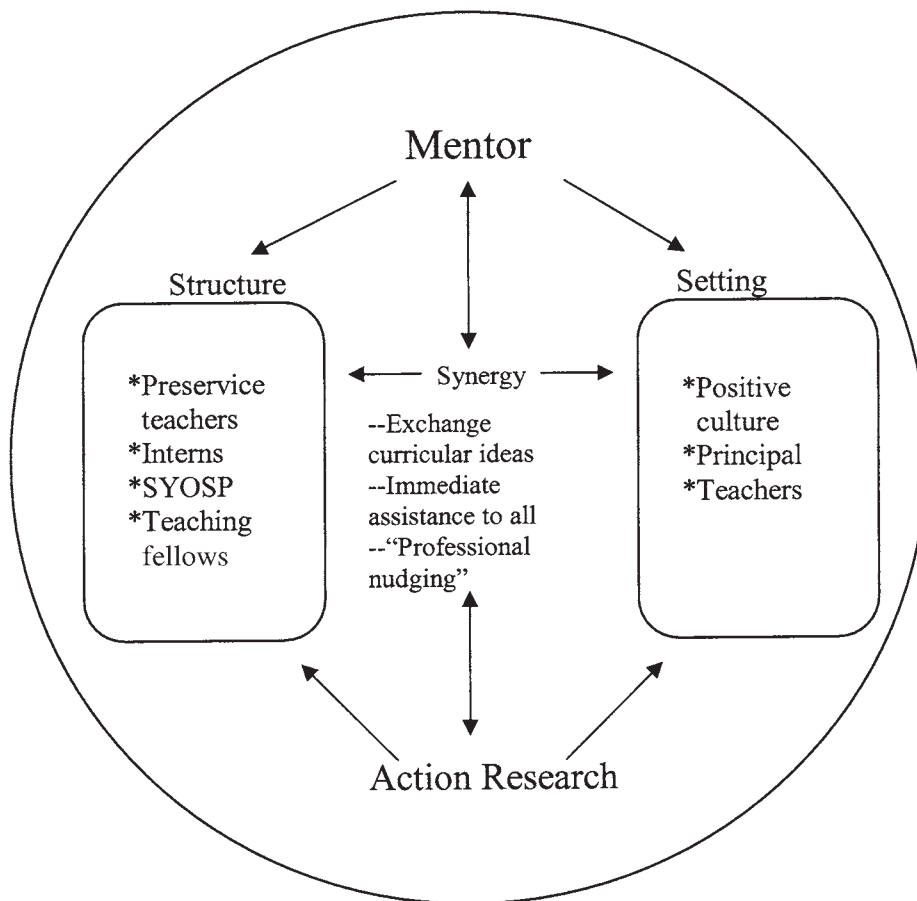


Figure 1. How are the teachers influenced by the school–university partnership?

district and the university. Because the two engines are intertwined, each of the following sections highlights one while showing the effects of the other.

Mentors. Parkland had four consecutive mentors since the Teaching Fellowship Program’s inception: Denise, Melinda, Lili, and Lynne. The mentors at Parkland supported their fellows and other teachers, helped focus the faculty’s inquiry, leveraged resources for the school, and strengthened the school–university connection. Their first priority was to support the teaching fellows in the classrooms. Lili explains:

I’m there to help them in any way they need help . . . whether it is knowing the lay of the land to start with or . . . model [lessons], talk a lot about curriculum and management and children’s behavior . . . or sitting in on parent conferences.

In addition to working with the fellows, mentors have various school responsibilities. Denise, one of the first mentors, recalled becoming a quasiadministrator in the school, by meeting with a parent if the principal was out of the building or by substitute teaching. Melinda said that the mentors supported teachers in ways such as sharing an instructional strategy, helping them learn how to use a program on the computer, and editing a parent letter.

The mentor facilitates the Classroom Research class, which is required for teaching fellows and which is held at Parkland. This class is open to other Parkland teachers for district in-service credit or university credit (or if they simply wish to attend as participants). In addition, the meetings are open so that teachers can drop in on occasion.

Mentors also support the school through the focus that each brings to the position—for



example, through Denise's and Lynne's interest in literacy, Melinda's knowledge about mathematics, and Lili's skill in technology. Melinda's case provides a vivid example of the ways that mentors help in leveraging resources for the school. With leadership from the principal, the school concentrated on math for that year partially as a result of Melinda's interest in mathematics. Melinda's one third school commitment included securing a 3-year math institute grant to provide leadership. She recalled,

For the school, I worked a lot with interviewing students who were struggling in math, and I tried to provide intervention when their teachers were stuck. I was really a professional development resource for math. In addition, I did all the scheduling of our university students, all the scheduling of visitors, observers from other buildings, as well as university level.

At the same time, Melinda taught a section of the undergraduate mathematics education class, as her one third commitment to the university, so, for the field experience that accompanied their class, she placed her undergraduate students at Parkland. Through the math grant and conversations with Melinda, teachers became interested in an alternative curriculum for math—TERC's "Investigations in Number, Data, and Space" (see <http://investigations.terc.edu/>). A number of teachers joined the Classroom Research group and concentrated on using questions surrounding TERC math as their foci for action research. Parkland faculty agreed to research math for a year, and Melinda was on-site to give teachers support with a new curriculum. Because Melinda worked with university math faculty, the school had easy access to the university's resources. The school benefited from Melinda as a kind of go-between with the university. Data revealed that the other mentors used their special interests and talents to highlight other parts of the curriculum for the school.

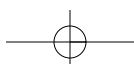
Action research. Action research was the second influential partnership engine. The data revealed that 30% of the faculty members

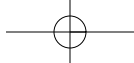
engaged in the Classroom Research class; thus, inquiry permeated the culture in this school. Action research influenced the attitudes of the teachers who engaged in it directly, as well as those who did not. It helped teachers learn from one another and focus their teaching. In this section, we describe how action research worked at Parkland and what some of its initial effects were.

The mentor teacher facilitated Classroom Research with the support of Pam Jennings, the university liaison. Although the group started small, it rapidly grew because of the immediate impact that it had on the classrooms. Laurie, a former fellow, explained the impact on her teaching:

It's not only impacted my teaching. . . . My kids really opened up and showed me what they could do because my focus was on them, and because my attitude was changing about math [her action research topic], their attitude changed dramatically too.

Principal Hastings was also committed to action research because she saw the collaboration occurring among her staff and the development of teachers as learners. She supported the process not only by actively engaging in action research (she studied looping and improving attendance) but also by giving teachers a forum at the end of the year to share what they had learned. Not all teachers were able to participate. Bonnie, a veteran teacher who did not participate in Classroom Research, suggested, "If you can't go out and do the research yourself, at least you can learn from someone else, and you know, maybe take from it what you can use in your own classroom." Although many teachers attended and enjoyed the presentations, not everyone applied the new knowledge in their own classroom. Two teachers mentioned that they had attended the presentations, but their reactions were more general. Donna suggested simply, "There was good information there," whereas Naomi mentioned that "everyone was talking about the results of the TERC, so yes, indirectly, it did affect me."





Teachers chose to do action research for reasons beyond the credit that they received. Many used words such as *focusing* (their year) and *honing* (their teaching). Katie, a former fellow, suggested that it made her more specific and that it forced her to become familiar with best practices. Although teachers spoke highly of action research, one current teaching fellow found it a challenging addition to her 1st year of teaching:

Action research was a blur for me for a really long time, just because I had no idea of what I was doing. My mentor tried to help me, but I was lost until the end, when I finally figured out what I had been doing and I was, like, “Okay, this makes sense.”

Interestingly enough, after the first experience, which for some teachers was difficult, about one third of the fellows volunteered to participate for at least another year.

Synergistic Relationships Within the Partnership

The interactions among the mentor, the action research class, the university structures, and the teaching community at Parkland created the potential for synergy. Through analysis of the interviews, we identified three overlapping themes within that synergy: immediate assistance, exchange of curricular ideas, and professional nudging—all of which often occurred simultaneously. Each theme is defined and then clarified through examples to demonstrate how these three interactions worked.

Immediate assistance. Immediate assistance occurred at a number of levels—from practicum students to veteran teachers, and vice versa. Fellows reported assistance from their mentors, the liaison, and other teachers. Teachers spoke not only of receiving assistance but of assisting one another, as well as fellows and field students.

Teachers at Parkland actively used practicum students and interns. These students were not simply running copies; they were primarily working with children. The ex-

pectation set by the principal was that all of Parkland was active in shaping preservice teachers. Catherine, a former fellow, responded to field placement students in a way typical of other teachers:

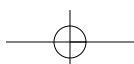
This last year I had two students who were early childhood. They came out Tuesday and Thursday all day, so they had to do some teaching of their own. And then they had to watch me and ask me questions, and then they participated in a lot of small groups, which was helpful to me. Because, you know, while the kids were in math groups, I could feel like I could have a more hands-on with [the practicum students] visiting.

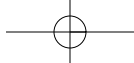
Catherine relied on the large blocks of time that the practicum students gave and the support they offered to her students.

Nearly every past fellow spoke of the powerful professional and emotional support they received from the mentor over the course of the year. For instance, Dayna appreciated that both a neighboring teacher and her mentor helped her in her 1st year: “[They] spent gobs of time with me that 1st year.” In general, all teachers spoke of giving and receiving aid and support from one another and the university students. The assistance was symbiotic: Teachers were helping the university field students, interns, fellows, mentor, and one another while receiving help from each of these entities as well.

Exchanging curricular ideas. Teachers suggested that curricular ideas were freely exchanged with other teachers, even the 1st-year teaching fellows. Lili suggested that “teaching fellows are valued colleagues. Other teachers learn from them. They bring a freshness to the building with their ideas.” Many veteran teachers were open to this exchange of new ideas from preservice and beginning teachers.

The strong professional community that exists at Parkland partially facilitated the sharing of curricular ideas that occurred. Many ideas were exchanged in the action research meetings. Catherine, a second-grade teacher, described having a growing awareness





of curriculum and teaching practices while building collegial relationships across grade levels:

It made me feel at home because I would walk down the hall Friday and say, “Hey, how’s it going?” because I met with her [a fourth-grade teacher] on Thursday. I had a heartbeat on what was going on in their classrooms because we’re always talking. . . . I got to learn what they were learning as they were finding out information for their question.

The meetings encouraged teachers to talk with people outside their grade levels and areas. Sharing research results helped teachers in various areas know about the activities and inquires of other teachers, thus promoting vertical knowledge.

Catherine was fascinated by a colleague’s research in building a community through mathematics, so she followed up by inviting this colleague to visit her classroom. Catherine was delighted when this colleague came to her classroom (several times) to see what she was doing in her own mathematics research. This gave Catherine ongoing support. As such, immediate assistance and exchanging ideas often occurred together and encouraged professional nudging.

Professional nudging. As the experienced Parkland teachers collaborated with one another and with the fellows and the preservice teachers, they felt more accountable to one another and to the children. Many reported that they tried to teach better because of the presence of the others. In a sense, the interaction served to scaffold professional development. We called such interactions *professional nudging*. Barb, a veteran teacher, related one incident of professional nudging:

It was one of those situations that was inspiring, where working with Cory [my intern] made me want to be a better teacher and to look at my practices and update them. I realized that I had lost a lot of my energy. It made me think that I need to have fun with the kids while they learned.

That was her strength, and it’s something I always struggled over.

Having a student teacher energized Barb, and it caused her to reflect on her teaching. For Tanisha, a former fellow, this process was dynamic:

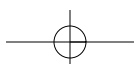
When someone else is sharing their findings with you and going through the thought process of their action research, you know, their ideas spark ideas with you and prompt you to think of something, so you always have constant thinking going on.

As teachers shared their ideas and built on one another’s thoughts—that is, as they worked together and nudged one another—their conversations gained a research edge and became more professional.

Discussion: How Does This Partnership Influence Teachers at Parkland?

From the beginning, Parkland has been a highly professional school, one where “being a good teacher” was the goal of many faculty members who realized that teaching matters and that good teaching matters more (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Although the teachers were already competent professionals, they became more collaborative after the partnership was established. Parkland’s culture and climate helped foster relationships that moved from individual partnership activities to true renewal (Goodlad, 1991). Renewal acts as an umbrella over the components (university and school), the engines that drive the renewal (the mentorship and action research), and the synergistic and symbiotic interactions that are at the center of the renewal (immediate assistance, exchange of ideas, and professional nudging; see Figure 2).

Two implications emerged from this renewal: first, a stronger professional learning community for preservice, new, and veteran



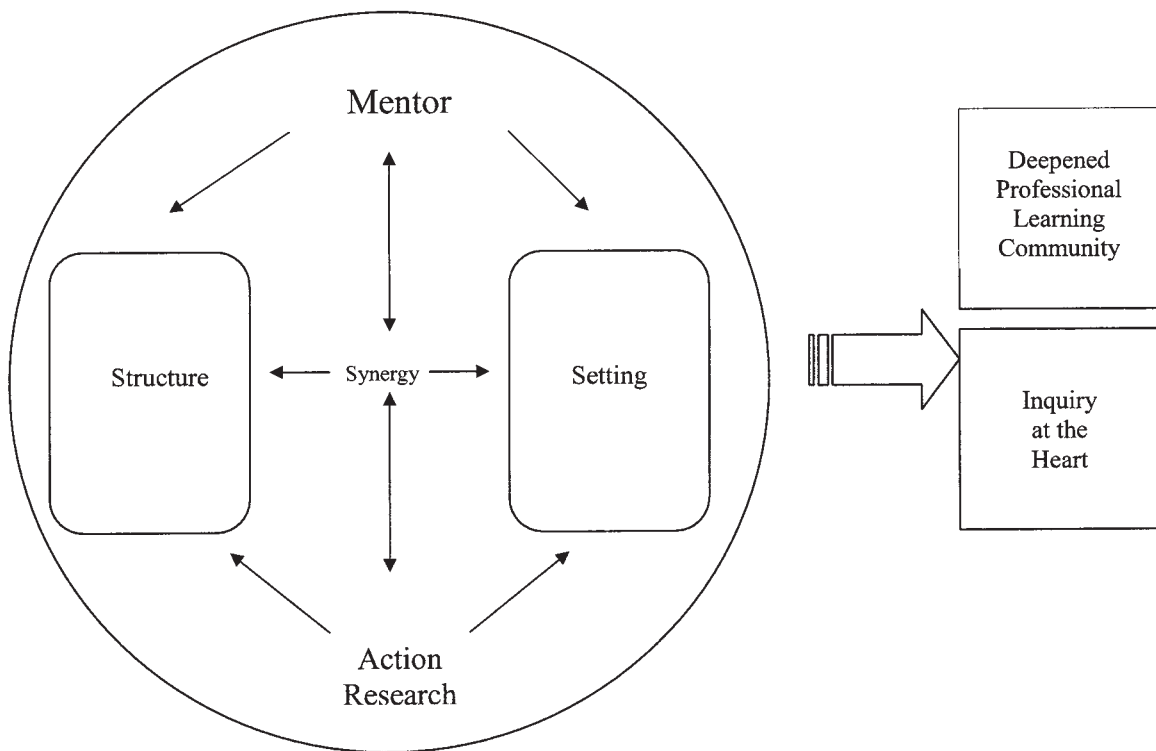


Figure 2. Model of renewal

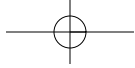
teachers; and second, inquiry at the heart of the school.

Although the term *professional learning communities* is sometimes overused and misused (DuFour, 2004), it does seem to fit what occurred at Parkland. This school, nested within the partnership, was able to create a strong professional learning community with the field students, the SYOSP students, the teaching fellows, the teachers, the principal, and selected university faculty.

To create such a community, the principal and the teachers had to take responsibility for acculturating preservice and beginning teachers. The principal expected that everyone would be involved with preparing this next generation of teachers, and the teachers concurred. Thus, veteran teachers regularly interacted with novices. Parkland teachers hosted university students because these students asked the hard questions—questions that helped the Parkland teachers reflect and articulate their own pedagogy and therefore become stronger teachers. In the same way, the

faculty regarded teaching fellows as “some of the best teachers in the building,” even though they were 1st-year teachers. Experienced teachers knew that they could bounce ideas off peers and fellows and in the process create stronger teaching for children. This synergy moved the teachers beyond collegiality and collaboration to a stronger, more collective purpose and identity (Murphy & Lick, 1998). They moved from collegiality to a professional community, with learning, a continual commitment to growth, and inquiry at its center.

The data identified two factors fostering this professional community: the role of the mentor and the leadership of the principal. The mentor was a force that drove renewal at Parkland School. Although each school in the Teaching Fellowship Program has an identified mentor, not every mentor had the same impact as those at Parkland did. At Parkland, the role of the mentor, as envisioned in the program, was bestowed on a talented teacher who had previous contacts and relationships



with university faculty. The result was a mentor who spanned boundaries, “active in the context outside of school who can bring new ideas as well as challenges into the community” (McLaughlin & Zarrow, 2001, p. 94). The mentor linked the school to the resources of the university (preservice students, faculty interest, and expertise) while linking the university to the resources of the school (her expertise and practical classroom knowledge). She facilitated and orchestrated the symbiotic relationship, or the renewal (Fenstermacher, 1999), of the school and the university.

The mentor’s success, however, could not occur without the principal. Because Hastings had been a classroom teacher, she was keenly aware of how important curriculum and collaboration were. She not only supported action research but honored and valued teachers’ research. Hastings made critical decisions that took into account the talents of her teachers and mentors. Dialogue with the mentors was part of the school planning. She set her agenda with the teachers instead of for the teachers.

Most teachers—especially, those who had been fellows—recognized that exciting possibilities occurred when teachers collaborated. In a sense, the participants became mentors to one another. Patterson and Stansell (1984) believe that mentoring is, at best, mutualistic—that is, the relationship is transactional, rather than interactional, and each party changes as a result (Stansell, 1997). The data suggest that these teachers engaged in a kind of mutual mentoring.

Second, this professional community was oriented toward inquiry. Classroom Research evolved into more than just a required class. It moved some teachers toward inquiry as a stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001)—from being consumers of other people’s research to creators of their own research. Instead of obtaining all new techniques and knowledge through the university classwork or district inservices, teachers’ best practices came from the results of their research and others’ research. If the principal suggested a new program (such as TERC mathematics), teachers did not automatically accept it; instead, they researched it

and made a decision based on the data that they collected and analyzed from their students. Action research was no longer something special but, rather, institutionalized and teacher initiated. Research became ingrained in the culture of the school, thereby giving teachers more control over the curriculum and its implementation and, therefore, more of a stake in its success.

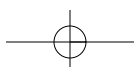
When one third or more of the staff was engaged in action research, the conversations in the school fundamentally changed to include research questions and data. Many of the teachers who were not engaged in research benefited from the knowledge. Parkland teachers had a common vision (“We do what is good for kids”); they had ways to test their ideas and strategies (through action research); and they had a strong professional community of teachers and learners.

Conclusion

What does this example of partnership activities, which lead to a deeper professional community and inquiry, mean to other schools and to other partnerships? From this example, we conclude that change and deeper renewal can occur even when a school is already strong. Change is so often reported only when a school is weak and when it goes through a changing event. Schools are actually changing every day.

Second, change does not occur because of a new set of structures or activities. In our model, we see that a combination of leadership (from the principal and the mentor), relationships (between and among the preservice, novice, and veteran teachers), and the action research was necessary to develop stronger professional communities. Given our study of Parkland, we believe that other schools might experience less growth and change if they have less seasoned mentors who have fewer experiences with the university or if they have principals who do not understand how to leverage resources. Thus, people are the most important element of change.

Our data suggest the positive effects that a school–university partnership activity can



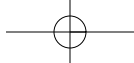
have on the quality of teaching for new and experienced teachers, as well as for the school. Overall, partnership activities provided additional resources and structures to strengthen the teachers at Parkland. Professional development is one key to learning. As teachers strengthened their teaching, they strengthened their learning as well. Renewal is complex and somewhat distinct to every school. We used the teachers' voices to narrate an account of one partnership's characteristics, interests, and values to explain the impact of the partnership on one school. It is the unique interactions of the faculties (public school and university), their administrations, and the pre-service teachers, within the structure of the partnership, that lead to the greatest renewal. As documented by the rich interactions that resulted from the inclusion of preservice teachers, teaching fellows, and veteran teachers within a climate of inquiry, partnerships increase the potential of excellent teaching and learning. Parkland Elementary School is indeed an example of complex renewal in action. ^{SUP}

Note

1. Pseudonyms are used for the school and for the participants cited herein.

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