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Metcalf Laboratory School: A Report on a Model for Preservice Music Teacher Field Experiences

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Preservice teachers need to work with children early in their professional sequence and to connect theory with practice (Lanier & Little, 1986). Teacher educators wrestle with the issue of how best to apply the pedagogy and theory to ‘real world’ teaching. Traditionally, this has occurred through various clinical and field experiences. Field experiences continue to be an important part of teacher education. To be most effective, these experiences should be conducted in situations that are themselves exemplary models of educational practice. These experiences include observations and practice teaching in both laboratory and actual classroom settings.

Research has concluded that field experiences should include opportunities for reflection on teaching and that university faculty should take on a clinical faculty role during supervision of preservice teachers (McIntyre, 1983). The idea of reflection as a means for improving teaching has been part of the literature in education since Schön’s *The Reflective Practitioner* was published in 1983. La Bosky (1994) and Johnston (1994), among others, argue that novices and interns need opportunities to examine their own teaching and adapt the
pedagogy they have learned in class to the context of the classroom in which they teach. In her review of literature on teacher preparation, Darling-Hammond (1991) maintained that supervised clinical learning provides for effective classroom management and that teaching intensive supervision during clinical experience is important in order to assure effectiveness. According to Meade (1991), clinical experiences should be the shared experiences of the university, the local schools and professional teacher organizations and should take place over an extended period of time. He suggests further that sites where clinical experiences take place should represent the population of students living in that area.

Laboratory schools, in association with normal schools (teacher training institutions) and universities, have been in existence in the United States since the late 19th century. By the turn of the century, 70% of the normal schools in the United States had their own laboratory or training school (King & Mizoue, 1993). However, the demand for new teachers throughout this century combined with cost-cutting in the 1970’s and 80’s led to more and more local and public schools being used for teacher training. Today there are only 100 university-controlled lab schools still in use.

King & Mizoue (1993) summarize both the possibilities and the problems that exist in creating an effective laboratory school.

The task of the cooperating (laboratory) school is to break new ground, to cause and test new thinking, to design and develop new practice, and to continuously share this knowledge with the educational field in general. Such
schools require creative and flexible people in supportive environments with considerable independence of operation. The creation of such environments, however necessary and attractive, has proven to be extremely difficult (p. 69)

It is possible for the laboratory school to meet the challenges put forth by our profession. Metcalf School, the laboratory school located in Normal, Illinois and associated with Illinois State University, is such a school. With the support of the department of music, the instrumental directors at Metcalf were approached in 1996 with the idea of establishing a collaborative effort where the curriculum of the University’s methods course would be reflected in the practices of the band and string program at Metcalf. Further, the instrumental preservice teachers from the University would take an active roll in presenting the curriculum to the students at Metcalf in a team teaching configuration. This report will summarize the successes and modifications that have taken place in the past ten years (1996-2006) with this collaborative effort between the instrumental methods classes at Illinois State University and the beginning band and string program at Metcalf Laboratory School in Normal, Illinois.

Background

Metcalf Laboratory School is the largest, state-supported, Pre K-8th grade lab school in the United States. Metcalf utilizes an admissions process to select students whose academic and socioeconomic characteristics mirror those of non
laboratory schools in the McLean/DeWitt/Livingston county area (Booth & Ryan, 1996). In addition, Metcalf provides services and education to students with low-incidence disabilities from a multi county region. Although Metcalf is directly linked to the College of Education at Illinois State University, the administration and director of Metcalf have considerable autonomy in hiring staff and in developing curriculum. The university does not dictate what is taught because Metcalf is a demonstration school designed to display the most current teaching strategies and instructional materials.

Undergraduate instrumental music education majors at Illinois State University (ISU) are required to take two semesters of Instrumental Methods. The first semester course covers issues related to instrumental music in grades 5 through 8 and the second semester course focuses on instrumental music in high school settings. The professor for the instrumental methods course at ISU is responsible for placing all instrumental method students in their field experiences. Before the institution of this project, efforts were made to place instrumental method students in public and private school settings near the University that had exemplary programs and to allow for ample instruction time. Unfortunately, many components of a successful field experience mentioned earlier in this article were missing, in particular, the strong connection between the pedagogy in the methods course and the teaching in the clinical classroom. At the end of the 1996 Spring semester, the band director at Metcalf was approached about creating a true collaboration between ISU method classes and
the Metcalf instrumental program. To date, the Metcalf music program had been used for unsupervised observations and micro teaching only. It was proposed that the 5\textsuperscript{th} grade beginning instrumentalists at Metcalf (both strings and winds) receive small and large group instruction from the University’s instrumental education majors during both semesters of their University method course. This has since been modified to include 6\textsuperscript{th} grade instrumental classes as well. This matches the suggestions put forth by Meade (1991) for extended shared experiences at clinical sites that are representative of the population in the area.

It was determined that the university students would apply techniques taught in their methods course and receive regular feedback from both the university professor and the Metcalf instructors. A formal proposal was presented to the principal at Metcalf and was approved.

In order for this to be a truly successful collaboration, the schedules for the two institutions involved were changed. The beginning band and string programs at Metcalf met simultaneously on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday which matched the scheduled days for the university methods course, but the meeting times did not line up. The university methods course was moved from the 9:00 a.m. hour to 8:00 a.m. to accommodate the laboratory schedule.

\textbf{Curriculum Issues}
Curricular innovation is a hallmark of the University lab school and as such was addressed in the planning for this collaborative effort. Our plans to align the pedagogy in the university methods course more closely with the instruction at Metcalf have since been implemented and reflect the National Standards in Arts Education released in 1994. The beginning method books chosen for both the band and string students during the first year of this project were decided on jointly. Rhythmic, melodic, harmonic and creative experiences for the beginning courses have since been added. Units that emphasize improvisation on selected scale patterns have been added to complete the curriculum.

Supervision and Instruction

The professor of the University methods course and the band and orchestra director at the lab school act as supervising teachers for all of the method students. For Wednesday classes, both the band and orchestra are divided into sections and taught by pairs of university method students. Mondays and Fridays are reserved for full group heterogeneous instruction from the band and orchestra instructors at the lab school while university method students meet with their instructor for various lecture topics relating to instrumental music instruction.

University method students are paired off into instruction teams by areas of expertise. Further, instruction groups are rotated once during the semester
(after approximately 5 weeks) so that all student instructors have the opportunity
to work with instrument families other than their primary one, i.e., woodwinds,
brass, percussion and strings. Working in pairs, one student instructor is
designated as the ‘lead’ teacher and is responsible for all instruction for the first
2½ class sessions in each rotation. The other student instructor acts as the
assistant and helps with individuals and provides peer feedback to the ‘lead’
instructor. In the middle of the third class session, the student instructors switch
roles. The final two weeks of the semester allow each student instructor time
rehearsing with full band or orchestra.

After conferring with the Metcalf orchestra and band instructor, student
instructors are responsible for creating lesson plans for each teaching episode.
Both supervisors guide university students in development of short-term goals
and performance benchmarks for the semester. Student instructors are given
specifics guidelines on presentation of new rhythms, counting systems and
articulations, but are afforded a great deal of freedom in development and
presentation of supplementary instruction materials. At the conclusion of the first
year of this collaboration, it was determined that the university method students
needed more guidance in creating goals and behavioral objectives for this age
level. The professor of the University methods course and the band/orchestra
director at Metcalf Lab School have since created model lesson plans for the
university method students to follow.
Each ‘lead’ teacher is observed every teaching episode for approximately 15 minutes. At the conclusion of the first 5-week rotation, the supervisors switch their observed groups of student instructors. This allows student instructors to receive feedback on their teaching from two different perspectives. Written evaluation is provided on a form created for this class that includes captions for teacher presence, verbal and non-verbal feedback, lesson planning, classroom management, evaluation and success of presentation. This type of regular supervision matches the recommendations of Darling-Hammond (1991) in her review of literature.

Reflection on Teaching

One of the benefits of this collaborative effort is regularly scheduled reflection time within the class. There is a 15-minute block of time before each Wednesday teaching episode for all of the student instructors and both supervisors to review the previous class session and plan for the class coming up. After reading and reflecting on the written feedback received from the previous class session and viewing the on-line video tape of their teaching session, supervisors allow students to think aloud and reflect on their teaching. Student instructors share techniques that have worked for them or develop alternative approaches for the presentation of difficult concepts. Student discipline problems and classroom management dominate student concerns.
during these reflection sessions. Many of the discipline problems are solved when the student instructors share possible solutions with each other. The band director at Metcalf often brings insight to the discussion on particular 5th grade students. This prompts student instructors to take into account factors such as a student’s home life or learning disabilities when dealing with student discipline problems.

Findings

Informal feedback from University students has been uniformly positive. University students appreciate the extended time with “real” students and working with instrument groups outside their specialty area. Written reflections from University students comment on the increased opportunities to “test out” techniques from their individual instrument method courses and the helpful comments from supervisors. All students commented on increased confidence when working with students of this age and conducting full ensemble. Student reflections still tend to be rather superficial and it is hoped that the depth of comments can be improved upon in the future. Recently, students have been asked to view on-line video clips of their own teaching at another clinical site and write reflections on their teaching. This has been helpful in getting the students to be more self-critical and aware of playing problems within the ensemble.
Some of the themes derived from a content analysis of these video critiques include:

1. a strong focus on “self” from the pre-service teachers rather than the students being taught

2. a tendency for the pre-service teachers to attribute problems with the lesson to the students rather than their own instruction

3. eventual agreement with the supervisor comments about the pre-service teacher’s instruction
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