

# Partnerships in Action

Fall 2008

## Welcome

from PDS Coordinator and Interim Associate Dean Jill A. Perry, Ph.D.

Welcome to our first issue of *Partnerships in Action*, a newsletter about the Rowan University Professional Development School (PDS) Network.

We have come a long way since the early 1990s when Dr. Marion Relling and Dr. Carol Sharp first brought the PDS model to Rowan. With our first PDS, Cooper's Poynt Family School in Camden, still on board (since 1991!), our PDS Network now comprises 13 PDS and Partner schools in South Jersey. Our PDS partners host our teacher candidates and build a reciprocal relationship with Rowan's educators, helping to foster a best practices environment beneficial to schools, educators, and teacher candidates alike.

This newsletter comes at an exciting time for us, as we are refocusing our work and renewing commitments between the Rowan University College of Education and each PDS and Partner school. We are proud of the work we have done in our 17 year history of PDS and we look forward to the work ahead of us.

You'll find that the PDS activities highlighted in this issue are as varied as the contexts in which they exist – but that all of our work includes extensive collaboration and a focus on P-12 students.

We hope you enjoy perusing the stories in this issue as we much as we enjoy sharing them with you. ❖

**A Newsletter about the Rowan University PDS Network**

*Written by educators for educators*

## Essential Questions in Williamstown Classrooms

One of the professional development focuses at Williamstown Middle and High Schools this year has been exploring the creation and use of Essential Questions. Liaison Martha Viator and colleague John Spencer started the year by offering two professional development workshops for the middle and high school social studies departments. Middle school teachers from math, science, and social studies are also learning about Essential Questions through a monthly

pattern between the rise and fall of civilizations? If so, are we next?

Rowan teacher candidates have also benefited from the curriculum revision work of the middle school teachers. Being in classrooms in which they see lessons developed around Essential Questions has enabled the practicum students to understand how to put constructivist theory into practice—and how it takes hard work. One candidate related, “I am having trouble with thinking of a good question and my cooperating teacher told me that



study group, facilitated by Viator, of Understanding by Design, by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe.

Several teachers already see benefits to using Essential Questions in the classroom. George Heidemark says, “It’s changed the way I teach US History.” While he “covers” fewer details, he believes students are developing a deeper understanding of the big ideas of history.

Christine Neri believes her sixth graders are better able to compare the various ancient civilizations they study throughout the year. One of her students last year, for example, came up with an Essential Question she now uses in the classroom: Is there a

she also struggles with essential questions.” The open mindedness and honesty of the middle school teachers about the difficulties they face in creating Essential Questions is invaluable in showing candidates that seeing oneself in a developmental process does not end with graduation.

Since September, Williamstown's middle and high schools teachers have welcomed into their classrooms over 50 Rowan teacher candidates in all stages of the teacher-training program. The cooperating teachers at both schools are extremely generous and gracious with their time, sharing their experiences and expertise with candidates. ❖

# Inservice/Preservice: Who's Teaching Whom?

Two Lakeside Middle School teachers presented this topic, along with their Rowan PDS liaison, at the 21st Century Learning at the Crossroads Conference at Kean University last November. When asked to present a workshop about preservice teachers, there was no hesitation on a topic. All five teacher candidates at Lakeside this past semester were using technology in innovative ways to enhance learning for their middle school students. Not only were the 6th and 7th grade students motivated by these new young teacher candidates, their cooperating teachers couldn't wait to try some of the new strategies and techniques in their own lessons.

As part of the presentation, Joan Siniavsky, math teacher, and Jill Fisler, technology coach, shared their own experiences as cooperating teachers who learned lots of new ways to use technology from their Rowan preservice teachers. Joan related how her teacher candidate, Colleen Oswald, used Geometer's Sketchpad and laptop computers for hands-on geometry lessons that engaged the students in creating, rotating, and translating polygons. She emphasized that the students were better able to visualize more advanced math concepts this way.

Also included in the presentation were video clips of other Lakeside inservice/preservice success stories. One clip featured teacher candidate, Mark Walter, who used technology in different ways to bring the study of geography to life for his 7th graders. His cooperating teacher, Bonnie Shropshire, who admits being



somewhat fearful of using technology before Mark arrived, had this to say, "Mark has been a wonderful teacher for me because he has introduced me to a whole new world of technology. I have learned from him as he has learned from me." She tells about learning to use the SMARTBoard to make learning geography interactive and using video clips to enable

students to visualize concepts that they would otherwise have trouble grasping. She is excited about trying her new skills when Mark leaves, adding that she'll probably call on him for help.

The technology fever does not stop in the teacher candidate's classroom. The Rowan students' influence extends to other teachers at Lakeside as well. It is not uncommon to see a teacher candidate helping set up a SMARTBoard in another classroom or even conducting a mini-workshop on PowerPoint games during a team meeting. One teacher candidate, John Coffey, was so effective in helping seasoned teachers with technology that he was invited by the technology supervisor to be part of the district technology committee.

The good news is that Rowan teacher candidates leave Lakeside School well-prepared to begin their teaching careers, having been nurtured by their cooperating teachers, as well as the entire Lakeside learning community. But the learning goes both ways—cooperating teachers are proud to admit that they have learned new tricks from their young preservice teachers as well. Certainly, as Bonnie Shropshire describes, "It has been a wonderful partnership!" ❖

## Great Opportunities Popped Up This Past Spring at Whitehall!

For the first time ever, Whitehall Elementary School hosted a Teaching in Learning Communities 1 course in the library of Whitehall School this past spring. There are over 20 Rowan University students who now call Whitehall "home" each Wednesday afternoon as they meet for class and field observations on-site. Due to the smaller size of Whitehall School, there are Rowan students in practically every classroom in the building! It is a wonderful opportunity for the teachers and students at Whitehall to get to know and work with the University students. In addition, the University students benefit from greater interaction with specific teachers who are participating in the TLC 1 course as panel discussants and guest speakers on various topics. Having a TLC1 course on-site increases the comfort level and access between Rowan students, course instructor and PDS Liaison Cori Meredith, Whitehall faculty, and administrators. It is a new opportunity they hope to make an annual event! ❖



# New Teacher Candidate Model at Dorothy Bullock Elementary

Over the past two years the PDS team at Bullock school has been working on a new teacher candidate model. During the 2006-2007 school year, Dr. Stacey Leftwich, PDS coordinator from Rowan, led a team of teachers and school administrators that developed a long term plan for improving the teacher candidate experience for both the school and the candidates themselves. Some parts of the plan were implemented during the first year, with surveys and reflections completed and analyzed before the start of the current school year.

During the 2007-2008 school year Leftwich and Bullock school PDS liaison, Steven Hempel, also an adjunct at Rowan, took the model out for a test drive.

The plan involves monitoring TLC 1 and 2 students conducting their practicum at the Bullock school and continuing to monitor student progress as they move to other schools. This will help the team become more familiar with the teacher candidates when they enter the school later for their field experience.

Each year the school in partnership with the University will select six students for their field experience. Once these teacher candidates arrive at Bullock, they become part of a learning community that assists and supports them in a variety of ways.

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“The ultimate goal of the model is to make the best teaching and learning experience”

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Leftwich and Hempel have coordinated a series of workshops for the candidates. These workshops take place after school and are conducted by members of the PDS committee, Bullock faculty and administrators. The workshops are tailored to the needs of the current teacher candidates’ responses to their initial surveys and input from cooperating teachers. Workshops range from teaching guided reading sessions, classroom management, effective learning environments, content area integration, interviewing preparation as well as understanding poverty.

In addition to the workshops, Leftwich meets with the teacher candidates every other week for a “bag lunch” to discuss any issues, concerns, and experiences in the classroom. Leftwich is the sole supervisor for all the student teachers in the building. This has been a very positive development in the model, because there is a continuity of expectations among the teacher candidates and the cooperating teachers.

“The teacher candidates are all on the same page and are in a position to assist and support one another through the process. Cooperating teachers can assist and collaborate as well because goals and expectations are common to all,” said Hempel.

The ultimate goal of the model is to make the best teaching and learning experience for both the teacher candidates and the staff at Bullock school. All parties involved are looking forward to building on the model that has been implemented this year. ❖

# Liaison Learns Humility

by Patrick M. Westcott

What excites me most as a PDS liaison is returning to home turf—the public elementary school! For twelve and a half years I had my own classroom. I fell in love with the curriculum I taught, most especially math and social studies. However, looking back, I was an abject failure as a writing instructor.

When I became a district staff developer I joined forces with a colleague who, to this day, lives and breathes writing instruction. Shirley introduced me to the Writing Project at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the formidable guru of writing instruction, Lucy Calkins. I learned that writing was a process, not an event.

So what did the teachers of Oak Knoll request of me in terms of support?

Yes, you guessed correctly: Improved writing instruction! It is with second grade teacher, Mary Vitale, with whom I have spent the most time on writing instruction at Oak Knoll. I use Mary as a source of endless examples of quality assessment (both academic and dispositional) and instructional strategies that I share with teacher candidates back on campus.

Currently, I’m working with Mary and her students on research writing. Each student selected a dinosaur to explore, conducting research via quality nonfiction from the school’s superior collection and via the web, each student accessing a bookmarked site on individual laptops. I’ve witnessed growth for the past two years. I am certain that this year’s writers will show marked improvement.

Mary and I conducted a persuasive writing workshop for Oak Knoll second grade teachers in April. Since the NJ ASK is moving away from picture prompts to persuasive writing, the third grade teachers stated unequivocally that second grade teachers needed to begin teaching persuasive writing to their students. ❖

# Relaxation and Collaboration

In 2000, when Johnstone Elementary became a PDS, members created a morning coffee klatch, called Brew U, to discuss current educational topics.

Since then, staff members enjoy meeting two to three times a month before school to participate in presentations by fellow members. Typical Brew U topics include ESL strategies, Everyday Math, guided reading, differentiated instruction, stress relief, cooperative learning, technology, and DWA.

As first grade teacher Stacey Saul states, Brew U's "help create and reinforce our school's learning community."

Another form of professional development that meets the needs of our clinical teachers is our Brown Bag sessions, designed to allow clinical teachers weekly professional development tailored to their unique needs. While eating lunch, members of the

Johnstone staff present topics in a relaxed atmosphere. Typical Brown Bag topics include the responsive classroom, 504 plans, writing instruction, interactive bulletin boards, working with parents, DRA, and student aggression.

Often, a topic will be added to a Brown Bag schedule to address an issue student teachers encounter, providing time to problem solve with other clinical teachers.

Clinical teacher Amber Westcott finds many practical applications for the information gleaned from Brown Bags, finding ways to "incorporate many of the instructional strategies presented by Johnstone staff into my planning."

Second grade teacher and clinical teacher supervisor Melissa Morgan agrees, "They come back relieved that others are feeling or dealing with the same problems as they are!" ❖

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**Dr. Carol A. Sharp**  
Dean

**Dr. Jill A. Perry**  
Interim Associate Dean

**Steven C. Farney, M.B.A.**  
Assistant Dean

**Jean Brodie**  
Executive Director,  
Student Services Center

*Partnerships In Action* is published periodically by the Rowan University College of Education to keep the community informed about Professional Development School (PDS) network resources, accomplishments and events.

Send comments and questions to:  
[PDSnewsletter@rowan.edu](mailto:PDSnewsletter@rowan.edu)

The Rowan University Professional Development School (PDS) network exemplifies the values and goals of learning communities. We believe that educators—seasoned, novice, and teacher candidates alike—benefit from learning and sharing with one another.



College of Education  
201 Mullica Hill Road  
Glassboro, NJ 08028



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