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**Professional Development Plans: A collaborative model between  
PK-12 teachers and Institutions of higher education faculty**

**Abstract**

This paper will discuss the development of a collaborative model between PK-12 teachers and IHE faculty which was designed to support the development of the initial educator's Professional Development Plans (PDP). This PK-16 Teacher Quality Initiative was a two year project that included a total of 20 University of Wisconsin-Stout faculty from the School of Education and College of Arts and Sciences, 20 mentors from Local Educational Agencies (LEA) assigned to the 20 initial educators. Specific training workshops, on-site visits, and a web enhanced learning community attributed to the approval of the majority of the initial educator's PDP and support in the process of writing PDP goals and activities. Feedback acquired from the initial educators, mentors, and university consultants targeted specific areas of concern in the PDP process which will be shared. The second year of the grant also included 15 three to five year educators who received training on how to collect student outcome data to measure and document the effects of professional growth on student learning.

**Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of the PK-16 Teacher Quality Initiative grant "A Model for Advanced Beginner Teacher Mentoring/Support was to support initial educators in their second year of teaching as they transitioned from a first year survival focus to reflective practice focused on student learning. While most area school districts provide some level of support for first year initial educators in the form of building mentors and/or periodic in-service, few if any provide sustained support through the critical year two when initial educators are required to develop their Professional Development Plans.

During the second year of the grant, the project was expanded to serve more advanced initial educators. For the three to five year educators, training on how to collect student outcome data to measure and document the effects of professional growth on student learning was conducted. Three to five year educators learned various methods to formatively assess student learning and behavioral outcomes, and each participant developed an assessment plan aligned with their PDP plan goals.

**Participants**

Participants included *initial educators*, who were in their second year of teaching, *site based mentors* from 14 surrounding Local Educational Agencies (LEA), and *university consultants* from the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Stout.

The ten Initial educators who participated in the project the first year, 2007-2008, held teaching assignments in secondary technology education, 3rd and 4th grade, early childhood-kindergarten, instrumental music, and special education. The majority of University Consultants were in the School of education however, one consultant was from the College of Arts and Sciences.

During the 2008-2009 school years, the participant's teaching assignments included elementary music, K-12 counselor, K-12 Art education, Family and Consumer Science education, Early Childhood education, Business/Marketing, High School Science/Math, and Elementary Physical Education. Six university consultants were from the school of Education and three consultants were from the College of Arts and Sciences.

Incentives for participation in the grant included the following monetary stipends: initial educators received one graduate credit and a \$600.00 stipend. Mentors received \$300 stipend for two half days during the summer institute and university consultants received \$800.00 for the year. However, feedback from participants, mentors and university consultants emphasized these benefits from participating in the program; the opportunity to interact with colleagues during the summer institute who shared the same questions and concerns about the PDP, the experience to receive non-evaluative mentoring and support from the university consultant, and PDP feedback from PDP grant coordinators, university consultants, and mentors. One university consultant summed up the rewards of the program for him in this way, "I hope I get more opportunities to do this in the future! The money isn't really the issue for me; being able to get into schools really adds to my practice. I gained fresh stories to communicate with my students. Being able to communicate these stories of reality in the classroom really helped my students understand the importance of what I am presenting to them as their future roles and responsibilities. I like to call it the why/what for..."

During the 2008-2009 year, the initiative also included 15 participants who were in their third to fifth year of teaching. The participants included teachers of Special Education, Early Childhood (including 4 and 5-year-old Kindergarten), Elementary Education, Music Education, Marketing/Business Education, and Family and Consumer Science Education. Two School Counselors from local LEAs were also participants.

### **Project goals**

The purpose of the UW- Stout Teacher Quality project was to support ten initial educators in their second year of teaching as they transitioned from a first year survival focus to reflective practice focused on student learning. It was anticipated that the results of the training, colleague mentoring, and university consultant support for each second year initial educators, would guide initial educators to identify the requirements of the PDP process, engage in greater self-reflection, develop appropriate goals and activities for their PDP, select their PDP team and gain final approval of their PDP goals.

Another purpose of the grant for the second year was to provide training and support to 15 teachers during their third to fifth years in the profession as they began to collect data on the effects of their professional development on student outcomes. It was hoped, as a result of the training and support, the participants would develop plans utilizing a variety of formative measures to inform their instruction and to document the positive effects of their professional growth on student learning and behavior.

Specific goals of the grant included:

1. Providing training and support for second year initial educators choosing to follow PI 34 for license renewal and develop a PDP.
2. Creating PDP goals aligned to Wisconsin Teaching Standards and based on self reflection and formative assessments designed to impact student learning. In particular participants would:
  - a. Identify strategies, activities, and resources designed to lead to the achievement of their professional goals;
  - b. Identify a variety of tools to assess and create evidences of their goal attainment, including but not limited to strategies to assess content knowledge, competence in planning and preparing instruction, meeting the needs of diverse learners, classroom management competence, and fulfillment of professional responsibilities;
  - c. Develop artifacts designed to provide evidence of student learning.
3. Creating a web enhanced learning community of mentors and educators consisting of initial educators renewing their license through the PDP process, the initial educator's site based mentors, and IHE faculty from the School of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences serving as university consultants.
4. Developing individual consultation teams/plans which would create and support initial educators in their activities identified in their PDP.
5. Design and conduct assessment of their own professional development and student learning related to their professional growth as third-fifth year initial educators .

### **Data/Information Collected**

Each year, summer institutes were held in August. All initial educators participated in the institute for credit. Mentors were invited to attend two half days of the institute. Five of the participant's mentors participated in the institute the first year and only two of the mentors participated in year two. The content of the institute included: 1) orientation to Quality Educator Interactive (QEI); 2) overview of the PDP process; 3) use of self-reflection tools to guide goal development including self-guided surveys, performance observations, indicators of student learning, and mentor feedback; and 4) training and practice in the identification of evidences of student learning.

A Pre-Post PDP test was given to the participants at the beginning and end of the two day institute. This Pre/post test consisted of general knowledge regarding the PDP. Results from pre-tests in 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 show that before the institute, initial educators were unclear about 1) the people who should make up the review team, 2) the collaboration component with others in the PDP and 3) the role of self reflection in writing the PDP. The question, *self reflection is not required to be in the PDP plan* misled initial educators consistently with more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the participants indicating it was a false statement. Results on the Post PDP test both years showed that initial educators clearly understood the components and requirements of the PDP. Out of the twenty participants over the two year grant period, only one participant failed approval of the PDP.

Various collaborative activities for the initial educator/mentor were provided during the two day workshop. These activities included 1) drafting professional development goals based on initial educator's self-reflection, observations, and student learning; 2) training and practice in converting goals to observable and verifiable objectives; 3) training and practice aligning professional development goals, activities, resources, and collaboration strategies designed to lead to the achievement of objectives and ; 4) training and practice in identifying strategies and tools to assess goal attainment and evidence of student learning, including artifact evidences. At the end of the two day institute, initial educators had a written draft of their goals and objectives for their professional development plan.

Three to five year educators also attended a two day summer institute at the UW-Stout campus in August of 2008 where the participants were taught various methods to formatively assess student learning (e.g., pretest-post-tests, curriculum-based measures, behavioral charting, etc.). Each participant met with the instructor/facilitator to discuss and develop an assessment plan aligned with the goals delineated in their PDP plans. Online support throughout the fall semester of 2008 was then offered to each participant as they developed their assessment plans and collected data on student learning.

Data was collected throughout the grant period. The use of rubrics measured:

- a) Satisfaction of participants involvement in the project beginning with the summer institute and ending with the final dinner meeting
- b) Alignment of university consultant's plans and activities to participants goals, objectives, activities and collaborative efforts
- c) Identification of strategies, activities and resources designed to achieve goals
- d) Participation in Desire to Learn (D2L) discussion threads

Initial educators and university consultants used Desire to Learn (D2L) courseware including the drop box and discussion board as a means to share knowledge, post questions/comments/responses about the PDP process and what they were learning. The coordinators created the discussion questions and also participated in the discussion with comments and suggestions which challenged and expanded the initial educator's thought.

### **Findings**

An outside evaluator was hired to evaluate the 2007-2008 project and another is hired in 2008-2009. In 2007-2008, the evaluator reported that participants found the summer institute and the ongoing

support from university consultants as the most meaningful and helpful components of the project. Likewise, consultants gained from their involvement with the initial educators. The evaluator particularly praised the relationships developed between the IHE and the initial educators and their mentors and the growth in participant's capacity as reflective practitioners as they focused on student learning.

In 2008-2009, the preliminary findings, based on feedback from initial educators, university consultants and mentors showed similar results. The participants found that the two day summer institute which introduced them to the Quality Educator Interactive (QEI) site and the PDP process were most helpful. These initial educators noted especially that the focus on self reflection was an integral part of their developing meaningful goals and activities for their PDP. Likewise, the participants spoke of the value of the university consultant's guidance in reviewing PDP goals and assistance with implementing and collecting evidences for their PDP goals.

Throughout the year, some of the initial educators also participated in PDP workshops hosted by a Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA 11), Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC), and Northwest United Educators (NUE). While these workshops were helpful for participants to explain the 'next steps' after the approval of the PDP, the expense occurred for reading the initial educator's PDP and participation fee in the workshop was alarming to them. One participant who had attended an information session responded that when the PDP process was presented to the initial educators, it seemed 'quick and dirty' and not as reflective as what she had experienced at the summer institute. The participants felt that the grant allowed for continual communication among consultants, peers, and coordinators, allowed for more openness to suggestions, and continual support and encouragement with the process.

Findings from the third to fifth year educators indicated training and support on methods of data collection and assessment are needed to assist them in documenting the effects of their professional development on student outcomes. Pretest/post-test assessment data from the third to fifth year educators demonstrated the participants learned a significant amount of information on various assessment and data collection methods that could be utilized to demonstrate growth in student learning and/or behavioral outcomes. Further, content from the participants' reflection papers demonstrated they valued having the opportunity to learn more about assessment. For example, one teacher wrote: "I will continue to give pre-tests and post-tests in the future to gauge the learning achieved from various activities and assignments I develop as I as I complete my Professional Development Plan. I am glad I was able to use the information in a manner that helped me to better understand the learning process of my students; and, in the future, I believe I will be able to continue to provide better instruction through tracking test scores." Another teacher wrote: "I learned how to assess *for* student learning. I use informal and formal assessments much more frequently so I can plan for interventions and make modifications to my instruction."

### **Goals and Objectives and Activities**

One of the goals and activities of the summer institute was to provide time for initial educators to self reflect. From their reflection about their teaching and learning, the participants were guided to write the

goals and activities for their PDPs. The challenge for the initial educator was to write their PDP goals broad enough and include methods to assess their professional growth. As well, they were to communicate how they would document the impact of their professional growth on student learning. Writing specific objectives and activities as outcomes which support the goal was also a challenge for most of the initial educators. Finally, many initial educators struggled with the expectation that there be evidences of both student learning and teacher growth documented in their PDP.

### **Mentors**

In August, 2007-2008, there were two initial educators who were unaware of whom their mentors were, however other participants knew their mentor. Seven mentors attended the dinner meeting in September but only four out of ten mentors attended the May dinner meeting.

In 2008-2009 only two mentors attended the summer institute and both of these mentors came from the same school district. At the dinner meeting in September, however, there were seven mentors in attendance but only three out of ten mentors attended the May dinner meeting.

Feedback obtained from the mentors of the Local Educational Agencies indicates that a clearer definition of the mentor's role is needed. The expectations of the role of the mentor would assist them in providing greater help and guidance to the initial educator. Most mentors were eager to work with the university consultants. It is noteworthy that this initiative, which included the collaborative effort of the university consultant and mentor, added to the success of the initial educators writing and approval of PDP goals because the mentor was available to assist the initial educator within the school system. The mentor is crucial to the success of the initial educator but there seems to be unclear expectations in some districts regarding the mentor's role to the initial educator the first year and beyond.

### **University Consultants**

One very successful and integral component of this grant was the university consultants. Pairing of the university consultant to the initial educators was based on the initial educator's goals. For example, a participant who identified a goal relative to content knowledge was matched with a faculty member from that content area; a participant who identified a goal related to differentiation of instruction was matched with a special education faculty consultant; and a participant who wanted to try a new instructional technique was matched with a clinical teacher education faculty consultant. A minimum of four individualized consultation meetings; two in the spring and two in the fall were arranged and conducted between the initial educator and the university consultant. These meetings were held at the in the initial educator's classroom in the Local Educational Agency.

Feedback from initial educators in regards to the role of the university consultants noted that the consultant's help in reviewing their PDP, suggesting activities that support PDP goals, and ideas to assess and document student learning and professional growth was valuable. Documentation from the participant's log shows that some university consultants connected more personally with the initial educator and spent more time and effort in communicating with them via email or added visits. A few university consultants even changed their own instructional practices as a result of the project. For

example, one consultant had her initial educator come in as a guest speaker to talk to student interns about getting a job, how to determine good fit if a job is offered and general Q and A session where current Stout students could ask questions of a young practitioner in the field. Other consultants noted that sharing relevant hands-on application of materials the initial educator shared while being in the classroom was valuable to current students .

### **Development of the PDP**

The project's objective was to increase initial educator's awareness of the PDP process, and in turn, assist the participants in writing their goals and activities for their PDP's. The objective was successful! The summer institute informed the participants about the PDP expectations by introducing the QEI site and carefully describing each of the sections of the PDP making participants aware of the self-reflection requirement and the expertise of the mentor used during the first year. This was a valuable piece of the project. The summer institute allowed participants to think about the up-coming year and to write their goals for the year with guidance and assurance that they were fulfilling the expectations of their PDP. Out of the twenty participants over the two year grant period, only one participant failed approval of the PDP.

### **Summary**

Due to budget restrictions, the funding for the PK-16 initiative has ended however; the discussion about PDPs and assistance offered to initial educators needs to be further examined. Some assistance and support to the initial educators in writing their PDPs must be given to obtain high quality PDPs. From my experience as coordinator of this grant, as well as my role as an IHE reviewer, has helped me to define common areas within the initial educator's PDP that are troublesome. These areas include 1) the description of how goal(s) impact professional growth, 2) a description of how educator's professional growth will have an effect on student learning, 3) documentation of the ways professional growth impacts student learning, and 4) writing appropriate goals and activities so that they extend through the educator's licensure period.

Although the sample size of this study is small, the results clearly show that support to initial educators from mentors and university partners is necessary to the writing of well designed goals and activities which impact professional growth and student learning. However, some areas of concern which are worth considering on a larger scale include: 1) clearer expectations of the mentors role after approval of initial educators PDP, 2) assistance to initial educators in identifying and selecting activities aligned to the PDP goals which will extend throughout the licensure cycle and finally, 3) support to initial educators in acquiring a deeper understanding of writing goals that include methods to assess and document professional growth and its impact on student learning.

Results also indicated most three to five year teachers need more information on how to assess student learning and collect data on behavioral outcomes. Without a solid foundation in assessment and formative evaluation, educators will find it difficult to meet the PDP requirement that specifies the need for them to demonstrate how their professional growth had a positive effect on student learning or outcomes. It is recommended that more information be provided to initial educators on how to write

goals and develop assessment plans aligned with their PDPs. It is also recommended that all educators receive training on the various formative assessment techniques that can be used to inform their instruction, determine the effects of their instruction on all learners, and document the effects of their professional development on student learning.

### **Next Steps**

As a result of the feedback from constituents involved in this collaborative model project there are changes being discussed and occurring between UW-Stout and other partners.

1. Due to the confusion regarding 'evidences of student learning', current students enrolled in teacher education programs at UW-Stout are moving toward creating Teacher Work Samples (TWS) from their practicum and student teaching placements. Students are taught the components of a TWS and how to document activities and ways to assess student learning for the sample. It is anticipated that students who create TWS and have a clear understanding of documenting student learning will have an easier time creating their goals, objectives, activities and assessments for their PDP.
2. Initial Educators at the summer institute benefited from the instruction to use the Quality Educator Interactive (QEI) when developing their PDPs. These educators felt that the QEI tool made the PDP process smooth from beginning to end. Any questions participants had were quickly answered by Mr. John Fischer. It is intended that this tool be introduced at the Student Teachers Seminars thereby encouraging students to use the QEI when creating their PDP.
3. In response to the request to offer assistance to Initial Educators in developing their PDP as well as sustaining the work begun with this grant, a Professional Development Course will be offered through UW-Stout beginning this summer at Richland Center. The course will provide Initial Educators with the foundations of the PDP and will have similar goals and activities as the summer institute.