
MASS COALITION COURIER

'Working Together to Prepare Quality Teachers for Our Urban Schools'

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Word from the Director:

Dennis Shirley

Coalition Principal Investigator
Boston College Partnership Director

"Just Try to Change"

One of my favorite quotations is from psychologist Kurt Lewin, who once quipped, "If you want to find out how things really are, just try to change them." His saying has evolved into a kind of golden rule for action research--that is, for those who try to learn about the world by transforming it. As the Coalition prepares to enter its fourth year, we've all learned volumes about teacher education, urban schools, community-based organizations, and our cities. As this school year comes to an end, I would especially like to take my cap off to the K-12 teachers in the Coalition who have invited higher education faculty, teacher education students, and parents into their classrooms. I personally benefited through the collaboration of two Boston Public Schools teachers who team-taught a graduate class with me for Boston college students on-site at Brighton High. The Coalition is creating a sense of real hope among urban teachers, community activists, and higher education faculty that broad-based networks of civic education really *can* transform our city schools and communities into settings where young people truly flourish. If this is the way a school year ends which began with 9/11, then I say *Viva* to all stakeholders in the Coalition!

Field Notes...

Though I enjoyed the days when my "field" was all of the seven partnerships in the Coalition, since the birth of my son, my "field" is now the five square miles of the Boston College, Garfield Elementary School and Brighton High School partnership.

At the awarding of the Title II Teacher Quality Partnership grant the Boston College partnership was in its infancy. Practicum students and individual professors worked in the schools but it was not until the grant that this work began to coalesce from a myriad of interesting projects into one recognizable program that I characterize as an exploration of the intersection of pedagogy and curriculum situated within the urban classroom. Each project addresses the core issues of the grant: what do K-16 students need to know and be able to do? How can those of us in schools and colleges work together to best teach them?

Program highlights include collaboration with several Arts and Sciences departments. With English faculty we study "Preparing the Best Secondary English Teacher", redesign courses to reflect the teaching and reading of subject matter and mentor student teachers at the high school. With the Urban Ecology Institute we are working to train science teachers in use of urban watershed areas. Students collect data at local field sites for use in the classroom while teachers use the sites to develop curriculum. Romance Languages faculty are developing website curriculum for foreign language learners as well as new elementary teaching certificates in Spanish and French. Integration of technology into elementary, high school, and the college student classroom is done through telementoring and faculty planning with teachers in the classroom. Learning about language and literacy is accomplished through in-depth study of elementary classrooms and high school writing assignments. The work continues to be exciting and engaging, and a challenge. *Darlene*

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Boston College
Boston Public Schools**

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Voices of the Coalition

A Graduate Intern's Perspective on Student Teaching

Stephen Greicos

In the spring of last year, ready to pursue my goal of becoming the high school English teacher, I chose to make my official return to Boston College, my undergraduate alma mater. After exploring the west, becoming lost in all that is wild and grand about it, I think I was looking for that something familiar. Comfort food, if you will, for the spirit and the mind. I packed my bags in between stealing precious last glimpses of the Teton Range. I was unaware of how unfamiliar my return to Boston College would later seem. The buildings, the place, the spirit were still that which I loved, but the juxtaposition of being both a student and a teacher strained me on many levels, including the professional, the personal and the ethical.

As a recipient of an English faculty mentor I was greatly encouraged. The effort is a clear and logical method of closing the gap between content and pedagogy. The faculty member who was assigned to my classroom was a wonderful mixture of excitement and open humbleness about his knowledge of the secondary classroom. I really appreciated his approach and his genuine interest in helping to prepare more effective teachers. On one occasion he arrived on what is known as Character Ed Day. This is a day where teachers are asked to incorporate discussion of a virtue into a lesson. I prepared a lesson, not knowing exactly how to approach the day. I checked with my cooperating teacher. However, when the day arrived I noticed my students were not nearly as responsive as I had hoped. My faculty mentor commented afterwards that he thought the content was missing. Of course!



Aspiring English teacher Stephen Griecos meets with Brighton High School Literacy Coordinator Andrea Stairs.

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Coalition Connections

Partnerships in Learning Through Telementoring

Melanie Goldman

Last spring we piloted and this year we are in full swing with a telementoring project between Boston College and Brighton High to improve 9th grade students' writing skills. This fall semester 39 Boston College students who are pursuing their certificate in teaching English Language Arts are using the Internet to telementor two classes of 25 Brighton High students (50 in total). These students have scored in the lowest quartile on the Stanford 9 Achievement Test in Reading and the failing category on the grade 8 MCAS.

Using specially designed telementoring software on the Web, Brighton High students submit writing assignments to their mentors and their mentors read the student's writing on the Web and respond with comments based on the Brighton High teacher's guidelines. To date, the students have exchanged five writing assignments, including a personal introduction, an essay on A Raisin in the Sun, a metaphor or simile to describe themselves, their thoughts about writing in their journals as part of Writers' Workbench, and their ideas for a poem.

We are excited about the potential of this project. The Internet now makes it possible to connect each student in the classroom with an outside telementor who can serve as a personal tutor and champion. This addresses a major constraint of today's schools, e.g., the limited capacity that even the most capable teacher has for providing every student in a class the level of personal feedback that is desirable for work that the student produces - especially when that work involves creativity and/or extensive writing. Brighton High students are finding the relationship with their Boston College telementors meaningful and helpful. Comments from Brighton High students are, "I really like getting comments from my telementor as she helps me with my writing rather than tells me what to write." Another commented, "I enjoy getting comments because my teacher just cannot give me the same kind of personal feedback."

An advantage of having these exchanges online rather than face to face has meant that students are more comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings. They know that their mentors are not going to give them a grade but help them and thus, they can more easily accept their mentor's constructive criticism. Students are also more eager to write knowing that they have a personal audience for their writing. A beginning personal relationship is exemplified in this sample exchange.

One student wrote:

"I had to write that essay of A Raisin In The Sun all over again because it was all confusing and stuff I kept sending you a whole bunch of mess that didn't make sense"

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Our Work

BC Partnership UNITED!

“The Urban Network to Improve Teacher Education (UNITE), is comprised of urban education partnerships from across the nation “engaged in a thoughtful redesign of teacher preparation and induction that begins with an understanding of and commitment to urban communities and that is responsive to these communities.” The group is an affiliate of the Holmes Partnership and collaborates with Title II partnership grant recipients (e.g. Mass Coalition) and the Great Cities Universities to develop a knowledge base for urban teacher education theory and practice, and develop and disseminate descriptive cases of the best practices in the areas of urban teacher preparation, recruitment and induction.

In two meetings each year UNITE members work on one of five task forces to achieve these goals. The task forces are: Urban Teacher Preservice Preparation, Urban Teacher Induction, Equity and Social Justice Education in P-16 and Teacher Education Curriculum, Urban Teacher Education Policy, and Community and Interprofessional Collaboration and Integrated Action. At UNITE’s April meeting in Memphis, Tennessee, a team of eight members from the Boston partnership joined together to contribute to this committed group and strengthen the work of the partnership. Members reported that they gained a greater understanding of the Title II legislation and the similarity of work of other school partnerships across the nation. Members are now taking this information back to their schools to assist other teachers in “getting the big picture” and fostering greater desire to participate in the work of the partnership.



BC's UNITE team in Memphis, Tennessee (l-r): Fran Loftus, Dennis Shirley, Liz MacDonald, Darlene Martin, Andrea Stairs, Carol Hurd-Green, Alison Skerrett, Wesley Williams.



Just Published

The Power of Culture: Teaching Across Language Difference

Partnership members write about their Coalition-funded classroom research in this book edited by Zeynep F. Beykont and published by the Harvard Education Publishing Group, 2002.

In *What We Would Have Liked to Know: Preservice Teachers' Perspectives on Effective Teacher Preparation*, Audrey Friedman concludes, “For the past three decades, I have witnessed and experienced the challenges, struggles, and obstacles of urban classroom teaching that are illuminated by the voices of these preservice teachers. Neither they now, nor I thirty years ago, were adequately prepared for the reality of teaching in urban schools.”

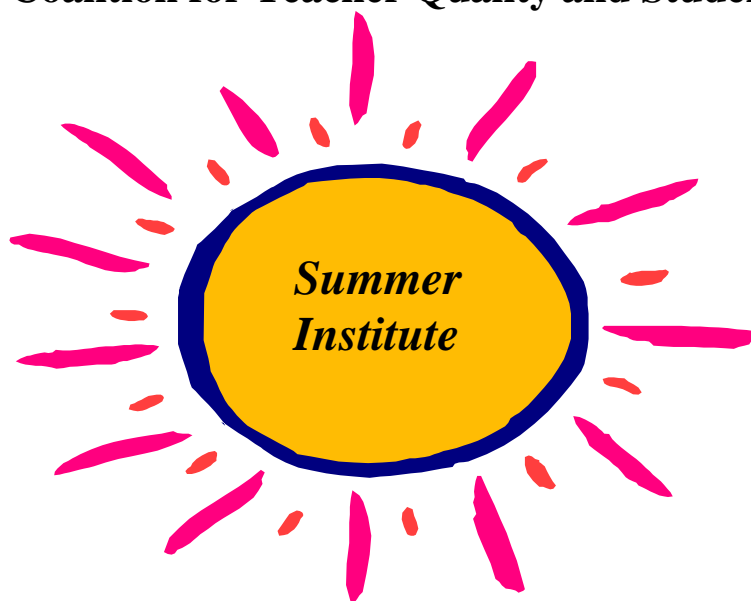
Maria Estela Brisk and Elizabeth MacDonald report along with Mary Dawson, Millicent Hartgering and Lucinda Zehr in *Teaching Bilingual Students in Mainstream Classrooms*. They find, “Teachers must take advantage of the presence of linguistic and cultural diversity in their classroom to challenge their instructional practices and enrich curricular content. Good teaching is not enough. The language and culture of the students must be present in teaching, curriculum and materials. Studying bilingualism and helpful instructional approaches as well as observing students contributes to developing expertise among mainstream teachers.”

Up and Coming...

Next year brings exciting new advancements in the BC partnership. Continued work with UNITE, expansion of content-mentoring to students teaching Foreign Language and expansion of our work with the Urban Ecology Institute to train more science teachers in local field research are just the beginning. As part of the Coalition we have learned much from our six partners and will be putting some of their ideas to work for us. For example, we are designing a combined practicum placement and on-site course for all practicum students at the high school and pre-practicum placements in urban communities that students will complete before their entry into the classroom. Partnership meetings may be held at each partnership school to bring together all the participants in an effort to look at the comprehensiveness of our programs as well as the efficacy of our work. In addition, we will continue to disseminate the work of the partnership and the Coalition through presentations and publications.

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Massachusetts Coalition for Teacher Quality and Student Achievement



Monday, June 3rd

- 8:00 am Registration and Coffee
9:00 Introductions
9:15 Coalition Video
9:30 Partnership Meetings
11:00 Partnerships Report Out
- What one unique thing characterizes your partnership?
 - What are two successes linked to student achievement?
 - What are three challenges linked to student achievement?
- Noon LUNCH -
1:00pm Panel of New Teachers
2:15 Literacy Inquiry Group
4:00 Adjourn
6:00 Dinner
7:00 "The First Year" Film by Davis Guggenheim
The film chronicles the initial year of five teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Tuesday, June 4th

- 8:30am Continental Breakfast
9:00 Facilitated 'Role Alike' Groups - *Focus on Partnership Roles, Work and Education Issues*
11:00 Follow Up Partnership Meetings
Noon LUNCH - *Tables of mixed groups of guests and participants for informal conversation on education issues*
1:00pm Education Issues Forum
- Issues
- Alternative teacher education strategies that enhance teacher quality and student achievement*
 - Roles for schools & communities in shaping teacher education and preparing new teachers*
 - Recruitment of teacher candidates to increase diversity in the teaching force and attract career changers*
 - Retention of teachers through beginning teacher support and professional pathways for teacher leadership*
 - Enhancing literacy in schools, communities and teacher education programs to improve student learning and quality teaching*
- Participants – *Legislators, Superintendents, Deans, Teacher Unions, state Education organizations*
- 3:00 Adjourn

**The Publick House
Sturbridge, MA**

Contact Darlene at (617) 552-4237 or your partnership administrator to register

(Voices, continued from page 2)

I had planned group discussion and writing based on experiential learning activities, but I had not provided any content, a piece of literature related to our activities, to help the students frame and process their thoughts. Perhaps this was supposed to be intuitive, but for this student teacher it was not. Having the content mentor helped expand my concept of teaching to include a deeper understanding of the integration of content and pedagogy.

Students in urban schools often need much beyond the academic. One student came in early this semester with a grossly swollen right hand. I approached the student after class and asked what had happened. "I got in a fight". He grimaced through two more days of class. I waited. "He has a mother" I thought, "She will take care of him". Each day I asked if he had seen a doctor. "No". He dodged shyly when I asked if his Mom was going to take him. On the third day I stopped waiting. I offered to take him to the hospital myself. I was surprised when he eagerly said "yes". My offer while sincere, was, I must admit, not well thought through. Could I do this? Was this allowed, or was it crossing a personal boundary? I sought advice from those at work, and they encouraged me to pursue a solution. First, they said, check with the administration, and see what you should do. I checked with our headmaster. He told me that taking the student to the hospital would only be appropriate once we had exhausted the option of his parents. He understood my concern but suggested I work with the nurse first. As it turned out she too had been working on getting his mother to take him to the hospital. I worked with the nurse. We developed a plan. It required more patience than I thought I had. His mother would have to take him by the end of that week, and then we would decide on what to do next. He came in before the end of the week with his arm cast.

Ethical issues appeared in many forms. Was I focusing enough on student needs or too much on content study? Where did I draw the line between being a teacher and being a friend? Was I ultimately responsible for anything that went wrong during my teaching time?

Living the life of a first year student teacher in a full time graduate program is, I think, akin to being stretched like a rubber band. As a full time student teacher in BC's Donovan Scholars program I have lived my second semester pulled between two separate worlds. The academic world, where work and mental energy is demanded of me in my courses, and the teaching world, where I owe responsibility to the academic and personal growth needs of roughly 40 adolescents each day. Despite the rewards of each I felt the strain of living in these two separate worlds and I was challenged in ways I could not have foreseen. Fortunately, I had a variety of support systems to help me process these experiences. I just happened to work in an office with lots of folks skilled and interested in improving teacher education. I was fortunate to have been accepted as a Donovan Scholar and been assigned a faculty mentor. I have a thoughtful and caring family. All have been vital to any success I achieved. What if I did not have these support networks?

(Connections, continued from page 2)

And the telementor responded, "Don't get down on yourself about your essay. I was really impressed with your work and I'm excited to see more of it." Next the telementor commented on the student's writing: "You have to make sure you are using complete sentences. To do this, you should always check each sentence by saying it to yourself in your mind. Each sentence should have a noun and a verb. For example, if you're writing a list like you did in your journal, instead of writing each thought by itself, try connecting thoughts with commas between each idea."

When we started, we were handicapped by a lack of computers in the Brighton High classroom with just 8 computers for 25 students. We are finding that students need more time to type their assignments and to read and digest their mentor's feedback. We have just purchased, with the Boston Public Schools, a set of 25 AlphaSmart keyboards. With the AlphaSmarts, all 25 students work at their desks, inputting their assignments. Then, we upload their completed assignments into the 8 Internet connected computers more quickly, freeing up time for students to concentrate on their mentor's comments and the revision process.

It is hoped that research published from this telementoring project will garner major funding to provide more extensive hardware to Brighton and possibly other Boston middle or high schools in order to more effectively develop a collaborative model around teaching, learning and technology.

Mass Coalition Courier

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For more information about the Coalition, to publish an article in the Courier, or to arrange a site visit in order to feature your partnership, please contact the Editor:

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Calendar of Events

National Staff Development Council

2002 National Conference
Lighting the Way to Revolutions in Learning

December 9-11, 2002
Boston, Massachusetts

Featured Speakers and Distinguished Lecturers:

Rudy Crew, Richard Elmore, Michael Fullan, Eugene Garcia, Asa Hillard, Gerry House, Lauren Resnick, Peter Senge and Dennis Sparks.

Mass Coalition Presentations:

- *K-16 Partnerships Working to Link Staff Development and Student Achievement*
- *Enhancing Quality Teaching and Learning through the Massachusetts Coalition K-16 Partnerships*
- *Training Teacher Interns in the K-16 Partnership*

For more information, contact NSDC at www.nsd.org OR call 800-727-7288

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