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From Cooperation to Collaboration: The Changing Culture of a School/University Partnership

NOT ALL SCHOOL/UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS are new. In many places, schools and universities have been working cooperatively on staff development and preservice teacher education for years. Transforming these relationships into professional development schools where school-based and university-based educators work collaboratively[1] would seem an easy task. However, that has not always been the case. While a common history can provide a foundation for establishing collaborative relationships (Darling-Hammond, 1994), in many cases obstacles must be negotiated before a cooperative relationship can become collaborative.

In this article, we describe the process school-based and university-based educators engaged in to transform a long-term cooperative relationship into the EPIC Professional Development School Community (PDSC), a school/university partnership involving the teachers and staffs from four elementary schools in three school districts[2] and faculty and graduate students from the language, literature, and reading program (LLR) at The Ohio State University. The authors of this article are members of the research team[3] charged with conducting formal research on the EPIC PDSC's collaborative work. We represent each of the constituent groups. In our roles with the EPIC program, Becky Kirschner is coordinator of the preservice teacher education program; Rhonda Dickinson is a clinical educator; and Carrie Blosser is a methods instructor and field supervisor.

In the following, we share what we learned about the challenges involved in negotiating collaborative relationships. We examine the critical role collaborative action research played in transforming a long-term cooperative relationship into a collaborative relationship in which a systematic model of inquiry was used to foster preservice education, the professional development of inservice teachers, and school improvement. To illustrate how collaborative action research promoted sustained conversations and provided a structure for weaving together multiple perspectives, we describe the process used to collaboratively restructure the field component of a preservice teacher education program.

Initiating the Program

The EPIC PDSC was initiated in 1991 by the teachers, staff, and principal of Highland Park Elementary School, who submitted a proposal to the College of Education at The Ohio State University to become a professional development school (PDS). Like the other schools associated with the EPIC program, Highland Park had a long-term cooperative relationship with the LLR program which had originally developed the EPIC preservice teacher education program over 25 years ago to prepare teachers

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to teach in informal classrooms using thematic units to integrate reading, writing, and children's literature across the curriculum.

Rhonda: In becoming a PDS, the Highland Park teachers wanted to preserve and extend the cooperative relationship we had with the LLR faculty and the EPIC program. The teachers saw this relationship as mutually beneficial to the university and to themselves. It provided the university with placements for preservice teachers where they would see theory being put into practice, and it enhanced our professional development by helping us reflect on our teaching. Interacting with preservice teachers gave us the opportunity to explain our classroom practices, and because we had to teach them to someone else, we developed a better understanding of our professional actions.

We also wanted to extend our relationship. By becoming a PDS, we hoped to increase our capacity to engage in systematic inquiry into our practice by bringing together teachers' practical experience and knowledge with university faculty's theoretical and research expertise in joint inquiries into ways to meet the needs of all children.

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After their selection as a PDS in the spring of 1991, Highland Park looked for a faculty person who might share the staff's goals and interests. In the summer of 1991, Becky was invited to serve as co-coordinator of the PDS.

Becky: I was delighted to be asked to work with the Highland Park teachers. First, as a new faculty member, I was anxious to find a group of teachers with whom I might work collaboratively. For 5 years prior to joining the OSU faculty, I had been part of the Teacher Development and Organizational Change Project (TDOC) at Michigan State University. In that project, school-based and university-based educators had worked collaboratively to learn what happens when teachers reflect on their practice. I had come away from that experience with a deep respect for teacher knowledge and teachers' ability to direct their own professional development through reflective inquiry (Berkey et al., 1990). From reading Highland Park's proposal and talking to colleagues who had worked with them, I concluded that these were teachers interested in and capable of initiating their own professional development, that they shared my interest in exploring how inquiry might serve as a vehicle for improving practice, and that they had voluntarily sought status as a PDS.

In addition, I had just agreed to coordinate the EPIC preservice teacher education program with which Highland Park was associated. My experiences in the TDOC project had taught me that teachers are not the only ones to learn from these collaborative relationships and that I too could improve my practice if I were willing to open my practice to reflection as well. I hoped to explore with the Highland Park teachers how they might help me strengthen the EPIC program.

Cooperation: Building on the Past

Our early interactions were patterned on Highland Park's preexisting relationship with the college of education. They were cooperative but not collaborative. That is, we worked "together toward a common end or purpose" *(American Heritage Dictionary,* 1992), but we did not initially work "in a joint intellectual effort" *(American Heritage Dictionary,* 1992). We came with our separate agendas and worked together to address them. The teachers asked Becky to help them increase their capacity to engage in reflective inquiry, and she agreed to teach a summer course to prepare the teachers to conduct action research in their own classrooms. Becky asked the teachers to help her strengthen the EPIC program, and they agreed to form a network with three other EPIC schools and to work during the next summer to develop a plan for improving the EPIC program. In working together to plan the inquiry course, develop a schedule and format for the summer work, and establish the EPIC network, we maintained our traditional roles: The teachers were the students and cooperating teachers, and Becky was the professor and program coordinator.

Even though our initial interactions were not collaborative, they did provide a firm foundation on which to build the trust, shared visions, and common ways of talking necessary for engaging in joint intellectual work. Through the conversations we engaged in to design the reflective inquiry course and to establish a network with the other EPIC schools, we learned that we shared a common philosophy of teaching and learning and valued reflective inquiry and shared decision making.

Many of the teachers were graduates of the EPIC program and most had earned or were working on master's degrees in the language, literature, and

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reading program. Since these programs were founded on the same formal knowledge base and because inquiry was an integral part of both programs, it was not surprising that Becky and the teachers were familiar with the same theories and research and considered inquiry central to their work. Furthermore, Becky's work in the TDOC project and the teachers' involvement in site-based management in all four schools had fostered their commitment to and capacity for engaging in shared decision making.

We also learned from our conversations that we shared a commitment to the principles the Holmes Group (1990) had offered for designing a PDS, and that we were all interested in creating a community of learners in which we would use inquiry to improve learning for children and adults. Several of the teachers had become familiar with the Holmes principles when they served on committees that were formed to initiate PDS's at Ohio State. Becky had engaged in similar work at Michigan State and had helped form one of the first PDS's at that institution.

These shared beliefs and values helped us avoid many of the conflicts others have experienced (Darling-Hammond, 1994) in inventing PDS's by providing us with a basis for identifying mutual interests, establishing common goals, and bridging communication differences. However, we still struggled with many of the same personal and institutional challenges others have experienced as we worked to invent the EPIC PDSC.

Ironically, the issue that posed the greatest threat to collaboration grew out of the very relationship that provided us with a foundation for building a collaborative relationship. In prior relationships between the teachers and the university faculty, clear distinctions had been made between the formal research-based knowledge associated with the university and the practical context-based knowledge associated with the teachers, and clear lines had been drawn between the roles played by school-based and university-based educators. Since engaging in joint intellectual effort requires mind-to-mind interactions, the free exchange of ideas, risk taking, and respect for different perspectives, we had to confront these issues of "privileged" knowledge (Whitford, 1994) and status (Miller & Silvernail, 1994). Before we could become collaborative, we had to challenge prior assumptions about knowledge and blur the lines between roles.

Negotiating Obstacles to Collaboration

During the summer inquiry course and our work on the EPIC program, we took our first halting steps toward collaboration. The reflective inquiry course provided a forum for challenging prior assumptions about knowledge and research.

Becky: In designing the reflective inquiry course, I selected readings that challenged traditional assumptions about knowledge and research and cast teachers in the roles traditionally played by academics. I had observed that inquiry was central to the EPIC teachers' work in their classrooms and schools; they constantly reflected on their practice, invented and evaluated new practices, and even participated in professional discourse about their research by publishing articles[4] and making presentations at state and national meetings. However, they made sharp distinctions between their inquiry and the "practical" knowledge it generated and research conducted by the university and the professional knowledge it produced.

I hoped that reading Schön's (1983) work would challenge the teachers' views of knowledge and research and that work by Duckworth (1986), Paley (1986, 1981), Jensen (1989), Hansen, Newkirk and Graves (1985), and Goswami and Stillman (1987) would help them begin to see reflective inquiry as a legitimate form of systematic inquiry. To help us think about possible models for conducting reflective inquiry and methods for carrying it out, I selected works by Ebbutt (1985), Kemmis et al. (1981), Erickson (1986), and Bogdan and Biklen (1992).

As we discussed the readings, we began to develop a shared vision of teaching as inquiry and of teaching as research. The teachers started to see that classroom inquiry was a recognized form of research, that teaching was research, and that the knowledge teachers constructed was valued. Using Ebbutt (1985) and Kemmis et al.'s (1981) work on action research, we developed a systematic model of inquiry. Erickson (1986) and Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) work on qualitative research provided the methodology for collecting and analyzing data.

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Work on the EPIC program began to blur the lines between school-based and university-based roles and further challenged our thinking about knowledge and the way we could interact. While Becky had initiated the work on the EPIC program, it was

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clear from the outset that the teachers shared her desire to strengthen the connections between the program and the schools. Without attending to distinctions between "practical" knowledge and "theory and research" or to boundaries imposed by our roles, we engaged in a free exchange of ideas. The teachers' shared their expert knowledge of the EPIC history, philosophy, and culture and Becky her knowledge of certification requirements and research on teacher education. Weaving together our knowledge, we jointly designed field assignments that connected what was being taught in methods courses with what was happening in the schools, and we planned professional seminars in which teachers would share their expert knowledge with preservice teachers.

In this manner, we began to transform our cooperative relationship into a collaborative one. Not only did we begin to erase the boundaries between the university and schools by creating new roles for teachers and extending the walls of the university classroom to the schools, but we glimpsed the new forms of knowledge we could construct when we worked together in joint intellectual work.

In reflecting on our work on EPIC, we discovered that we had been using the action research cycle to structure our interactions. We agreed to use the systemic model of inquiry we had adopted to structure our future interactions and to formally study how it supported our collaborative work. In the following, we describe how we used collaborative action research to promote the sustained conversations required in collaborative work (Hollingsworth, Dybdahl, & Minarik, 1993) and how it provided a structure for weaving together multiple perspectives.

Using Collaborative Action Research to Restructure the Program

In the summer of 1993, we formed a collaborative action research team composed of teachers, supervisors and methods instructors, and the program coordinator to further revise and restructure the EPIC program. The impetus for this project grew out of two shared concerns. First, undergraduate teacher education at Ohio State was scheduled to end in the Spring of 1995 and be replaced by a master's of education degree. Becky and the teachers wanted to strengthen the program to insure its place in the new program. Second, during the previous year, two preservice teachers had failed to successfully complete their student teaching, and we had asked them to return in the fall to repeat student teaching. This painful experience made us all want to reflect on the program to assess what had gone wrong for these students and to consider how we might avoid a similar experience in the future.

Using the action research model we had adopted in our reflective inquiry course to structure our interactions, we began a spiral of problem framing, planning, acting, monitoring, evaluating, critiquing and reporting, and replanning (Ebbutt, 1985; Kemmis et al., 1981). Our guiding research question was: How can the formal university and informal field components of the EPIC preservice program be restructured to better prepare teachers who: engage in interactive teaching, have a deep understanding of children, are critical thinkers, and possess a penchant for inquiry?

Problem framing

Beginning with the problem framing phase, we identified gaps that might exist between working theory and practice in the field component of the program. We collaboratively analyzed the documents and approaches that had been used to facilitate field experiences and student teaching and shared our perspectives of the problems we believed the action plan should address.

Becky: I expressed my concerns about the documents and approaches we had been using to communicate our expectations to preservice teachers during their field experience and student teaching. I did not feel that the lists of weekly requirements used to communicate expectations to the preservice and cooperating teachers acknowledged the developmental nature of learning to teach or supported preservice teachers' development.

Rhonda: The teachers were concerned that neither the list of activities nor the supervision model or documents explicitly articulated the EPIC philosophy or clearly communicated program expectations. Our philosophy was embedded in our classroom structures, and when it was executed well, it was all but invisible. Our expectations were so implicit that we did not even think about them when we talked with preservice teachers. Like the mice in the story of the blind mice and the elephant, preservice teachers were never seeing the whole picture. They were just touching the different parts of teaching that we showed them. The lists of activities focused preservice

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teachers' attention on teaching behavior but not on teaching, and they encouraged them to focus only on a product, whereas our intention was to teach them a process.

We were also concerned that the lists of activities did not focus on what we valued. We as teachers did not ask children in our classrooms to do meaningless work and, likewise, we believed that the work preservice teachers did should be meaningful and contribute directly to their learning to teach as well as help them to develop the ability to reflect on that teaching in order to improve it. It was our belief that in order for the preservice teachers to value and understand working with children in a democratic way, they should have the experience of learning that way themselves. We believed that in order to help children set their own learning goals, the preservice teachers would first have to learn to set goals for themselves. If that did not happen, they could not teach in a democratic manner consistent with the EPIC philosophy.

Carrie: The field supervisors had not found the lists of activities or the evaluation forms helpful in supporting preservice teachers' development. As field supervisors, it was our job to make sure preservice teachers were completing the lists of weekly assignments. That process was frustrating for us and for the preservice teachers. The lists did not articulate what it meant to be a good teacher. In going through the evaluation process, it became apparent to us that cooperating teachers, supervisors, and preservice teachers had assumptions about what constituted good teaching. Ironically, these assumptions were often only articulated when a student was having difficulty. It seemed that students who were most successful were those who could guess or sense what their teachers' expectations were. Those who needed the most direction were given the least support by the lists of activities and generic evaluation forms.

We were also concerned that the documents did not facilitate preservice teachers' reflection on teaching and learning or encourage them to take ownership of their own learning. The weekly assignments detailed behaviors without explicit discussion of the learning goal embedded in the act. In *Experience and Education,* Dewey (1938) discusses the role of experience in learning. He says that experience provides opportunities for reflection and that it is through reflection that future experiences are shaped. Without reflection there is no learning. We gave our students field experiences, but we did not give them a framework that led them to reflect on those experiences. The preservice teachers could fulfill the requirements on the lists without reflecting and learning from their experiences.

As a program, we believed that successful student teaching was less a matter of compliant performance and more a constructive process; however, our assessment tools communicated just the opposite message. Providing the preservice teachers with lists of activities denied them the opportunity to set up learning goals for themselves. Without learning to do that, they would not have a basis for initiating their own self-improvement in the future. By default, we were teaching these preservice teachers to be passive recipients of an education instead of active constructors and contributors to the profession.

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When we had all had an opportunity to express and discuss our concerns, we wove our perspectives together and framed the problem we would address in our action plan. We agreed that we needed to develop new documents and approaches because the lists and supervision forms we had been using did not support preservice teachers' development. The revised components had to (a) make explicit the EPIC program philosophy of teaching and learning; (b) facilitate preservice teachers' reflection on teaching and learning; (c) encourage preservice teachers to take ownership of their learning; and (d) provide a structure to support preservice teachers' learning and development.

The action plan

Having framed the problem, we began developing an action plan. Once again we engaged in sustained conversations during which we expressed our individual perspectives.

Rhonda: The teachers wanted to find a better way to communicate the EPIC philosophy to preservice teachers and to clearly spell out what we thought an EPIC teacher should know and be able to do. We felt we needed a document that made expectations explicit for the preservice teachers as well as for the mentor teachers to help us work more effectively with them and communicate our common expectations, not just our own particular expectations. Because we wanted the preservice teachers to see themselves as

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learners and to see teaching as a continual learning process, we felt the obligation to communicate as well as celebrate the complexity of learning to teach. We wanted to communicate the thought, structure, and effort behind the performance and to support and facilitate the preservice teachers' professional development.

Carrie: The supervisors also wanted to develop an instrument that better communicated the program philosophy. We wanted to rethink the supervision model. The checklist-type evaluation we had been using could not capture the complexity of mature teaching, nor did it break the task into emergent goals the student could work toward. Our preservice teachers seemed to assume that if they enacted the behaviors set forth week by week on the lists of activities, they would be teachers. We, on the other hand, expected them to learn from these behaviors the things that would facilitate future experiences. Because we never unpacked the "things" that would promote their learning, they were confused that jumping through these hoops was not making them successful in the classroom.

To them, teaching was performance, the performance of the items listed on their weekly assignments or their quarterly evaluation. Yet, as teachers, we believed that performance was only the most surface level of accomplishment. We needed a way to unpack our complex conception of teaching, build interactions that would facilitate the students' development in these areas, and help students negotiate goals appropriate at various points in their development. This would mean a transformation of our role from assignment giver and evaluator to teacher, a welcome change!

Becky: I wanted to develop documents and approaches that reflected current theory and research on teacher education. Many of the approaches the teachers used in their classrooms to support and assess their students' learning were being discussed in the literature on teacher education. I wanted to develop a plan that would take into account Shulman's (1986a, 1986b) work on teacher knowledge and the learner-centered approaches the teachers were using in their classrooms.

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After we had shared our individual perspectives on what our action plan should include, we worked to develop a document that articulated the EPIC philosophy. At this point, the lines between roles were blurred and distinctions between the two forms of knowledge disappeared. Our interactions were collaborative as we worked to develop an image of a successful EPIC teacher.

Weaving together our practical knowledge and our knowledge of learning theory and research on teacher education, we generated a list of competencies preservice teachers needed to gain our endorsement for certification. When we completed that task, we then divided the competencies into four categories, each of which corresponded to a domain of knowledge we associated with the EPIC philosophy of teaching and learning. The four domains of knowledge were: observation/assessment, interaction, planning, and professional growth.

Continuing to work collaboratively, we considered how we might construct a document that would reflect the individual and developmental nature of learning to teach. We all agreed that giving the preservice teachers a list of competencies did not correspond with what we had set out to do. Carrie pointed out that the practice of assigning the same learning experiences for all students regardless of their developmental level was out of line with the EPIC program's learner-centered philosophy and that it did not facilitate the students' ability to set learning goals for themselves. Heeding that warning, we turned to the work Highland Park had done on revising their student progress report and used it to help us construct a developmental continuum.

Working backward from the image of a successful EPIC teacher, we generated definitions for each domain of knowledge on three developmental levels, beginning, developing, and consolidating. Table 1 shows the definitions for each knowledge domain across the three developmental levels.

Having established the definitions for the knowledge domains and having placed the definitions on a continuum, we wrote descriptions of competencies for each knowledge domain. Table 2 shows the competencies for level 1 (beginning) of planning. The three columns with arrows illustrate the manner in which expectations were subdivided within each level for each knowledge domain. As is the case with this example, expectations were arranged on a continuum for each knowledge domain at each developmental level.

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Table 1
Knowledge Domains Across Developmental Levels

	Beginning	Developing	Consolidating
Observation	Becoming aware of the child as a learner and social being	Developing strategies for assessing cognitive and social development	Consolidating observation and assessment strategies to guide meaningful instruction
Interaction	Becoming an active participant in the life of the classroom	Developing strategies for effective teaching and learning	Consolidating strategies for effective teaching and learning
Planning	Becoming aware of the layers of planning and beginning to co-plan with mentor teacher	Continuing to co-plan; developing the ability to plan independently	Consolidating planning and coteaching strategies
Professional Growth	Becoming aware of and demonstrating the qualities of a teacher as a professional	Developing qualities of a teacher as a professional	Consolidating and defining self as a teacher and a professional

Table 2
Competencies for Planning at the Beginning Level

Level 1 (Beginning)
Planning: Becoming aware of the layers of planning and beginning to co-plan with mentor teacher.

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Begins records/files of effective activities, ideas for future use; plans for the implementation of existing classroom routines (e.g., circle time, read alouds); becomes familiar with courses of study and teacher goals.	Begins co-planning of activities with teacher, gathers resources (books, paper, etc.) necessary for activities/unit; takes initiative to plan for routine activities; becomes aware of rationale for plans (e.g., connections to course of study, students' developmental needs and learning).	With teacher assistance, plans and teaches whole group lessons; plans for and teaches small group lesson in one content area on regular basis (e.g., language arts, math); articulates rationale for plans (e.g., explains connections to course of study, students' developmental needs and learning).

Once we had completed the continuum, we agreed that we needed to revise the supervision model if we were going to give preservice teachers ownership of their learning. Our completed action plan included (a) the developmental continuum and a plan for using it, (b) a goal setting form, (c) guidelines for assembling a portfolio, and (d) a format for conducting three-way conferences.

Preservice teachers would use the continuum to set goals, guide co-planning with their mentor teachers, stimulate reflection on their development, and guide discussions of their progress during three-way conferences. They would use the goal-setting form to reflect on their progress during the previous week; list activities they engaged in; identify their emerging strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement; and set goals for the next week. In their portfolios, they would collect and organize materials they could use to document their development. These materials could include journal entries, lesson plans, course assignments, photographs, assessment forms, goal-setting forms, and other artifacts that demonstrated their growth as learners and teachers.

Supervisors and mentor teachers modeled and supported the preservice teachers' goal setting and reflection. The preservice teachers used the continuum, goal-setting forms, and portfolios to facilitate and document their development. When they reached the end of level 2 (developing) in all four knowledge domains, they assembled a showcase portfolio and made a presentation to their mentor teacher and university supervisor, using evidence from their showcase

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portfolio to document their readiness to become the lead teacher in the classroom.

The format for the three-way conference defined the roles the preservice teacher, the mentor teacher, and the university supervisor would play during these interactions. The preservice teachers would open the conferences by discussing the progress they had made in each knowledge domain on the developmental continuum, using materials from their portfolio for documentation. The mentor teacher and supervisor would ask questions to help the preservice teachers extend their explanations, reflect on their progress, and set new goals. At the end of the conference, the preservice teacher would summarize the discussion in writing and the three participants would mark the continuum.

Monitoring and evaluating

The action plan was implemented during the 1993-1994 school year. Throughout the year, mentor teachers, instructors, and supervisors worked collaboratively to implement the supervision model, and the collaborative action research team monitored its implementation. Consistent with our inquiry approach, the collaborative action research team systematically monitored the implementation of the model. During the summer of 1994, we evaluated the supervision model and began revising our action plan.

Conclusion

We have continued to use collaborative action research to support our collaborative work. Through our sustained conversations, we have continued to negotiate the obstacles that interfere with our efforts to engage in joint intellectual effort. Over the years, we have discovered that the lessons we learned during our first year of work together hold true today. It takes time, careful nurturing, and the constant support of all involved to build a community of learners. To work collaboratively, participants must constantly define and redefine how they work together, what roles they play, and who will play which roles, when, and how.

Some of the same structures within the university and schools that inhibited our work that first year still exist today. However, collaborative action research and the support it has provided for sustained conversations and for weaving together multiple perspectives have helped us address the challenge of working collaboratively. This collaborative work has furthered our goals to enhance the quality of schooling through research and development and the preparation of career professionals in teaching.

Notes

1. In professional development schools, educators work collaboratively "to develop and demonstrate (1) fine learning programs for diverse students; (2) practical, thought provoking preparation for novice teachers; (3) new understandings and professional responsibilities for experienced educators; and (4) research projects that add to all educators' knowledge about how to make schools more productive" (Holmes, 1990, p. 1).
2. The EPIC PDSC is dedicated to (E)ducating (P)rofessionals for (I)nformal (C)lassrooms. Schools involved in the EPIC PDSC include: Highland Park Elementary School, South-Western City Schools, Grove City, Ohio; Indianola Alternative Elementary School, Columbus City Schools, Columbus, Ohio; Wickliffe Elementary School and the Informal Program at Barrington Elementary School, Upper Arlington City Schools, Upper Arlington, Ohio.
3. The formal research team used Richardson's (1994) guidelines for conducting formal research on practical inquiry to jointly document and analyze the contributions and perspectives of the school-based and university-based educators involved in this project. In preparing annual reports, presentations, and articles, we engaged in conversations to co-construct meaning around the data. While Kirschner took primary responsibility for organizing and writing this article, the ideas expressed were jointly constructed through conversations with the coauthors. Where the perspectives are those of a single author, the author is identified.
4. For articles written by the teachers about their research, see Kirschner (1995).

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