

**Frances S. Johnson Junior Faculty Innovative Teaching Award
Application Form**

Application Deadline: June 29, 2018

Name: Brent Elder

Department: Department of Interdisciplinary and Inclusive Education

Department phone number: 856-256-4500 ext. 53852

Home phone number: 805-570-4170

Email: elderb@rowan.edu

Year hired: 2016

In submitting this application, I am verifying that I have not have received tenure at Rowan or any other university by June 29, 2018.

Using Professional Development School (PDS) Partnerships to Support Clinical Practice Interns to Create Special Education Reform

Context for the Teaching Methodology and its Implementation

Within the nine Rowan University professional development school (PDS) partnerships, I am a professor-in-residence (PIR) and a lead supervisor of clinical practice candidates at Bowe Elementary School in Glassboro, New Jersey that serves students in grades 4-6. There are approximately 500 students at this “high needs” Title 1 school, with 44.2% of students living below the poverty line. There are 85 students with individualized education plans (IEPs). This number includes 14 students with speech-only IEPs, and eight students with labels of multiple disabilities (MD). Four of the classrooms are “self-contained” special education classes. Three of these classes serve students with labels of “learning disabilities,” with one class educating students with MD labels. In addition, six “inclusion classrooms” have students with disabilities included in them, and students are co-taught by one general education teacher and one special education teacher. Over tLast year I supervised five clinical practice candidates, all of whom were placed in inclusion classes and/or MD classes.

As a part of my PIR responsibilities at Rowan, I am required to spend one day a week at Bowe Elementary and collaboratively create professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, clinical practice candidates, and administrators. Last year, during my initial assessment of school needs, faculty and administrators expressed a strong desire to improve existing special and inclusive education practices on campus, and improve outcomes for students with disabilities. In response to these needs, I led the team, including the clinical practice candidates, in developing a research-based plan of action aimed at creating innovative approaches to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. This allowed the clinical practice candidates to participate in all special education reform and professional development activities—experiences these candidates would not have had if they were not at a PDS.

In the United States, students with disabilities are far too often given a “separate and unequal education” (Erevelles, 2000, p. 5). De facto segregation of students with disabilities prevents them from making the educational gains their peers without disabilities acquire and enjoy. Over 30 years of research shows that when students with and without disabilities learn together in integrated settings, *and* they are given appropriate instruction and supports, all students can participate and learn within grade-level general education classrooms (Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation [SWIFT], 2014).

Professional development school literature shows that student teaching in a PDS produces high-quality teachers (Flynn, 2001; Neapolitan et al., 2008), however, the research does not specifically address their abilities to teach students with disabilities. The PDS research that does exist on inclusive education practices is minimal. Present studies report that PDS can improve attitudes of clinical practice candidates toward inclusive education practices (Long & Morrow, 1995; Strieker, Gillis, & Guichun, 2013). These studies represent the emergence of ways to better support student with disabilities in schools though PDS research; nevertheless, the minimal dearth of research underscores the need to innovatively leverage PDS to better support clinical practice candidates enact inclusive special education reform.

In order to address this gap in the research, during the 2016-17 and 2017-18 school years, I led a PDS steering committee that included all eight special and general education Rowan clinical practice candidates from both years. The PDS steering committee was charged with developing innovative practices that would improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Participation in the project entailed attending monthly PDS committee meetings, regularly collaborating to create professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, clinical practice candidates, and administration, and participating in 1:1 semi-structured qualitative interviews at the end of the school year. I feel including clinical practice candidates in such PDS activities helped them to better support students with disabilities, and will translate into the candidates becoming highly qualified and effective future teachers of *all* students in their respective schools. While I recognize the clinical practice candidate sample size is small, the exponential impact of teaching these candidates to think and teach inclusively is immeasurable.

How and Why this Technique is Innovative

Our committee-based approach to using PDS as a tool to create more inclusive schools is innovative because it connects the research on inclusive education and PDS in nuanced ways that push the field forward. Further, it utilizes existing school resources (e.g., does not cost extra money) and in-school expertise to develop innovative practices that are immediately applicable to current student needs. By placing teachers at the center of school reform, this redistributes power to teachers, and encourages *sustainable* bottom-up school transformation. Further, this locates clinical practice candidates at the center of research-based school reform, and provides them with the tools to enact such school change in their own schools following graduation.

Communication and collaboration are at the heart of this PDS work. Due to the communication foundations of our collaboration (e.g., monthly meetings), we have developed sustainable structural supports that have been embedded within the school structure and culture that were absent before. These structures have been specifically created and applied to support students with disabilities as they move from segregated classrooms into more inclusive settings. These supports included creating professional development days aimed at improving special education practices. During the professional development days, clinical practice candidates presented to the faculty on how to support students with disabilities. Another inclusive support, which clinical practice candidates helped to develop, was communicating student needs through Fast Facts (see Appendix A). Clinical practice candidates were also a part of critical conversations around developing tools to communicate more effectively with parents of students with disabilities through action planning (see Appendix B). Finally, clinical practice candidates also helped to develop tools to collect more rigorous data on the progress of students with disabilities through the creation of IEP data matrices (see Appendix C). As a result of these structures we collaboratively put in place, the clinical practice candidates now have the tools to enact inclusive special education reform in their respective future schools.

Evidence of Impact on Students

To highlight the effectiveness of our PDS work with our clinical practice candidates, the following is an excerpt from a 1:1 qualitative interview I conducted with a special education teacher who is in charge of coordinating clinical practice candidates at Bowe School.

BRENT: What do clinical practice candidates gain from working on our PDS steering committee?

TEACHER: There is much to gain from working in an inclusive environment that is a PDS. Candidates are exposed to a wide range of students with various abilities and academic levels, which provides them with a better perspective, for when they become teachers themselves...I believe they will be better prepared for whatever comes their way as far as students and their needs, working with other colleagues, whether it be in a co-teaching environment or just as one staff member to another, and dealing with parents.

When asked the same question, a cooperating teacher in a general education classroom stated,

TEACHER: Clinical practice candidates have the benefit of working in a PDS inclusion setting to gain perspective of the least restrictive environment; its benefits and its pitfalls. More importantly, the candidates learn the foundational inclusive skills to implement them when they graduate and begin their own teaching careers.

In these excerpts, both teachers acknowledge the benefits for clinical practice candidates working in inclusive settings. What makes these excerpts innovative, as acknowledged in the literature review above, is the fact that using PDS as a way to improve inclusive practices fills a significant gap in the literature *and* has potential for exponential impact as the clinical practice students move on in their careers.

As evidenced above, this innovative work has direct value and application to the teaching practices of our clinical practice candidates working in PDS settings. Not only are they learning how to create bottom-up school reform to benefit students with disabilities, but they are immersed in a setting where they learn how to bridge theory and practice. Further, we are amplifying this work by submitting and publishing this work in widely-read journals (see Appendices D and E).

Word Count: 1343

References

- Erevelles, N. (2005) Reconceptualizing curriculum as "normalizing" text: Disability Studies meets curriculum theory. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 37(4), 421-439.
- Flynn, R. (2001). So what type of teachers are they? – Graduates of a PDS teacher preparation program 3-6 years later. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA.
- Long, J. C., & Morrow, J. (1995). Research analysis of professional development school graduates and traditional Phase I and Phase II graduates. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Detroit, MI.
- Neapolitan, J., Hartzler-Miller, C., Kenreich, T., Wiltz, N., Schafer, K., Proffitt, T., Kirmani, M., & Bolton, J., (2008). Keeping good teachers: Connections to professional development school preparation. *School-University Partnerships*, 2(1), 61-72.
- Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT) (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.swiftschools.org>.
- Strieker, T., Gillis, B., & Guichun, Z. (2013). Improving Pre-Service Middle School Teachers' Confidence, Competence, and Commitment to Co-Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 40(4), 159-180.