A teacher **residency** meld**s** classroom theory with clinical practice
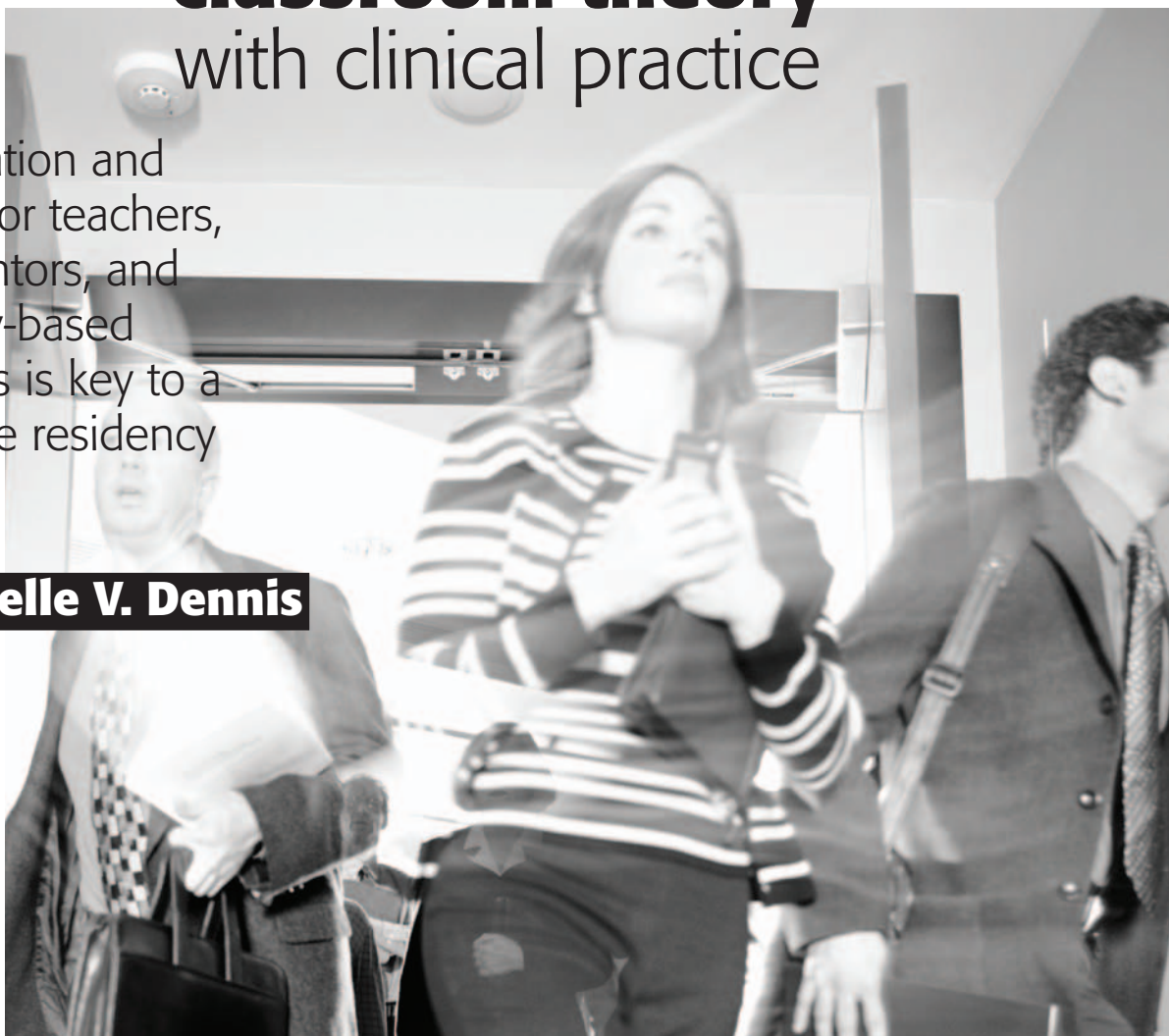
Collaboration and support for teachers, their mentors, and university-based educators is key to a preservice residency program.

By Danielle V. Dennis

Recent calls for reform position teacher residency programs as the new standard for clinical teacher preparation in the U.S. A shift to residency models changes the quantity and quality of required coursework and clinical practice. But a dearth of research on the effectiveness of such programs raises questions of scalability, particularly in light of decreasing enrollment in teacher education and tight resources for such programs (Sawchuk, 2014).

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Yet a search for answers about residency models could include the experience of the University of South Florida over the last decade. The Tampa-based campus is home to two public, Title I elementary schools, with a third located in the nearby Museum of Science and Industry. One would expect these three schools to be bustling with activity related to teacher preparation. When I arrived at USF in 2007, however, nothing could have been further from the truth. USF's undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program lacked a systematic approach to coursework, and its theory-to-practice divide was expansive. Aside from sharing Rocky the Bull as mascot with the elementary schools, there was little indication that a partnership ever existed between them. That made ours the type of program that so many recent reports have called to improve upon.

As a newly appointed assistant professor of literacy studies, I was assigned to teach coursework focused on reading assessment. I quickly learned that the majority of my elementary preservice teachers had little to no experience working one-on-one with children, which was particularly concerning because my course was one of the last they enrolled in prior to final internship. In an effort to develop stronger coursework for preservice elementary education majors and to build partnerships with the schools on campus, I began working closely with the two elementary schools on campus and within a year was teaching literacy coursework at one of the schools, incorporating opportunities for preservice students to practice what they learned in class while working with K-5 students and their teachers. This teaching model, along with a more focused and purposeful approach to teacher preparation in our department, was the impetus for a new way of preparing elementary teachers at USF, and, in fall 2011, we admitted our first class to the Urban Teacher Residency Partnership Program (UTRPP).

Outlines of the program

UTRPP is a community focused on high-quality, integrated, clinical experiences that create collaborative connections to better prepare partners in urban schools to meet the needs of children. The program came to fruition through an extensive partnership with Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS), the eighth largest school district in the nation. Six urban elementary schools are part of the UTRPP network — the three on or near the USF campus and three within five miles of campus. Each school serves a student population of which 90% or more qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Thus, the preservice teachers enrolled in the program work in settings similar to those in which they are most likely to be hired (Grossman, 2010).

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Who enrolls in UTRPP?

USF's undergraduate elementary education program enrolls about 200 preservice teachers each year. One cohort of 20 to 25 students enrolls in the UTRPP track. Once these students are admitted to the larger elementary education program, they then decide to complete the additional application requirements to join UTRPP. The requirements include:

- Evidence of at least 50 hours working with children (daycare, after-school, summer camp, babysitting, etc.) with references from these experiences that we may contact;
- A letter of intent describing their interest in joining UTRPP; and
- A signed contract indicating they agree to enroll in the program from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday throughout the two-year program. The contract aligns with a teacher's contract in Hillsborough County Public Schools and encompasses coursework and clinical practice, including a yearlong residency in their second year.

Merging coursework and clinical practice

As noted by Urban Teacher Residency United (2015), three factors play a role in developing high-quality clinical practices:

1. Rethinking the nature of the clinical experiences;
2. Reimagining coursework, pedagogies, and pathways to program entry; and
3. Underscoring the importance of authentic collaboration and partnership.

Clinical practice is at the heart of UTRPP, and we have paid careful attention to the balance between increased quantity and quality of the clinical experience. This has required our team of university-based and school-based teacher educators to collaboratively revise our program from what we knew teacher preparation to be to what we want it to become.

USF and HCPS collaborated to design the UTRPP course content and sequence. Using what we refer to as the i4 model (innovation, integration, inclusion, and inquiry), we plan coursework that includes these components while addressing the developmental trajectory of a preservice teacher. Though we want innovation, integration, inclusion, and inquiry to be evident throughout the two-year program, there are semesters in which one strand is stronger than the other three in order to zoom in on the aspects of that strand that support K-5 student learning. UTRPP focuses instruction on the K-5 student and how best to support the preservice and mentor teachers in aiding the child's learning (Dennis et al., 2014). We believe that all members of the clinical practice team — school-based teacher educators (mentor teachers), preservice teachers, university-based teacher educators, and boundary-spanning teacher educators — learn together by employing a problem-solving approach to K-5 student learning. Boundary-spanning teacher educators — whom we refer to as Partnership Resource Teachers (PRTs) — are classroom teachers on special assignment with the university to support preservice and mentor teachers as they navigate the terrain of clinical practice.

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Integrated assignments

Critical to this work are the faculty who teach courses within UTRPP. They don't work in disciplinary silos but collaborate to develop course assignments that promote interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning. This often means that each faculty member negotiates his or her assignments, typically leaving a few off their syllabi to allow preservice students time to authentically approach their integrated coursework. One example of an integrated assignment is entitled the "Story of My Professional Learning," which students complete at the end of their second semester. Using a data-driven approach to understanding children's abilities and instructional needs, preservice teachers create a five- to seven-minute video demonstrating key understandings of literacy, math, social studies, and special education coursework, based on field experiences that are supported by research literature from each discipline. These videos are shown in a colloquium attended by all UTRPP students and faculty. Each faculty member scores the assignment based on his or her course criteria. The assignment itself is the product of faculty collaboration in developing the expectations and rubric used to assess the videos. Faculty are in regular communication with each other throughout the semester and present the assignment together during a UTRPP seminar.

A UTRPP alumna said she:

. . . think[s] about the [Story of My Professional Learning] video all of the time. I did not realize it then, but now I see that completing that task introduced me to the ways of thinking about my children that is expected of me every day. And it showed me how important collaborating with my mentor teacher was on a daily basis because he helped me problem solve about our kids.

Coteaching

Traditionally, the student teaching experience relied on a few weeks of observation, followed by weeks of teaching, with several intense weeks of takeover, often without support (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010). In addition to coursework, UTRPP residents spend over 2,000 hours in clinical practice, nearly twice that of preservice teachers in the larger elementary education program at USF. With the shift from one semester of student teaching to two years of intensive classroom experience, we had to rethink our approach to clinical practice. In doing so, we moved to a model of coteaching. In both the first and second years of the program, residents and their mentor teachers work together to plan and implement lessons. In their meetings with university-based teacher educators, mentor teachers learn about varying models of coteaching and how to support residents as they navigate the terrain of teaching together. What's more, university-based teacher educators coteach with residents and their mentor teachers on a regular basis as a means of modeling and supporting this practice. Bacharach and colleagues (2010) offer convincing evidence for coteaching as a means for increasing K-5 student achievement in reading and math, including students with disabilities, those on free or reduced-price lunch, and English language learners. Further, UTRPP teachers are more likely to request a resident because they're able to remain intimately connected to the children in their classroom as opposed to the traditional hands-

off approach to the student teaching experience.

Teaching rounds

During the first year of the program, residents engage in teaching rounds. These teaching rounds provide preservice teachers the opportunity to first observe expert practice through either live teaching or video examples and debrief these experiences with peers, faculty, and school-based teacher educators. Residents then prepare for teaching by planning with peers and with university- and school-based teacher educators. Then they practice their teaching with these same supports. They use the feedback to refine the lesson before presenting it to children, which they record and code with the support of teacher educators to receive feedback about their practice. Teaching rounds are consistent with the framework for preparing preservice teachers offered by McDonald, Kazemi, and Kavanaugh (2013), in which the authors call for a more deliberate approach to refining the pedagogy of clinical teacher preparation.

Content-focused coaching

During the second year, residents shift from teaching rounds to content-focused teaching. This shift removes the preparation support they received in the first year but maintains the feedback loop offered through video coding with a university-based teacher educator. Faculty or advanced graduate students in literacy, math, and science serve as content coaches and work with small groups of residents for five-week rotations in which the resident and coach coplan lessons that the resident implements, coteaching with either the coach or mentor teacher. The resident video records the lesson, the coach and resident separately code the video based on a scaffold provided by the specific content area (literacy, math, or science), then discuss their codes and findings together. Emerging research from UTRPP's content coaching shows it as a promising practice for accelerating residents' pedagogical content knowledge and in supporting their ability to meaningfully reflect on their teaching practices (Gelfuso & Dennis, 2013).

Quad-model clinical practice

Content coaches are unique to UTRPP. Because of their consistent presence at UTRPP schools, content coaches are integrated into the traditional supervision triad to create a quad model for clinical practice that includes:

- Resident;
- Mentor teacher;
- Partnership resource teacher; and
- Content coach.

The first three members of the quad remain con-

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sistent throughout the residency; the content coach rotates based on the five-week content focus at the school site. In pursuance of a UTRPP goal to deeply support residents' content knowledge development, it is essential for the coach to be a member of this team in order to address challenges presented during the content-focused coaching and to allow for consistent communication between all parties responsible for developing the resident as a professional. The content coaches and partnership resource teachers collaborate and provide mentor teachers with information and materials related to the coaching cycles, as well as to offer job-embedded professional development for mentor teachers who continue to improve their mentoring practices and their content knowledge.

STEM PLCs

Despite a heavy emphasis on STEM subjects across the U.S., elementary teachers continue to report a lack of preparedness in science and mathematics (Weiss et al., 2001). Consistent with most elementary teacher preparation programs in Florida, UTRPP students take two mathematics courses and one science course. We find this inadequate for preparing math and science teachers so we revised our program to include a STEM professional learning community (PLC) during the residents' second year. The STEM PLC is a weekly, hour-long workshop

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focused on developing pedagogical content knowledge across STEM subjects. Coplanned and cofacilitated by USF faculty (math and science content coaches) and district content specialists, the STEM PLC incorporates new district expectations for elementary STEM with best practices from research literature. In many cases, residents are taking the lead in coteaching STEM with their mentor teachers because the district model is so new, and the residents have first-hand experience with the district supervisors who are developing the new expectations. This creates a safe space for both residents and mentor teachers to practice infusing STEM concepts into the classroom and offers the opportunity for math and science content coaches to support them in the classroom as they do.

Teacher leadership

An additional component to UTRPP is that USF offers mentor teachers the opportunity to earn a certificate in teacher leadership. Mentor teachers are compensated with graduate course credits each semester they host a resident. The credits can be used for the Teacher Leadership Academy or any other graduate coursework the teacher elects. Created as a job-embedded and context-specific program, the Teacher Leadership Academy uses the strengths and needs of the school site to provide an enhanced professional development program for those enrolled (Burns et al., 2015). Based on the National Teacher Leadership Standards, the USF faculty, UTRPP school administrators, and participants in the Teacher Leadership Academy collaboratively design coursework to best meet their needs and the needs of their students. While hosting residents, mentor teachers practice what they learn in the Teacher Leadership Academy and in doing so share promising practices with preservice teachers who will enter their own classrooms. This model focuses on building teacher capacity across the lifespan from novice to veteran.

Concluding thoughts

Our first UTRPP class completed the program in 2013. Since then, we graduated 64 residents, 62 of whom still teach full-time. Of those, 46 are teaching in Hillsborough County Public Schools, 41 in high-need, urban schools in HCPS, and 20 are employed in one of our six UTRPP schools. Woodland Johnson, principal at UTRPP partner school Mort Elementary, said he hires our alumni because "they better understand the needs of the community and their students and are more empathetic to the needs of their students. They have a strong work ethic regarding what it takes to plan and meet the needs of students, and they use the inquiry process to continue their learning."

Such progress takes time. Developing and maintaining UTRPP requires creative use of resources from USF and HCPS and a deep commitment from all partners. Although calls for reform include residency programs as strong teacher preparation, we believe additional research on the potential for scaling up and the sustainability of these models is essential before residencies become the norm for preservice training. While we are pleased with our accomplishments, we are also keenly aware of how fragile school-university partnerships are and how carefully we must nurture those relationships as we make determined progress toward our goals. **K**

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