NNER Resource: Published in *Educational Action Research Journal*, 12(3), 433-453. Used with permission.

Life on the Borderlands: Action Research and Clinical Teacher Education Faculty

Robert V. Bullough, Jr.

Center for the Improvement of Teacher Education and Schooling (CITES)

Brigham Young University
(Bob_Bullough@BYU.Edu)

and

Roni Jo Draper, Lynnette Erickson, Leigh Smith and Janet Young
Department of Teacher Education
Brigham Young University

Address: CITES, 149 McKay Building, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602

contact: Bob_Bullough@BYU.EDU

Published in *Educational Action Research Journal*, 12(3), 433-453. Used with permission.

Abstract: Seeking to soften the gap between clinical and tenure-track teacher education faculty, a year-long action research seminar was conducted. Using data from observation notes, interviews, and a taped seminar session, the authors explore the seminar from its very rocky beginning to its conclusion. Drawing on the concept of "communities of practice" (Wenger,1998), the authors explore reasons for the hesitancy of the clinical faculty to share the results of their studies and their struggle to find legitimacy within the university.

Introduction

With the dramatic expansion of field work in pre-service teacher education clinical faculty have grown in importance both in the United Kingdom and in North America (Cope & Stephen, 2001; Utley, Basile & Rhodes, 2003). This change has brought new opportunities and challenges to teacher education. The challenges are many and now widely recognized: Shifting from classroom teaching to teacher education new clinical faculty move from one culture to another with very different status and symbol systems. Uncertainty follows as they seek to find place in and to bridge two institutions while not fully meeting "the traditional expectations" of either (Cornbleth & Ellsworth, 1994, p. 61). As "boundary spanners" (Sandholtz & Finan, 1998, p. 24), they often feel they do not fully belong to either world.

Many tenure-track faculty fear the "clinicalization of teacher education" even as program dependence on clinical faculty grows (Bullough, Hobbs, Kauchak, Crow and Stokes, 1997). Recognizing these tensions but believing clinical faculty are crucial players essential to improving teacher education, Sandholtz and Finan (1998) make the now oft heard plea: clinical faculty must be moved from the "borderlands" and into "a new institutional coalition where the boundaries between the practitioners and the professors are blurred, where equal partners are working together in a mutually beneficial relationship, and where their collaborative work is recognized and rewarded" (pp. 24-25).

The Study

Following analysis of a series of interviews conducted with clinical faculty and tenure-line faculty, each of these issues emerged as serious considerations for the teacher education program at Brigham Young University. In this article we report on an action research seminar that was organized to strengthen the sense of belonging of clinical faculty members, soften the boundaries separating them from tenure-track faculty, increase clinical faculty members' understanding of research and expand their conception of themselves as teacher educators. There is, of course, a two-way challenge. Tenure-line faculty also need to change: "Academics must acknowledge teachers as theorists and interact with them as such if they are to have significant influence in the field" (Beck & Kosnik, 2001, p. 226). Our effort here is preliminary in the sense that we are primarily concerned with clinical faculty conceptions of their work, which we believe is a necessary step toward making the case that tenure-line faculty suspicions of clinical faculty are misguided. Of this, more will be said later.

The decision to offer an action research seminar was based upon a number of considerations. Action research has been shown to be a means for fostering "collaboration and professional development" and for "changing views of research" (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003, pp. 511-512). There is a good deal of research supporting the conclusion that collaboration among teacher researchers in learning communities that build knowledge can change "relationships which, in turn, affect teaching practice and educational change" (Christiansen, Goulet, Krentz, and Maeers, 1997, p. xvi). For over a decade collaborative research has been suggested as perhaps the most promising means for encouraging crossing the boundaries separating school and university. However, this aim has proven to be extremely difficult to realize in part because the interests of university researchers in programmatic research and the problems that energize and capture the imagination of practitioners so seldom seem to converge (Winitzky, Stoddart & O'Keefe, 1992). On their part, "Teachers often see little relevance in studies that answer questions they do not ask and reports that use terminology

they do not understand. As a result, the gap between research and practice widens" (Knight, Wiseman & Cooner, 2000, p. 27). There are parallel and equally troubling tensions within university faculties between clinical and tenure-line faculty members. In both situations lack of trust looms large. It is these tensions that concern us and that we hoped a seminar would help meliorate.

Background

Since 1984, the College of Education (now the McKay School of Education) at Brigham Young University has been involved in a partnership with five school districts. An original member of the National Network for Educational Renewal (Goodlad, 1994) and supporting one of the largest teacher education programs in North America, the School and the districts share "governance, resources, and responsibilities" (Osguthorpe, Harris, Harris & Black, 1995, p. 283) for teacher education as they seek "simultaneous renewal" (Goodlad, 1994). As the partnership has evolved and as new responsibilities have been accepted, traditional roles have necessarily changed. A variety of clinical faculty roles have been developed: 1) Given the size and complexity of the program, a Liaison position has been created. Liaisons are employed by the university from among the outstanding teachers in a district to coordinate teacher education efforts within that district. Liaisons teach courses, work intimately in program and course design, and participate on various university and district committees. Working closely with departmental leadership, they help oversee the program. 2) Clinical Faculty Associates (CFAs), of which there are 13, work closely with the Liaisons. CFAs are outstanding teachers who are hired by the university with the support of the school districts for two-year appointments. During the two years, the CFAs may pursue graduate education if they wish. CFAs work in district teams, and are responsible for student teacher supervision, some teaching, and for coordinating with cooperating teachers. They participate in a variety of seminars designed to help them understand and successfully perform in their varied responsibilities. 3) Partnership Facilitators mentor interns. Over 120 interns are placed in schools each year. Interns complete all but the student teaching portion of the pre-service teacher education program and, receiving half salary and full benefits, take the place of an in-service teacher. In this way, the assignment of two interns to a school frees a teacher, a Partnership Facilitator, who then mentors the interns and participates in a variety of professional activities typically not available to teachers.

The three clusters of clinical faculty differ dramatically in how they relate to the university and connect with one another. The Liaisons meet frequently and identify with one another and with department and district leadership and have considerable power, influence, and

autonomy. The Partnership Facilitators maintain their close affiliation with the school faculty, and within this context enjoy considerable power and status. Their responsibilities are reasonably clear and set. In contrast, the CFAs are torn between multiple masters. Unlike when they taught in the public schools, CFAs are not masters of their own workplaces. Like university supervisors generally they face the difficulty of negotiating the "student teaching triad" from an outsider's position, as one who faces a "strong coalition between [cooperating teachers] and [student teachers]" (Veal & Rikard, 1998, p. 113). They are visitors to the schools, and, since their appointment is for two years, they are just passing through the university as well. While they meet frequently with the district Liaison to whom they directly report, they also meet monthly with a second Liaison who is responsible for coordinating all CFA work. In addition, they meet with individual tenure-track faculty who have responsibility for specific course offerings.

Action Research Seminar

The seminar was organized in this way: In the CFA orientation meeting held during the late spring of the year prior to the beginning of the study the Liaison responsible for coordinating CFA work outlined the plan for the next year, that an opportunity would be provided to participate in an action research seminar and to work with a few tenure-line faculty members. Several weeks before the first seminar meeting two reviews of recent developments in teacher education that support the value of teachers studying their practice were distributed to the CFAs along with a statement of seminar purpose and a request that participants come ready to discuss the readings at the first meeting, September 13th. At the opening seminar an overview of action research was presented and additional readings on action research, including on data gathering, were distributed for discussion in the second meeting. The readings were chosen to represent a range of views of action research, including both practical and emancipatory action research.1 The specific model of action research chosen to guide the work of the seminar was drawn from *The Action Research Planner* (Kemmis & McTaggert, 1988) and included emphasis on the "action research spiral": plan, reflect, act, observe, revise.

Based upon prior conversations with the department chair, who explained that part of the CFA role definition was participation in program evaluation and improvement efforts, the seminar leader understood that all CFAs would participate in the seminar. This understanding proved to be a source of serious confusion. Four tenure-track university teacher education faculty members were invited by the seminar leader to participate in the seminar and to study it. These were faculty members who the seminar leader thought would be supportive of the project and valuable resources for the CFAs as they conducted their studies. The expectation

was that the tenure-line faculty would support the CFA projects and not lead or direct them.

Data Gathering and Analysis

Seminar meetings were held monthly except at the beginning of the year when it was necessary to meet more often. During the seminar, the tenure-line faculty took notes of what transpired. Only occasionally were the notes detailed; rather the intention was to record impressions and describe important events. After each seminar the tenure-line faculty and the seminar leader met and discussed what transpired. Based upon these conversations, plans were made for subsequent seminars and adjustments made. Once the CFAs had a basic knowledge of action research, time in the early seminars was spent identifying possible topics of interest around which, eventually, research teams were formed. Topics were discussed and then refined. Through conferences with individual teams and via e-mail, topics were adjusted until each team had a clear albeit evolving sense of direction. Additional team conferences followed sometimes on campus, sometimes at schools. While the seminar leader met most frequently with the teams, the other participating tenure-track faculty members also met with them outside of the seminar and as invited. Each was readily available to lend assistance. Once teams began their studies, the monthly seminars became opportunities for reporting progress and for exploring problems and making adjustments. The second of these sessions was tape recorded and the tape transcribed. At the end of the year and following the same protocol, each CFA was interviewed by one of the participating tenure-track faculty members about the seminar, but not the seminar leader. The notes and transcribed interviews were analyzed in two ways, first to get the story of the seminar and then to identify themes, or what Ebon Guba (1978) called “recurring regularities” (p. 53). The story, told to highlight tensions and issues, follows.

Seminar Story

September 13th, first seminar meeting. Regularly scheduled CFA meetings were held every second Thursday. The decision was made that the time would be divided and the second half of the meeting, about an hour and a half, would become the action research seminar. The seminar leader sat in on most of the first half of the first meeting to learn the CFA’s names. When the second half of the meeting began, he reviewed the names and introductions followed. A brief revisit of the CFA role and responsibilities followed, including consideration of the possible ways in which CFAs might pursue research. A brief overview of the nature of theory in teacher education and teacher education research followed. Then, the idea and practice of action research was introduced. Finally, an invitation was extended to

become involved in action research with the support of the tenure-track faculty members in attendance. A few articles on action research were passed out. CFAs were told to read them prior to the next meeting to gain a better sense of what sort of studies might be conducted and to underscore the value of working together on topics of mutual interest. These articles would be the point of departure for the next meeting.

At the conclusion of the seminar, the seminar leader was left puzzled by the muted reaction of most of the CFAs. Some seemed surprised by the expectation that they study their work or in other ways participate in research. Others were obviously distrustful. The job description of the CFAs included two statements that lent institutional legitimacy to the decision to conduct an action research seminar: "Develop a program for personal professional development" and "Assist the District Liaison in conducting inquiry and research projects" (Role Description, Clinical Faculty Associates, n.d.). Based upon this job description, the seminar leader naively assumed the CFAs already expected to participate in research of some kind and, in this belief, he anticipated uncertainty about but not resistance to the idea of conducting action research. There was much unanticipated confusion evident when discussing the CFA role. Later, this issue became very important to two of the CFA action research projects.

Recognizing the confusion, and sensing significant resistance to the idea of conducting research on their own practice--a difficulty anticipated in the work of Goodson (1994)--prior to the second meeting plans were made to present an alternative project that would focus on the study of a program issue and be directed more like a traditional research project. Thus, during the second seminar meeting CFAs would have a choice of either engaging in an action research project or participating in some fashion with the seminar leader and other participating tenure-track faculty in a planned study.

The October 11th seminar began with a recap of the previous meeting. The option of participating in an alternative study was presented, and discussion began. The group was tense. Heads hung low, but nothing was said. Thinking discussion of the articles would clarify confusion about what was involved in conducting an action research project, the seminar leader invited questions or comments about the readings. Soon, it became apparent that half the group had not done the reading. Complaints were expressed about being and feeling "overwhelmed." "I thought participation in the seminar was optional," one said, "and so I didn't do the reading. Perhaps I misunderstood." To this comment the seminar leader responded, but "[I understood that] your role includes participation in some sort of research." We turn to one set of our observations notes:

> [The CFAs said] their heavy schedules and...their responsibilities in supervision and teaching were simply overwhelming. There was an openly belligerent tone to R's challenge to [the seminar leader] and to the idea that research should be included in the set of expectations of the CFA. Others from [the same school district] were sympathetic. D. was vocal about how extensively she felt she needed to support the interns and student teachers she supervises, and what a time-intensive job being a CFA was. She seemed to feel it was her job to "save" the struggling interns in her district–sometimes spending the whole day with one in order to model best practice and to plan with the intern to solve management or other problems. K. talked about how he was willing to do what needed to be done, but that his last years had exacted such a toll on his family life that he would need to let go of something else if this new role were to be added to his load... J. seemed to be the only one who had much of a sense of what it would be like to do action research and she seemed willing and maybe even eager to engage in it.

The seminar leader tried to turn the discussion to ways in which action research and working in teams might actually help improve the situation. R., who had not done the reading, would have none of it, and continued to press his complaint that he was overworked and underappreciated. The claims were undoubtedly legitimate, but in themselves represented a deep misunderstanding of the role of the CFAs as conceived by the department leadership who wrote the job description. In the hands of these CFAs the role had expanded beyond what was intended or perhaps humanly possible. Sensing a crisis, the seminar leader turned the discussion away from R. and toward others who he thought might have a different view or understanding. Two of those who had done the reading, including J., remarked that they were interested in conducting action research projects, even though they were a bit uncertain about how to proceed. They had issues and wanted to study them. At this slight sign of a turn in the discussion, R., sitting red faced and fuming, exploded (observation notes): "I feel like you are ignoring me," he charged. "You are right, I am, I've heard what you have to say." A sharp exchange followed which had three effects, R. was silenced, the seminar leader was deeply troubled and puzzled about what to do next, and the remaining CFAs were stunned. The seminar leader then said, "we need a break," and he excused from the meeting those who really did not want to or felt they could not be part of an action research project. R. left and so did B. It was evident that only two of the CFAs had any knowledge of action research and that the suggestion the CFAs become involved in it was seen as unreasonable, especially since so few had done the reading. After the break, the seminar leader apologized for getting upset, and suggested that the group stand back for a moment, take a deep breadth, and consider the benefits that an action research project might have for their work. The impact of

the confrontation between the seminar leader and R. lingered. As one CFA remarked in interview at year's end, "it took me a while to warm up again after the R. issue. I had felt connected with R., as we all had felt connected with each other and that incident in the meeting was very disconcerting for me because I didn't know [the seminar leader] at all. I only knew R." After this meeting, the seminar leader wondered if the seminar could be salvaged, however he found hope in the willingness of the group to meet off cycle, October 22nd, to consider the readings to determine if, in fact, a project was worth doing. The lesson of the blowup with R. was not lost on the seminar leader, although it came a bit late. Referring to what they call "holistic approaches" to action research, Leitch and Day (2000) argue that "emotions are key... due to the recognition that emotions across the range are such powerful determinants of thinking processes...and that turbulent emotions, whether past or present, limit thinking...and encourage responses based on restrictive patters of behaving" (p. 197).

Prior to the October 22nd meeting, R. and the seminar leader met. R. shared that part of his frustration came because of serious and very stressful personal problems in his family, apologies on both sides followed and R. withdrew from participation. The seminar leader also met with B., who was told that it was his decision whether or not to participate but if he wished to rejoin the seminar he would be welcomed. He did so, and became a very active participant. Greater sensitivity to the pressures the CFAs felt resulted in more time being made available within the seminars to address concerns and to pacing the work so as not to overwhelm. But, the conflict with R. points to a set of issues well beyond family problems, issues to which we will return later.

The CFAs (except R.) came to the October 22nd seminar prepared to discuss each reading. Despite having done the reading, uncertainty was high (from the observation notes): "At the beginning of the meeting (as in previous meetings), the same general feeling of fear or uncertainty about their roles as researchers was strong. They resisted the idea and were both fearful of a process they didn't understand, as well as reluctant to take on more work." It quickly became obvious to the seminar leader that he needed to back track and address some basic questions. As one of the CFAs remarked, "We have no schema for this [action research]." On the whole, they had difficulty thinking of themselves as researchers and did not think of their own experience as legitimate sources of data. When they thought of research they thought of number counting and statistics. The seminar leader asked, "What counts as data? What is data?" Other questions followed: "Who can help us gather data useful for thinking about our practice?" "Once we have some data, what do we do with it, how can we

make sense of it?" They were uncertain about what a good question to study might be. They did not think of posing questions of their own practice and of attempting to resolve practical problems as even related to research. In this meeting the seminar leader tossed out some possible questions for study that he thought might be of interest. (Observation notes): "As the meeting progresses, CFAs begin to add more and more to the conversation–begin to smile and appear to be more enthusiastic about the process of gathering data and of finding questions that they are mutually interested in answering." From a second set of observation notes written by another observer: "the tension in the room began to fade and the CFAs gradually began to contribute to the discussion until at the end of the meeting they expressed feelings of relief–that this was something they could do and that it was something they could do as a group with common concerns and questions... As they broke into small groups, conversations were animated and interested, especially as they established questions [for possible topics of study]." The transformation was amazing. The meeting ended with the CFAs eagerly working in teams and beginning to settle on possible questions for study. Plans were made for the groups to contact the seminar leader with the questions they thought they would study before the next seminar, which required that the CFAs communicate with one another in between meetings and with tenure-line faculty members. They were also told by the seminar leader that they should expect their initial questions to evolve as the studies evolved, which they did.

Prior to the November 8th meeting, teams met and e-mailed draft questions to the seminar leader. He responded with detailed feedback. The CFAs tendency was to state a problem of such scope that to attack it would take not only significant resources but also time well beyond what was available. The challenge for the seminar leader was to help reign in the CFA's ambition while still enabling them to frame an engaging problem. During the November 8th meeting each team, which initially formed around school district assignments (participants worked in schools within the same school district), shared a preliminary problem with the entire group. These included studies of why some teacher education students chose internships in urban schools, of CFA supervision practices, of teacher education expectations of CFAs, of the relationships between CFAs and Partnership Facilitators, and of the value of student teacher seminars. Each topic was explored by the entire group, possible data sources and potential problems with the study discussed, and possible benefits identified. Energy was high. Preliminary data gathering soon began, which included, for some, the designing of surveys.

The spirit of the December 14th meeting is nicely captured in our observation notes by one

event: "B. (who had earlier withdrawn from the seminar but returned) made an interesting statement almost at the end... He sort of leaned back in his chair and said that he thought the results of their [preliminary] survey showed that they were just on the surface of some really important things. I took [this] to mean that he had just caught a glimpse of the power of the process of being systematic about data collection and analysis. Perhaps he meant that there were more questions that had been sparked by [the survey], and he was just coming to see how research is a self-extending activity. The group brain stormed new ideas and extensions of what they had already done, and as they recognized that they needed to clarify a new level of questions before they went forward into their next step in data gathering..." There was still uncertainty but there were also signs of growing confidence among each of the CFAs--something good was afoot. Trust was building.

Dramatic changes took place between the December 14th and January 10th meetings. These changes were evidenced in a shift of the communication pattern within the seminar. Formerly, most talk had gone through the seminar leader, but not at this or subsequent meetings. The CFAs spoke directly to one another. By the January meeting, five action research teams were established and functioning well. Study topics were relatively firm, although, in the words of one CFA, some "tweaking" took place, and data gathering was underway. Two teams developed surveys which were piloted. At the January meeting the team studying the quality of communication between CFAs and Partnership Facilitators reported the initial results of their survey which proved to be a source of growing confidence as well as a means for beginning to rethink one aspect of the program, the intern and student teacher seminar. This team discovered that in the eyes of the Facilitators, they were doing some very good work, which was a welcomed discovery particularly for the two new CFAs on the team who were uncertain they were performing adequately in their roles. The team studying why some beginning teachers opted for urban internships reported data from an instrument designed to identify individuals "called" to teaching. What they discovered was that nearly all of the urban interns felt called to teach but they wondered if this finding was unique and they began to make plans to gather similar data from individuals who chose non-urban internships. Results from posing this question would lead to a fundamental shift in the project.

The seminar leader began the February 14th seminar, which was tape recorded, with a question: "It's really time for us to take stock... You've been doing something that we call action research. What distinguishes what you have been doing from traditional research?" Several CFAs spoke: "We are looking at ourselves, our own practices as opposed to watching someone else's." "We change as we go–like if we see that, 'Oh, this isn't really working out,' maybe my question [needs] tweaking." "You are supporting us. It's not, 'We are helping you

with your research,' you're helping us with ours." A second question followed, one designed to broaden the CFA's perspectives about action research and the value of other, more traditional forms, of research: "Is there a place in action research [for] other literature....research literature?" A lively discussion followed. With the help of the seminar leader, the team focused on urban education was reading studies related to teacher calling and urban schools which influenced the team's thinking. The seminar leader commented, "It seems to me that some of you are at the point where getting into the [wider] literature makes a lot of sense and I want to encourage that movement and connection. When you look at traditional research, typically what [you find] is that there will be a body of literature and you, [as researcher,] stand in the middle of it. The question [that drives your study] actually comes out of the body of literature, because you kind of live it and you have some questions that [perplex you].... I suggest that that's where several of you are. You have a question, you have a problem, you have worked it through, you have gathered some data, and I urge you to think about situating that question now in a wider conversation."

The discussion that followed indicates that the seminar leader had pushed the CFAs to the edge of their comfort zone. Tensions rose as he suggested that they consider sharing the results of their studies with the wider faculty. Several suggested that no one on the faculty would be interested: "Sometimes I have felt like, and I will put it just like I [feel], like the illegitimate child [here]." Others disagreed: "I feel that the professors that I work for...view me as a credible person." All were hesitant to share: "If our project developed into something we feel proud to present then maybe we will step forward and say, 'Yep, I'll want to share this.' But [right now], it's like (laughing), I want to do this?!" The seminar leader suggested that they would return to this question in the near future. Team reports followed, during which time the seminar leader sought to encourage each team to consider additional data sources and alternative interpretations, theories, of the data presented.

This proved to be a pivotal meeting. Gradually, the CFAs were beginning to come to terms with a wider purpose for the group, yet tensions remained. The fear of sharing persisted. Darling (2001) sheds some light on what transpired in this particular seminar session. She describes how a "reform initiative explicitly founded on the concept of a community of inquiry for teacher education" collided with the conception of community embraced by pre-service teachers (p. 7). For the beginning teachers in Darling's study, the "purpose of the community [was] defined by its role as a support group, not by the learning that is taking place" (p. 12). Darling suggests that these represent two different types of communities and call forth different virtues. "Inquiry...requires the virtues of conscientiousness, including such virtues as honesty and truthfulness. In a community of inquiry, people must learn to

disagree...argue their own positions with conviction, and make judgments about the worth of the truth of others' claims. Their duty is to the inquirers, but also to the inquiry and to upholding the standards of inquiry.... Teacher educators have a responsibility to model the virtues necessary for inquiry and to do our best to persuade students of their value" (p. 16). In contrast, a "community of compassion" calls for "the virtues of benevolence, and the virtues of conscientiousness" (p. 15).

The seminar leader pushed the values of inquiry and, while attempting to be supportive, pressed for deeper understanding, which included, as he articulated in the seminar, the need to connect the projects to a wider research literature and to share the results of the studies, to open them to discussion and possible criticism. At this point in the evolution of the seminar, these aims were threatening, although the evidence suggests confidence in the seminar leader and in the four participating tenure-track faculty was growing. On the whole, the CFAs sought and gave support but resisted challenging or questioning one another. The expectation of support as the main function of the seminar may help explain a portion of the deep negative reaction to the seminar leader's confrontation of R. At times, the "virtues of conscientiousness...need to take precedence over virtues of benevolence" (Darling, 2001, p. 16).

Between this meeting and the next, the seminar leader met with and corresponded through e-mail with each of the teams attempting to facilitate the studies. He responded to requests; he did not initiate them. Teams also met with the other tenure-track faculty to discuss their projects and obtain assistance as needed. With some encouragement, eventually three of the five teams requested help locating published research related to the CFA studies. A fourth group conducted its own literature review. Only one group chose not to delve into what others had to say about their topic.

Four of the projects were presented during the April 18th meeting. Two made Power-Point presentations of the data gathered and orally shared interpretations of the data. A third created a handbook designed for use by future CFAs in the hope of assisting them to better understand the nature of their role and responsibilities. A fourth, the urban teacher education team, spoke from a rough draft of an article they planned to submit for review when completed. A fifth, a study of CFA supervision practices, would be presented in the May meeting but had completed data gathering. With each presentation, the seminar leader pushed the groups to theorize, to push their interpretations and to consider the meaning of the findings for different groups, student teachers, mentor teachers, future CFAs, teacher education admissions committees as well as their own practice. In addition, he took the opportunity to

remind the CFAs of the way in which action research cycles, so that new questions emerge for exploration along the way, and suggested new questions for consideration. Once again, he urged them to consider "going public" with their findings. Members of one group said they had already made arrangements to share the results of their study of CFA, mentor, and intern relationships in an upcoming orientation meeting for new CFAs. Members from another group agreed to share their study in the opening fall faculty retreat and on the spot the presentation was scheduled. These teams seemed eager to share their studies.

Interview Themes

Views of Research

Eleven CFAs were interviewed following a set protocol.2 The first questions focused on the CFA's understanding of research. Two of the CFAs had previous experience with action research. Nearly all the CFAs thought of action research, and the "action research spiral" that they had been taught in seminar, as an extension of what teachers normally do when reflecting on a problem or issue, yet with a subtle and important difference: "It's something that I've done all along...but it's...more formalized." McMahon (1999) captures the nature of this difference when he asserts that while reflective practice may set the stage for action research unlike action research it does not necessarily involve "strategic action." The CFAs held a similar view, echoing the assumptions of practical action research: "[Action research] is studying my own practice, trying to see if what I am doing is working for the children, for myself, for my associates....and then trying out some new ideas." "The action part is what you do after you look at [your practice], after you reflect on your practices, after you look at data, then you would go back and change [your] behavior in some way." The place and importance of systematically gathering and then carefully considering data in order to take increasingly effective action was central to the CFA's views of action research. More importantly, nearly all said that in the future they would pay greater attention to the value of data in decision making: "[My action research project] has given me a new appreciation [for] actually collecting data and writing it down and analyzing it...for future events... There's lots of things I wonder about." Noting a contradiction in her practice, another CFA remarked: "Here I am trying to teach my students that when they assess they need to document–and when I assess my children I document–but I've not documented [my own practice]. Now I can see the value of [gathering data], having it on paper [and not merely taking] mental notation."

The CFAs were asked to compare action research to other forms of research. Responses to this question revealed some surprising results. "As teachers, we're so afraid of the word

'research,' are afraid of the word 'publish,' [but now] I'm not as afraid anymore." Another CFA spent the first few seminar meetings confused, as she recalled: "I actually had a misconception. I thought we were going to be engaging in a research project for the university and that we would be the gophers. I didn't see, as a CFA, that we would actually be doing inquiry on our own work, our own practice. That was a little bit shocking at first." With two exceptions, those who had some prior experience with action research, the CFAs thought of research as something others do, not teachers, not CFAs, but professors. Lines between practitioners and researchers were drawn broadly and firmly, and CFAs stood on the side of the practitioners. Perhaps it is for this reason that early in the seminar the CFAs resisted engagement with journal articles. "Action research is different [from other types of research]. I think it is more fluid. I have more options with it. It can change as it goes along, where as I see [with] other kinds of research you are stuck with an initial question.... [With both types of research] you are studying a problem. You come up with an initial problem and then you study that problem, pull together different data sources. [Traditional research] is more tight." Because action research is "more fluid," may not involve a "hypothesis," "control groups," "statistics" or aim at publication initially it appears that several of the CFAs did not think of it as research at all and had to stretch to imagine themselves as researchers. This view, they said, changed.

The Value of Research Literature

The change in views was encouraged once several of the CFAs began to grapple with their topics and to wonder if others might not have insights worthy of consideration. As noted in the seminar story above, when the seminar leader believed it would be helpful for a team to engage in the wider literature he offered assistance. Despite initial resistance, three of the five groups eventually accepted the assistance, and one team worked on its own, with very positive results. "The more I read the clearer my understanding was regarding the importance of preparing preservice teachers to teach in diverse environments. However, it left me with many more questions about how we ought to do this not only on the university level but in relation to teacher induction programs... I began to see the bigger picture." "[The seminar leader] gave us some literature that we could review. We separated it out between the three of us...and jigsawed it. Then when we met to go over the pieces, it was like little lights turning on. 'We could do this, we could try this,' and we came up with a couple of different ideas than we originally thought would be the direction we would be going. The literature review...really [got us] quite excited." Seeing their work in relationship to others' enhanced confidence that what was being done was worthwhile, as well as broadened views of research and encouraged exploration of new directions.

Uncertainty: Changing Conceptions of CFA Role

As noted in the story of the seminar, a great deal of uncertainty accompanied the first several meetings. All of the CFAs, but most especially those new to the role, felt terrific pressures on their time: "I was very apprehensive just because of the time restraints that we were under." Time pressures and "the rigors of the immediate demands of practice" are oft given reasons for teachers limited involvement in critical reflection (Cope & Stephen, 2001, p. 922) and in action research (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Early in the seminar for all but two of the participants, the term, "action research," had no particular meaning, which added to their uncertainty and feelings of being overwhelmed. Looking back on the beginning of the seminar, the general criticism raised was that the seminar leader did not tell the participants exactly what to do: "I was a little confused about what we were expected to do. We were given readings, but we were never given a syllabus that said, 'Here is what you should do.' (laughter) I was kind of confused about what we were supposed to do, and I had a little trouble focusing on something here that I was interested in [to study]....[But] as I started getting involved in a project, started seeing some applications for the work I was doing, it started getting more interesting and I started realizing that we really [were] expected to do some research here. Finally [I realized], we're really even expected to share it.... It just sort of gradually fit together." Finding a topic and thinking through how to attack it proved to be very difficult for some. Indeed, finding a topic may be not only difficult but very stressful (see Leitch & Day, 2001). One CFA gave up, and joined a group even though the "project that we ended up working on wasn't one that I was passionate about." He felt he was wasting time. To this person, the aim was to "fit in" as he said, and get a project finished. Yet, ironically, at year's end he felt very strongly that action research has value although he was not certain he could conduct a study on his own: "I'm not sure that I'd be comfortable doing something by myself." Despite warnings to the contrary, for much of the year half the group felt rushed and needed constant reminding and encouragement to slow down, to gather data and to reconsider topics and direction. "One of the things that changed was [that at the first] we were trying to proceed too quickly. We needed to step back and actually do a survey and see what our mentors thought about the problem we were posing. At that point, it relaxed. It changed. I really enjoyed doing the mentor survey and having them come back with information [that we could] compare." As busy, task oriented and very practical people, the CFAs were used to grabbing hold of an assignment and finishing it as quickly as possible and then moving on. Feeling constant time pressures, the rush to judgment was an ever present danger. Indeed, until near year's end, talk in the seminar of action research cycles made little sense.

The Value of Action Research

When asked, all of the interviewed CFAs reported that they expected to engage in action research in the future, even as they recognized that pressures on time will persist. "I will [do action research], especially when I go back into the classroom. I'm really interested in being a bit more brave, [I'd like to] publish a bit, and [continue] studying things to become more clear." B, who initially wanted to withdraw from the seminar, dramatically changed his views: "Absolutely! [I'll do action research]. As I've gone through my own course work, I think action research ought to be a big thing, a big part of any teacher's practice or school's practice. You know, what's the sense of doing something if you're not going to evaluate it and see how you can improve it?" The CFAs especially enjoyed working in teams, and said they'd prefer to work with others in the future rather than conduct individual studies. "There is such great value in collaboration, and that is really what I see [we have done]." Importantly, it appears that the virtues associated with building communities of inquiry gained in prominence. For example, with the exception of one team, the same team that failed to delve into the wider research literature, the CFAs became more openly critical of their projects–indicative of the virtues of honesty and truthfulness--and increasingly anxious to improve their studies to better answer their guiding questions. One CFA who will shortly assume a position as a principal had very strong opinions about the value of action research: "I think it is going to be very, very important for me to observe my practice. To really be able to see how I am conducting faculty meetings, how I am interacting with teachers, parents, students, and to really sit back and reflect on, 'Is this effective practice?'... [The seminar and study have] given me a kind of parameter on how I might go about moving into my new job." She continued: "[Action research] has given me some empowerment, [I feel] I am able to try some things."

Hesitancy Remained

Despite growing confidence and a desire to continue to participate in action research, the majority of the CFAs at year's end were still hesitant to share their studies with any but carefully selected tenure-track faculty and others closely linked to the schools, people who they assumed were allies. While the distance between the CFAs and the seminar leader and four participating tenure-track faculty members lessened there is no indication of a transfer to the wider faculty, no dramatic move of clinical faculty from the borderlands. "I still don't see our role as being really valuable... We can study our own practices, but the effects of our research pretty much are limited to what we do within the confines of our [small group]." While desirous to be further involved in action research, about half of the CFAs expressed hesitancy about working alone. This conclusion was grounded in two very different sources. On one hand, all of the CFAs with one exception greatly valued working with other CFAs on their projects and they desire to continue in similar sorts of relationships. On the other hand, a

few thought they lacked the knowledge about the process of action research needed to successfully bring a study to conclusion. They wanted additional experience, practice with the process. In some ways, research remained a mysterious process.

Making Sense and Looking Ahead

Wenger's concept of “boundary crossing” between “communities of practice” is helpful for making sense of what transpired in the seminar and of what the CFAs said in interview. Generally speaking, a community of practice is a group of people who share a social context that are bound together by a set of problems and a shared pursuit for solutions to those problems that involves developing a body of knowledge held in common and shared expertise. Participation in a community of practice brings with it a sense of belonging and commitment to others within the community and identification with the expertise that forms the basis of the shared practice and its improvement. Thus, while communities of practice are everywhere and everyone belongs to multiple communities, there are boundaries that set off one community from another even when the communities are to some degree overlapping and problems shared. The conflicts encountered in the seminar point toward the difficulty of boundary crossing between communities of practice.

Wenger writes:

> Crossing boundaries between practices exposes our experience to different forms of engagement, different enterprises with different definitions of what matters, and different repertoires... By creating a tension between experience and competence, crossing boundaries is a process by which learning is potentially enhanced, and potentially impaired. (1998, p. 140).

The seminar leader's conflict with R. was jarring. Uncertainty increased because, as several of the CFAs reported, he did not give specific directions on what was to be done and outline specific expectations. Then there were the lingering doubts that tenure-track faculty, outside of those they worked with in the seminar, would care at all about what the CFA's did or about what they accomplished with their action research projects even as the CFAs saw genuine value in their work. And there was self-doubt about their ability to study their practice on their own. Each of these point to the challenges and difficulties of boundary crossing, of moving between established communities. The CFAs came to the university as members of their respective teaching communities of practice. The CFA’s identities were and are deeply embedded in those communities and participation within them brought ways of making sense of teaching and of being a teacher that helped form the boundaries of practice and the terms of

membership. As noted, the CFAs were chosen to work with the university precisely because within their respective communities they were powerful and successful people, skilled teachers of children. Within these teaching communities, as noted earlier, research did not enjoy a particularly prominent place. For the CFAs articulating problems for study and systematic data gathering were foreign actions. Moreover, distrust of university faculty was and is endemic to these communities. When the seminar began the new CFAs were in the process of engaging a new community of practice, an evolving community with a history beginning with the appointment of the first CFAs in 1996. Moving from one to another community of practice often is a source of considerable difficulty in part because what is required is a renegotiation of action, meaning, and ultimately of identity. Uncertainty abounds (Utley, Basile & Rhodes, 2003). This can be frightening; it most certainly is unsettling even as it may be exciting and energizing. Similarly, the implicit invitation, some thought requirement, of the action research seminar was for all of the CFAs to connect in some fashion to yet another community of practice, one inhabited and born by the seminar leader and the tenure-track faculty. What followed is what Wenger calls a "boundary encounter" (p. 113), made difficult by the perception of the CFAs that they were generally not welcome into this, the university, community. No doubt their perceptions were not wholly inaccurate. While university-based teacher educators acknowledge the value of clinical faculty to teacher education, they are deeply ambivalent toward them (Cornbleth & Ellsworth, 1994). The CFAs felt they were unwelcome outsiders; at best they would be allowed to participate on the fringes of the university community of practice. To the seminar leader and the participating tenure-track faculty members the invitation to engage in action research with their support seemed like a “productive enterprise around which...diverging meaning and perspectives” could be negotiated (Wenger, 1998, p. 114). This view was not shared by the CFAs, who, based upon their prior experience, initially and implicitly sensed a kind of colonization was about to take place. That it did not was a source of surprise and relief which, we believe, opened possibilities for learning in next year’s seminar well beyond what was possible in this year’s. But their hesitancy raises questions about the very nature and differences of these two communities which require direct exploration in their own right by members of both communities.

While the CFAs came to think of themselves in some ways as researchers, and research came to be accepted as a legitimate part of the role, they continued to think of their interests and the tenure-track faculty’s interests as related but fundamentally different, a point underscored by Winitzky and her colleagues (1992). In their uneasiness, perhaps they were right: While they were invited to come in from the borderlands they were not invited to settle in the university community of practice. Serious mistakes were made in the way in which the seminar was

initiated, where a formal statement of CFA responsibilities was used to justify the seminar. That the tenure-track faculty members kept to a supporting role was also probably a mistake, one that confirmed their superiority to the CFAs. In retrospect, the message sent to the CFAs was that the tenure-track faculty members were in charge. To make the CFAs fully welcome in the university community would require, as some within the tenure-track faculty sense and fear, fundamental changes in that community's practice. On the other hand, university tenure-track faculty members have little interest in attempting to join teacher communities of practice and perhaps little reason to believe they would be welcomed. Both communities, in Wenger's terms, are "guarded" (p. 120). Perhaps the solution is not so much a matter of bringing clinical faculty in from the borderlands as it is to create a shared and new community of practice, one standing between and overlapping with the other two but not replacing them. We believe that such a community can be formed. But it is far from clear just what such a community would entail although we suspect action research would be central to its practice.

1. Practical action research "aims to improve practice through application of practical judgement and the accumulated personal wisdom of the teacher.... [The] aim is to improve the quality of action within a situation" (Leitch & Day, 2000, 183-184). Emancipatory action research aims to free the individual from social and system restraints.

2. CFA/Teacher Research Protocol (CFATRproto): You have been participating in the CFA action research/teacher research seminar this year. Would you tell me, What is action research? (Probes: What is action research's purpose or aim?); How is action research related to other forms of research? (Probes: Are there important differences? What are the important similarities?); Prior to the seminar, did you have any experience with action research? If yes, ask: Would you describe the nature of that experience?; In the beginning, what were your feelings about participating in the seminar? What did you expect would happen? What were your concerns?; Did your feelings about the seminar (and participation in an action research project) change over time? If yes, ask: What prompted the change?; Describe your project; If you had to explain to another teacher what you did and why you did it, what would you say?;

For you, of what value was the project? Of what value was the seminar?; Characterize the process by which your action research team was formed. How effective was your team? How involved were you in it?; Has your project and/or participation in the seminar influenced you in any way? (Probe: Has your thinking about teaching been influenced? Has your understanding of the CFA role changed? Others?); If you had to do the seminar over again and had the ability to change most anything, what would you do differently or tell the seminar

leader to do differently? (Encourage them to talk about themselves, the team, and the seminar leader); How likely is it that you will engage in some sort of action research in the future? Please elaborate.

Beck, C., & Kosnik, C. (2001). Reflection-in-action: In defense of thoughtful teaching. Curriculum Inquiry, 31(2), 217-227.

Bullough, R.V., Jr., Hobbs, S.F., Kauchak, D.P., Crow, N.A. & Stokes, D. (1997). Long-term PDS development in research universities and the clinicalization of teacher education. Journal of Teacher Education, 48(2), 85-95.

Burbank, M. (2003). Modeling action research: Reflections from a self study. The Professional Educator, 25(2), 31-42.

Burbank, M. & Kauchak, D. (2003). An alternative model for professional development: Investigations into effective collaboration. Teaching & Teacher Education, 19(5), 499-514.

Christiansen, H., Goulet, L., Krentz, C., & Maeers, M. (Eds.) (1997). Recreating relationships: Collaboration and educational reform. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Clarke, D. & Hollingsworth, D. (2002). Elaborating a model of teacher professional growth. Teaching & Teacher Education, 18(8), 947-967.

Cope, P. & Stephen, C. (2000). A role for practicing teachers in initial teacher education. Teaching & Teacher Education, 17(8), 913-924.

Cornbleth, C. & Ellsworth, J. (1994). Teachers in teacher education: Clinical faculty roles and relationships. American Educational Research Journal, 31(1), 49-70.

Darling, L.F. (2001). When conceptions collide: Constructing a community of inquiry for teacher education in British Columbia. Journal of Education for Teaching, 27(1), 7-21.

Goodlad, J.I. (1994). Educational renewal: Better teachers, better schools. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Goodson, I.. (1994). Studying the teacher's life and work. Teaching & Teacher Education, 10(1), pp. 29-37.

Guba, E.G. (1978). Toward a methodology of naturalistic inquiry in educational evaluation. University of California, Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Evaluation.

Henson, R.K. (2001). The effects of participation in teacher research on teacher efficacy. Teaching & Teacher Education, 17(7), 819-836.

Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (1988). The action research planner (third edition). Geelong, AU: Deakin University.

Knight, S.L., Wiseman, D.L., & Cooner, D. (2000). Using collaborative teacher research to determine the impact of professional development school activities on elementary students' math and writing outcomes. Journal of Teacher Education, 51(1), 26-38.

Leitch, R. & Day, C. (2000). Action research and reflective practice: Towards a holistic view. Educational Action Research, 8(1), 179-193.

McMahon, T. (1999). Is reflective practice synonymous with action research? Educational Action Research, 7(1), 163-168.

Osguthrope, R.T., Harris, R.C., Harris, M.F. & Black, S. (Eds). (1995). Partner schools: Centers for educational renewal. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Sandholtz, J.H. & Finan, E.C. (1998). Blurring the boundaries to promote school-university partnerships. Journal of Teacher Education, 49(1), 13-25.

Utley, B.L., Basile, C.g., & Rhodes, L.K. (2003). Waling in two worlds: Master teachers serving as site coordinators in partner schools. Teaching & Teacher Education, 19(5), 515-528.

Veal, M.L. & Rikard, L. (1998). Cooperating teachers' perspectives on the student teaching triad. Journal of Teacher Education, 49(2), pp. 108-119.

Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Winitzky, N., Stoddart, T., & O'Keefe, P. (1992). Great expectations: Emergent professional development schools. Journal of Teacher Education, 43(1), 3-18.

[Print Window] **[Close Window]**

Copyright © 2006 National Network for Educational Renewal. All rights reserved.