In this era of standardized testing for elementary students and teachers, sometimes children and teachers just need a little support. At Duzine and Lenape elementary schools in New Paltz, some of that support comes from SUNY New Paltz faculty and students in the department of elementary education.

At Duzine, college students and faculty enrolled in courses aimed at teaching reading, spend a half-day each school week in the classroom. “It’s incredibly helpful to us and to our teacher candidates,” says New Paltz assistant professor Caroline Hopenwasser. “Our students observe teaching as it’s happening and we can explain to them why a teacher did or said a certain thing at a certain time.”

This is what research recommends: the “clinically rich” model of learning to teach. Observations translate into experience and enhance the educational experience for all. Teacher candidates at New Paltz learn in the context of the classroom, says Tarie Lewis, lecturer and coordinator of the college’s literacy program. “Not only is a college student on hand to assist,” she says, “but we offer extra brain power, too. We try to provide vital support in helping teachers who are making transitions in their own instruction by using new materials in new ways.”

Visiting a number of local school districts, Michael Rosenberg, dean of the New Paltz School of Education, has noted that teachers are under tremendous pressure to have their students meet exacting new standards. Assistant professor Jennifer Davis-Duerr, who spends one day a week at Lenape working with teachers, students and teacher candidates, sees it in part as an opportunity to review Common Core standards for both teachers and candidates alike. “We can help with text complexity and close reading, two important aspects of the shift to Common Core standards,” she says.

Davis-Duerr also collaborates with reading specialists in thoughtful conversations about the specific needs of children who attend the college’s Literacy Center after school. The Literacy Center, a popular community program, pairs them with School of Education graduate students working toward their New York state Literacy certification or Literacy/special education certification. These candidates already have initial teacher certification.

Children attend the Literacy Center one evening a week to receive intensive intervention and one-on-one attention. It serves the community; children come from five local school districts. “We start from a child’s point of need,” says Lewis. “They may have been in school all day struggling with their reading. We build on their strengths and interests. Each of our candidates takes ownership for one child’s learning, and it’s a powerful experience for both.”

Sam Slotnick, adjunct faculty member and Literacy Center coordinator for the Department of Elementary Education, sees changes in the children over the course of the Center’s 13-week program. Children who come in discouraged and disengaged end up “asking to go to the library, or reading with a flashlight under the covers at night,” he says. After all, as Tarie Lewis says, “It’s fun to be good at something!”

Registration has begun for the Spring 2014 Literacy Center program. Registration information is available at http://www.newpaltz.edu/literacycenter/.