

Universities And P-12 Schools Both Benefit From Professional Development School Partnerships

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Abstract

This article advocates the establishment of Professional Development Schools for the simultaneous renewal of teacher education and P-12 schools. It asserts that both the public schools and the universities benefit when engaged in these collaborative partnerships. Specific benefits that accrue to both institutions are delineated.

Historically, colleges and universities have assumed major responsibility for the preservice education of teachers. To a limited degree, this responsibility has been shared with public schools, especially in providing clinical and field-based experiences. Control and responsibility, however, have largely remained with the higher education institutions. P-12 schools have not regarded teacher education to be one of their primary responsibilities. Thus, educators have staked out certain professional boundaries: colleges and universities have viewed teacher education as their responsibility and P-12 schools have regarded the education of children as their responsibility. This situation reflects tradition, but is not acceptable today if we are to adequately prepare teachers for the schools of the 21st Century.

It is necessary to build cooperative relationships among all members of the educational community. The concept that universities produce and the public schools consume teachers is no longer operationally feasible. Once teacher education becomes a shared enterprise, numerous opportunities will emerge whereby university faculty and public school teachers and administrators can work together to improve the educational programs offered in the schools. Such partnerships will also result in students who are better prepared to face the challenges of higher education (Dixon & Ishler, 1992).

Professional Development Schools

In teacher education programs today, the clinical and field-based experiences must be extensive and continuous, culminating with student teaching and/or a full-year internship in a Professional Development School (PDS). These partnerships allow for the extensive involvement of both P-12 teachers and university faculty in the preparation of new teachers.

The establishment of Professional Development Schools around the country is advocated by various groups, including the Holmes Partnership, the National Network for Educational Renewal, the National Education Association Teacher Education Initiative, and the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. The Professional Development School "is best thought of as an ideal type toward which reform-minded schools are striving" (Nystrand, 1991, p. 1). PDSs are proposed as a way to *simultaneously* renew schools and teacher education. The goal of this initiative is "to provide new models of teacher education and development by serving as exemplars of practice, builders of knowledge, and vehicles for communicating professional understandings among teacher educators, novices, and veteran teachers" (Darling-Hammond, 1994, p. 1). Analogous to teaching hospitals in the medical profession, PDSs are the vehicles for providing prospective teachers with intensive clinical experiences grounded in state-of-the-art practice that will increase the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs. Inquiry, research, and collaboration between schools and teacher preparation programs expand the knowledge base and foster professional growth of teachers and university faculty-education faculty as well as arts and sciences faculty by providing the opportunity for research to be translated into practice and for practice to be connected to research. PDSs have the potential to "redefine teaching and learning for all members of the profession and the school community" (Darling-Hammond, 1994, p. 1).

The Professional Development School is a new kind of school in many respects. It embraces democratic values and uses the full range of knowledge and skills of classroom teachers, school administrators, future teachers and professors to shape the school, teacher-preparation curricula, and the teaching and learning processes. Teacher educators, teachers, and administrators need to learn from each other if they are to fulfill their responsibilities to students and society. The Professional Development School is a school in which professors, teachers, administrators, and prospective teachers and administrators work together to build a collegial learning community. This community has as its primary goal the intellectual engagement and development of all its members students, teachers, administrators, professors, and future educators.

The most recent call for the establishment of Professional Development Schools comes from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996). In its report: **What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future**, the National Commission recommends that teacher education programs be extended and include a full-year internship in a Professional Development School. The national Commission states,

The power of Professional Development Schools for leveraging reform is that they sit at an intersection of universities and schools and of preservice and inservice development for teachers. Thus, they provide the means by which schools and colleges of education can simultaneously redesign their work. (p. 80)

Professional Development School partnerships between universities and P-12 schools have the potential for benefits to both institutions. The real beneficiaries of PDSs are, of course, the new teachers who are prepared there and the P-12 students who attend these schools.

Benefits to P-12 Schools

When P-12 school administrators and teachers consider entering into an agreement with a university to establish PDSs, a logical question is: "What are the benefits to our school?" While there are benefits that accrue to both the P-12 school and the university, the bottom line is that there will be better educational programs available to the students who attend the PDS.

Indicated below are the types of benefits that P-12 schools receive from their involvement as PDSs:

- Involvement with the preparation of future teachers and other educators.
- Influence and help shape teaching behaviors of novices.
- When student teachers/interns are treated as professionals, there are more *teachers* available in the school to work with the P-12 students.
- Team teaching is more easily achieved.
- Individualized instruction is made more possible.
- If student teachers spend the entire semester or longer in a school, the need for hiring substitute teachers is diminished.
- More opportunities for professional development on site.
- Allows the P-12 school to better meet the needs of all children.
- University faculty assigned to the PDS can serve as a valuable resource and as a *broker*.
- Student learning will improve.
- New teachers will be more familiar with practices required in today's schools.
- Teacher associations (NEA/AFT) believe PDSs contribute to the enhancement of the profession.
- Access to state-of-the-art research on teaching and learning.
- Recruiting costs are reduced.
- Opportunities are provided for P-12 teachers to assume new professional roles.
- P-12 students have increased hours of adult attention.

Benefits to Universities

The primary mission of any college of education is to prepare teachers and other educators for P-12 schools. In order for colleges of education to be successful, they must prepare educators for schools that exist and that are likely to exist well into the 21st century. By conducting much of their work in and providing prospective educators with experiences in Professional Development Schools, they are able to provide relevant preparation for prospective teachers, administrators, and counselors. At the same time, using the PDS as the primary *workplace* for teacher education faculty allows them to grow professionally and ensures the relevance of their work.

Indicated below are specific benefits that accrue to universities as a result of their involvement with Professional Development Schools:

- Provides context for thinking about education as P-16 rather than as P-12 and higher education separately.
- Involves university faculty in educating P-12 students.
- Involves P-12 faculty in teacher education.
- Provides professional development opportunities for higher education faculty.
- Keeps higher education faculty current with P-12 schools.
- Creates better laboratories for clinical and field experiences for students preparing to become teachers.
- Allows teacher education students to gain extensive experience in real school settings.
- Recognizes the importance of student teaching and other field experiences
- Allows universities to involve P-12 teachers in teaching methods classes and in the supervision of student teachers and interns.
- Provides opportunities for research and inquiry.
- Provides for overall better teacher education programs. This results in better prepared teachers which results in better education of P-12 students.

Summary

Significant improvements can occur in P-12 schools and in universities' teacher education programs when the two institutions collaborate to establish Professional Development Schools. These innovative partnership schools can provide the venue for the simultaneous renewal of the curriculum in the P-12 schools and in the universities' programs for the preparation of teachers and other educators. When appropriately established and implemented, PDSs benefit both P-12 schools and higher education institutions.

References

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