



The Professional Development School Approach to Teacher Education: Identification of a Model

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Abstract

Increasingly, school leaders and researchers recognize that the quality of education is aligned with the quality of teacher preparation and the ongoing professional development and support that teachers receive throughout their careers. One very promising way to optimize teacher preparation is through the Professional Development School (PDS). This paper will identify the essential elements of a Professional Development School model for teacher education and provide strategies for implementation and sustainability.

By definition, a Professional Development School (PDS) is a partnership with a shared research focus designed to improve teacher preparation, enhance professional development for teachers, and improve student achievement. The partnership typically includes a college of education and an elementary or secondary school. The essential elements of a PDS include a formalized partnership designed to assure connections between research and practice to promote learning and professional development. While no two PDS schools are the same, common elements often include university classes taught at the PDS, school administrators teaching college courses, year-long internships for pre-service teachers, demonstration lessons, co-teaching between teacher candidates and classroom teachers, classroom research, inquiry-based teaching, and a shared focus on research to improve professional practice.

Successful Professional Development Schools are grounded in positive working relationships based on a clear understanding of common goals and individual responsibilities, especially since the college or university and K-12 school have very different cultures. Clarifying these goals and purposes is a critical role for leaders who are developing a new PDS. Each step in the process must follow principles of change and allow each participant to join the PDS with both a personal and professional understanding of the plan and expectations. Although the plan for the PDS often begins with approval at the administrative level, the true success occurs when teachers, teacher candidates, and university professors work together to improve student learning. The model presented will offer strategies and a timeline for implementation that have proven to be successful for establishment of a PDS.

1. Teacher quality and retention

The quality of teachers is an essential factor the academic achievement of students. Policy makers focus on teachers because research indicates that raising teacher quality is significantly aligned with increasing student learning [1]. Although there is a clear connection with teacher quality and student achievement, the variables associated with teacher quality vary. Some policy makers focus on strong knowledge of content, others focus on selectivity in terms of academic achievement, and still others claim that adherence to rigorous standards is essential [2].

Responses to the need to recruit and retain quality teachers include calls for strong academic preparation in the areas of pedagogy and content as well as models for alternate preparation of teachers that focus exclusively on content knowledge with no formal preparation in pedagogy. In the USA, the debate over measures and indicators of quality continues while issues of high stakes testing, teacher accountability, reduced school budgets, low teacher salaries, a negative image of the teaching profession, and a retiring workforce deter many potential teachers from pursuing careers in teaching. The issue is compounded by a teacher shortage and the fact the many teachers leave the profession within the first three to five years.

Key elements associated with teacher quality and retention are teacher preparation and ongoing professional development. When teacher candidates have extensive and diverse clinical experiences that are effectively supervised by experienced mentors, they are better prepared for the classroom. They are prepared for the classroom and can anticipate the realities of contemporary schools and the needs of diverse student populations. With ongoing opportunities for mentoring, these teachers can develop the skills and dispositions they will require to navigate the early years of teaching and develop

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their professional skills. As these educators become engaged in professional development that focuses on classroom research and inquiry into solving the problems of practice, they will continue to develop as educators who can positively influence student learning. Their success in the classroom will provide the kind of incentives that will help to build positive and effective careers in teaching.

One model that has been demonstrated to be effective for the ongoing preparation and professional development of teachers is the university-school partnership known as the Professional Development School (PDS) [3]. Essentially, a PDS is a focused, formalized partnership that exists between a College of Education and a K-12 School. A true PDS has elements that include teacher candidate preparation, professional development for classroom teachers, research and inquiry, and a shared emphasis on improving student learning outcomes. The concept of the PDS is not new; it is based on clinical models for professions and has similarities with the preparation of doctors in teaching hospitals. Currently, there is a renewed interest in the PDS as increased emphasis is being placed on partnerships and high quality, extended clinical experiences.

2. The professional development school

In the United States, the group that first established a definition and standards for the PDS was the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). This organization provided a definition of the PDS that stated, "Professional development schools are innovative institutions formed through partnerships between professional education programs and P-12 schools. Their mission is professional preparation of candidates, faculty development, inquiry directed at the improvement of practice, and enhanced student learning" [4]. Each element of the PDS must be included and assessed in order for a true PDS to exist. The model for the PDS established by NCATE had five standards. Standard 1 established the PDS as a Learning Community with shared goals and a common vision of teaching and learning; Standard 2 required a shared commitment to accountability in meeting professional standards; Standard 3 addressed collaboration and noted the need for interdependence and joint effort toward achieving the goals of the shared partnership; Standard 4 focused on diversity and equity in the learning environment and opportunities for all learners; Standard 5 address the necessity for clearly delineated and shared structures, resources and roles as well as clear communication within the PDS. Although NCATE has now merged with another group to form the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation, these standards have continued to be used as the key standards for the development, assessment, and improvement of the PDS [5].

Currently, the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) has been established to continue the momentum of the PDS as a model that will advance teacher preparation and ongoing teacher quality. This organization has established nine essential elements of the PDS. These essentials are based on the original NCATE standards and extend the partnership to require a formal memorandum of understanding as part of the formation of a PDS [6]. In establishing the nine essentials, the NAPDS stated that each element must be included in order for a partnership to identify itself as a PDS. Colleges and some school districts that claim to be professional development schools are actually partnerships, not a PDS. The implementation of a true PDS requires a focused adherence to each of the standards and essential elements that comprise the PDS.

3. A model for implementation of a professional development school

The PDS offers a vehicle for establishing a clinical model that will promote teacher quality and teacher retention. Among the more salient features of the PDS model currently being promoted are the year-long internship for teacher candidates and co-teaching that is shared by a teacher candidate and a classroom teacher. The establishment of a true PDS requires a strategic approach to implementation of the standards and elements. The model provided here offers implementation strategies that have been used effectively to establish and sustain one PDS partnership.

A major stumbling block in establishing a PDS is that often the persons involved have different definitions of a PDS and different expectations for what it means to them personally. Successful Professional Development Schools require positive working relationships based on a clear understanding of common goals and shared understandings of what the PDS will be. Clarifying these goals and purposes is a critical role for leaders who are beginning the process of developing a new PDS. This issue continues throughout the implementation process and each time there is a change in personnel. Every new person introduced to the PDS starts the process anew.

One solution to assure successful implementation of the PDS is to consider it as a process of change. Through this approach, leaders of the process will face challenges of establishing a clear and consistent message, establishing an agreed upon definition of the PDS, assuring a clear understanding of common goals, clarifying and operationalizing these goals and purposes, navigating



the mix of priorities and values in the K-12 and college/university cultures, and preparing to answer the consistent questions of “what is this change?” and “what does it mean for me?”

The Concerns-based Adoption Model (CBAM) offers a model for change that can be useful for bringing together administrators, teachers, university faculty, students, and parents for the formation of a PDS. The key principals of this model are that change is a process, not an event, facilitating change is a team effort, and, leadership at multiple levels is essential to long-term change success. This approach to change recognizes that change is experienced at an individual level and that persons go through a process of change with varying degrees of resistance and adaptation through a series of stages. These include a level of unconcern and move toward a stage of seeking additional information, a concern for how the change will affect individuals at a personal level, an interest in managing the change, collaboration, and finally refocusing the change to make it even more effective [7].

Establishing a PDS begins with the key leadership of the organizations. These leaders must begin with information to be shared focusing on the standards and essential elements. Once the basic tenets of the PDS model have been agreed upon and communicated among the leadership team, a collaborative team be established to develop an implementation plan. Key elements of an implementation plan should include initial plans for development of the memorandum of understanding, the selection of the actual school that will become the PDS, a plan for communication, a timeline for implementation, the identification of key personnel, and basic activities for the first year including professional development, assessment, and internships. All of these elements should be included in a formal agreement to establish the partnership.

A very significant stage in this model is the identification and initial connection with the actual school that will become the PDS. The identification of the school is a major step that truly begins the actual PDS. The leadership message must be clear message: the PDS is a partnership with a shared research focus, designed to improve teacher preparation, designed to enhance professional development for teachers, and designed to improve student achievement.

Two additional key stakeholders must be included in the process following this model. They are the teachers in the school and the parents of the children. The leadership team should articulate that possible changes for them may include university courses taught at the PDS, university students at their school in methods classes and internships. The new opportunities for the teachers may allow them to serve as a mentor teacher for an intern/student teacher, have methods students assisting in their classroom, or co-teach with a student teacher or college faculty member. They might participate in professional development related to instruction, participate in or publish research related to instructional needs of students. The final key group of stakeholders important to include in the implementation process is parents. This group must be addressed at the informational level of change and assured that they will be involved in a process that will benefit their children.

After about the first year, or 18 months of implementation, it is most likely that the PDS will be functioning at levels of change ranging from unconcerned, informational, or personal, and at some levels, management. Leadership and intervention for the establishment of a PDS is a recursive process, moving forward and backward with each new stakeholder and each new stage of the process. Effective Leadership at each step of implementation of a PDS requires communicating and establishing an agreed upon definition of the PDS and assuring a clear understanding of common goals and individual responsibilities, clarifying and operationalizing these goals and purposes, navigating the mix of priorities and values in the K-12 and college/university cultures and always preparing to answer: What is this change? What does it mean for me?

As these basic questions are addressed with clear and consistent messages, the process will move forward. Following a strategic model that is based on meeting the standards and essential elements of the PDS will increase the quality of teacher preparation, offer an extensive range of experiences that will prepare teacher candidates for the realities of the classroom, and encourage career retention within the teaching profession.

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