

Chapter 80

Nurturing Teacher Development and Promoting Student Academic Achievement through a Reciprocal Learning Experience

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ABSTRACT

True education occurs when teachers become learners and learners become teachers (Freire, 2000). This epistemological ideal was achieved through reciprocal learning experiences of a successful Professional Development School (PDS) partnership between one high school and a local university. This chapter presents a model for a PDS relationship that: a) promotes a professional community of learners, b) engenders reciprocal teaching and learning, c) encourages mentoring at multiple levels, and d) positively impacts student and candidate learning. Data analyses indicate significant benefits to all participants due to the unique opportunities created by the partnerships in learning embedded within a PDS setting.

INTRODUCTION

The preparation of future teachers and the quality of P-12 schools are factors that have a great impact on student achievement (Blank & de las Alas, 2009; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Goldhaber & Liddle, 2012). Professional Development Schools (PDS) provide collaborative opportunities for

both universities and P-12 schools to focus on the improvement of teacher preparation and school quality (NCATE, 2010). A vital element in successful school reform is the relationship of teacher growth and development to student learning and achievement. In an effort to positively impact that relationship, a major emphasis of a PDS is the provision of an environment in which all

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stakeholders involved gain in knowledge and skill development. Cochran-Smith (2009) indicated that professional development schools provide an opportunity to arrange internships so that students, in collaboration with experienced teachers, can learn to “teach against the grain.” She goes further to use the term “collaborative resonance” to describe programs that foster critical inquiry within a culture of collaboration so that “novices and experienced professionals alike work to learn from, interpret, and ultimately alter day-to-day life of schools” (p. 284).

PDS partnerships are ultimately about the learning acquisition and outcomes of children in the P-12 schools (NAPDS, 2008). The work that university faculty do, the experiences that candidates in professional education programs receive, and the professional development of career teachers is very important and integral to the success of the partnerships, but it is the work that is done to enhance those opportunities that brings about learning opportunities for children. A PDS can become a “hub” of professional development opportunities for teachers in multiple phases of their careers, including candidates in pre-service teacher education programs and career teachers who provide mentoring for new and beginning teachers. As indicated by Holland (2005), professional development can influence teachers’ instructional practices significantly and lead to improved student achievement when it focuses on 1) how students learn particular subject matter; 2) instructional practices that are specifically related to the subject matter and how students understand it; and 3) strengthening teachers’ knowledge of specific subject-matter content.

The PDS described in this article is a suburban high school situated within fifteen miles of the university. The student population consists of approximately 1,700 9-12 students of which 76% Caucasian, 15% African American, 5% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 2% Multiracial and Other, and 0% Native American. 22% of the student population is on free or reduced lunch. The PDS relationship

that has evolved at this PDS high school began with a request that was initiated through the PDS Committee work plan. Each department within the high school was asked to generate a wish list of areas that they felt university faculty could assist. The social studies department approached the university with requests for particular needs which included a workshop on Socratic seminar and help with End-of-Course-Tests (EOCs) student preparation. This request was passed along to the methods professor which resulted in a successful in a professional development workshop on Socratic Seminar and a collectively defined goal of developing a sustainable tutoring program to help at risk social studies students. Objectives of the tutoring program focus on student weaknesses in reading comprehension and study skills and habits. The intervention program is based on the premise that if students developed the skills and strategies for learning and understanding social studies this would translate into higher student achievement in social studies courses and improved student success on End-of-Course-Tests. The learning outcomes of this tutoring program are the focus of this chapter.

This tutoring program is not a typical university-school program. The uniqueness of this experience is that the tutoring program is embedded in the university social studies methods course for middle and secondary candidates, which is taught onsite at the PDS. The tutoring program targets struggling students enrolled in social studies courses required for graduation and is offered weekly throughout the academic year. The emphases of this tutoring program are improving students’ study habits, test taking and study skills, and strengthening students’ reading comprehension strategies. The social studies methods course serves as a bridge between theory and practice by merging research-based practices with real-time applications in clinical settings. Candidates practice what they are taught and systematically reflect on their learning.

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