

PDS Partners

The Official Magazine of the National Association for Professional Development Schools

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A Message From the President

Donna M. Culan, Howard County Public School System

I hope this issue of *PDS Partners* finds you rested and rejuvenated after the summer. Whatever the summer held for you, I hope you are now fully energized as you begin the 2010-2011 school year.



At the summer meeting of the Executive Council and Board of Directors (EC/BoD) of NAPDS, the newest members of the group were welcomed and put right to work! On behalf of the EC/BoD, I would like to again welcome Kevin Bivins, Karen Hassel, and JoNancy Warren. Kevin joins the EC/BoD as the P-12 member of the Board of Directors, completing the term for a vacated position. Karen and JoNancy will serve as co-chairs of the Membership and Elections Committee. Each brings much to the association leadership—NAPDS is very fortunate to have them as members and to have them serve on the EC/BoD!

In addition to welcoming Kevin, Karen, and JoNancy, EC/BoD addressed many issues at the summer meeting. The review and revision of the NAPDS by-laws is almost complete. The revised by-laws will be presented to the membership in early January so that a vote on these can be taken at the March NAPDS Business Meeting. The "branding" of NAPDS was discussed and a session will be held at the PDS National Conference in March for input by members on possible brands for our organization. Please consider joining us to share your insights, ideas, and opinions as we work together to determine the best and most accurate "public face" of NAPDS.

The EC/BoD wishes you a smooth start to the new academic year. We look forward to hearing from you in this magazine, in the association's journal (*School-University Partnerships*), on Facebook, and through any other means. And we look forward to seeing you in March in New Orleans for the 2011 Professional Development Schools National Conference!

Donna Culan is the President of the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) and a Facilitator for the Professional Development Schools Program in the Professional and Organizational Development Division of the Howard County (Maryland) Public School System. She can be reached at donna_culan@kcpss.org.

An Intern's Reflection on the PDS National Conference

Lorraine McGarry, Park Forest Elementary School

"I realized that an effective PDS community succeeds for the same reason: it proves its regard for the voices of students, new teachers, veteran teachers, and teacher educators alike, by providing opportunities for dynamic, multi-way communication."

In a typical corporate meeting room, it is not uncommon to find a framed poster displaying a scenic photograph, the word "INNOVATION," and the quote - *"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."* - Charles Darwin

Attempting to apply evolutionary biology to market economics, the poster suggests that the success of a business is directly connected to its ability to adapt to changing market conditions. In particular, it evokes the idea that human organizations are acted on by outside forces and must react to those forces in order to endure: it is, in essence, a philosophy of competition and survival. This philosophy often creeps into education as well, particularly when budget cuts, policy changes, and social trends loom as outside forces to which educators have to react in order to survive. It presents itself in competition among schools, districts, and states and can, if left unchecked, create a culture of fear, scarcity, and powerlessness. Nevertheless, I believe that there is an alternate philosophy at work among many educators, a belief that my week at the 2010 PDS National Conference (co-sponsored by the University of South Carolina and NAPDS) confirmed. In speeches and presentations by leading-edge educators, I heard stories of students and teachers who are proactively bridging the "what is" to the "what could be" and "rewriting the story" that has been scripted for education. It is to this latter philosophy—one of collaboration and creative power, rather than competition and survival—that I subscribe as a new teacher and that I hope to embody throughout my career.

Prior to attending the conference, I had an infant's understanding of Professional Development Schools as physical communities of new and veteran teachers, sharing knowledge about the profession, reflecting on their practice, and engaging in inquiry. However, between Dr. Brian Schultz' address on Friday morning and subsequent presentations, discussions, and encounters throughout the weekend, I began to see PDS as the community of ideas that my patient Professional Development Associates have been describing since I was a prospective intern. In sharing his work with students in the Chicago Public Schools, Dr. Schultz made a point to remind us that effective teachers do not give their students voices but rather allow student voices to be heard. As he spoke, I realized that an effective PDS community succeeds for the same reason: it proves its regard for the voices of students, new teachers, veteran teachers, and teacher educators alike, by providing opportunities for dynamic, multi-way communication. In this type of collaborative community, the intelligence lies in the group, with dialogue about creative practices, action research, and reflections of the members elevating the quality of education for all. The educators behind the voices in this community understand their students' needs, recognize the shortcomings of current educational models, and support risk-taking that bridges the "what is" to the "what could be." Although these educators are continually impacted by outside forces, my interactions with them that week assured me that the future of education is still being designed and that students and teachers are far from powerless in shaping it.

The proactive and collaborative power of the PDS community became most clear to me following my presentations on service learning, when I received numerous questions about how to "fit" such learning into a daily schedule and how to obtain administrator support for "non-traditional" teaching. Several questions came from classroom teachers in states where a strong focus on standardization has inhibited educator attempts to integrate curriculum and design project-based learning opportunities. However, after having explored and tried service learning with fellow interns, veteran teachers, teacher educators, and administrators in the Penn State/State College Area School District PDS, I was able to share both my practices and my evidence of student learning with others seeking to effect positive change. I was able to provide concrete examples of how my project addressed specific language arts, mathematics, and social studies standards and boosted student engagement through authentic learning opportunities. Although only an intern, I believe that I was able to add value to a conference-wide conversation on service-oriented, authentic learning and to help bridge the gap from standardized teaching to Dr. Schultz' model of student-centered learning in the Chicago Public Schools.

As I collected my thoughts for this reflection, I realized that these concepts were neither new to me, nor reserved for a group of insiders who attend PDS conferences. In fact, I had heard all of this before, from my methods course instructors on their self-described "soapboxes," from the Professional Development Associates guiding me through collaboration,

reflection, and inquiry, and in every reading and assignment that I have completed during my time as a PDS intern. However, the conference brought these repeated exposures together for me in a powerful and punctuating way. It helped me recognize that outside forces will continue to impact education throughout my career, but that I have the ability and responsibility to make my voice heard and transcend the impulse to react and survive. Perhaps more importantly, I have also learned that my voice is far more informed

and powerful when I am part of a learning community and that I must actively seek opportunities to collaborate with other students and educators. In the end, while I hope to “INNOVATE” wherever I teach, I plan to do so not when forced to adapt to change, but to proactively improve education for all learners. With no offense intended to Darwin, I would prefer the following quote on my classroom wall:

Be the change you wish to see in the world. – Mahatma Gandhi

Lorraine completed her internship in the Penn State University/State College Area School District PDS in June 2010 and is now an elementary teacher in a 1st/2nd-grade multiage classroom at Park Forest Elementary School in State College, PA, which is an active partner in the PSU/SCASD PDS. She can be reached at lsm17@scasd.org.

Developing a Reading Tutoring Program for Struggling Students in a PDS School

*Suzanne Horn and Amy Thornburg, Queens University of Charlotte
Paul Bonner and Shavonn Perkins, Myers Park Traditional School*

Review of the Literature

The inability of students to read is a social justice issue. Illiteracy causes students to miss out on information and opportunities afforded to them upon graduation, if they graduate. Those who cannot read have hindered access to both economic and political power (Alger, 2007). Cooter and Perkins (2007) call for researchers to address reading success of students since “...literacy is the gateway to opportunity, social justice, and freedom...”(8).

There is a need for teachers to commit both heart and mind to improve literacy and implement reading strategies in addition to teaching content (Alger, 2007). “One of the challenges in teaching is to find ways to meet students where they are in their learning and to then help them develop their skills...” (Singer & Shagoury, 2005, p. 1). Allowing children to pass through our schools with below average literacy levels is setting students up for many difficulties. With this in mind it is important that we all work together in the community of education to

help students succeed.

Framework for the PDS

PDS schools are teaching schools that work toward improving the education of pre-service teachers, strengthening knowledge of practicing teachers, and enhancing teaching by serving as models for others (Snow & Marshall, 2002). A successful partnership functions effectively and acts in a collaborative manner (Marlow, Kyed & Connors, 2005) respecting the partnership enough to work across two or more organizations towards the same goals (Teitel, 2003).

Pre-service teachers in the PDS are more likely to work with mentor teachers and receive feedback, structured supervision, and opportunities to experiment and reflect (Hallinan & Khmelkov, 2001). Pre-service teachers in PDS settings are better prepared when they leave college (Koehnecke, 2001); thus, the K-12 school receives better-prepared candidates who are less likely to suffer from reality shock, leading to lower attrition rates (Hallinan &

Khmelkov, 2001).

Setting

The elementary school in which we conducted the tutoring project on which we report here is located in a large metropolitan area in the South Eastern United States. The school has an enrollment of 713 students with 35% being African American, 2% Asian, 2% Hispanic, 3% declaring themselves multi-racial, and 58% Caucasian. 24% of students are benefiting from free and reduced lunch.

Queen’s University was founded in 1857 and has transformed from an all-women’s college into a comprehensive university. The university offers degrees in undergraduate, evening, and graduate programs and has an enrollment of 2,300 undergraduate and graduate students.

Participants

There were a total of 16 fifth graders who participated in the tutoring program. Of the 16, there were 7 males and 9 females; 15 were African Americans and 1 was a Caucasian student. 15 were

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participating in the free or reduced lunch program.

The Tutoring Program

As a part of this PDS-based project, the Queens University researchers met with the principal and literacy facilitator at this elementary school to determine the specific needs of low performing 5th grade students. College students in an education course were selected to become tutors and learn about how to help struggling readers in their future classrooms.

The researchers, two fifth grade teachers, and the literacy facilitator planned the semester of tutoring to improve struggling students' reading and comprehension skills. The tutors were trained in the Question Answer Relationship (QAR) model. This model helps develop students' comprehension skills while reading, focusing on how to answer specific types of questions (e.g., explicit versus implicit questions).

Pre-service teachers from the university tutored at the elementary school under the supervision of a university professor and the fifth grade teachers. The materials used were passages similar to those students faced on the state's end-of-grade testing. While focusing on the QAR model, tutors also

incorporated strategies from past education courses. One day a week, for an hour, tutors met with students in small groups. On a second day, students met with the tutor independently. During all tutoring sessions, university faculty were present to mentor and facilitate. After each session they met with the tutors to debrief, share ideas, brainstorm, teach, and plan. The faculty offered advice about working with struggling students who were frustrated. The faculty stressed that motivation is essential to becoming a successful reader and tutors were provided with ideas to help motivate students.

A pre and post-survey was given to the students at the first tutoring session and then again at the final session to monitor any growth in motivation or comfort level. To measure motivation, the questions from the survey included statements like the following: I like to read, I can easily understand what I read, I know how to find the answers to the questions at the end of the passage, etc.. The students ranked their feelings on each topic from one to three, with one being the highest and three being the lowest.

Results

Upon completion of the tutoring sessions, findings proved that

students increased in their ability to answer questions after reading a specific passage. Nine of the 16 met expected growth. Fourteen out of 16 passed their End-of-Grade Exam.

Further, on the post-survey students showed that they were more comfortable answering questions. The statements that had the highest jump in ratings from the pre- to post-test were “I like to read” and “I can easily understand what I read.” The surveys show that students really did value the tutoring sessions and that these sessions improved their comfort level when reading passages.

Conclusion

Throughout the sessions, students were very motivated and excited to participate. If a student missed a session they would frequently ask the university faculty member when they could make up the time they missed. This is exciting since most struggling students do not want to spend time reading passages and answering questions. We were pleased that half of the students who started behind attained expected growth in their grade level. We were also pleased that the majority of the students (14) passed their grade level test. Their success has opened

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The “Stages” of a Professional Development School (PDS) Relationship

*Fran Greb and Amy Bembridge, Montclair State University
Alison Noel-Alva, Knollwood School*

The “script” for our PDS partnership was written over nine years ago. Some of the original “cast” has moved to other “stages” while others who had “leading roles” are now “stand-ins” or “extras.” The “stage” remains the same; however, the players assume different roles. This theatrical metaphor serves as a description of the life of a PDS relationship between Montclair State University

in Montclair, NJ, and Knollwood School in Parsippany, NJ.

At the beginning of this partnership one of the now “leading ladies,” Allison Noel-Alva, was an “understudy” while she completed her student teaching. She attended professional development workshops, gained confidence through experience, and profited from mentoring. Allison then

secured a position as a first grade teacher at Knollwood. As she became more confident in her “role” as an educator, she began to investigate ways to further hone her skills. This investigation brought her to the work of Ruth Charney and the Responsive Classroom® approach to classroom management which she shared with her university mentor who is

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them to possible future success in schooling when encountering text assignments, as they now have access to effective strategies and find themselves at a passable reading level.

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Digital Reflective Practice in the PDS Setting

Gary Willhite and Rita Chen, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Deborah Markos, Logan High School

Digital storytelling, through the lens of reflective practice, has had a positive yet challenging impact on our Professional Development School (PDS) teacher candidates. Positive in the sense of true reflective practice demonstrated. Challenging for the PDS teacher candidate as reflective practice requires accountability and change.

Our experiences and research are based in two very different PDS settings that are both identified as Field Experience I with each averaging 24 students per semester. Site one is a K-5 elementary school with a reading emphasis. Teacher candidates meet each day on site for class and then tutor in reading for an hour. Site two is a 9-12 secondary school in which teacher candidates are placed in all disciplines with a general methods emphasis. Teacher candidates are expected to be in the field 4 days

a week for 2.5 hours and meet for class on site on Thursdays—often the secondary grades faculty co-teach with the university instructor. As university instructors we chose to work collaboratively on this project to prod our students into moving beyond reflection to reflective practice.

Historically John Dewey (1933) is acknowledged as a key originator of the concept of reflection. Dewey considered reflection to be a special form of problem-solving thinking to resolve an issue. His basic ideas are seminal and indicate that reflection may be seen as an active and deliberative cognitive process. Dewey implies that two distinct components are involved in reflective thinking: the process and the content. In order to have a better understanding about teachers' reflective thoughts, both the process and the content of reflective thinking must be

considered simultaneously.

Reflective practice, on the other hand, rests on the belief that a teacher should be more than a technician. A reflective practitioner is a teacher who moves beyond rigid or impulsive approaches to classroom situations, considering new ways of framing a problem to arrive at new solutions to that problem (Jay & Johnson, 2002; Schön, 1983). Reflection is more than thinking about a problem; reflection is about recognizing, analyzing, and solving problems (Danielson, 2008). Reflective practice is complex, and many who write about reflectivity resist reducing reflection to a set of techniques (Jay & Johnson, 2002; Larrivee, 2000).

Schön (1983) describes the process of reflection as a three-stage cycle. At the first stage, reflection-for-action, the teacher takes into

“Digital storytelling, through the lens of reflective practice, has had a positive yet challenging impact on our Professional Development School (PDS) teacher candidates. Positive in the sense of true reflective practice demonstrated. Challenging for the PDS teacher candidate as reflective practice requires accountability and change.”

“While this yielded interesting information, it was more of the typical ‘I felt’ messages of reflection with little depth or understanding of what they should do while and after reflecting. We then took a diverse approach to the assignment. The elementary PDS focused on reflective practice as related to reading skills and strategies learned and tried in the field experience. The secondary PDS focused on reflective practice as related to the use of Web 2.0 as an effective teaching strategy.”

account student needs, content, and the strategies to be used by planning instruction. At the next stage, reflection-in-action, the teacher responds to the immediate situation, modifying approaches and drawing upon prior knowledge and techniques to create a functioning learning situation. The third stage is reflection-on-action, in which the teacher analyzes successes and problems and what these imply for future practice. In this way, the teacher cycles back to reflection-for-action with new knowledge to repeat the cycle. In other words, the reflective practitioner encounters a situation that stimulates the practitioner to view the situation in a new way, in a new frame (Schön, 1983). This reframing of a problem stimulates a new course of action. Finally, the course of action is taken and evaluated for future practice. This is the direction we anticipated our teacher candidates moving in with digital storytelling or digital reflective practice.

Digital storytelling is a term that is ambiguous, but generally involves the combination of storytelling and the usage of digital technology

(Freidus & Hlubinka, 2002). As a meaningful practice, digital storytelling can be viewed within the context of new technologies and their meaningfulness to young people (Robin, 2008). The most popular technologies for young people tend to be those that require user contributed content or social media—technology that the user can manipulate and customize. Within this context, digital storytelling has emerged as a classroom practice to create personalized stories using technologies that are attractive to students, while providing benefits to student learning (Robin, 2008).

One common method of digital storytelling consists of a series of still images with narration (Bull & Kayder, 2004). Digital storytelling can also take the form of narration accompanying a live-action video (Valkanova & Watts, 2007). The content of a digital story can also be quite diverse. Digital stories can be used to inform/instruct or examine historical events (Robin, 2008; Sadik, 2008). Digital stories can also be used to tell a personal story or personal reflection—this is perhaps their most common use

(Robin, 2008).

The project on which we report in this article, conducted over the past four semesters, has been enlightening for all of us. At first, we asked the teacher candidates to “reflect” on their experiences in the field. While this yielded interesting information, it was more of the typical “I felt” messages of reflection with little depth or understanding of what they should do while and after reflecting. We then took a diverse approach to the assignment. The elementary PDS focused on reflective practice as related to reading skills and strategies learned and tried in the field experience. The secondary PDS focused on reflective practice as related to the use of Web 2.0 as an effective teaching strategy.

This past academic year, we modeled and discussed reflective practice with the teacher candidates at each site. We hope this reflective practice helps our teacher candidates construct their professional identities as teachers through creating and crafting their multimedia tales. We documented their professional growth and

“Editors’ Corner”

*Kristien Zenkov, George Mason University
James Harmon, Euclid High School
Athene Bell, Manassas City School District*

Since the 2010 PDS National Conference in Orlando, about 60 members of the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) have been involved in face-to-face and on-line conversations about the future of *PDS Partners*. This committee has included representatives from almost thirty states, universities, and schools, representing more than two dozen PDS partnerships. In these discussions, we have assumed that the magazine would grow, but we have also been very conscious of expanding the ways that *PDS Partners* serves NAPDS constituents and everyone involved with PDS work. Ideas have included regular columns by interns, mentor teachers, and university supervisors; a “Dear Abby”-type column through which PDS challenges might be addressed by a range of constituents; and offering the magazine as a benefit of institutional (rather than only individual) memberships so that entire partnerships might gain from its content. At the July 2010 meeting of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors of NAPDS, Kristien reported the results of these initial conversations, and by the next PDS National Conference (New Orleans, Mar. 10th-13th, 2011) this committee will have concluded its work and will make recommendations about the direction and future contents of the magazine. We invite all readers to suggest ways that the magazine might better serve all PDS constituents—from interns to P-12 students—by contacting us.

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pedagogical competencies represented in this semiotic transformation. The result has been on target and rewarding. Constructing their digital stories gave the teacher candidates a voice and a space to “redefine their powers and limits and rewrite all the rules” (Lundby, 2008, p. 6) in their PDS experience. Through modeling and direct teaching of

reflective practice through digital media, we will continue to explore the increased awareness of what reflective practice is and how it impacts one’s teaching.

Gary Willhite is Associate Professor, serves as the Director of the Master of Education in Professional Development program, and is an Eagle Bluffs

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The “Stages” of a Professional Development School (PDS) Relationship

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also the PDS Liaison to Knollwood School. The Liaison shared this information with the school and due to great interest a study group was formed. The study group, facilitated by seasoned Knollwood teachers and the Liaison, continued to learn how to improve their teaching through a Responsive Classroom® lens.

As the teachers became “experts” in various teaching techniques, they shared this information at “local theaters” and took it on the road “nationally.” After years of “touring” some of the actors were ready to assume supporting roles. Now, Allison assumed the

leadership role of the study group and is facilitating research on the power of teacher language. The staff is embracing the work and attending monthly lunch-and-learn sessions. Plans are in place for continuation of this community of learners facilitated by Allison, one of our former student teachers.

Our PDS is constantly changing and actors move from “stand-ins,” to “leading people,” to “members of the audience.” This metaphor describes the “show” that is constantly developing in our collaborative and adaptive school/university partnership.

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“As the teachers became “experts” in various teaching techniques they shared this information at “local theaters” and took it on the road “nationally.” After years of “touring” some of the actors were ready to assume supporting roles. Now, Allison assumed the leadership role of the study group and is facilitating research on the power of teacher language. The staff is embracing the work and attending monthly lunch-and-learn sessions. Plans are in place for continuation of this community of learners facilitated by Allison, one of our former student teachers.”

Update on *School-University Partnerships: The Journal of the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS)*

*Pam Campbell, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Eva White, Clark County School District, Nevada*

We are honored to serve NAPDS as Senior Co-Editors of *School-University Partnerships: The Journal of the National Association for Professional Development Schools*. Thank you to the NAPDS Board of Directors and the Executive Board for their support during this past year. In particular, we are most grateful for the generous encouragement and professional expertise of our predecessor, Roger Brindley.

As Co-Editors, we are committed to representing the voices and vision of both university and school-based educators who are engaged in Professional Development Schools. During the past 12 months, we have added five Associate Editor Teams

consisting of one member from a university/college setting and one from the partnering P-12 setting for a total of 20 Associate Editors. We also now have more than 60 people who have agreed to serve as Reviewers, giving of their time to provide valuable feedback on your research. A concerted effort is being put forth to match the content of the manuscripts that are submitted to the expertise of the journal's Associate Editors and Reviewers, while maintaining the mission of the journal to represent both college/university and P-12 voices in the process. Thus, authors can be confident that their submissions will be reviewed both by college/university and P-12 partners.

The first issue for which we have had responsibility is with the publisher and we are in the process of finalizing the second. We encourage you to submit manuscripts that represent both university and school-based research and practice and, in particular, provide evidence of the effectiveness of our PDS.

Pam Campbell is an Associate Professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; she can be reached at campbelp@unlv.nevada.edu. Eva White is an Academic Manager with the Clark County School District in Nevada; she can be reached at emwhite@interact.ccsd.net.

The 2011 PDS National Conference: An Update from the NAPDS Conference Committee

Bruce Field, University of South Carolina

The Planning Team for the 2011 PDS National Conference (March 10th-13th in New Orleans, Louisiana) is busy putting together the schedule and program for the event. The last dozen years of conference dialogue have enriched our understanding of the difficulties embedded in crafting and sustaining successful PDS collaborations, and so for 2011 we will be inviting PDS practitioners to share the strategies they have designed to meet and overcome those challenges. While we recognize that there are numerous such challenges, the Conference Planning Team has identified five strands and encourages individuals and teams of PDS partners to offer conference attendees practical suggestions, based on their own personal and collective experiences, for overcoming these specific hurdles.

The five conference strands are:

- Engaging Faculty and Administrators in a PDS
- Identifying Funding and Other Resources
- Succeeding in a Challenging Political Climate
- Designing Successful High School and Middle School PDSs
- The Special Challenges of Rural and Urban PDSs

While most of the planning for the annual conference takes place at the University of South Carolina, the faculty and staff at USC greatly appreciate the work of colleagues throughout the nation in helping us orchestrate the event. As you perhaps know, since 2006 the Conference Planning Team has recognized specific institutions

that have gone above and beyond the call in support of the conference by naming annual recipients of the "Spirit of Partnership Award." The five recipients of the award have been the University of Central Florida, East Stroudsburg University, Towson University, Salisbury University, and the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. We look forward to naming the 2011 award recipient and to seeing all of you in New Orleans!

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Pre-service Teachers as Agents of Change: Examining College Readiness at the PDS

Martin J. Ward and Sherry L. Simmons, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi
Delia M. McLerran, Roy Miller High School

University pre-service teachers are invited participants in the commitment to make Roy Miller High School in Corpus Christi, Texas the best it can be. The school-university partnership between Miller High School (MHS) and Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC) is in its 12th year. This partnership lends itself to the innovative efforts of MHS faculty and administration in preparing their graduates for success as future college students.

College attendance is one of several viable options upon graduation for most high school students across our nation. For many MHS students, however, going to college seems to be only a remote possibility. As with other urban, high-poverty, predominantly minority high schools, most MHS students' parents are not college-educated. In a survey of MHS students, only 19 of 221 reported that their fathers had earned a college degree while only 22 of 241 students reported that their mothers had graduated from college. Furthermore, 106 of the fathers and 104 of the mothers of the surveyed MHS students did not complete high school. The MHS students whose parents did not attend college were three times more likely not to pursue a college degree than the students whose parents did attend college (Ward, et al., 2004).

Recently, MHS Principal Delia McLerran and Texas A&M University site professor Marty Ward collaborated to pioneer an assignment for the pre-service teachers that would enhance their professional development at MHS, as well as the college readiness efforts of the school. To launch this project, TAMU-CC pre-service teachers were required

to develop individual PowerPoint presentations that encouraged MHS students to pursue a college degree and possibly consider a career in teaching. In addition, the pre-service teachers were asked to observe and gather information about how students at MHS were being prepared for a successful experience in higher education.

Early in the semester, Delia led a seminar with the pre-service teachers that introduced the topic of college readiness at MHS and identified unique challenges faced by many MHS students concerning a college-bound future. She emphasized rigor, relevance, relationships and reflection as the "Four Rs" that establish the foundation in the school's quest to better prepare its students for college. Additionally, Marty equipped pre-service teachers with topically relevant readings from selected resources.

The MHS College Readiness Project was a two-part assignment. Each pre-service teacher was required to compose an individual paper that connected happenings at MHS with the topic of college readiness. Outside research was necessary and at least three journal references were required for the completed paper. Interviews with school administration, faculty and students were encouraged. Marty provided feedback to the pre-service teachers on preliminary drafts of their papers. The finished papers were submitted to Delia and shared with other interested faculty and administration.

The project culminated with multimedia presentations involving groups of three to five pre-service teachers to Delia, Marty and other MHS faculty/administration. The 15-20 minute presentations were followed by an informal panel

discussion. Pre-service teachers' grades for this project assignment were based upon their papers and the group presentation.

"What would you do to better prepare MHS students for college?" In their pursuit to answer this question posed through the college readiness project, Sherry Simmons and her fellow pre-service teachers became active agents of change at MHS. Sherry reported, "A whirlwind of ideas quickly filled my head regarding my own personal beliefs about education reform and my sometimes frustrating college experience. I immediately began to reflect on what could have been done to better prepare myself for college. Additionally, I started to recall ideas and methods that have been discussed by my knowledgeable professors pertaining to this topic."

In the weeks that followed, Sherry spent many hours scouring through her class notes, personal books, articles, online resources, the library database, and interviewing several colleagues. However, when she began to write her paper, she realized that her focus had been on college preparation for the "typical" high school student, not the students of MHS. Consequently, she began to spend more time making meaningful observations in her clinical classrooms, including the newly initiated Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) classes for MHS freshmen and sophomores. She also interviewed two MHS counselors and several students. Thus, she was able to narrow her scope and construct ideas that would be most beneficial to the students of MHS.

The process of collaborating with other pre-service teachers proved both energizing and challenging.

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Accepting others' viewpoints, personalities and methods required open-mindedness, patience and perseverance on the part of each group member. The result was a fresh, meaningful perspective on college readiness at MHS. Delia and the other MHS faculty and administration who participated in the multi-media presentations took notes, asked questions, and were enthusiastically engaged. Sherry and her group members were left with a sense of pride and encouragement as future educators.

The MHS College Readiness Project elevated the university pre-service teachers from guests in

training to agents of change. The project allowed the pre-service teachers to reflect upon and evaluate the overall academic program at MHS in terms of its effectiveness in preparing students for college, as well as specific endeavors such as the AVID course. Faculty and administration members were equipped with thoughtful insights regarding their existing programs and fresh ideas to consider in their continuous journey to better prepare MHS students for higher educational opportunities. For some pre-service teachers, this project had a profound and inspiring effect. In Sherry's words, "My passion for improving student achievement was intensified and

my belief that I could be an agent of change was renewed."

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Impacting Teacher Candidates through the Development of Communities of Practice

Christine Sherretz, University of Louisville Liaison

Dewey Hensley, J.B. Atkinson Academy for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

J. B. Atkinson Academy for Excellence in Teaching and Learning is beginning its 4th semester as a Professional Development School. As we reflect back on where we have been and where will still need to go, one key component of the partnership that has resonated in our thinking is the importance of developing a community of practice through professional learning communities that include teachers, staff, administration, university faculty, and teacher candidates.

It has become clear that in order to "turn around" low performing school principals must leverage professional development to affect student achievement. In order for that professional development and the resulting improved student

achievement to become "systemic" and permanent, the principal must retain the teachers who have experienced that relevant professional growth. To foster this growth and teacher retention the principal must collaborate with partners to provide access to cutting edge, research-based practices and create a sense of "significance" in each teacher. By utilizing the knowledge of the university we can help ensure our professional development experiences are relevant, innovative and important. By having teachers collaborate with university students, university teachers, and community members, we can build that sense of significance and relevance. Such partnerships are conducive to classroom and school-wide research projects that can identify

professional development needs and evaluate new and seasoned programs and practices.

This learning community positively impacts teacher candidates at our PDS. Teacher candidates and the university liaison begin each semester by attending all of the professional development activities attended by their mentor teachers at the PDS. This builds an immediate sense of community and collaboration. Additionally, our teacher candidates participate in weekly faculty meetings, weekly professional development led by teacher leaders at the school, grade level professional development, and in-services and training by the literacy coach. Participation in these activities connects the teacher candidates to the school and grade

level learning communities. The inclusion of the teacher candidates in professional development prepares them for the immediate curricular and instructional activities being implemented in the school. The partnership has enabled teacher candidates to be involved in authentic teaching opportunities with qualified teachers in a supportive, research-based field site. Teachers at the PDS are provided with professional development opportunities that will continue to push them to further excellence in teaching, and research and innovative teaching strategies and projects are underway that focus on student achievement. One student teacher noted in an interview, “There are tons of support systems. There are many professional development opportunities. Everyone is willing to share the wealth of knowledge they have. I get immediate feedback and positive instruction.”

While developing and fostering this learning community, the key players in our PDS have learned some valuable insights. First, at the core of any PDS should be the needs of students. Utilizing the skills and resources of university faculty and students, offering professional development opportunities to teachers, and actively engaging in research are all done with the overarching idea of meeting

the academic, emotional, and physical needs of the students in the PDS. The professional learning community allows everyone the ability to accurately and effectively review and analyze those specific student needs. Second, relationships between university faculty and staff and teachers and staff at the PDS have to be established and maintained. For example, teachers and faculty members must be allowed to plan together collaboratively, and time for meetings and research should be valued and allowed in the schedule of all parties. Third, strong leadership from the principal and the university has to be provided to sustain the PDS. The principal must encourage teachers to become involved and take risks. Additionally, leadership at the university must support faculty in their work at the PDS. This includes viewing faculty work at the PDS as a legitimate and recognized commitment of time and supporting the PDS financially.

Our PDS has had a great impact on all partners because of the professional learning community that has been fostered. Teacher efficacy and student achievement have improved. The partnership has opened doorways to everything from best and “even better” practices, teachers as leaders,

differentiation, and larger gains in reading and writing. It has even helped to change the culture and the dialogue between teachers and faculty in the school, thus leading to greater teacher retention. The success is also evident in the high percentage of student teachers from the PDS who have been hired. After the first semester of having student teachers, six of the seven student teachers received jobs, all four of the December graduates received teaching positions in the area, and eight out of nine of our spring 2010 graduates were offered early hire contracts by the local school district. This PDS is now gaining a reputation in the community as being a field site that nurtures and trains the best teachers. We believe this is due to the strong emphasis on a professional learning community that builds a sense of significance for all partners.

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