

Simultaneous Renewal in Research: Principles to Consider in Research on Partnerships

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ABSTRACT: The concept of simultaneous renewal as a vehicle for improving teacher preparation, the teaching practice of experienced teachers and teacher educators, and the contexts of public schools and universities has been a powerful force in the work to establish school–university partnerships and professional development schools. This article describes the development of one partnership over the course of 15 years and its efforts to document the impact of partnership work—in particular, efforts to document the impact of professional development school on the renewal of schools, teachers' practice, and K–12 students' learning; the development of a culture of inquiry through teacher and teacher education candidate's action research; partnership-based preparation on teacher education graduates and their students; and the implementation of the professional development school standards in the partnership discussed here and in a statewide network of partnerships. From the analysis of these efforts, this article proposes a set of principles that reflect a commitment to simultaneous renewal.

The concept of simultaneous renewal, as articulated in the work of Goodlad (1994), has provided a foundation for establishing school–university partnerships and professional development schools (PDSs) to support teacher and educator professional development. The central idea of simultaneously renewing the preparation of new teachers, the practice of experienced teachers and teacher educators, and the contexts of public schools and universities has been a powerful platform for developing and sustaining partnerships that bridge two cultures.

In the early days of school–university partnership work, the focus was on forging relationships and structures that enabled schools

and universities to collaborate. As school–university partnerships have matured and the agenda of simultaneous renewal has begun to be legitimized through the work of national organizations such as the National Network for Educational Renewal and the National Association of Professional Development Schools and through the creation of national standards for PDS by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2001), the focus has shifted to the impact of the work of partnerships. This focus reflects a convergence of external and internal forces in teacher education. Stakeholders at all levels are demanding that practitioners demonstrate results, and partnership participants are at-

tempting to address those demands through research that informs efforts to renew preparation and practice.

We argue that the work to document and describe results of these efforts must be rooted in similar collaboration between public school and university practitioners. In what follows, we provide a description regarding how one partnership developed and sustained structures and processes to provide documentation and evidence of the impact of the work and how that partnership involved multiple layers and perspectives. We describe initiatives undertaken to document and provide evidence of results across the 15-year history of one school–university partnership in order to offer strategies and a framework for such efforts. These initiatives include large-scale studies of the impact of PDS on the renewal of schools, teachers' practice, and K–12 students' learning; the development of a culture of inquiry through teacher and teacher education candidate's action research; the impact of partnership-based preparation on teacher education graduates and their students; and the implementation of the PDS standards in the partnership discussed here and in a statewide network of partnerships. We argue that these processes and structures are as important in their value in sustaining the professional learning communities that make up the partnership as they are in how they provide research and evidence on the success of partnership work. Finally, an analysis of these processes and structures reveals a set of principles to consider when engaging in research on partnerships.

Context

The school–university partnership that serves as the basis for this analysis was established in 1990 as the result of a planning grant from a private foundation to a state land grant university in a small rural state. Initially, university faculty from the colleges of education and arts and sciences collaborated with public school faculty and administrators to design an integrated 5-year dual-degree teacher education program in which students simultane-

ously pursue a bachelor of arts or science and a master of arts in education. This plan includes six intense sequenced clinical experiences that take place in PDSs. Coursework and clinical experiences are designed to support the development of a set of 10 characteristics that the more than 200 participants in the planning process identified as defining the successful novice teacher. The plan states,

We believe that the novice teacher should (1) have a commitment to and skills for life-long learning, (2) be an effective communicator, (3) recognize that teaching is a professional, moral, and ethical enterprise, should understand moral issues and ethical practices in educational environments, and should have developed ethical frameworks which facilitate effective teaching, (4) be a facilitator of learning for all students, (5) have in-depth knowledge of pedagogy, (6) have in-depth knowledge of content, (7) effectively integrate content and pedagogy, (8) be a reflective practitioner, (9) be aware of and have respect for human diversity, and (10) be liberally educated. (Benedum Project, 1992, pp. 5–6)

In addition to identifying these characteristics and articulating a program framed around them, the planning group adopted a set of five core belief statements intended to guide the development of PDSs:

1. All in a Professional Development School are learners.
2. All in a Professional Development School have the opportunity for success.
3. The organization of a Professional Development School encourages all to be empowered.
4. A Professional Development School fosters an environment of mutual respect.
5. A Professional Development School promotes curriculum and instruction that evolves from continual review and that reflects the school's vision. (Steel & Hoffman, 1997, p. 53)

Early on, the work of the partnership focused on the establishment of PDSs. Five public schools in three county-based school

districts spent nearly 3 years engaged in the development of site-based professional learning communities, with parallel development of collaborative structures across their schools and with the university. During this time, public schools in the state were just beginning to engage in forms of site-based management, and this movement, combined with the development of sites of best practice and professional culture, promoted the creation of new roles for teachers and administrators. PDS site-based school improvement teams led by teacher site chairs emerged to support the renewal agenda at each school, particularly through professional development.

As the installation of the 5-year program began, the number of PDSs was expanded several times, resulting in a network of 28 preK–12 public schools and five county school districts. The installation of the 5-year program was the catalyst for another shift in the primary focus of the partnership to the renewal of initial teacher preparation. Although school renewal efforts continued, PDS and university faculty began engaging in the development of both the knowledge base and the structure necessary to implement the new teacher education program.

In addition to growing new PDSs and building the process for preparing new teachers, the partnership expanded and refined its governance structure that provides that space in the middle between public schools and universities where simultaneous renewal is nurtured. This space fosters the creation of new roles and relationships for public school and university participants and broadens the scope of the work to incorporate and integrate these perspectives. As PDS teachers took on responsibility for the teacher education programs in their schools, university faculty forged relationships with PDSs to support their school renewal and teacher education efforts as liaisons to the schools. Principals and superintendents began working with partnership staff to institutionalize these new roles and responsibilities, and the governance structure provided shared ground for each group to systematically and democratically inform the partnership work.

Documenting Results

PDS assessment study—multiplicity of purpose and perspectives. The first attempt to examine the impact of the PDS initiative emerging from this partnership was framed around the five PDS belief statements. Although stakeholders were most interested in the bottom line, or a summative evaluation of the impact of PDS on student achievement, members of the partnership were interested in the formative aspects of the study and the possibility of informing the continued development of PDSs. Capacity building was a critical objective within the partnership, and a research team was structured to represent the membership of the partnership and to build the capacity of PDS and university faculty to participate as researchers and critical consumers of evaluation results. To this end, in 1995 a team of university faculty and graduate students worked with an advisory group of PDS faculty to develop and implement data collection strategies.

Beyond the technical support that PDS faculty provided in the form of access to their schools and the perspectives of their faculties, their contributions to transform the PDS belief statements into a set of interview questions and survey items for K–12 student response were invaluable. For example, the team struggled with the translation of *empowerment* into language that elementary school students would easily understand. PDS teachers guided the team to adopt the phrase *making choices*. When the data began coming in from the elementary PDSs, it was clear that this translation enabled the study to capture developmental differences across schools where students believed they were empowered to participate actively in their own learning. This included, for instance, making choices about what they learned, how they learned it, and how they demonstrated their new knowledge and skills.

The PDS members of the research team also contributed to the mediation of tensions in their schools related to the summative evaluation purposes of the study. It was common knowledge at that time in the partnership that

the major funding agent intended to commission an external evaluation of its efforts to incorporate the PDS belief statements and the impact of those efforts on student outcomes. PDS research team members worked with their schools and the larger team to identify a site-based focus for data collection in each PDS. This site-based focus helped to recast the demand for a connection to student outcomes as a reasonable expectation. Although the guiding belief statements said nothing about student achievement as measured by statewide standardized tests, the collaborative structures and levels of empowerment helped to create a context where partnership participants could take on this responsibility and level of scrutiny of their work.

In addition to broadening the expertise of the research team, an advisory group including representatives of the research team and major stakeholder organizations and agencies (State Department of Education, education policy-making organization, funding agent) was convened to inform the design of the study and serve as a first audience for results. This also served as a capacity-building strategy. Although some members of the advisory group had a history with the partnership work and understood the framework guiding the development of the PDSs, for others this was their first substantive exposure to the concept of simultaneous renewal. Both the research team and the advisory group helped build consensus around understandings of partnership work in general and this partnership in particular. With the advisory group, this issue of contextualization proved to be most important.

During the presentation of results—particularly, the results of an analysis of statewide standardized testing—participants found it very helpful to be able to ground findings in the idiosyncratic context of each school. For example, at one point, there was a discussion of a dip in scores at one PDS, and concerns were raised that this might be an indication that increased professional development and site-based decision making might be diverting teachers' energies from the central work of their classrooms. However, when the history that gave meaning to those results

was provided, the dip was seen as an anomaly. In this case, the results were from a small school with only one classroom at every grade level; the test was administered in the third grade; and the third-grade teacher passed away unexpectedly just before the administration of the test that year. As a result of a commitment to understand site context and local voices in the process, the site-based focus was viewed as legitimate.

A final purpose of the research initiative was to remind and inform all participants across PDS, university, and policymaking contexts of the common core beliefs that were intended to guide the work of the partnership. By asking questions framed around the belief statements, the initiative sent the message that those beliefs were valued. Given where the partnership was in its history, participants who had been engaged in the work since its conception were regrounded in that vision, whereas newcomers were asked to consider it as something that did not just exist as a set of statements.

Action research—practice what you preach. When the 5-year program was designed, an action research sequence was included as the master's-level evidence of research competency. Rather than require a traditional thesis, the planning group opted for a research experience that was viewed as having more utility for teachers and providing an additional opportunity to reinforce reflective practice. The implementation of the action research sequence provides opportunities for authentic collaboration across schools and the university because each student works with both a university and a PDS mentor over the course of 2 years to design, implement, and disseminate a project. This collaboration is intended to strengthen the projects, but it also serves the purpose of enriching partners' understandings of teaching and inquiry.

Although predating National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education demands for documentation of candidate impact on student learning, the action research projects implemented during a full-time teaching internship clearly serve this purpose. Even though the early projects were more broadly

focused—studies of schoolwide initiatives, classroom environmental factors, conditions of work for teachers—a conscious effort has been made in recent years to move the focus directly onto teacher classroom practice and its impact on student learning. The decision to move in this direction was informed by the perspectives of the action research faculty and the Teacher Education Coordinator Network, a network of teacher education leaders from each PDS site. This focus has not only enhanced opportunities for student learning; it has also increased the marketability of graduates as they demonstrate their ability to reflect systematically on the integration of content and pedagogy in the contexts of the needs of their students.

It recently became apparent that the partnership needed to provide transparent models of action research in action in the PDS and university classrooms. Teacher education students were aware of and involved in the renewal efforts in the PDSs and the scholarly research activities of their university faculty but were not seeing explicit models of systematic teacher inquiry in practice in those contexts. The first cohort of action research fellows (veteran teachers working in PDSs) was organized in 2004 to address this need. When this cohort presented its work at the poster exhibit and conference held annually to disseminate the action research studies of the students in the 5-year program, it was joined by action research faculty at the university who disseminated the results of their efforts to conduct action research in the sequence. These dissemination efforts highlighted the value of making PDS and university faculty inquiry transparent to students.

Although candidates were encouraged to work collaboratively across classrooms to examine common aspects of their teaching and student learning, the action research fellows worked alone. When it became apparent that the real vehicle for their inquiry was the energy and expertise shared during their meetings, the second cohort was organized in 2006 around school-based teams. In recognition of the need to elevate teacher inquiry at the uni-

versity, a university-based team was included. In this second cohort, PDS-based teams included an administrator and a faculty member, whereas the university-based team included all faculty members teaching sections of an instructional design course and a PDS teacher.

Graduates study—guiding beliefs, negotiating benefits. Teacher education programs have begun to grapple with the question of how to demonstrate their impact on graduates and the impact of those graduates on the students whom they serve in their classrooms. This focus has been galvanized by the comprehensive review of research on teacher education by the American Education Research Association, the demands of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, and the pressures for ongoing program improvement. In a number of respects, the partnership described here is well positioned to address these questions. As students have matriculated through the program, the data generated have been archived (entry grade point average, ACT/SAT scores, portfolio reviews, course grades, clinical performance scores, etc.), and contact information for a large percentage of six cohorts of graduates has been kept current.

Drawing from previous experiences, a team of PDS and university faculty came together in 2005 to inform the design of a mixed-method study intended to serve as a pilot for a larger comprehensive evaluation of the 5-year teacher education program embedded in the partnership. The study was structured around the standards for preparing new teachers, the 10 characteristics that guide the program, and features of the program such as the intensive clinical placements in PDSs. This research includes the development of a teacher education matriculation database, open-ended semistructured interviews with a convenience sample of 64 program graduates, and a pilot site visit to one PDS where program graduates were observed teaching and interviewed where their mentor teachers and principal were also interviewed.

Although the partnership has been able to provide modest financial support for this work, the most vital support has come from the op-

opportunities for research that team members take on to pursue their own intellectual, scholarly, and practical interests while contributing to a common agenda. For example, one university faculty team member in educational psychology is mostly interested in developing statistical analyses that will connect graduates' performance in the program to success in the classroom, whereas another team member is interested in publishing in the field of program evaluation. His work with the development of the database and the PDS site visits provide a vehicle for that work. Due to her role as a PDS teacher education site coordinator, another team member is invested in the research because it will inform the improvement of the teacher education program in her PDS. Another team member, who serves on the action research faculty, believes that the research will not only lead to scholarly activity but provide an opportunity to evaluate the impact of the action research sequence in terms of preK–12 student learning. As a final example, a university faculty member in instructional design and technology sees his work with the development of the database as a way to apply his knowledge of informational systems development and create opportunities for his graduate students to engage in research.

Statewide standards initiative—a developmental approach. Nearly 5 years ago, this partnership helped to establish a statewide network of 10 public teacher education programs engaging in or considering the establishment of school–university partnerships. This network has leveraged foundation and legislative funds to support and sustain the development of partnerships and the improvement of teacher preparation. As the statewide network has evolved and partnerships have received increasing levels of funding, the need to document the impact of partnership work has intensified. The PDS standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education have been adopted as a guiding framework for assessing the work of the partnerships, and the network is participating in the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education PDS standards documentation pilot

project led by Georgia Southwestern State University and Towson University. The fund project is intended to yield a web-based self-assessment system for partnerships aligned with the PDS standards. In addition to assessing progress toward the standards along a developmental range (beginning, developing, or at standard), the project allows participating partner schools to archive concrete evidence of progress.

To support the 10 local partnerships in providing documentation of impact of the partnership work at the local level, the network has commissioned an initiative intended to do the following: create a structure for providing reports to the legislature, the governor's office, and other key stakeholders on the progress and impact of partnerships statewide; build a long-term strategy for research and documentation of partnership efforts to provide coherency and consistency in how the work is informed within and across partnerships; and provide an evidentiary base of the impact of the partnership work to complement the self-analysis process supporting the PDS standards framework. The design of this documentation initiative involves faculty at the state's two research universities in providing leadership to a team of university and PDS faculty from across the statewide network. This team is in the process of developing the design of the research, which will include case studies at four of the more developed partnerships, as well as the identification of a protocol for collecting longitudinal data across all 10 partnerships. Although representatives of all the partnerships understand the connection between documentation and continued state-level funding, the focus on a developmental perspective in these documentation efforts has been critical in gaining support for the research and access to partnership.

Principles to Consider

In summary, we present a set of principles that have emerged from the research conducted in and about our partnership that we

believe address the complexities of the work of simultaneous renewal. These principles include the following directives:

- Focus on capacity building:* Whether it is a new set of skills for university faculty as they learn to collaborate with practitioners or the ability of public school faculty and stakeholders to become critical consumers of evaluation results, documentation efforts in partnerships can create resources to sustain the broader collaborative agenda and enrich the purposes that may be informed by research initiatives.
- Respect the perspectives of all partners:* The purposes and design of research are enriched and enabled by multiplicity of perspectives from preK–12 and higher education.
- Ground research on partnerships, school renewal, and teacher preparation in the idiosyncratic and powerful contexts of those activities:* Acknowledging contexts increases the ability of research to speak to participants and broader audiences.
- Reflect the guiding beliefs of the partnership:* Some beliefs are articulated in locally developed documents such as the 10 characteristics or the PDS belief statements, whereas others are delineated in national standards; regardless, they provide a consensual framework for the documentation of results. In addition to providing a structure for documentation, the core beliefs of the partnership can and should serve as the basis for framing research initiatives.
- Enhance opportunities for collaboration and be representative of partnership constituencies, including external stakeholders:* A research agenda should be negotiated in the same way as partnership relationships, resulting in benefits for all partners.
- Adopt a developmental approach:* Measuring progress toward standards and goals supports continuous renewal and improvement.

Make documentation a naturally occurring activity in the partnership or network of partnerships: Just as action research should not be an add-on in a classroom setting but rather an organic teaching activity, ongoing longitudinal documentation must become part of the work of the partnership.

In closing, just as the commitment to simultaneously renew teacher education, the teaching of K–12 and university faculty, and the contexts of public schools and university requires us to engage in “powerfully productive symbioses” (Goodlad, 1994, p. 103), engaging in research on the impact of simultaneous renewal should rely on a similar engagement. As Goodlad points out in reference to school–university partnerships and as we have discovered in the work described here, the success of such endeavors depends on distinctive differences between the courting parties; the complementarities of these differences—that is, the degree to which each side’s uniqueness contributes to the other’s and the degree to which the courting parties first envision and then engage this distinction complementarily; and the engaging powerful contextual contingencies. ^{SUP}

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