

CHAPTER 13

LEARNING FROM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Recommendations From 10 Years as a University Liaison

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This paper shifts the lens of the professional development school (PDS) researcher to focus on the university liaison, the intermediary between the university and a public school in a PDS partnership. The goal is to demonstrate how becoming a university liaison with a public school can contribute to one's professional agenda, particularly for new tenure-track faculty members. This chapter, based upon reflexive research, includes suggestions and lessons learned based on 10 years of involvement with new and experienced teachers, school administrators, and teacher education faculty.

UNIVERSITY LIAISONS IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOLS

In most professional development school (PDS) partnerships, there are two key individuals who make the day-to-day and overall organization of

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the PDS run smoothly—the university liaison and the school coordinator (a teacher or administrator from the PDS site). The university liaison is often a professor from a college or a department of education who is appointed (or may volunteer) to be on the school site to deal with the variety of issues that stems from placing preservice teachers and other professors on the school campus. The liaison position may be a part of a professor's load or may be a "service" item but, nevertheless, it takes up a significant amount of time and effort. Mantle-Bromley (2002) commented, for example, "Descriptive narratives regularly detail the labor-intensive nature of collaboration ... [and] the failure to adequately compensate involved school and university participants" (p. 4). However, it is the supposition of this paper that, first, the position can be managed well if the professor carefully maps out his or her professional journey and, second, the position brings valuable professional growth to the individual.

The university liaison straddles the two different worlds of academia and public schools with different views of knowledge production (theory validation and practice, respectively) and different reward systems (research products, teaching years, respectfully). A liaison must first be aware of these differences and, second, be able to negotiate his or her involvement to serve the expectations of both worlds. Liaisons may serve a variety of roles in a PDS, and they provide what Teitel (2003) calls a "boundary spanner" between the two worlds. The liaison may work closely with the site coordinator at a PDS, as well as directly advise teacher candidates. The liaison may provide expertise for professional development and assist the teachers and principals in some way. The degree of involvement of a liaison with a PDS may depend, to a great extent, on the support a college of education (COE) gives the teacher education program and to what extent peer review committees and department chairs value the work of the liaison (Oakes & Rogers, 2001).

In their review of methods courses and field experiences, Clift and Brady (2005) documented the impact of PDS activity on university liaisons and teachers in terms of the trust that slowly developed between them (Wiseman & Nason, 1995) and in making a partnership work (Allexasaht-Snyder, Deegan, & White, 1995). However, as noted, the politics of teacher education in a college of education can serve to deter faculty service in a PDS (Bullough, Hobbs, Kauchak, Crow, & Stokes, 1997), as well as the amount of time that a liaison can spend supporting the PDS model in a public school (Metcalf-Turner & Fischetti, 1996). The opposite can sometimes be true, as noted by Freese (1999) who renewed her commitment to helping new teachers develop reflective habits.

METHODOLOGY

This study was labeled as a product of *reflexive* research, a broader mode of inquiry than reflective inquiry, examining one's personal history and the mutual influence that other educators have on their students and each other. This chapter has been an initial study on my personal role as a PDS liaison, and I have approached it as I might other avenues of my research agenda (based upon self-study data). A more systematic approach to reflexive inquiry may be needed to truly adopt a *reflexive stance*. A reflexive mode of inquiry, according to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000), requires an understanding that all sources of data are interpreted with personal attention on the researcher, the context, and the phenomena under study, including the research and practitioner communities, society as a whole, and the problematic use of language.

FINDINGS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The ways that university liaisons can contribute to a PDS depends on one's interests and one's faculty rank. The following recommendations are based on what has been learned from 10 years as a university liaison, first as a newly hired tenure-track assistant professor and continuing in a post-tenure-track position.

Recommendations for Tenure-Track Faculty

Invest and Learn About the Program

Time is needed to understand the connections between a program vision, features, policies, and realities. The best way to learn about a program is to participate in some aspect of the program. Providing professional development to a school may be one way to do this prior to agreeing to become a liaison. In this way, one learns about the specifics of the program and the realities of the public school. My initial activities in the PDS, for example, were attending the teacher candidate orientation held at the public school, observing teacher candidates, and supervising action research. The first year began a slow osmosis of understanding the tensions between the practicum requirements in the public school with the methods courses back at the university. I learned that it is difficult to fully appreciate teacher education unless one is directly involved with students and public school teachers. One cannot abstractly understand a teacher education program by reading a brochure describing it.

Meet With Your Department or Program Chair

A liaison should ensure a clear understanding with the department chair on his or her role in teacher education and also that the appointment letter is explicit about expectations in the field area. If not, the liaison should make sure that his or her file is updated with a memo, documenting (on paper) any changes.

Have a Research Agenda

One's first year as a new faculty appointment will be taken up to a great extent by teaching. During this time, faculty members should establish a written research agenda. One of these research avenues could be a dissertation or research carried out while still attending graduate school or at another institution. The research agenda, much of which could be facilitated by concentrating on areas that one finds in field-based teacher education, might also involve other new liaisons, public school teachers, or other professors working at the site.

A liaison should examine all his or her involvement opportunities in teacher education at the PDSs for its research and publication potential. Not every activity will be research-oriented, but it is useful to examine one's activities with a research question in mind. Many PDSs engage with action research projects that are extremely valuable to the inquiry requirement of PDSs but may not be as valuable to the research community in higher education. This is often because PDS work is practical rather than theoretical or conceptual and often limits itself to quantitative data; therefore, possible publications can be limited to venues with less prestige in terms of university criteria. These issues should be clearly differentiate in terms of one's tenure track requirements, as PDS sites *can* provide solid research opportunities. Investigating what questions schools may have (that could provide opportunities for research), for example, can be valuable to both entities. A liaison can design studies that take advantage of both high-quality quantitative and qualitative data. These may range from large projects or grants that districts co-partner to smaller action research projects with teachers or graduate students, as mentioned. If in a large "research university," one can think in terms of grant writing and designing quantitative studies that may match Tier I agendas more readily and focus on studies that may involve student achievement. When working with districts, the researcher must find out well ahead of time their policies and processes (especially their human subjects requirements) for grants and other research. PDS work may not always lend itself to high-dollar grants, but "pieces of it" can be included with some forethought and ingenuity. In addition, calls for studies on the PDS impact on school students have been made for many years. This is an area that is

extremely ripe for investigation (Thornton, 2005). Including school partners in presentations should be planned whenever possible.

Include Your Teaching in Your Research Agenda

Faculty members in colleges or schools of education forget that pedagogical research not only models for teacher candidates that inquiry is worthwhile but that teaching and teacher research is part and parcel to the educational research enterprise. As designing and delivering courses will occupy two-thirds of one's time, building in an inquiry component to the courses is worthwhile. Teaching a course can be framed in terms of one or more research questions that students will answer. For example, teacher candidates may be tasked with finding out "What different teaching strategies are used to implement project-based learning across different grade levels and content areas?"

Watch Your Time

The tenure-track calendar is shorter than one thinks. While most faculty reviews involve up to 6 years of work, the reality is that the submission and review of materials will cut into at least half of that sixth year. With the lag between submission of papers and acceptance of papers, one's time for publication is probably less than 5 years (Shambaugh, 2009). Liaisons must watch out for too many meetings on their calendars. Part of one's first years in any institution is guarding his or her boundaries. A liaison must to be his or her own advocate during a tenure-track period.

Document the Work You Do

The annual review committees can regard much of the work in PDSs as "service activities" (if not specifically designated as a part of one's official load). Again, one must look to examining some of this activity for its research potential so that this work can be acknowledged in the research category during annual review. In addition, much of one's service work in PDSs is often not well documented to show time and effort. Requesting letters acknowledging service and looking for ways to make this work visible through self-developed descriptive and visual artifacts will add to one's report. This chronological approach makes sense to new university faculty, who can relate to the demands of the tenure-track appointment. Personal "working logs" is one suggestion to document academic activity for teaching, research, grant, and service activities. These logs are used to identify activities and dates. In addition, conference presentations document research conducted on the action research requirement for new teachers (Shambaugh, Webb-Dempsey, & Curtis, 2008) or in-house project reports (Benedum Collaborative, 2009). If a new liaison does not carefully document all time spent on site in various issues from conferencing,

advising, and many others, he or she will quickly find that time has been eaten up without any way to prove work was conducted.

Make Your Work Meaningful to the Public Schools

A liaison should be sure to understand the agenda of the public school. One way to do this is to get to know the principal who, for example, may be concerned with “meeting AYP” (Adequate Yearly Progress) in English/ language arts and mathematics. Another way is for the liaison to sit in on school improvement committee meetings. By demonstrating that that one is a mutual player with public schools instead of being seen as falling into the trap of doing research in the public schools at their expense, relationships are enhanced and research may become more available. A liaison should ask, “What will the school get out of it?” One of the values of well-articulated PDS models is that mutual forms of learning and professional development are in place and that the people who are at the table can readily agree to this research.

Model Best Practice

Liaisons must always practice what the teacher education program preaches. They cannot very well ask mentors, preservice teachers, or administrators for cooperation, action research, technology, and so forth, if they do not practice these ideas in their own teaching and interactions.

Learn From Teachers

I reminded graduate students (who had been hired to assist with a technology integration grant) that when they entered public schools, they were really there to learn from the teachers. Unless one understands teachers and the settings in which they work (and are willing to give them an equal partnership as teacher educators), any form of professional development will go nowhere. (I have learned this lesson time and time again during my 10 years as a university liaison with several public schools and have paid dearly when I have forgotten this lesson).

Recommendations for Tenured Faculty

Involve New Faculty Members in Public Schools

New faculty members need the liaison’s connections to public schools. A liaison may introduce them to teachers and principals, and allow them to “shadow” him or her within a PDS. New faculty should grow accustomed to the context of the school which can help them make their own decisions about involvement. The work in teacher education for many new faculty members can be a voluntary activity, although for others it

may be part of their job requirement. The scope of the fieldwork should be thoughtfully negotiated for each person.

Involve New Faculty Members in Your Research

New faculty members will also benefit from the momentum a liaison has in disseminating results of PDS work. A liaison can look for ways that new faculty members can contribute to existing or new avenues of inquiry. Finding opportunities for them to take lead-author status when that credit is warranted will be valuable. The liaison is in the best position to see collaborative possibilities. He or she can point them out and try to get people together for the benefit of all.

Involve Graduate Students in PDS Work

Working with graduate students takes considerable desire and time. Not all graduate students are attracted to public schools, but a liaison may have the opportunity to work with teachers who are working towards advanced degrees. The benefit of working together can be a long-term and productive relationship.

In a PDS, there is also a chance to recruit many teachers to the university world. The results can be an increase in the graduate population, but it will also support a growing understanding of the differences between public schools and the university.

Take Risks—Try Something Different

This recommendation is directed at planning work for the next 10 years for a liaison. Is there a shift needed to keep the work fresh and maintain attention in the public schools? Would one want to move to professional development or back to research? Is work with teachers and spending actual time in a public school classroom personally valuable? A sabbatical or research leave may be a good opportunity to shift gears, but a course of work should be visualized. One research effort might involve reflective inquiry to examine one's own teaching practice (Valli, 1992). This study of one's liaison involvement with teachers and teacher educators can be framed (as discussed earlier) by a reflexive mode of inquiry (Cole & Knowles, 2000), a broader view involving one's professional history and how this time influences one's relationships with other educators, as well as learning from teachers. Some of the techniques available for teachers to study their own teaching, such as life history, personal teaching metaphors, shadow study, and action research (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995), could also be used by university faculty members to study their liaison activity. Shulman (2002) endorses the idea that good teaching at all educational levels requires diligent investigation into teaching and learning.

PERSONAL LEARNING AS A LIAISON OVER 10 YEARS

Liaison activity, while regarded as a service contribution by some peer review committees, is another avenue of teaching and learning and one that affords a faculty member an opportunity for inquiry. Working with teachers requires deeply rooted “personal” involvement—very much like teaching. As expertise is seen as developmental, these conclusions are presented in a timeline framework as a report of experiences of learning about teachers, teaching, and public schools over a 10-year period as a university liaison and as an extraction of “lessons learned.”

PDS Teachers

Learning About Schools

This element is integral to our ability to develop work that is not always seen as “in the ivory tower.” I have learned much about how teachers survive under a continuing cycle of reforms and initiatives, as well as societal expectations. One of the accomplishments I have enjoyed with teachers is being able to engage in “teacher talk.” To feel comfortable talking with teachers about their world takes time to achieve. One has to want to be with teachers and take time to talk continuously with them and principals. They will not talk with you about anything serious if trust and relationships have not been built. One cannot make too many generalizations without understanding the particular context of that school in its community with its history.

Getting involved in governance activities is another way to learn about schools. By year eight, I involved myself in the governing groups of the 5-year teacher education program. I became one of the liaison representatives on the executive committee, which oversaw the program and represented the various constituencies of the school-university partnership. This committee was composed of liaisons, teachers, and principals, as well as administrators of the program. In addition, I facilitated many liaison meetings, including the orientation of new faculty members. I also became the faculty advisor for a student group representing their peers in the 5-year program. These are some examples of the many ways that the liaison can learn more about the setting.

Looking ahead is also a part of a liaison’s work. Schools are in a constant state of change with mentors and administrators who move, gain new trial programs, and so forth, leaving the PDS in a different state or having to move to a different location. A liaison who cultivates *many* mentors will have other teachers who will readily take preservice teachers when mentors may drop out or leave. A liaison who “stays in the loop” will

catch hints that administrative changes may be occurring and will be ready to educate those who are new and/or can suggest new sites that may be ready and willing to move into PDS work. Flexibility is an important attribute for a liaison, but also being prepared for any changes must be thought through as partnerships develop.

Teachers Trusting University Faculty

One of the lessons, mentioned above, that I learned from time in the public schools is that trust with teachers and principals must be developed and that it takes time. One must be reliable, be there as much as possible, take calls immediately from teachers and administrators (or answer emails), be willing to problem solve, and always help in some way. Particularly when there is a situation with a university student, the liaison must react without delay. I also always learned from observing the teachers, as well as the teacher candidates, within the context of the school in a particular area. Liaisons who invest in their PDS tend to have the trust of the educators in that building.

University Faculty Trusting Teachers

I learned to trust public school teachers. One of the unwritten tenets of a 5-year teacher education program in which I was involved has been to trust the host teacher and other educators in the individual PDSs. Again, teachers should always feel that they are *teacher educators* in a PDS. A great deal of latitude was given to these teachers, as they had a hand in the program's development (Benedum Collaborative, 1992/1993). The trust in public school teachers by some university faculty, however, has not always been evident based in how they talk about teachers, how they view the curriculum of teacher education, and in resisting the input of public school teachers. Listening and respect for "the other side" must be a part of the partnership.

Teacher Candidates

I Continue to Learn About and From My Students

Teacher candidates *often* find themselves caught in the middle, as they have to negotiate the very different worlds of the college and the public school. They also often cite the mismatches between what is taught in courses and what occurs in classrooms. Taking this mismatch seriously is important to PDS work. How we *approach* what "is" and what "could be" can be important to the long-term way both PDSs and our preservice teachers view teacher education in universities.

What I have learned from teacher candidates as a whole is the need to have a life. This generation has reminded me that “having a life” requires making difficult decisions. They value their working life, as well, but not at the expense of their personal side, which consists of relationships with family and friends—but also integrity in one’s life. They taught me these lessons every day. I am from a generation that focuses on the working world and that one’s identity is about what one does in one’s working life (Chester, 2005). This is not so with recent generations. I have to listen carefully to these young people. If they turn off early, I have little ability to affect their learning.

I Became a Better Teacher

I learned from preservice teachers who were working their way through a rigorous program that I must be aware of its details so that I understood what was “on their plate” (which can often be more than we think). I also became more conscious of making courses relevant, doable, and clear as to requirements and assessment. The key is connecting courses with their immediate experiences in the public schools. I also felt it was a moral imperative to model what I was preaching. I used technology. I studied my own teaching. I showed them my own portfolio. I credit the power conflicts in which teacher candidates can sometime be caught between the schools and the university, especially when they may desire to teach in the district after graduation.

Paying attention to these students meant listening to their concerns, responding promptly to queries, and being enthusiastic. For example, one major assignment in a course was having students design and reflect on their teaching in the public school. The lessons typically involved reading, mathematics, and/or science lessons. From reflective comments on the lessons they taught, I came to understand the unique relationships that teacher candidates have with their host teachers. I came to learn more about each PDS and its host teachers. Over time, I could pull on this knowledge, making reference to that particular PDS, the host teacher, and the candidates who had taught there and graduated from the program. I also took pictures and shot videos of teaching, building an archive of images and teaching stories for this course. It is a powerful moment to show them a video clip of a peer actually teaching and be able to say to them, “You’ll be doing this 1 year from now.”

I Trusted Students

The basis for my success with these young teachers was developing trust over a 2-year period that I knew them. I knew them from teaching observations, action research, and portfolio reviews. I knew them from my liaison activities in several public schools. I also knew them from being a

faculty advisor of a student group where I would hear their concerns about public schools and teacher education programs—concerns that were often well-grounded. While some might dismiss their complaints as a normal feature of students, I believed that their outspokenness demonstrated the development of strong teacher identities. Many of them, I am confident, will be teacher leaders in public schools.

University-School Partnerships

Be Conscious of the Reward System

I continue after 10 years to learn about the inner workings and complexities of a teacher education program. The work involved in governance and coordination of teacher education in a PDS model is endless. Teacher educators seem accustomed to this reality and do not think twice about it. However, faculty members from other academic programs might find its requirements too demanding for their workload.

I made a conscious decision to act as an advocate for students whenever I could. However, such a stance often earned little currency in annual faculty reviews or in the ranking process. I do not mean that such advocacy is not valued. It is just that the structure of faculty review (away from others who do this work) does not know how to “count” this contribution. In reflecting over 10 years, I find it interesting that guarding my boundaries in the early years to get the research done was slowly replaced by my student advocacy. One aim should be to always have the faculty member(s) who serves on the university rank and tenure committee member thoroughly versed on the issues of working in PDSs so that he or she can explain and advocate well for any such faculty going up before this committee.

Relationships Need Continual Attention

Over 10 years I came to value partnerships between teachers and between the university and the public school. I constantly reminded everyone at venues where we gathered about the ongoing accomplishment of so many educators coming together at the table. One of the qualities of a 5-year program is that almost 20 years of relationships have been developed; we all became accustomed to partnership work, and we take this work personally, much like how we regard teaching as personal. Not all of the 30 schools are equally invested and, over the years, there is a natural waxing and waning of motivation, as well as a turnover of teachers. I see a need to continuously provide orientation on all aspects of teacher education and partnership work. To accomplish this, I can see a working group of teachers and university faculty whose task it is to over-

see the briefing of new educators in teacher education and public schools with details on how the program works and their negotiable role in the program with teacher candidates and engaging in professional development opportunities.

Mature Programs Need Reexamination

In addition to the customary scope and sequence aspect of program review, I am reminded by an idea from Drucker (1974) that, as a business grows, the nature of that business changes. What is the purpose of our “business”? Mature teacher education programs that embrace the PDS model expand beyond educating new teachers to nurturing the growth of the educators in public schools. Vision statements need to be continuously reviewed, of course, and participants need to ask themselves, “Is this what we are about?” Another question to ask is, “What do we want to be known for?” This marketing question may be uncomfortable for some, but a teacher education program, like any other academic program in a university, cannot be all things to all people. What are the one or two niches that a program can deliver well? Programs compete for students. Why should a student enroll in a particular program?

Other major questions that need to be considered revolve around issues such as sustainable partnerships and ongoing changes in university structures and policies towards PDS work (Metcalf-Turner & Fischetti, 1996). Workload and reward policies always float to the surface and these issues have to be tackled head-on. Public school teachers, who are continually forced to change due to reform initiatives, perceive academic change as lagging behind. Teachers and principals who face increased accountability pressures expect the same accountability for teacher education programs and question whether the increased work involved in the PDS model is worth it.

Issues of accountability from exterior accreditation groups tend to drive the evaluation of these programs (rather than from the vision statements of the program). I believe that public school teachers are more sensitive to this assessment issue than higher education faculty. Public school teachers stay close to students in terms of their needs while paying attention to testing. Accountability for higher education faculty, meanwhile, is framed by teaching, research, and service, but the focus on the student, I believe, is more removed as compared to public school teachers.

However, mature programs still need to pay attention to the student experience. Over time, a plethora of day-to-day forms and policies attempt to cover all contingencies. Filling out forms and rubrics may begin to take priority rather than providing direct and immediate feedback. When I talk to students about rubrics, I prompt them at the end of the rubric to ask, “What was the overall nature of the performance really

about?” Sometimes, the real accomplishment from students gets lost in the rubric categories that subdivide the performance.

Final Comments

Inquiry

I can see the potential to conduct such reflexive inquiry collaboratively with other liaisons, as well as with teachers who supervise new teachers in the classroom, so that “lessons learned” from a liaison could be interpreted with the input of educators in the public schools.

Overall Benefits

Duckworth (in Meek, 1991) commented that teachers need to reflect on themselves as learners before they can reflect on themselves as teachers. The same caveat could apply to university faculty members, particularly those who interact with new and experienced teachers. This chapter has been an attempt to reflect on liaison activity in terms of learning from teachers in public schools and new teachers in teacher education programs. For both worlds of the practicing teacher and the university faculty member, reflection is an agreed-upon principle but not always well carried out (Houston & Warner, 2000). While programs are structured in ways that require new teachers to study their teaching, be reflective practitioners, integrate technology, etc. it behooves us as teacher educators, one and all, to model these practices for new teachers, while at the same time paying attention to the mutual development of knowledge and skills and adhering to standards.

In my 10 years as a liaison to a public school, I came to value the school-university partnership and found I could learn quite a bit from public school teachers, as well as teacher candidates who see the world of work quite differently from me. I came to be a better teacher by learning more about my students. My teaching decisions improved when I took the world of the students into account. I realized that teacher candidates must also gain the trust of their own students in order to make good teaching decisions. The work of teacher education remains endless, and this work can be difficult. In taking into account the different needs of teacher candidates, public school teachers, principals, and our peers in the university, I came to realize that the investment was worth it. Ultimately, I learned to relax in the classroom, learned alongside my students, and came to love my students. When you have their trust, you can do things. When you love them, great things are always possible.

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