

The Benedum Collaborative – Features for Simultaneous Renewal

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ABSTRACT: The Benedum Collaborative was recognized by the National Association for Professional Development Schools for “exemplary professional development school achievement” at the 2012 National Professional Development Schools Conference. The conceptual framework supporting simultaneous renewal of teachers, pre-service teachers, and university faculty members within the Collaborative is based on a set of belief statements. Six distinctive features of the Collaborative are described by PDS and university faculty, and graduates in this article.

Introduction

The Benedum Collaborative is designed to *simultaneously renew* teaching and learning in 30 West Virginia public schools *and* West Virginia University. The conceptual framework for this simultaneous renewal includes the following Belief Statements:

- All in a Professional Development School are learners.
- All in a Professional Development School have the opportunity for success.
- The organization of Professional Development Schools encourages all to be empowered.
- A Professional Development School fosters an environment of mutual respect.
- A Professional Development School promotes curriculum that evolves from continual inquiry and renewal that reflects the school's vision.

Below we describe six features of the Collaborative in the words and voices of PDS teachers, graduates, and university faculty members. We include the names of each of the PDS constituents who the following descriptions of each of these respective features.

Governance Structure

*Sarah Steel, Program Coordinator and PDS Liaison and Toni Poling, Teacher and PDS Teacher
Education Coordinator*

The governance structure has been a means whereby beliefs about *empowerment, mutual respect, opportunities for success, and all are learners* could be demonstrated within structured groups. The largest group is the Cross-Site Steering Committee (CSSC), comprised of members of the other governance groups. The CSSC uses an executive committee, a hard working group that serves as the program coordinator's advisory board and provides oversight to all of our work. Another level of governance is role-alike groups, which meet regularly. These groups include the Professional Development Coordinators (PDC), University Liaisons, PDS Administrators, and Teacher Education Coordinators (TEC). PDCs meet four times each year to

plan professional development initiatives for their schools. University Liaisons meet monthly to discuss their work observing and discussing teaching with pre-service teachers, mentoring action research, and designing/providing professional development for PDS faculty. PDS administrators meet as needed and TECs, who serve a multifaceted role, meet twice a semester.

The TECs, according to TEC Toni Poling, serve as the “university’s eyes and ears in the schools.” At TEC meetings, which are held twice a semester, Coordinators review and decide on program features, receive training on new initiatives, and meet with university faculty to discuss programmatic changes. At the end of each semester, TECs have a one-on-one meeting with the Program Coordinator during which they submit documentation on pre-service teachers and discuss issues. ”As a graduate of the Collaborative, I came to the role with a pretty good understanding of the needs of pre-service teachers. Not only did I believe in the program’s Belief Statements, I had lived them and was a product of them.” Poling’s role serves to span the boundary between PDS and university, and brings the voices of pre-service teachers, PDS faculty, and students to discussions of issues related to PDS and teacher education. She also makes all of the placements for the pre-service teachers, monitors their progress, completes observations and, along with her PDC, manages the school’s PDS budget. The day-to-day decision-making at the PDS level is managed by the TEC. “As part of my boundary-spanning role as a TEC, I also serve as the high school representative on the CSSC Executive Committee and as an adjunct professor for WVU.”

Financing a School/University Partnership

Sarah Steel, Program Coordinator and Liaison and Randy Farley, Marion County Administrator of Curriculum, Technology, and Instruction

A grant from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania contributed millions of dollars for start-up and implementation of our partnerships. Supporting

the involvement of all stakeholders was critical during buy-in and creation of a program that was intended to represent best practices from both schools and universities. Hand-in-hand with a plan to gradually reduce its support, the Foundation worked with the West Virginia State Department of Education to create a legislative appropriation for partnership work. In 2008 the governor included a line item in the state budget which funded school/university partnerships across all ten of the state's teacher education programs. The Center for Professional Development is a state agency that manages this grant process and determines how the state funding will be allocated. Every spring the Center hosts a state-wide PDS conference where the partnerships share their work, sending a strong message to policymakers about the value of this work. A major portion of our legislative appropriation compensates PDS coordinators and university liaisons. The funding also supports research initiatives that involve WVU and PDS faculty, as well as pre-service teacher research and professional development for network-wide needs. WVU has supported a Program Coordinator and Office Assistant, as well as office space and related expenses.

Each of the five counties in our partnership shares in the financial burden by collaborating on some activities in a joint partnership between all three entities. "Making the puzzle pieces fit together in a PDS Partnership requires good strategic planning," says Randy Farley. "It is imperative to set goals, objectives, action steps and subtasks, assign shared responsibilities, and develop a budget to guide the work. Once you have all of that in place, then staying the course for success is much easier." Each school and university has different sets of resources that may come from a variety of programs, services, partnerships, entitlements, state aid formulas, grants, donations, bequests, endowments, fundraisers, and volunteerism. All resources come with guidelines, rules, talents, timelines, availability and purposes. According to Farley, "It is sometimes necessary then to 'braid' together various resources. We are physically

located between two universities and have developed vibrant PDS partnerships with both of them.”

Extensive and Intensive Field Experiences

Laura Van Horn, Teacher and PDS Teacher Education Coordinator and Susan Yohe, Graduate, Five-Year Teacher Education Program

In their first two years, pre-service teachers complete 60 hours or more of volunteer activities in an education setting, and through a portfolio review process, earn admittance to the program. During their first year in the program (“Tutor” year), pre-service teachers observe and work one-on-one with students. The following year (“Participant” year) pre-service teachers are responsible for entire lesson sequences during their seven-hour per week placement in the fall semester. In the spring semester of this year, Participants spend 12 hours per week in their field placements, designing and delivering lessons at least once per week and teaching “full-time” for four weeks; two weeks from their mentor teacher’s lesson plans and two weeks from their own plans. During their final year in the program (“Intern” year), Van Horn provides this description of their placements: “The fifth year Interns report to school the first day alongside our staff and gradually assume classroom responsibilities, taking over the classroom for six weeks of full-time teaching. In the spring semester a professional development theme is collaboratively chosen across a 135-hour contract of activities to address this theme and the needs of the Interns and school.” In addition, Laura ensures that her pre-service teachers meet all certification requirements and she carefully places the pre-service teachers with mentors whose expertise and experience meet the specialized needs of the prospective teachers.

Susan Yohe, a recent pre-service teacher at North Elementary, shares this about her field experiences: “During my Tutor year I interacted in small and large group settings in a first grade of English speakers and an ESL pullout classroom.” In the fall of her Participant year, Ms. Yohe

learned how to structure discovery-based learning in a pre-kindergarten classroom: “The spring semester took me to 4th grade, and although I was initially intimidated by my 4th grade placement, I soon fell in love with my students and classroom.” Working with her host teacher, Ms. Yohe created a social studies inquiry-based unit that was the centerpiece of her action research. “I found that allowing students to lead their learning and choose what they want to learn increased their motivation, engagement, and interest. During the Intern year I lived the daily stresses and triumphs of a kindergarten classroom.” Two days per week Ms. Yohe reported to the university for her on-campus action research course and practicum seminars. Through six weeks of full-time teaching, she promoted inquiry skills authentically in student activities. During the spring and final semester, Ms. Yohe created her *contract*. Since North is the most racially/ethnically-diverse school in West Virginia, she examined other diversities, such as ability level, exceptionality, and student interest. “Spending time with students with autism and learning disabilities greatly influenced my decision to work in Special Education.”

Collaborative Faculty in Residence (CFIR)

Aimee Morewood, Assistant Professor and Collaborative Faculty in Residence and Susan Taylor, Title I Reading Specialist, Technology Integration Specialist and PDS Professional Development Coordinator

The Collaborative Faculty in Residence (CFIR) was created to strengthen the collaborative work between the public school and the university. A university faculty member is released from one course per semester and spends one day per week over a two year period in a public school and redirects his/her work related to research and teaching towards the needs of the school. “Being a CFIR was a transforming experience for me,” says Dr. Aimee Morewood. “Often in higher education we hear that being in schools takes time and focus away from our teaching, research, and service agendas. I was able to use the work at a public elementary school

to strengthen my courses at the university, publish manuscripts and give presentations on the work, and participate in service events within the school.” After first observing teaching in one classroom, Dr. Morewood and the PDS teacher began to co-teach, co-plan, and engage in collegial conversations about teaching. “I fielded requests to work with other grade level teachers, Academic Coaches, and Title I Specialists. It was not uncommon for me to walk in and out of classrooms all day without any advance notice. This allowed me to work ‘on the fly’ with our pre-service teachers.” These informal classroom visits provided the just-in-time mentoring pre-service teachers needed and proved less intimidating than the required and more formal observations. Dr. Morewood was also able to collaborate with her PDS faculty to write and obtain a Research Intensive PDS Grant, which they used to engage in action research to explore and understand how their teaching influenced students’ learning.

According to Susan Taylor, a Title I Teacher and Technology Integration Specialist, “The role of the CFIR at my school was a beneficial experience for all. We learned about best practices, action research, and the project gave us ample time for collaboration and reflection on our teaching.” The group studied phonemic awareness, Response to Intervention (RtI), the writing process, guided reading, spelling, Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), and data analysis. The professional development and action research funded by Research Intensive grant supported their work as it crossed traditional institutional boundaries. The expertise of the CFIR, (e.g., research, grant writing, and data analysis) combined with the knowledge of the classroom teachers (e.g., content, student data, assessments) ensured this job-embedded professional development and action research was purposeful and relevant.

Inquiry/Action Research

Sharon Hayes, Assistant Professor and PDS Liaison and Rachel Viglianco, and Jaclyn Combs,

Graduates, Five-Year Teacher Education Program

In addition to an action research course, inquiry and reflective practice are stranded throughout the program. Prospective teachers meet weekly in small group seminars to engage in professional learning communities devoted to questioning the research, our practices, and the educational status quo. The teacher candidates engage in a series of mini inquiries beginning with an *inquiry of self*, in which they explore who they are, their memberships in cultural and discursive communities, as well as their experiences in and out of schools. Next, an ethnographic lens provides a perspective for observations and interviews that engage prospective teachers in *inquiries of students and school contexts*, in order to gain in-depth knowledge of students and how they experience school. The teacher candidates also conduct *inquiries of curricula* and *inquiries of teaching practices* in which they explore state standards, their county's curriculum plan, as well as their own lessons plans and explore how the curriculum and research-based practices in specific subject areas influence/inform teaching and learning. Their final inquiries, conducted during their Intern year, investigate a dilemma they have experienced in their teaching. The results of these inquiries are shared with peers and PDS partners at a spring conference.

For Rachel Viglianco, inquiry played a vital role in becoming a much more aware and empowered professional educator. "I don't have to just sit back and watch things happen. I can investigate ways to make my classroom better and my students happier and more successful. I never saw myself as a researcher before Benedum, and I didn't think I was good enough for that. Now, I cannot envision teaching without inquiry. I'm a teacher, and I have the power to make things better through reflection and inquiry and I will continue to embrace that for the rest of my life." Initially, Jaclyn Combs, like many of her peers, engaged in inquiry because it was what was expected of them. However Jaclyn shares that, "As the semesters passed it started to become more of a habit rather than a requirement. I looked beyond the course and realized that I inquire

and wonder every day. I want my students to inquire, wonder, and learn from the things they are thinking about. I believe that inquiry is an important practice at any age, in any classroom, at any school.”

Sustaining Inquiry within Research Intensive PDSs

Neal Shambaugh, Professor and PDS Liaison and Terry Morris, Teacher and PDS Teacher

Education Coordinator

The “Research Intensive PDS” involves PDS faculty, pre-service teachers, and university faculty who *jointly* conduct inquiry *within* the PDS. Funding comes from the program’s professional development budget and the five counties in which our PDSs are located. Proposals are required to address NCATE PDS Standards, focus on student learning, enhance teacher practice, prepare novice teachers, and embed action research in the PDS. The schools awarded funding are designated as *Research Intensive PDSs*, and their findings are presented at an annual inquiry conference. Four projects were funded in year one with six projects funded in year two. Three of the six projects were continuations of year one work. These projects have included PBL teaching, teaching with iPads, reading fluency and comprehension, K-8 writing alignment, guided reading, student voice, and the use of an online commercial package. In addition, the Research Intensive PDS project has raised the interest of the state educators and legislators, as the work begins to tackle whether or not there is a “PDS Effect” for both teacher and student learning. Year three of the project began with a summer research institute to help schools understand action research and develop proposals.

Terry Morris worked on a consortium project involving four schools from the same county, and she shares: “Teachers and pre-service teachers studied how Project-Based Learning (PBL) units could improve student engagement and learning, and how to manage their implementation.” A liaison delivered an online course with unit design and assessment organized

around the professional development guidelines used by the state for the PBL training of teachers. In addition to the unit design and teaching, pre-service and mentor teachers delivered in-service sessions on PBL teaching. One PDS teacher observed the high level of student engagement and said that “We should be teaching like this all the time.” Data collection and analysis procedures were embedded *within* the unit development, making the research process a part of the teaching. Technology was used as needed to support learning. Their liaison commented that “I can see PBL as an overarching teaching approach where students use technology alongside their teachers, as opposed to being a teacher-driven strategy.”

Final Comments

The Benedum Collaborative’s five Belief Statements were in place before the NAPDS Nine Essentials were developed. The success of the program is directly related to the personal and sustained involvement of all educators in enacting these beliefs – that all in a PDS are learners with opportunities for success, empowerment, and mutual respect. Simultaneous renewal of all educators and educational settings, however, requires sustained financial support and sincere desire for ongoing inquiry and transformation.

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Sharon Hayes is an assistant professor of Curriculum and Instruction/Literacy Studies, liaison to North Marion High School.

Aimee Morewood is an assistant professor of Curriculum and Instruction/Literacy Studies, liaison to Mason-Dixon Elementary School.

Terry Morris is a 2nd grade teacher and the TEC, Rivesville Elementary/Middle School.

Toni Poling is a secondary English teacher and TEC, Fairmont Senior High School, program graduate.

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Sarah Steel is the Program Coordinator of the Benedum Collaborative, liaison to East Dale Elementary School.

Susan Taylor is a Title I Reading Specialist, Technology Integration Specialist, PDC at Mason-Dixon Elementary School.

Laura Van Horn is a kindergarten teacher, TEC at North Elementary School.

Rachel Viglianco is a 2012 graduate specializing in Secondary English.

Susan Yohe is a 2012 graduate and is working on her second master's in Pre-School Special Needs.