

Pushing the Boundaries of School-University Partnerships: Engaging the Community

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Abstract: The editors of the journal conclude this issue with a call to action. We call on those who do the work of PDS to reflect on and examine how we can better engage all three groups of stakeholders – university, school, and community – to better serve students at all levels. Creation of third spaces focused on engaging the community and advocacy efforts that advance the profession are essential to strengthening Professional Development Schools and Systems. It is in these spaces and communities where we see partnerships continue to move towards mutually beneficial action.

KEYWORDS: PDS, school-university-community partnerships, NAPDS Essentials

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

1. NAPDS Essentials: A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within the schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;
2. A school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;
3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need;
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;
5. Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants; and
8. Work by college/university faculty and P-12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings.

Increased privatization of education and new political realities of teaching and teacher preparation in an ever-changing world require a renewed focus on partnerships that evolve and

open space for advocacy, increase professional growth throughout the school and university, and intentionally engage community organizations as vital members of the partnership.

To maximize their impact on educator preparation, P-12 schools, student achievement, shared professional growth, and research, school-university partnerships (SUPs) must find ways to develop spaces that allow for dynamic, mutually beneficial practice. These spaces have been referred to as third spaces or edge communities, and are ones in “university teacher education where academic, school-based, and community-based knowledge come together in less hierarchical and haphazard ways to support teacher learning” (Zeichner, Payne & Brayko, 2015). According to Frances O’Connell Rust (2009), referencing the work of Gorodetsky, Barak, and Harai and Wenger, they are:

Places where strong, new, creative communities can emerge and flourish giving support to the original communities from which they emerged and providing a place for the testing of new ideas and new forms of organization and relationship [enabling] substantive, far-reaching, and much needed change in teacher education (n.p).

School-university collaborations have the potential to embody, create, and support spaces where collaboration of this nature exists (Holmes Group, 1990; Levine, 2016) and provide organic opportunities for practice-based teacher education (Ball & Cohen, 1999).

Historically, professional development schools (and systems) operate primarily within the dyad of school-university. PDSs are situated within university settings and serve two primary purposes: to provide professional contexts for preservice teacher learning and to provide ongoing teacher education and development to practicing professionals. The relationship is typically transactional; the university benefits from partnering with sites that provide classroom placements and training for their preservice teachers and the schools benefit from services provided by the university. This can take many forms, including professional development workshops, curriculum development, and action research with the assistance of university faculty (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Murrell, 1998). These systems are successful, with positive outcomes in both teacher preparedness and student success (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

While most school-university partnerships remain flexible in the configurations of the structures that support collaborative teaching and learning, an analysis of research over time reveals that partnerships have remained true to the core essentials of professional development schools, having “more intersections than divergences” in their definitions (Zenkov, Shiveley, & Clark, 2016).

As separate entities, schools and universities both engage with the community. At the university level, community partnerships are abundant, ranging from student service learning projects to intern placement in local businesses. Faculty and staff members often do volunteer work with local organizations. Many colleges and universities partner with area businesses for resource support and funding for student projects and extracurricular activities.

In schools, community partnerships often take the form of parent involvement. In Epstein and colleagues’ (2002) list of six types of school-community involvement, five focus on school/family engagement. This includes assisting with parenting skills, school/home communication (including interactive homework to engage families), parent volunteer work in classrooms, and involving parents in decision making at the school level. This can also include family support activities like providing meals for low-income students during the summer months. The sixth type of involvement is collaboration with the larger community. This

involves enabling contributions to and from the larger community for students, staff and families. School-site dental and health screenings are an example of this type of partnership.

What is not as well developed is the third space that exists where schools, universities, and communities overlap. According to Murrell (1998), the disconnectedness of PDS organizational structures from the wider community results in inadequacies in the pedagogical inquiry PDS seeks to provide. He urges PDSs to “enrich the working relationships in new activity settings that afford authentic and meaningful participation for parents and community stakeholders in the work that matters” (p. 47). He proposes an “anti-bureaucratic” partnership approach that allows collaborative flexibility between all stakeholders, including parents and community stakeholders. Some school-university partnerships and PDSs are pushing the envelope, finding new and innovative ways to span boundaries, and engaging a lesser-known stakeholder for the purpose of teacher preparation, community partners. We echo these beliefs, and call on those who do the work of PDS to reflect on and examine how we can better engage all three groups of stakeholders – university, school, and community – to better serve students at all levels. Further, we believe there is a need to expand conversation around NAPDS’s *Nine Essentials* to include a tenth essential focused on engaging the community and advocacy efforts that advance the profession. It is in these spaces and communities where we see partnerships continue to move towards mutually beneficial action.

In section 3 of this journal, we showcased some projects that are reaching into the third space to try and build school-university-community engagement opportunities. The Liao and Bentley articles are examples of projects between schools, universities, and individual members in the community. These are cases of where partners are starting to push the boundaries of typical PDS work, thinking outside of the school-university dyad. The two final articles by Sweetman and Radina stretch us to think bigger, more boundary spanning and highlight large-scale connections between school, university, and community around mutually beneficial activities advancing the profession.

However, this type of work and community engagement is not easy, and often not on the radar of those who do the work of PDS. How can we, as a PDS community, further engage in this type of valuable work? How can PDSs facilitate conversations between and among all units in this triad to make our work more all encompassing? How can we take small-scale work, like that of Liao and Bentley and make it more intensive like the work of Sweetman and Radina? We encourage our readers and the NAPDS community to consider these questions of how we can truly engage in organic, school-university-community partnerships to advance our profession and create a new essential: Engaging the Community.

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