

# *We Must Face It: PDSs Have Failed to Innovate*

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**ABSTRACT:** A big picture perspective on the PDS movement reveals a failure to innovate in teacher learning. The vast majority of PDS schools are traditional schools of industrial age design which serve to induct teachers into the profession as traditional classroom teachers thereby neglecting the development of teacher agency, teacher collaboration, and new school designs. Both a substantial literature base and recent surveys clarify that these traditional schools do this at the expense of teacher participation and learning. These traditional schools have a top-down authority structure which is increasingly controlled by central authority mandates from state capitals or Washington D.C. Meanwhile, teacher learning is relegated to how to comply with these demands from central authorities by focusing student learning on the raising of test scores. As this unfolds, our PDSs do not focus teacher learning on the well-documented promise of teachers working in collaborative learning communities which invent new school structures, practices, and designs. The very relevance of the NAPDS demands that we revisit our commitment to innovation.

*NAPDS Nine Essentials Addressed: #3/Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all guided by need; #4/A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; #5/Structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration.*

The most popular question in education these days is how to create effective teachers. This question, of course, is the one that has guided the work of the professional development school community since its earliest days. What the PDS community has long contributed to answering this question is the importance of moving new teacher induction away from college classrooms and into communities of practice in actual schools. The benefits of novice teachers learning to teach while immersed in a community of practice are many. Those benefits and their refinements are commonly the subject of the reports found in this journal.

The reports of benefits have rightfully focused on improved teacher learning.

Novice teacher learning has moved from the higher-education-classroom-theoretical to the in-a-local-school practical. Thus, information about the work of teachers became first-hand and precluded all of the problems associated with decontextualized learning in higher education classrooms. In addition to first hand observation, novice teachers were also given immediate access to question experienced practitioners, sometimes in the very moment of an event. They were also able to do the same with students. The concreteness of this participation in a community of practice led, then, to a more personal experience and allowed the novice teacher to sort through both the cognitive and emotional meaning of events. Through this process, a novice teacher's knowledge became contextualized and began to be supported by and infused with what Polanyi has called "tacit knowledge" (1969), the knowledge that comes not from instruction but from participation, from being in the mix of a community of practice. The importance of such participation in a community of practice has been highlighted by NCATE's Blue Ribbon Panel (2010) which placed special

importance on the value of clinical exposure and practice in the development of novice teachers.

This idea of inducting teachers via direct participation in communities of practice is intellectually compelling. It is worthy of all of the effort the PDS community has invested in it. Members of the PDS community should be proud as this enhanced induction process has at once increased teacher learning and teacher retention as it has set teachers on a faster path to proficiency.

Thus, it is with much trepidation that this author must now insist that the PDS community face a difficult reality: the failure of schools to innovate as stipulated in the Nine Essentials now finds our novice teachers being inducted into schools of industrial age design and becoming acculturated to the structures, routines, and mind-sets of traditional schools. Most of our novice teachers do their formative learning in schools committed to the assumptions, practices, and cultures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They do it in schools that were not designed for teacher learning and which refuse to involve teachers in creating new designs for schools, schools that would better serve their learning and their students' learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thus, our community engages in a contradiction. It does highly professional work in providing new teachers a thorough process of induction rich in teacher participation and collaboration. Then after this induction, our teachers acclimate to the assumptions, practices, and cultures of traditional schools. As will be clarified, by and large, these are traditional schools where teacher learning is a low priority.

Certainly all readers are aware of the mountain of literature that has called for schools to change in very substantial ways. Readers are also probably aware of another mountain of literature that laments our schools' inability to change. We have

## Text Box I

## A Short List of References Calling for Schools to Change

- Goodlad, J. I. (1984). *A Place Called School*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education. The Holmes Group (1986). *Tomorrow's teachers: A report of the Holmes Group*. The Holmes Group, Inc., 501 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI.
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all heard the proposition that if Rip Van Winkle were to awaken today, the only thing he would recognize is schools . . . because they just haven't changed. It is this literature about our inability to change that should remind us of our own expressed but unfulfilled commitment to change and innovation.

Given the wide spread resistance to change, it is now time for the PDS community to face the reality that in spite of our aspiration and expressed commitment to innovate, we have done little to change our schools. The vast majority of our PDS schools are basically structured the same as they were a hundred years ago. The outcome of this is that most of our novice teacher are now becoming acculturated in communities of practice that have an industrial age orientation wherein innovation, teacher collaboration, and teacher learning, itself, are low priorities. This reality challenges the fundamental relevancy of the NAPDS.

If this indictment seems too extreme, consider this. Educators are now more than two decades into exercising two concepts that truly promised to push the evolution of teaching, professional learning communities and professional development schools.

These concepts promised that teachers would participate in important school decision making and give teachers broad participation and leadership in guiding the learning of students, their own learning, and the learning of novice teachers. They made this promise because it was the wisdom of our finest organizational thinkers (DuFour et al., 2006; DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012; Senge, 1991; Garvin, 2000; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015) all of whom called for, and still call for, the broad participation of all organizational members in the effort to continuously improve an organization. This thinking has had a much heralded application to schools supported by many publications and has led to the concepts of professional learning communities and professional development schools becoming wide-spread.

Now, some twenty-five years later we learn that these programs did not even come close to fulfilling their promise. As reported by the Gallup polling organization, a 2013 Gallup poll of teachers indicated that among all occupations tracked in their survey, teachers were the least likely to say that their opinions counted at work (Busteed, 2014).

And, our teachers are right. Their opinions count for very little. Most of them are now situated in a school that is not focused on teacher learning, thinking, or decision-making. Our teachers do not follow routines rich in lesson study, reflective practice, or collaborative application of teacher thinking. Instead, their schools are focused on compliance with the mandates of central authorities. These are the central authorities who are now doing the important thinking with respect to standards, goals, curricula, and standardized assessment. Teachers even find themselves marginalized with respect to lesson design and what teachers should say in delivering lessons. It is clear evidence that these schools were not designed for collaboration or teacher learning. When you take away teacher participation and decision making, you take away the most important learning opportunities for teachers.

## Text Box II

## A Short List of References that Discuss Schools' Inability to Change

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Rick and Donna Adair Breault refer to this condition in their work *Professional Development Schools: Researching Lessons from the Field*. In confronting issues of culture and innovation and the resulting implementation uncertainties in PDSs, they explain:

This [implementation] is aggravated by the PDS typically being situated in a regular public school that is distracted by the necessity of its own technocratic preoccupation with state standards and high stakes testing. As a result, whatever idealistic potential there might have been in the NCATE PDS standards is undermined by the bureaucratic, politically situated nature of their sponsoring organization, and the

potential for critical reflections and naming PDSs through dialogic process is lost. (Breault & Breault, 2012, p. 23)

There is a reason for this. Without a dedicated mission to innovate, the cultures of the traditional schools where our teachers are employed will not yield. These traditional schools were not designed as places for teachers to think, collaborate, learn, and then create change. With their old organizational structures, their old time structures, their old assumptions about teaching and learning, they were designed to function as top-down authority structures. Their intent was to make schools into static learning factories for the mass production of a citizenry who would be provided the basics of what was needed to survive in the industrial age. They were not designed for teachers to collaborate and make critical decisions for continuous school improvement. The current control of our schools by central authorities as they assert state and federal regulation has extended and intensified this legacy condition. Like it or not, the idea of teacher learning has always been and continues to be a side show in these traditional school cultures.

What is most troubling about all of this is that it flies in the face of important scholarship that has demonstrated that teacher collaboration is essential to high quality schooling. John Hattie's extensive research demonstrated that teachers, working together as evaluators of their impact on student learning have the single greatest effect (by a wide margin) on student learning in comparison to all other variables (Hattie, 2011; Hattie, 2013)

This conclusion about the importance of teachers working together was also reached by the *National Center on Time and Learning*, which underscored the perspective that teachers working in community produce the best learning outcomes for students. As developed by this organization's publication of *Time and Teaching* (NCTL, 2015), "Research shows that schools with the strongest PLCs [professional learning communities] generate higher student performance." Moreover, this working together reaches its optimum effect when teachers are involved in school design that expands the amount of time they have to work together (Davis, 2015).

Some may resist the idea that the Gallup data apply to PDS schools because they believe PDSs are different. They believe that because of our community's unique goals, mission, and induction protocols that PDSs have eluded the grip of the traditional school model. But objective data do not support this view. The factors that restrain innovation in traditional schools also restrain it in PDSs.

If we examine these restraints closely, we see that what restrains innovation in traditional schools also restrains it in PDSs. Peter Senge (1991) points us to a primary restraint on innovation in schools, the persistence of the industrial age assumptions about learning and schooling. The fact is, as will be confirmed shortly, these assumptions drive most schools, PDS or otherwise.

Consistent with the unconscious nature of these assumptions, many organizational scholars have explained that these

assumptions cause **organizations to do what they have done before** (Hess, 1999; Kelly, McCain, Jukes, 2009; Senge, 1991; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Wagner et al., 2006; Waters, 2014) Add to this that governments and schools, per industrial age thinking, still rely on **standardization** to maximize the “efficiency” of schools. Schools are prompted to do things as other schools do them, especially to use the same standards and assessment tools. The number of comparisons of schools to industrial age factories in the literature is too many to mention but here are a few. (Schlechty, 2009; Senge et al., 2000; Wagner et al., 2006; Waters, 2014).

**Regional School Evaluations and Accreditation** have a similar impact on innovation. These evaluations assess school management that results in well run traditional schools. They do not look for innovation that strives to move away from the traditional school model. (This author has chaired a regional school evaluation and served on an evaluation team for Middle States).

**Legacy employment agreements** have a similar influence. Local associations resist change because it may disrupt or nullify working condition agreements that have taken years to achieve. The influence of negotiated employment agreements are a well-documented restraint on innovation (Chubb, 2012; Moe & Chubb, 2009).

**College admission standards** such as those asserted by the NCAA also stand as a powerful restraint on innovation as will be developed shortly (Lytle, 2016).

When readers look at this very partial, list they can probably recognize that most schools are affected by these legacy restraints whether or not they are PDSs. Given this condition, research on schools in general has much greater application to PDSs than some readers would want to admit. Yes, the idea of the partnership between universities and schools is a wonderful innovation, but it is self-contradictory if the movement inducts teachers into the structures, practices, and cultures of traditional schools where their participation and voices are restrained.

To make this point more concrete, consider James Lytle’s January 20, 2016, piece in *Education Week* where he laments the “chokehold” control the NCAA has on secondary schooling and how it restrains the kind of innovation in schools he imagines in this excerpt.

Imagine a high school offering integrated math courses, Rosetta Stone as an option for foreign languages, dual-enrollment programs with a local community college, massive open online courses, industry and corporate apprenticeships, service learning opportunities, an International Baccalaureate option, performing and visual arts concentrations, and portfolio/competency assessment all taught by highly qualified teachers and others with content expertise. Although such a school might incorporate many of the elements of cutting-edge reforms, it might well have to forgo NCAA review

rather than be constrained policies, to the disadvantage of its student-athletes.

Having imagined this innovative school, readers should ask what percentage of PDSs are probably subject to the NCAA regulations that restrain such innovation. It is very likely 100%. The reality is that PDSs are subject to the whole gamut of restraints cited above just like traditional schools.

All and all, the notion that PDSs are so different from most traditional schools is not credible. The literature and surveys that the author has cited in this essay do, in fact, apply to PDSs because, like most schools, they have been locked into the past by all of the restraints. Faced with these restraints, it must be seen as more true than not that in PDSs “Most of our novice teachers do their formative learning in schools committed to the assumptions, practices, and cultures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They do it in schools that were not designed for teacher learning and which refuse to involve teachers in creating new designs for schools, schools that would better serve their learning and their students’ learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” Most importantly, the reality of such restraints fly in the face of the previously cited research which confirms that teachers who collaborate in professional learning communities have better student learning outcomes than teachers who do not (Davis, 2015; Hattie, 2011)

Although some readers may find the accusation of failure to innovate a hard pill to swallow, the more important issue now is are we going to do anything about it. Is the PDS movement willing to lead the charge to change the schools into which we induct our teachers, schools which by their very configuration establish the design and direction of teacher learning? Within our vital partnerships are we going to prompt schools in new directions where teachers work and learn in collaborative communities and see it as part of their job to assert their ideas and redesign schools?

Such a change in the brand of teacher learning is essential when we consider the resilient hold traditional school culture has on our schools and that this hold has long been established in the literature (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Schlechty, 2009; Senge et al., 2000, 2012; Wagner, 2006, 2012, 2015; Zhao, 2009, 2012). It is a condition that few schools have been able to escape. While that inability is understandable considering all of the forces that affect schools, it is also unacceptable. There are many good reasons why we need to move away from the traditional school model. Chief among them is teacher learning. If the professional developments school movement is going to lead in the creation of effective teachers, it needs to change the places where teachers learn to be teachers.

Should, now, readers in the PDS community face that traditional school culture has this same stubborn grip on our PDSs, teacher preparation institutions and PDSs will

- 1) Clarify for aspiring teachers that the schools they will enter to start their careers are of obsolete design. They were never designed for teacher learning, and it will be the job of new teachers to redesign schools for teacher

## Text Box 3

## Industrial Age Schools Are Based on Assumptions

About **Time**: Credit for learning is based on teacher evaluation after a student has accumulated the required seat time in an approved course. School will run morning to afternoon 5 days a week except for holidays and weekends for 180 days per school year. There will be a vacation period of about 10 weeks during the summer months.

About **Place**: The primary place of learning is the school and its grounds.

About **Resources**: The school and its programs will be funded by the local board of education as funds are provided by a local municipality via the raising of taxes. These funds may be supplemented by state and federal grants.

About **Teachers**: Teachers are the primary conveyors of knowledge and skills. Credit for learning will follow a student who receives instruction from a teacher in a classroom.

About **Students**: Students are inherently deficient and need to be coerced into having their deficiencies remediated by highly structured school programs.

About **Motivation**: Students will be offered a variety of extrinsic incentives such as grades, rewards, praise, and recognition as the outcome of doing the work prescribed by the school.

About **Context**: The school is dedicated to serving its local community by developing students who are prepared for work, college, and participation in community government and city affairs.

About **How Students Learn**: Certifiable student learning comes primarily from classroom instruction with the use of approved curriculum and textbooks where the students have fulfilled required seat time in a classroom and successfully passed a teacher evaluation process.

About **Knowledge**: It may be thought of as an entity or thing that has quantity and mass. Knowledge can thus be transferred to students by teachers in the way water might be poured into an empty container.

About **What Students Learn**: Students shall learn the approved school curriculum including locally and state required subjects as well as required subjects as stipulated by the many colleges and universities to which students apply. These required courses will be supplemented by elective courses and after school activities.

About **How Students Are Evaluated**: Students will be evaluated by teachers on assignments and given letter grades (A, B, C, D, and F) that certify the completion of work and the level of achievement the work represents.

About **How Learning is Certified**: When students receive passing grades in their courses, they will be certified as having developed the necessary knowledge and skills for that particular course. (Waters, 2014)

learning with new assumptions, organizational structures, and collaborative cultures.

- 2) Encourage aspiring teachers to develop a philosophy of education with the understanding that with teachers designing new kinds of schools, those designs will need to be driven by philosophies.
- 3) Help novice teachers to understand the need for greater teacher leadership in and responsibility for their own learning and overall school success.
- 4) Provide novice teachers a deeper understanding of the organizational change process and/or the start-up process and its initiation in big schools to make smaller learning communities with a variety of new structures that meet the needs of local populations.
- 5) Help novice teachers develop deeper subject/subject teaching/ and interdisciplinary teaching expertise.
- 6) Help novice teachers develop a deeper appreciation for the role and value of student voice in teacher learning and student learning.

The fact is that there is little in these suggestions to change teacher education that is new. It is a fact that should trouble our membership and leave us to wonder how we came to neglect ideas which we found important when our movement began. The idea of a significant change in the structure of schools and the roles teachers play in them has long been a part of the PDS literature. That literature extends back to works like *A Nation at Risk* (1983), Goodlad's famous study reported in *A Place Called School* (1984), the NASSP's *Breaking Ranks I* (1996) and *II* (2004) and the works of Sizer and the Coalition of Essential Schools. Especially notable in these references is the Holmes Group Report, *Tomorrow's Teachers* (1986) which is a foundational document to the PDS movement, and called for "changing the teaching profession" with special emphasis on enhanced teacher learning through teacher collaboration.

In more recent years some works reported progress. Fifteen years ago Peter Senge et al. (2000) advanced their work, *Schools that Learn*, a book that urged new assumptions, structures, and practices for schools, schools that were the outcome of the broad participation of teachers (and students) in continuous reflection and learning. That work was reissued in 2012. Both works have given many examples of schools that were reinventing themselves based on collaboration and continuous learning as an organization.

This literature on how teachers learn is being extended. Recently, the work *Trusting Teachers with School Success: What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots* (Farris-Berg & Dirks-wager, 2012) provided research based insights into the promise of schools run by teachers and the significant learning opportunities that emerged for teachers in such settings. Even more recently, the work *Deeper Learning: How Eight Innovative Public Schools Are Transforming Education in the Twenty-First Century* (Martinez & McGrath, 2014) clarified the need for change and how it can be pursued. This research based work provides a list of model schools that are truly innovating and discusses at

length their use of the following common strategies that depart from those of the industrial age and inform our quest for schools that create effective teachers.

- Establish cohesive, collaborative learning communities that sharply differ from the top-down national norm;
- Empower and encourage students to become more self-directed, creative, and cooperative by getting them out of their chairs and more directly involved in their own education;
- Make curricula more engaging, memorable, and meaningful by integrating subjects and establishing relevance to real world concerns;
- Reach outside classroom walls to extend the idea and purpose of learning beyond school, forming partnerships with businesses, organizations, research institutions, and colleges and universities;
- Inspire students by endeavoring to understand their talents and interests, customizing learning whenever possible to discover the motivational “hook” for each young person; and
- Incorporate technology purposefully to enhance, rather than simply automate, learning. (Martinez & McGrath, 2014, p.14)

What is most significant about putting this new emphasis on involving teachers in school design for the PDS community is that it is not only better for student learning, it is much better for teacher learning and career satisfaction. It encourages the idea of teachers as thinkers and change agents. As developed in this author’s (2014) own work, *The Evolution of Teaching: A Guidebook to the Advancement of Teaching, Teacher Education, and Happier Careers for Early Career Teachers*, school change led by teachers offers teachers ownership over their work but also an opportunity to address many of the irritants in the teaching profession that now, according to the most recent Met Life survey (Met Life Foundation, 2012), find teacher job satisfaction at an historic low point. Involving teachers as dedicated change agents in the redesign of schools will give them the participation they want as professionals and the control they should rightly have over their own practice.

## Conclusion

The fact is that in the last two decades the PDS community has done very special work. The idea of bringing teacher education into communities of practice in actual schools has greatly advanced teacher education. We learned long ago that the real places teachers learn to teach is in the schools where they work, not higher education programs. The university-school partnerships that have made local schools the places of new teacher learning have led the way to more effective teachers and better schools.

This partnership between higher education and local schools sets a destiny of innovation for the PDS movement. Now we must look to the next stage of innovation, changing

what teachers do in our local schools. Changing what teachers do will change what they learn. This change must be about how and what teachers learn when they collaborate as thinkers, creators, and decision makers. It must be about understanding how teachers develop when they perceive their schools as places where their opinions count and continuous school improvement depends on teachers acting as agents of change.

We have a choice. Teachers can continue to acclimate and adjust to the traditional school model where their opinions don’t count, or teachers can acclimate to and learn in collaborative cultures where teacher thinking leads change and continuous school improvement.

If, back in the 1980s and 1990s, we had asked the Holmes Group if establishing school-university partnerships was intended to pass on the legacies of traditional schools, they would have surely said no. Using terms now prominent in the Nine Essentials, they would have told us that the partnerships were about change and increased teacher agency, that they were about “active engagement,” “commitment to innovation,” “reflective practice,” “deliberate investigation of practice,” and “a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration” (Holmes Group, 1986).

These terms confirm that from its inception, the PDS movement has been about heightened teacher agency and teacher collaboration. University-school partnerships have always been about teacher empowerment. In affirming this, the PDS movement has been right all along. Research has told us again and again that teachers are most effective when they work in collaboration. Teacher collaboration is the best way to improved student and teacher learning.

With this self-affirming knowledge, we must now reassert our focus on innovation so our movement provides teachers with not only a highly professional induction but also, through the redesign of schools, a full career of learning in collaborative cultures, cultures that put teacher agency at the core of creating effective teachers and continuous school improvement. This was our commitment from the start. <sup>SUP</sup>

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