

Finding Meaning in PDS Stories

By Rick A. Breault

It is true that storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it, that it brings about consent and reconciliation with things as they really are, and that we may even trust it to contain, eventually by implication, that last word which we expect from the 'day of judgment.' (Arendt, 2007, pp. 270-271)

The Professional Development School (PDS) literature is filled with the stuff of good storytelling—archetypes of an ancient profession, struggles of marginalized individuals against powerful structures, personal triumphs, and devotion to a quest. However, much of the writing about PDS experiences that could be considered storytelling tends to simply recount events with some minimal emphasis on the feelings of participants, more informal language, and personal relationships. As a result, the reader is left with something that is not quite a meaningful story but not quite research either.

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Why PDSs and Why Now?

There are indications that the PDS movement may be at an uncertain point in its development. There are signs of the movement's continued strength—an on-going commitment from the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the growing membership of the National Association of Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) (www.napds.org).

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napds.org/about_napds), and a healthy Special Interest Group in the American Educational Research Association (AERA). On the other hand, numerous conversations at conferences and other anecdotal sources hint that the impact of budget cuts, the lack of evidence of effectiveness, and the time and resource intensive nature of the PDS might be leading toward stagnation or even decline. In either scenario, it is important that we reexamine what and how we write about PDS partnerships. If the movement is growing despite a lack of strong research and theory, then we need to determine whether the growth is warranted or provides a strong evidential basis for continued support at a time of shrinking resources. If the movement is in decline, then we need to document what led to the decline and search for insights into why such a promising reform has not worked.

I have spent a considerable amount of my professional life working in and researching PDSs and the literature written about them. After working in several PDS settings, talking to dozens of colleagues from PDSs across the country, and reading hundreds of articles, papers, and books on the subject, I am convinced where PDSs have not lived up to their promise or failed altogether the problem has been due less to insufficient resources than to dysfunctional relationships and a lack of understanding, recognition, and imagination. In the project described here I advocate for a genre of PDS literature that might better capture the human and relational dimensions of PDS work. While there is an immediate, literary, or aesthetic appeal to the idea, there are also practical, utilitarian purposes to be mined.

First, it is not always easy to write the truth about a partnership. As Murrell (2001) argued, once in schools, the fear of offending or alienating cooperating teachers and host schools makes it difficult to interrogate and conduct a critique of existing classroom practices and school culture that is prerequisite to substantive change. Fictionalized accounts of real PDS activities might allow an author to explore issues related to problematic partners in an allegorical way that has been used by revolutionaries and subversives throughout history. Second, this new genre could also sharpen the research skills and interactional insights of the researcher by demanding closer attention not only to what participants do but how they do it, how they respond to others, and the dynamics of internal politics. One brings to mind Virginia Woolf's attention to both the interior lives of her characters and the minutia of their external lives or Dicken's attention to ethnographic detail in describing the underclass of London.

Finally, if the first two purposes are accomplished, the contribution of PDS writing in general might become more meaningful. At present, the majority of PDS writing consists of simple program descriptions and advocacy that result in few new or transferable insights (Breault & Adair Breault, 2003). When analytic insights are offered they tend to turn what is intensely personal or relational into something clinical and removed. Well-crafted PDS stories might better capture what Arendt described, in the quotation at the outset, as the ability of a storytelling to reveal meaning without defining it. It would respect the genre and power of storytelling

and the experiences of the tellers without forcing the story into a narrowly defined and inadequate research framework. The appeal of this new genre would not be to those who are seeking PDS data of the sort that will lead to a “day of judgment.” It will not provide those answers. Instead, its appeal would be to those who read it and say, “Yes, that’s what happened. That’s exactly why we were able to (or never able to) make the partnership work.”

Why Stories Matter

Telling and listening to stories was an integral part of the human race as we gathered around a fire to hear tales of the elders and remains so as we gather around a high-definition, flat-screen television. Only in the past twenty-five years or so, though, have educational researchers come to tap into the power of storytelling in understanding our profession. In the case of PDS writing at least four functions can be served by telling of our stories. Each is described below, but first it is worth considering why PDS stories are worth closer scrutiny.

Why PDS Stories Matter

In the last twenty years or so, the PDS has become the most ubiquitous model for professional interaction between schools and universities. Maryland requires the model across the state (Maryland State Department of Education, 2008) and NCATE has promoted the model as a “standard bearing institution” and as a “boundary spanning” institution that helps teacher education partners “cross institutional boundaries to develop new roles and relationships” (NCATE, 2008).

As teacher educators we attempt to span boundaries between schools and universities and to use those border crossings to re-imagine teaching and teacher preparation. In this process we need to find a language and a way of sharing what we know and learn across professional and lay cultures that will also free our imaginations and spark creativity. Powerful claims have been made for the effectiveness of PDSs. For example, NCATE (2008b) declares unequivocally that PDSs help all students learn and prepare teachers better—and NCATE has devoted significant money and time to the success of the PDS. Research can tell us some of what we need to know about the effectiveness of the PDS, but stories might be able to do so more powerfully.

The professional development school movement involves the creation of a new culture and we—as members or potential members of those partnerships—may need to free ourselves from the limitations of traditional research frameworks and discourse. When we begin to view each PDS story as recounting the creation, evolution, failures, and triumphs of the movement—a sort of honoring of the traditional village storyteller—we imbue future PDS stories with more significance by moving toward a different genre, or at least a reworking of existing academic writing as we attempt to share our PDS experiences. There is also a certain political expediency

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in reconsidering a research and publication language based almost solely on the university culture. In the PDS, two cultures, each with its own discourse and ways of organizing practices and representations, find themselves in a new, shared context. As they enter the new field they both “seek to maintain or alter the distribution of the forms of [linguistic] capital specific to it” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 14).

In the case of PDSs the linguistic struggle is played out, at least in part, in the language of written texts. To some extent, it is in these texts that the “market value” of the language of the university and the language of the public school classroom is determined (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 67). Therefore, one thing those of us who write about the PDS experience might do to contribute to the creation of a shared culture that does not privilege one language over another is to explore a more personal, literary language with which to tell our stories.

Possible Worlds

Bruner (1986) suggested one of the more compelling cross-disciplinary arguments for the place of stories in human psychology and communication. In a project where concrete, observable outcomes matter—higher achievement, greater retention of effective teachers—there is a need for traditional, empirical research, or what he referred to as the paradigmatic or logico-scientific mode. PDS success depends largely on the successful interactions of human beings with a variety of interests and experiences. The teachers who work in schools have “developed their own brand of inquiry worthwhile to school settings” (Schubert & Ayers, 1999, p. vii). Learning from that inquiry requires what Bruner called the narrative mode. It is that mode that draws significance and drama out of the particulars of experience.

Philip W. Jackson (1995) has suggested that educational storytelling can provide a transformative function for the reader.

Stories . . . are often credited with changing us in ways that have relatively little to do with knowledge per se. They leave us with altered states of consciousness, new perspectives, changed outlooks They acquaint us with aspects of life that had been previously unknown (p. 9)

Even non-transformative stories are worth telling, if for no other reason than the need for “methodic groping”—a term Jackson borrowed from the philosopher Justus Buchler. The exploration in this article might be considered a sort of “methodic groping.” In other words, it is the beginning of an answer to the questions, “How can the sharing of PDS stories transform our partnerships?” and “How can we prime or shape the transformative function in our stories?”

Communal Therapy

Beyond the role of stories as a form of research they can function as personal or relational therapy that takes place in a public setting. There are some who argue that scholarly journals and conferences are not the places to work through feelings

of abandonment or lack of respect as a PDS liaison but it is impossible to discuss stories about the intense personal and professional relationships inherent in the job of PDS liaison without considering their cathartic or therapeutic role. At least as far back as Freud we have taken seriously the notion that listening to someone's story can provide not only insight into that person but might also help that person more constructively reconcile various personal issues. In Jungian terms, telling and hearing stories can lead to insights into the collective psyche as our personal "shadows" and "personae" (Storr, 1973). Coles (1989) echoes a similar purpose.

What patients say tells us what to think about what hurts them; and what we say tells us what is happening to us—what we are thinking, and what may be wrong with us . . . Their story, yours, mine—it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them. (p. 30)

Writing and reading stories can also bring healing and change to the world. Good writing "enlarges readers' knowledge of the world or empowers readers to act for the common good . . ." (Pipher, 2006, p. 7). Haggerson (2002) described the work of the mytho-poet in education in similar terms. They "open minds of human beings around the world with love, kindness, beauty, and knowledge" (p. 75).

What characterizes these world-changing stories? Pipher (2006) suggests that seldom will they be considered great literature but they are written to convey a clear message. While they might not be literary stylists, the most powerful, socially conscious writers do, or try to, saturate every page of their work "with authenticity and transparency" (p. 23). They try to emphasize how to think and not what to think and try to connect readers to ideas and experiences that the readers would not have had on their own.

Cultural Transmission

A third function of storytelling is its role in socializing future members of the profession and in reinforcing the profession's cultural norms to existing members. The most common conflicts in PDS writing is between pre-K-12 and university culture (Stoddart, 1995; Valli, 1999) and between clinical and research faculty subcultures in large universities (Labaree, 1995). Such conflicts and lack of identity, can be brought on by, or at least compounded by, a lack of shared cultural mythology (May 1991).

I suggest that we need to examine the mythologies that underlie our institutional cultures as well as the shared mythology that leads educators to put faith in the PDS movement. With that awareness we can look more closely at how what we write about PDSs reflects and reinforces those cultures and the resulting conflicts. Or, we can use future writing to construct a new mythology that nurtures archetypes of collaboration.

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A Means of Professional Growth

Stories are omnipresent in teachers' work lives and act as a way of imposing form on a generally chaotic experience (Grumet, 1988; Shank, 2006). They can help reframe the way we examine and interpret classroom events. Since stories are rich with context and given life by the individuals in them they can offer a better sense of what teachers value and find meaningful (Nelson, 1993). Self-descriptions of practice might also offer more explicit insight into the connections between beliefs, theories, and practices (Good & Weaver, 2001).

The Stories

The 32 PDS stories used in this study were identified during a larger review of PDS writing in which 250 articles and papers were randomly selected from a search of all PDS writing done between 1990 and 2006 (Breault & Adair Breault, 2002; 2003). In that initial work, sources were categorized as to whether they could be considered research (quantitative or qualitative) or not and whether or not the authors' conclusions could be considered valid and warrantable. Validity was determined by using criteria for rigorous qualitative/naturalistic research as suggested by Lincoln, Guba, and others. Whether or not the authors' assumptions and claims could be considered warranted was determined by using Dewey's (e.g., 1929, 1938, 1997) framework based on the extent to which an assertion exhibits coherence, methodological integrity, and evidence of abstraction. One of the findings of that earlier work was that only 53% of the papers reviewed were classified as research of any type or quality. Of those, only 56% offered valid conclusions (Breault & Adair Breault, 2007).

Based solely on the results of empirical, outcome, or effectiveness-based research, it would be difficult to justify the resources being devoted to professional development schools. Furthermore, when the studies were subjected to narrative analysis we also found that warranted conclusions were not necessarily valuable conclusions. There was little opportunity for consumers of the literature to gain insights that would help develop, sustain, or critique their own partnerships. Given the large body of writing that could be considered descriptive or accounts of personal experience and the scarcity of empirical research, in order to make a case for or learn from the PDS model we need to explore ways in which those stories can be made more valuable.

What Counted as a Story?

The articles and papers labeled as "stories" possessed the following characteristics: the authors directly claimed to be telling a story; they did not claim to be or had none of the characteristics of quantitative or qualitative, naturalistic research; they did not attempt to develop a conceptual or normative argument; they emphasized the sharing of personal experiences/opinions but did not attempt the insight

or interpretation that might be found in narrative or phenomenological research; and they chronologically recounted a series of events or described a specific PDS program without any attempt at analysis, critique, or interpretation.

Many were well-written and informative. For example, Earle, Seehafer, and Ostlund (2001) and Weisenbach and Steffel (1995) provided thorough histories and PDS-related project descriptions that could be helpful to a PDS start-up committee. Or, a frustrated PDS worker might find cathartic value in the Hayes, Camilli, and Piazza (1997) account of a failed partnership or Gullledge's (1998) emotive style in describing her coming to the conclusion that she would not recommend PDS initiatives "without some cautionary remarks" (p. 11). In some cases even the potential contribution to any reader was questionable. As each story was read the inherent value was not assumed but there was an attempt to mine potential meaning from each.

Looking at Form and Function

The PDS stories were not read for what they had to say about the PDS movement itself. Instead, I looked at what might be called their literary style (the plot devices, development of characters, conflicts, intended audience, and so on) and according to the function, or potential function, as stories. For example, Gullledge's (1998) paper was written in a confessional, first person style using precisely descriptive but metaphorical before and after group photographs taken of the PDS partners to portray the working relationships and varying social distances between the partners at different stages of the collaboration. This approach and the content focus of the paper—the author's own feelings of vexation, disappointment, lack of recognition, and eventual close relationship to the teachers—would seem to fit well with the personal function of stories. The story comes across as honest and sincere and could provide an empathetic kind of comfort to some readers. Additionally, the descriptions resemble archetypal images of teachers that might lead into a confrontation with some of taken-for-granted assumptions about our roles.

The Literary Elements

Here the papers were not judged on the quality of writing or their literary merit. Instead, I read them to identify: (1) the styles or literary devices with which they were written and (2) the potential for the paper to have been written as a story. With few exceptions the authors used what I describe later as a documentary approach. Within that basic framework you can find significant variations that indicate attempts at something new and different and possible frustration with the limitations of typical academic writing. You can sense a story trying to get out.

A Story Waiting to Emerge

All the papers in this study have the potential of being told as stories since all recount the bringing to life or sustaining of a partnership or describe the relation-

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ships—with all their latent tensions and promise. Twenty-six, however, showed a deliberate attempt at or at least some minimal indication of being told and having significance as story. The writing in each of those accounts contained elements of one or more of the following four categories: a promising plot, familiarity, a literary writing style, and a happy ending.

A Documentary Approach

Most of the reviewed pieces had a documentary feel to them. Few of us in our field were trained as fiction writers or storytellers and promotion and tenure committees and the editorial review process do not reward that approach. So it was only natural that even those authors who claimed to be storytellers felt compelled to include at least a small literature review and some interpretive remarks. The degree to which this was the case differed. Earle, Seehafer, and Ostlund (2001) and Weisenbach and Steffel (1995) both provide thorough descriptions of the various phases and activities of apparently effective PDSs. They differ in that the former provides a number of evaluative and reflective comments and the latter stresses the rationale behind the various activities. In contrast, Thacker (1994) simply described her role as a liaison with not much more than a bulleted list and Proctor, Wagstaff, and Ochoa (1998) began by declaring their intention to be storytellers but incorporated more of a research approach than many papers that claimed to be research.

It could be argued that since these papers grew out of partnerships full of human dynamics all had potential to be told as personal stories. Bennet, Ishler, and O'Loughlin (1992) described their award-winning collaboration in a straightforward, academic style. However, the description of the setting and situation, the commitment and effort that goes with an award-winning project, the emphasis on qualitative outcomes, an emphasis on individual participants, and a happy ending are all seeds for a good story.

A Promising Plot

Eleven of the papers relied on the identification and resolution of a conflict and clearly identified protagonists and antagonists. In some, the villainous antagonists are identified at the outset as in Chase, Merryfield, and Chism (1996) who begin with a quotation about the irrelevance of college methods courses and describe the clinical faculty's meetings with the administration and research faculty of a major research university as frustrating, demeaning, unprofessional, and elitist. In others, protagonists from both cultures struggled, Romeo and Juliet-like, against the institutional barriers and traditions that kept them apart, typified by these observations in Roselli, Perez, Piersall, and Pantridge (1993): “. . . working feverishly to bond and become a working entity often left them [the teachers] struggling with the process rather than the product and feeling overextended . . . we were conscious of the fine line between surviving and drowning” (pp. 133-134).

Sometimes the results were even tragic. Gullledge (1998) “got no recognition

for her work, no research data . . . and the teachers did no PDS work” (p. 11). Similarly, Hayes, Camilli, and Piazza (1997) tell how the partnership struggled against university-level resistance and ultimately failed to institute the PDS program.

Alber (1995) was one of the better examples of a PDS story that was not told as such but had the elements of a good plot. The parents from a diverse, urban setting were archetypal heroes thrown into a role for which they were willing but not confident or prepared. They confront a variety of barriers related to politics, power, teachers, and the university. They overcome those barriers to gain empowerment in a setting where that was not expected and had not been done before. Then, in a climactic moment made for the movies,

The future facilitator cried as she attempted to maximize participation in the drama. She said that she couldn't facilitate and wouldn't do it. The other parents rallied around her and with hugs and words they convinced her that she could do well and that they were behind her. This is the day that the group became a team rather than a collection of parents. (p. 9)

The group goes on to put a condescending university department chair in his place and even take their show on the road to other groups of parents.

Two papers came closer than the others to intentionally realizing their storytelling potential. Mitchel's (2000) is a self-promotional autobiographical account in which the author is anointed to begin her quest—“. . . this dedicated, talented, and skillful teacher conferred on me the title of instructional leader” (p. 506)—and in which “I” is the dominant pronoun. Much of the article is written in a conversational, story-like style—“One day we came together at a faculty meeting, just to look at what we knew about the sixth-grade curriculum” (p. 515). Similarly, Gullede (1998) used emotive, personal language, deliberate visual metaphors created from field notes and an attention to descriptive detail more common to fiction than academic writing.

Notice the person in the middle with a tailored jacket and slightly higher heels . . . This is the university professor who dressed up just slightly, only because this is the first meeting and she wants to convey that . . . it is a special thing for her and she respects them. (p. 4)

One teacher is caught by the camera looking away with a grimace because she spotted a student of hers sneaking out the side door of the building. (p. 5)

Familiarity

At least 15 of the papers used a familiar, conversational style as the primary literary convention and another five made occasional use of emotive language, less formal third-person descriptions and other techniques that blur the line between researcher, storyteller, and reader. A good story does not require connection to a first person experience and can use a formal and dignified style, but seldom does it keep its readers or the characters within the story at an emotional distance from the telling. In the nine stories that focus on the experiences of university liaisons and

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PDS coordinators—an exhausting and often frustrating job—no other style seems appropriate. Even in these cases, the story potential was sometimes missed when authors emphasized the simple listing of duties (e.g., Thacker, 1994) or were still compelled to return to their academic selves by stepping back to offer, or give the appearance of offering an objective and removed analysis (e.g., Hayes, Camilli, & Piazza, 1997).

Literary Style

A less common, but often powerful glimpse of storytelling found in these papers was the use of literary style or language—descriptive flourishes, engaging metaphorical language, or attempts to evoke a more visceral and emotional response from the reader. This is more typically the realm of the novelist than the education scholar and was not common in these papers.

The earlier excerpts from Alber (1995) and Gulledge (1998) are two examples. Some expressed hope in phrases like, “. . . if we could touch the teachers at their core, our children would be caressed with the necessary stimulation to produce academic excellence” (Mitchel, 2000, p. 506) or “[keeping] the flame of professional development burning brightly” (Raymond & Leinenbach, 1996, p. 209). Others expressed potential loss or discouragement, such as the example from Roselli and colleagues (1993) or an extended account in Wonkling and Warren (1999), too long to reprint here, in which one of the authors recounts the bittersweet memory of listening to his last music student begin to sing while he is filled with unhappiness and doubt about being in the partnership and in teaching, in general.

In addition to descriptive or emotive passages, a number of authors used other literary devices. Steffel and colleagues (1996) and Williams (1996) chose extended journey analogies. Others tried to establish a story-like atmosphere.

It is 9:25 a.m. on a warm Tuesday morning in Texas. Rather than walking across campus to their next class, the music education majors are getting in their cars (Wonkling & Warren, 1999, p. 1)

An energetic mathematics teacher of 22 years, Marylin was suddenly placed in a new position Although not the typical scenario of how research in schools is initiated, the above tale is true nonetheless. (Raymond & Leinenbach, 1996, p. 206)

Happy Endings

Film audiences in the United States do not like endings that are ambiguous, lack hope, or are not happy. One gets the same feeling in PDS stories. Only Wonkling and Warren (1999) had a decidedly unhappy ending. Even Gulledge (1998), who received no recognition or data for her work, partnered with teachers who did no PDS-related work and only cautiously recommended PDS initiatives, concluded that her experience was still a “positive, professionally enriching experience” (p. 11). Eleven papers provided upbeat conclusions about PDS collaboration. One

ended on a more downbeat note. The others were either neutral or clinical in their conclusions.

While there is nothing inherently wrong with a happy ending, it should be consistent with the other aspects of the story. As Richard Toscan, in his Seminar on Playwriting, emphasizes, “Endings need to grow organically out of the conflict and characters of your play” (<http://www.vcu.edu/arts/playwriting/happend.html>). Fellini (quoted in Perez-Esclarin, 1978) was even more adamant in his warning against a preoccupation with happy endings.

If you give films a happy ending, then you tempt people to go on living in a superficial way By refusing to put a happy ending in the film, one helps to rid them of their false sense of security. Thus they will have to find their own answers. (pp. 33-34)

In most cases the happy ending was innocuous and consistent with the upbeat tone of the article. Ebert (1997) relied mostly on positive anecdotes and conversations and ended on a fitting, somewhat folksy recollection of the project’s end, “Chris, we’re really glad you joined us on our year-end celebration ‘weekend at the beach trip!’ ‘Thanks for inviting me. This is really super!’” (p. 62). On the other hand, Chase, Merryfield, & Chism (1996) and Chase and Merryfield (1998), used hopeful but incongruous endings as a prescription for a challenging and tension-filled partnership. They conclude that, despite the problems, they share a common resolve that they would not want things any other way. Or, there was Hayes, Camilli, and Piazza (1997) who, in describing a PDS that failed with many negative consequences concluded that, “While we failed to institute the PDS initiative, we still ‘keep the faith’” (p. 11).

A preoccupation with happy endings may be less harmless than is first apparent. They should raise an ethical question, albeit one that is unavoidable given the tentative, sensitive balance in PDS partnerships. When we enter a relationship that requires overcoming suspicion and building trust and openness and then research that relationship, is it possible “to go ‘public’ with an interpretation which is other than celebratory” (Thomas, 1993, p. 473)?

No Sense of Place

One aspect of good storytelling missing in every story was a sense of place and context that could provide a deeper explanation of character. A few papers provided a brief description of school or community demographics but, except for reading the authors’ professional affiliations, it would have been impossible to determine whether the events took place in Manhattan or on the Nebraska plains. Unless we believe that university professors somehow transcend their geographic roots or that the term “teachers” refers to some amorphous collective identity, the geography of a PDS story does make a difference, even in academic writing.

A common theme in PDS writing is the clash of cultures and a tendency of

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teachers to resist reforms or the imposition of university ideas on their teaching. Where explanations are offered, they focus on factors of professional culture and socialization. However, it makes sense to also consider the extent to which a teacher's resistance to or support of new initiatives might be related to their sense of place. Consider three fictional groups of teachers who resist new partnerships with local universities. One group is located in a blue-collar area of Chicago, another in a rural area of Georgia, and the third is in a small town on the Great Plains near a large university. All three believe they have the best interest of students at heart and consider themselves open to innovative practices if they help the children's learning. So their resistance cannot be explained away by the usual explanations. Geography and place could provide insight.

Resistance in working class Chicago could be rooted in a place-oriented culture of teachers who are not only members of strong unions themselves but might have grown up among generations of European immigrant union workers. Unions would play little to no role for the Georgia teachers, but historical identity, suspicion of outside imposition, and, depending on the content of the reform, race and religion could be crucial factors. Cautious acceptance of outsiders and change might also be factors in the rural Great Plains, but so would the Midwestern sensibility and work ethic and a history of town-gown tensions. While we want to avoid simplistic stereotyping, it is unwise to engage in PDS talk of community, bridging cultures and parity among institutions without considering geographic and place-oriented influences on how local teachers define community, relationship and the people with whom they form those bonds.

The PDS stories included much talk of insider/outsider perspectives and differences between professional cultures. Personal observation, however, leads me to speculate that those potential clashes are often due less to university and school culture than they are to the individuals who are the local teachers and the university professors. It might not be the university position itself that alienates a PDS liaison from rural Southern teachers as it is the fact that the liaison comes from an entirely different background, brings an understanding of rural poverty that comes only from books, and has an unwittingly parochial and condescending view of the South. If that is the case, the value of the local teacher who becomes clinical faculty is not so much in providing a professional as a cultural bridge.

So, if we were about to write the PDS stories in the three previously imagined school settings, we should keep in mind what good storytelling teaches us. While the larger issues of human existence might be similar, Flannery O'Connor's Georgia cannot be confused with Algren's Chicago. Cather's, *Antonia*, or Jim Harrison's, *Dalva*, all of whom are women shaped by the plains where cattle are raised, not Sinclair's Chicago *Jungle* where they were slaughtered.

Making Stories Matter

In the Benedictine tradition, there is an emphasis on the idea of drawing meaningful lessons from one's experience. "Experience counts. Wisdom is simply its distillation" (Chittister, 1992, p. 48). The notion of distillation served as a helpful metaphorical device in this research in that it implies the active role of both teller and listener in the creation, sharing, and interpretation of stories. The foundational assumption of this study was that both reader and consumer of PDS stories have some obligation in the active search for meaning in individual stories or, in distilling it from the collective body of stories. So, how do we begin to infuse our writing with greater potential and distill greater wisdom from our PDS experiences?

First, we might do nothing. It is possible that our human nature is such that the important elements of story are embedded in the writing with or without the author's intention. It is possible that the reader discovers and draws on those elements subconsciously without further explication. Tampering with that might make the stories too contrived or moralistic, like some heavy-handed child's morality tale.

A second approach might be to keep writing as we have been and leave the task of finding and applying meaning to the reader. This implies that we would have to practice a new degree of attentiveness and train ourselves to act more as literary critics and to look beyond the basic information of any given story or body of stories; to seek more than practical tips or valid research findings. This approach rests on the assumption that we have stories worth mining for insights and that have tapped into the more profound social and personal elements of PDS interaction.

A third approach is more challenging but distributes the responsibility more broadly and is potentially the more powerful and empowering option. This direction would require a new kind of rigor and creativity on the part of authors, greater attention and broader intellectual curiosity on the part of readers, and a willingness to redefine rigorous scholarship and ways of determining it. This move could not be taken lightly since for the stories to have the desired impact they must be carefully crafted by skilled writers. That is not to say that most PDS writing has not been done in an articulate and skillful way. But a new kind of storytelling requires a new kind of writing skill. So, what form might those new stories take?

What if...?

The field of education has never lacked for literary forms of representing itself. Between the gospel portrayals of Jesus' parables and Plato's dialogues to video presentations on Teacher Tube, our practitioners have produced a wealth of first person narratives, diaries of frontier teachers, poetry and novels about teaching experiences as different as *Goodbye Mr. Chips* and *Up the Down Staircase*. To my knowledge no such attempt has been made to chronicle the PDS experience. Besides, the examples above are all long form representations and not conducive to journals or conference presentation, unless education journals were to experiment with serialization like some literary magazines.

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Still, there are other non-traditional narrative forms that would not require inordinate space or a novelist's skill. For example, field and researcher notes could be used in reverse chronological order resembling the narrative in the film, *Memento*. This could be effective in cases where the partnership has, or is about to fail. In this case, the researcher could begin with the current state of the PDS and its problems and then follow the trail of notes regarding key people or activities back to where things fell apart. Individual field notes could be cited and then used to recreate an overall description of the partnership when the notes were made—thus recontextualize the notes for your self as research and for the reader. Not only might this make for an engaging piece for the reader but it could be a helpful way to approach data analysis.

Another approach that could more interestingly capture a multidimensional experience would be to use parallel narratives in a manner similar to that used by Michael Cunningham in *The Hours*. In this novel based around Virginia Woolf's character, *Mrs Dalloway*, Cunningham wove Woolf's own life into independent, parallel stories about two other women in two different time periods that shared characteristics of both Mrs. Dalloway and Woolf herself. In a PDS story the researcher might consider a blend of experiences that share a central concern or experience but differ in setting enough to encourage more profound insights into each person's experience.

Then, perhaps writing with a medical educator who is interested in similar topics related to surgeons-in-training, at points of potential connection, the narrative could shift to an intern put between the conflicting wishes of her primary mentor and another surgeon or the nursing staff. In the process, the reader could get a better idea of how similar or different the teaching hospital model really is but yet how the experiences of novices are also similar. When an issue of collaboration arises and how the tensions made collaboration difficult, the narrative could shift to a historical perspective in which an imaginary preservice teacher might be participating in the highly collaborative planning process of Dewey's University of Chicago Lab School.

Other possibilities could be borrowed from literature and film. Instead of parallel narratives, the author could use multiple, intersecting narratives like in Ende's fantasy, *The Never Ending Story*, where the "real" character can have an impact on the character about which he is reading. Another option might resemble the film *Crash* or Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge at San Luis Rey*, in which the lives of the victims of a bridge collapse are traced to see what brought them all to that place at the same time.

Imagine a PDS committed to improving the education of diverse students in which a preservice teacher's controversial lesson and the opposing reactionary responses of the observing university supervisor and K-12 teacher lead to a tension filled meeting with a student, parent, administrator and faculty. A phenomenological study of each participant and a fictionalized portrayal of what brought each to the

tension-filled moment could provide a powerful lesson about the need to understand the individuals that form a partnership.

Some Final Thoughts

None of those options imply a lower level of scholarly rigor, just a new kind of rigor—the rigor of good prose. This would require procedural changes. Peer review might include fiction writers, psychologists, or literary editors. It might require that those who want to dabble in other literary forms learn from experts outside our field how to write good short stories and how to study people with whom we work and the roles we play with an eye toward character development instead of a forced analysis that is often biased or self-serving but gives the veneer of academic rigor.

Susan Sontag (1966) argued that the critic's task should not be to find “the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all” (p. 14). Sontag wrote this in a longer critique of a culture that is based on excess and overproduction. These conditions of modern life, in her view, have joined to “dull our sensory faculties” (p. 13). In response, she challenged us to recover our senses: “We must learn to see more, to hear more, to *feel* [original italics] more” (p. 14). Maybe the same should be true about PDS writing.

There is no shortage of PDS information. Some databases show more than 7000 entries for the descriptor, “Professional Development Schools.” While there remains a need for good empirical research there is also a need to distinguish among and draw value from the countless descriptions of partnerships and retellings of “what I learned from working with teachers.” Perhaps when we try to write about the human dimensions of the experience—the inherent emotions, tensions, challenges and relationships—we should write in a way that allows the story to tell itself. Our stories do not lack for power. I know PDS colleagues who have returned to campus in tears, the resistance of teachers who resented university attempts to fix their classrooms, and a preservice teacher who walked away from her lifelong ambition to be a teacher because of a bad field experience. Maybe it is just that, to paraphrase Sontag, “In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of” the PDS experience.

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