

Efficacy of Professional Development Schools in Developing Countries: Panama

Gordon Brown, George Mason University
Beverly Shaklee, George Mason University

ABSTRACT: This article attempts to describe the creation and implementation of the first Professional Development School (PDS) model of teacher education in Panama. The authors set the context within brief histories of international education and PDSs and provide operational definitions of the critical terminology. To be sure, the scope and scale of the project was small, and although the implementation met some criteria for PDS models, it exhibited deficiencies in others. Nonetheless, the narrative reveals distinct local impacts, and suggests possibilities for international collaboration for the purpose of developing and implementing teacher education programs.

NAPDS Essentials Addressed: #1/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 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; #4/A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; #8/Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; #9/Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.

Introduction

It is one of the cruel ironies of history that the United States today occupies a uniquely dominant global role while its citizens remain dangerously ignorant of the new global dynamics driving the events of the 21st century. . . A critical point of leverage for higher education in changing this situation is the training of future teachers in K-12 education (Heyl & McCarthy, 2003)

History of International Education

It is possible that different tribes of our ancestors met on the African plains millions

of years ago, exchanged ideas about stone tools and berry-gathering, and thus gave birth to international education. However, lamenting the lack of prior historical context, Sylvester (2007) traces the growth of international education to the 1800s. During the 19th century, the first world's fair occurred, the Spring Grove School in England was founded, and numerous concepts for international education arose. Between 1901 and 1923 more international organizations sprang up, such as the Shantiniketan school in India, the League of Nations Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, and the World Federation of Education Associations (Sylvester, 2007).

However, scholars often mark the origin of the edifice of international education at the near simultaneous opening of the International School of Geneva and the Yokohama International School in 1924 (Sylvester, 2007; Hayden & Thomson, 1998).

Notably, education for international understanding provided inspiration for some of the growth in the field of international education, as evidenced by the work of Fern Andrews and Trocme and Theis (Sylvester, 2007). Part of this growth was in response to the World Wars, as in the case of the 1945 creation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to “prevent the outbreak of another world war” (UNESCO, 2011). In 1964, the *1964 Yearbook of Education* noted “the existence of a new concept—international schools founded with the specific purpose of furthering international education” (Jonietz, 1991 as cited in Hayden & Thompson, 1998, p. 2).

Yet certain facets of international education prove elusive and cause for concern. One is expressed in the above opening quote from Heyl and McCarthy regarding the global ignorance of US citizens. Numerous educators and researchers believe that internationalization of teacher education at the pre-service and in-service levels should provide the solution to this concern, in addition to training teachers to teach in international settings (Levy, 2007; Merryfield, 1995; Merryfield, 1997; Heyl & McCarthy, 2003; Kelly, 2004). Furthermore, Crossley (2002) calls for collaboration between the northern and southern hemispheres in order “to help ‘bridge’ the gap between educational research and its potential to improve policy and practice” (p. 82). On the bridge to the Americas and path between the seas, we tried to do just that. In collaboration with Universidad Latina, Escuela Victoriana Lorenzo and other organizations and individuals in Panama, we developed and implemented the first PDS in Panama.

History of Professional Development Schools in the United States

One of the core concepts of the PDS model—that of apprenticeship of the inexperienced individual with the experienced—could be considered thousands of years old, dating back to the Prophet Mohammed, Jesus of Nazareth, and Siddharta Gautama who mentored their disciples. For a secular example from the seminal western Academy, Socrates trained Plato who founded the Academy and mentored Aristotle. Indeed, most professions evolve from maternal home-based occupations, to apprenticeship-training models, to eventual university-education programs (Case, Lanier, & Miskel, 1986).

In the colonial period of the United States there may have been some examples of pre-service teachers being mentored, to wit, some students of schoolmasters became the teachers. However, pre-revolution, most teachers were untrained and many only had an 8th-grade education (Vold, 1985; Parker, 1990). It was the state of Virginia that in 1686 first recommended an examination and licensure for teachers, and about 75 years later training academies began appearing, such as Benjamin Franklin’s Philadelphia Academy (Vold, 1985; Parker, 1990). The first public institutions to train teachers, called normal schools, opened in Massachusetts in the mid-1800s (Parker, 1990). Hence, Cremin (1953) divides the history of teacher education in the US into the following four periods: (a) 1600–1789, little interest in teacher preparation; (b) 1789–1860, schooling expanded and normal schools were established; (c) 1860–1910, liberal-arts colleges and universities incorporate professional schools of education and normal schools transition to become four-year colleges; (d) 1910–mid-1950s, enrollment rises, curriculum expands, and standards increase (as cited in Case, Lanier, & Miskel, 1986).

Unfortunately public dissatisfaction with education in the United States has persisted. By the mid-1980s this dissatisfaction seemed

The PDS partner institutions are accredited. Both demonstrate a capacity to use results to improve practice.

Note. From NCATE Standards for PDSs (2001) Standard II: Accountability & Quality Assurance—Developmental Guidelines, p. 20.

Figure 1. NCATE Standard II: At Standard

to increase as evidenced by—or a result of—the publication of numerous reports, such as *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), and *Tomorrow's Teachers* (Holmes Group, 1986). It was the Holmes Group (1986) that laid the foundation for the development of PDSs. In *Tomorrow's Teachers*, they called for partnerships between universities and K-12 schools, with year-long internships for pre-service teachers, and practicing teachers acting as faculty in the pedagogical training of the pre-service teachers (Case, Lanier, & Miskel, 1986; Hohenshil, 1987).

Some claim that since appearing just about 25 years ago, the PDS has become “the model of choice” for teacher preparation programs (Neapolitan & Tunks, 2009). This may be a result of some research that has demonstrated gains in a variety of teaching performance measures including instruction, management, assessment, and perseverance (Castle, Fox & Souder, 2006; Latham & Vogt, 2007). The following narrative adds an international and operational perspective to that literature.

Operational Definitions

International Education

Some credit Comenius with introducing the term—and a rationale for—international education (Hill, 2007; Wilkinson, 1998). In Comenius' time, the late 19th century, international education referred to education

in a school with many nationalities, or students travelling to different countries to learn the languages and cultures. Furthermore, many prefer terms such as “global education” or “education for world citizenship” in order to de-emphasize a focus on national boundaries (Marshall, 2007, p. 38–40). Webster's New World Dictionary (1976) defines international as an adjective meaning: “1. between or among nations” (p. 736); and education as a noun meaning “4. systematic study of the methods and theories of teaching and learning” (p. 444). So, while we appreciate the debate over the terminology, in this case, the dictionary definition suffices, as indeed, this project involved a pedagogic partnership between institutions in Panama and individuals from the United States.

PDS

According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2001), “Professional developments[sic.] schools are innovative institutions formed through partnerships between professional education programs and P-12 schools. Their mission is professional preparation of candidates, faculty development, inquiry directed at the improvement of practice, and enhanced student learning” (p. 1). We adopted this as our broad definition, using specific NCATE standards, such as accreditation of partnering institutions, to narrow the definition (see Figure 1, and NCATE Standards for PDSs, 2001).

History of the First PDS in Panama

While discussing a teacher preparation program we were developing in Panama, we realized that we might be creating a PDS and thus we turned to the PDS literature and standards. Despite its diminutive size and limited scope, we became interested in what happened with this PDS—which to our

knowledge was the first international PDS in Panama. We examined the artifacts such as program syllabi, program rationale, and participant feedback. In addition, we reflected and wrote extensively on the process of developing this PDS. Moreover, through informal discussions and formal presentations, we engaged in discussions with scholars regarding the process and results. This left us with a rich narrative, ripe for analysis and critique. What follows is that narrative: the story of how we collaborated with foundations, a school, an orphanage, and a University to meet challenges and experience successes in Panamanian teacher education. Given Gordon's primary, on-the-ground role with this project, this narrative is written primarily in his voice and from his first-person perspective.

The Narrative: *Lo Que Pasó* (tr. What Happened)

In 2005 I moved with my family to a rural village in the mountains of Panama. My wife and I are both English teachers, and we quickly noticed a general lack of literacy-related programs: lending libraries and bookstores were few and far between. Thus, we found ourselves implementing and coordinating a number of programs, including instruction in emergent literacy in Spanish, music, fútbol (tr. soccer), and arts and crafts. A state-run home for abandoned and abused children (HAAC) was the site for some of these activities. For all of these programs, we recruited and worked with instructors, most of whom had neither teacher training nor experience.

The director of a foundation who lived near us suggested we submit a grant to support these endeavors. Shortly thereafter, I was awarded a small grant to enhance three volunteer programs that were currently operating at HAAC, specifically, the Saturday sports, arts and crafts program, the mentor program, and the music program. In addition, two new programs were proposed. One was a

reading recovery class in Spanish for about six children at HAAC that we had determined could not read. The other I titled *Enseñanza por Panama* (EPP, tr. Teaching for Panama). It is this program that became the first PDS in Panama.

The concept for EPP arose from our work with para-professionals: the music instructors, the mentors, and volunteers. Prior to receiving the grant, I informally taught skills for working with children, particularly children with special needs. Initially, I thought we might expand the scope of EPP to include pre-service and in-service teachers in the future, but first I hoped to pilot a few modules with this group of para-professionals on topics such as planning instruction, management/discipline, and diversity/learning styles.

However, two Panamanian directors of a partner foundation wanted EPP available to school teachers immediately. I requested they give me until January, and began frantically calling on former professors and colleagues. The question I asked them was, "If you were designing a teacher preparation program, what three aspects would you consider necessary?" Responses ranged from detailed specific strategies to overarching core philosophies, and a number of themes emerged.

First, that new teachers need less theory and more pragmatics and inspiration. Second, that teacher education instructors should always model the espoused methods, philosophies, and strategies. Finally, there seemed to be consensus that the key to good teaching is connecting with students, and, furthermore, that this connection is primarily engendered by a teacher's genuine affection for students.

Meanwhile, back in Panama, I asked the same questions to Panamanians in the education field. I also added the question, "Cuales temas quiere en un programa asi?" (tr. What topics would you like to see covered in a program like this?). Their responses indicated that they wanted instruction in discipline and technology, but were less interested in education laws and regulations, so I adjusted the

At Standard — The mission of the PDS partnership is integrated into the partnering institutions. PDS work is expected and supported, and it reflects what is known about the best practices. At this stage partners work together effectively resulting in positive outcomes for all learners. Partnering institutions have made changes in policies and practices that reflect what has been learned through PDS work, and that support PDS participants in meaningful ways.

Leading Level — Advanced PDS work is sustaining and generative, leading to systematic changes in policy and practice in partner institutions, as well as to impact on policy at the district, state, and national levels. At this stage of development, the PDS partnership has reached its potential for leveraging change outside its boundaries and its supporting institutions, and has an impact in the broader education community.

Note. From NCATE (2001) Standards for Professional Development Schools, Developmental guidelines, p. 7.

Figure 2. The Two Highest Levels from the NCATE (2001) Standards for Professional Development Schools.

program accordingly. Specifically, I dropped the module on education laws and regulations, and broke out technology as a separate module. Thus, we ended up with four modules of instruction as follows: (a) Organization and Planning; (b) Management; (c) Technology and Resources; and (d) Learning Styles and Diversity.

In August I began exploring a possible partnership with a local university, where I had taught English and enjoyed a collegial relationship with the coordinator of the English department. With just a poorly translated four page description and syllabus, I met with her and the coordinator of the education department. They asked me to present at the administrative meeting that very night.

“No te preocupes,” (tr. “Don’t worry”) they said, “Just come tonight.”

That night they seemed to like the idea and wanted it to start that September. I felt we needed more time, but agreed to try to implement in October, with a lot of university support including the marketing of the program, translation of documents, and provision of two assistants.

That October, we began with two cohorts: a cohort of potential pre-service teachers who were getting their masters degrees in English translation, and a cohort that included two child-care workers from HAAC, five public

school teachers and one school leader. Each module called for approximately ten hours of class time. The cohort of pre-service teachers was required to observe the cohort of in-service teachers and record their reflections. In addition, the in-service teachers agreed to two videotaped observations.

In March, 2009 we graduated this first “pilot group.” A second group, of just pre-service teachers, graduated in November, 2009. In many ways we met the NCATE standards for a PDS (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 below), which include making changes in the policies and practices in the partner institutions.

One example of a partnering institution changing policies and practices as a result of participation in the PDS came from the module on diversity. For one of the sessions a panel of speakers discussed their experiences as diverse learners. The indigenous population in Panama suffers discrimination, oppression, and resulting gaps in education. Hence, the panel was not very diverse racially: all were members of the Ngobe tribe. One was a university student—a rarity for the Ngobe; in fact, he spoke of his experience as the only member of indigenous ethnicity in his university classes. Another was a young Ngobe woman who was graduating from high school—also uncommon for the Ngobe—and planned to attend medical school. The third

panel member was a Ngobe man who only had a 4th grade education. He spoke on behalf of his daughter who suffered from Rett Syndrome, and thus, could not speak for herself. He relayed some of the difficulties she encountered in the school system due to her special needs.

At the end of the panel discussion, the three speakers and PDS students—a mix of pre-service and in-service teachers, as well as an administrator and two child-care professionals, discussed issues surrounding inclusion laws in Panama. The discussion focused on the need for support for classroom teachers in the form of special educators and/or training to better serve students with exceptional needs. Inspired by this session, the director of the partnering public elementary school held a meeting with all teachers and parents of the children in her school with special needs. More than sixty parents attended. The parents and teachers discussed specific ways to better serve particular students.

The program also affected one of the pre-service teachers, who chose to pursue a career in teaching, rather than translation and interpretation. She has since received her master's degree in education. She chose a career path that will earn substantially less money in Panama. Teachers in Panama generally earn between \$350 and \$900 per month; English translation and interpretation services can pay between \$15 and \$50 per hour. Furthermore, this pre-service teacher and one of the experienced teachers from the partnering elementary school delivered the instruction for the second cohort. Thus, in addition to changing special needs policies and practices at the elementary school, we recruited a teacher, and developed teacher-leaders.

Moreover, participants met a number of learning objectives. During the instructional technology module, some of the in-service teachers established email accounts for the first time, and learned how to build web pages

and use PowerPoint, among other skills. Our two child-care professionals, who worked in a local orphanage and had received scholarships to attend the PDS, self-reported less stress, fewer headaches, and less frequent yelling at the children. They credited the program for these changes, particularly the management module.

Indeed, as with any education program, individual student development is often the most rewarding outcome, as the following endorsement from a participant suggests:

Enseñanza por Panama ha sido un curso de gran utilidad...nos ayuda como estudiantes a emplear de una manera diferente divertida y eficaz los metodos de aprendizaje y enseñanza ya sean tradicionales o no. Los diversos modulos...demuestran que la docencia debe ser reciproca, es decir, yo aprendo del estudiante su conducta y le ayudo en la disciplina y aprendizaje, y el estudiante me ayuda a descubrir que metodo utilizar para que tenga una mayor captación de lo que se le pretende enseñar el uso de los seminarios socraticos para el intercambio de ideas y opiniones con el debido respeto, tambien crea un ambiente de confianza y motivación a expresar pensamientos y a saber respetar los otros.

The gist of her note is that this was a very useful program, it taught different, fun, and efficient methods of teaching and learning, which should be reciprocal between teacher and student, and that the Socratic seminar demonstrated a way to allow for interchange of opinions in a safe atmosphere (see Appendix A for complete translation).

Another participant, who was a professor in the partnering university, sent the following email:

I was just thinking of our meeting last Saturday...It was very interesting and full of experience from very dedicated and professional teachers. I enjoyed hearing them all...on my way to the

border, I was meditating and saying like “wow” . . . they’ve been through things I haven’t yet. . . it takes a lot of dedication to keep up with the same patience and love throughout the years.

For me, these individual developments in disposition, motivation, and knowledge are as salient as systemic policy changes—and may be prerequisites for those changes.

While I was generally pleased with these results, of course there were challenges and failures that should inform attempts to establish professional development schools in Panama and other developing countries. Those challenges generally fell into four categories that often overlapped: language, culture, funding, and collaboration.

A simple example of the language challenge was the word “syllabus.” Between the first and second cohorts, as our team reviewed the materials, our two official translators got into a long discussion over the use of the word syllabus. Apparently one of the original translations, while technically correct, is so rarely used in Panama that despite slight spelling differences we determined that it could be confused with “syllable” and, in any case, it would not be understood. The bottom line is that adequate, official translations cost about twelve dollars (\$12.00) per page in Panama. With materials, syllabi, instructions, binders, etc., multiply this by thousands of pages and obviously translation costs must be addressed if countries wish to collaborate on international projects.

Even without translation costs, funding of PDS models is not easy. This program ran on a shoestring: I received approximately seventy-five hundred dollars (\$7,500.00) to develop and implement the program. Most of the materials were covered by the students’ fifty-dollar (\$50.00) tuition. As previously mentioned, the university provided two assistants, promotion, and translation services. The university also provided fine classroom space—secure, air-conditioned, and with computers with Internet. The school, Escuela

Victoriano Lorenzo, also provided excellent class space—an air-conditioned, state-of-the-art computer lab. Nonetheless, funding a PDS is difficult. However, north-south collaborations may be able to access grant monies in both regions, in addition to tapping into funds, such as those provided by US AID, which are slated for programs that involve international cooperation.

Creating anything can be challenging, and creating a school of education is no exception. Decisions regarding what to include, when it is good enough to launch, and the like are common in any creative process. Collaboration brings another set of challenges. Moreover, if the collaboration involves different cultures, more complications may arise. In this case, some of the above-referenced challenges inherent in intercultural collaborations resulted in limiting the number of partner schools. In addition, the termination of the program after two cohorts was largely due to my relocation to the United States. Thus, one implication may be that for international collaborations to succeed, representatives from collaborating nations should be in the same physical location.

So what can we learn from this experience? First, participant comments, such as, “I’ve seen Mr. Brown calm some of our worst children,” seemed to enhance my credibility as a teacher educator: participants knew I was working with K-12 exceptional-needs children in Panama, and this engendered respect. While gaining credibility in this manner may have been more important as a foreigner, the idea of teacher educators concurrently teaching in K-12 schools should be further examined within our own teacher education system. Second, I observed aspects of the Panamanian education system that differed substantially from ours, including required uniforms and values education, both of which inform my practice as an educator today.

What I learned from the Panamanian system highlights a point that was driven

home during the presentation of a preliminary version of this paper at the 2010 Global Education Conference. A participant asked, “Does Panama need us?” I emphatically responded, “No.” However, I explained that Panamanian educators wanted to learn new pedagogical philosophies and methods, mainly because (a) their students performed badly compared to the rest of the region¹; and (b) the professional development they received from the government had not changed in many years².

In this and similar experiences, I have found inter-cultural collaboration enhances both the creative process and resulting outcomes. As my eight-year old son eloquently articulated, “People of different races from different places make the world better, because we can all learn from each other” (personal communication, September, 2010). In the development and implementation of the first PDS in Panama, *eso es lo que pasó* (tr. that’s what happened).

Conclusion

Was this a PDS? It was just forty hours of instruction during Panama’s summer break—not a full year in a P-12 school. However, during those forty hours, the pre-service and in-service teachers exchanged ideas, worked together on assignments, and, when the school year began, the pre-service participants observed their in-service counterparts. In

addition, the partners—specifically the university and an elementary school—shared resources in new ways: for example, joint sessions were held at both sites. Furthermore, one of the instructors for the second cohort was a practicing teacher who graduated from the first cohort, thus meeting the above-referenced Holmes Group (1986) criterion that practicing teachers act as faculty in the PDS model of teacher-preparation.

Like the typical PDS, Enseñanza por Panama partnered a public school with a university. However, in addition to all partner institutions being accredited as per NCATE Standard 2, our partnering institutions included local and international foundations as well as a state-run home for abused and abandoned children. This naturally increased the potential for impact on the broader community.

Indeed, despite its short lifespan of just over a year, I was pleased with some of the aforementioned outcomes, such as recruiting a university student to the teaching profession, developing teacher educator faculty from practicing teachers, and improving teachers’ knowledge and application of technology. The child care professionals at the orphanage reporting less stress and less frequent yelling at the children may have been the outcome that pleased me most. However, the change in special education practices at the partnering elementary school was the achievement that may have qualified our PDS at the “Leading Level” according to the developmental guidelines of the NCATE (2001) Standards for Professional Development Schools.

Despite meeting these and other NCATE standards for PDSs, Enseñanza por Panama never made it past the fetal stage. We had accredited partner institutions. We had practicing teachers working as teacher educators. We had modules of instruction designed for the summer break that received positive feedback from participants. However, the notable deficiency in our program was that our pre-service participants did not spend a

¹The documents supporting the rationale for establishing this PDS included a report in the August 28, 2008 edition of *La Prensa*, the major Panamanian newspaper by Molina, “Educación, Estancada Hace 11 Años,” as well as the SERCE (Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study) of student achievement in Latin America and the Caribbean available online at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001610/161045e.pdf>. Both documents show Panama at or near the bottom of performance in reading and math as compared to other countries in the region, despite Panama’s relative wealth.

²As part of an informal needs-assessment, I asked more than a dozen local teachers and administrators what they wanted in professional development. To a person they informed me that the government promised new professional development content every year, but every year, for more than a decade, they received exactly the same program during the February school vacation.

full year with their cooperating teachers, as the Holmes Group envisioned in 1986.

Moreover, the potential benefits of international collaboration—from accessing funding sources to academic and cultural exchanges were largely unrealized. Nonetheless, aspects of Panama's system inform my current practice as both a high school ESL teacher and a professor of teacher education. For instance, I find myself incorporating more values education, and bringing personal perspective to issues such as uniforms in public schools. Likewise, recent communications with former participants indicate that their practice has changed demonstratively—from applying what they learned from the technology module, to becoming more involved in teacher education in Panama.

Were I to start another international PDS, I would start small and design the program according to a needs assessment, like we did in 2009. However, I would work hard to more effectively realize the benefits of international collaboration—including exchanges of intellectual and economic assets.

Author Note

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Appendix A

Translation of a Participant's Comments

Teaching for Panama has been a very useful course...it has helped us as students to use fun, effective methods of teaching and learning in a different way, whether tradition-

al or not. The different modules...demonstrate that teaching should be reciprocal, i.e., I learn from the student and help her with discipline and learning, and the student helps me discover which method to use to ensure increased uptake of what I am teaching. The use of Socratic seminars for the respectful exchange of ideas and opinions, also creates an atmosphere of confidence and motivation to express thoughts and to respect others.

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Gordon Brown has taught secondary English and ESL for more than 15 years. In 2007 he founded the first Professional Development School in Panama. Gordon currently works at George Mason University while pursuing his PhD in education.

Beverly D. Shaklee is Director of the Center for International Education and Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at George Mason University. She has been a classroom teacher and international teacher educator for some twenty-five years. Dr. Shaklee created the first IB authorized Level I and Level II programs in North America.