

RESEARCH REPORT

A Comparative Case Study of the Professional Development School (PDS) and Traditional Pre-Service Teacher Education Models

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Pre-service teacher education programs have undergone strong criticism with regards to their effectiveness in preparing pre-service teacher candidates for the teaching profession. This qualitative case study explored the influence two different pre-service teacher education programs had on pre-service teacher candidates' perceptions of readiness for the teaching profession. The professional development school (PDS) model provided an integrated learning experience for pre-service teacher candidates that was stretched over a five-month period. The traditional model was structured in a block system whereby pre-service teacher candidates first studied theoretical aspects of teaching and learning, and then were placed in a practicum.

Research Method

The research question that guided this study was as follows: How do the experiences of first year Bachelor of Education students who have participated in a professional development school model differ from first year Bachelor of Education students who have participated in a traditional Faculty of Education model with regards to their perceptions of readiness? In this study, pre-service teacher candidate data were collected at a university campus located in western Canada. Cooperating teachers' data were collected at public school sites: a grades 9-12 suburban secondary school, and two K-8 middle-years schools located in a city situated in western Canada.

The 23 participants were 15 pre-service teacher candidates and 8 cooperating teachers. The pre-service teacher candidates volunteered after a public presentation by the researcher, and the cooperating teachers were randomly chosen from PDS and traditional lists. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, using open-ended questions, with 15 pre-service teacher candidates and 8 cooperating teachers. Emergent and a priori themes were developed from textual data. Using the voices of traditional and PDS pre-service teacher candidates and cooperating teachers, this study attempted to identify the instrumental factors that facilitated strong self-efficacy in pre-service teacher candidates.

Conclusions

(based on data related to the seven research sub-questions)

1. Compared to their first term experience with the traditional model, and in comparison to the pre-service teacher candidates who experienced only the traditional model, did the PDS experience enable the pre-service teacher candidates to make stronger connections between theory and practice? If so, how? How did this influence their perceptions of readiness?

The case study research found that the professional development school experience did enable pre-service teacher candidates to make stronger theory-to-practice connections. The structural design of the professional development school and the four requisite learning conditions embedded within the PDS model were key factors that assisted pre-service teacher candidates to strengthen these connections.

The structural design of the PDS model enabled pre-service teacher candidates to take theory that they had just learned in their university classes and then immediately apply it within

the practicum environment. Learning became highly contextual, and as a result pre-service teacher candidate were provided with more opportunities, over a longer time frame, to engage in the process of praxis.

The four requisite conditions – time, collaboration, ongoing feedback and reflection – embedded within the PDS model worked together to formulate an integrated learning environment. Time, in the form of sustained participation, enabled pre-service teacher candidates to make more theory-to-practice connections over a longer period of time, but the ongoing feedback, collaboration, and self-reflection also engendered deeper theory-to-practice connections. Data revealed that PDS pre-service candidates saw the integrated components of the PDS learning environment as being tremendously powerful in providing them with strong perceptions of readiness for the teaching profession.

2. Compared to their first term experience with the traditional model, and in comparison to the pre-service teacher candidates who experienced only the traditional model, what were the PDS pre-service teacher candidates' perceptions of readiness in the areas of curricula, Backwards by Design planning, differentiated instruction, classroom management, and overall understanding of a teacher's job demands?

In the area of curricula, most PDS pre-service teacher candidates expressed having stronger perceptions of readiness with the PDS *[course title]* curricula compared to their previous curricula experiences in the traditional route. With regards to understanding curricula, PDS pre-service teacher candidates expressed a lack of conceptual coherence within their traditional model experience. Most PDS pre-service teacher candidates articulated feeling comfortable with deconstructing outcomes in the PDS *[course title]* methodology course, based on the instruction that they had received in this course. PDS pre-service teacher candidates reported that they were taught how to deconstruct outcomes. The modelling of how to deconstruct curricular outcomes and scaffold learning provided PDS pre-service teacher candidates with greater understanding of the *[course title]* curricula. As a result of their experience in this methodology class, many PDS pre-service teacher candidates expressed having greater confidence working with *[course title]* curricula.

Compared to the first term experiences and the experiences of the traditional cohort, PDS pre-service teacher candidates demonstrated greater understanding and confidence using a Backwards by Design approach. The majority of PDS pre-service teacher candidates effectively articulated, in great detail, the elements embedded in Backwards by Design planning. PDS pre-service teacher candidates noted that they felt greater confidence using the Backwards by Design framework because they had been taught how to use the framework in the *[course title]* PDS methodology course. PDS pre-service teacher candidates also expressed greater understanding and experience in how to design a year plan for a chosen grade level. PDS pre-service teachers spoke of the need to have greater emphasis placed on unit planning versus overemphasizing lesson planning skills.

With regards to differentiated instruction practices, PDS pre-service teacher candidates' perceptions of readiness mirrored the level of self-efficacy expressed by the traditional cohort. Both pre-service teacher candidate groups spoke highly of *[course title]*, which focused on how to address aspects of student diversity. These pre-service teacher candidates identified that this course provided them with important background information on various student exceptionalities, provided the opportunity to examine IEPs and behavioural plans, and discussed the role that differentiation played in meeting students' needs. Many traditional and PDS pre-service teacher candidates discussed that in their other courses teacher educators created an awareness surrounding differentiation, but they felt unprepared in knowing exactly what tools to use for particular subject areas.

PDS pre-service teacher candidates' perception of readiness in the area of classroom management differed slightly from the traditional cohort and their previous experience in the

traditional model. Some PDS pre-service teacher candidates felt more confident in their classroom management techniques because the sustained participation enabled them to hone their classroom management skills. Many PDS and traditional pre-service teacher candidates expressed that they valued the practicum because they were able to apply various classroom management theoretical concepts to an authentic context.

The majority of both PDS and traditional pre-service teacher candidates expressed that their classroom management methodology course provided them with a comprehensive overview of various classroom management styles. A variety of PDS and traditional pre-service teacher candidates expressed that they valued classroom management theory, but they also articulated that their understanding of these theoretical concepts did not take place until they applied them to an authentic classroom context.

With regards to understanding the demands of the job, some PDS pre-service teacher candidates articulated having slightly stronger perceptions of readiness in the area of job demands compared to their the traditional cohort. They attributed their sustained participation in providing them with a deeper understanding of job demands. These individuals spoke of learning to develop better time management skills, to juggle timetable changes, and to set boundaries between their work life and home life.

3. How did daily contact time with the school influence PDS pre-service teacher candidates' perceptions of readiness?

PDS pre-service teacher candidates saw daily contact time with their school as positively influencing their perceptions of readiness for the teaching time. Learning became highly contextual, and as a result pre-service teacher candidates were provided with more opportunities, over a longer time frame, to engage in the process of praxis. Ongoing contact enabled pre-service teacher to engage in more collaboration and ongoing formative feedback. In addition, some pre-service teacher candidates spoke of having more opportunities to correct mistakes, which they perceived would not have been possible in the traditional model's rigid time schedule that excluded re-do opportunities.

4. Did the structure of the PDS enable pre-service teacher candidates to gain a more well-rounded experience that broadened their skills set and overall understanding of the teaching and learning process, in comparison to the pre-service teachers who experienced only the traditional model? How did this influence their perceptions of readiness?

The structure of the PDS model provided pre-service teacher candidates the opportunity to engage in a phenomenon identified as sustained participation. Sustained PDS participation was defined as spreading university coursework and the seven weeks of practicum time incrementally over a period of five months, from the second week of January to the first week of May. The sustained time period was a component, but not *the* component, that fostered deeper learning experiences. Rather, it was the integration of all four key requisite components – time, ongoing feedback, collaboration, and reflection – that enabled PDS pre-service teacher candidates to enter deeper learning domains.

During the sustained time period, many PDS pre-service teacher candidates encountered deeper and broader learning experiences, which they perceived as developing a stronger level of self-efficacy. Many PDS pre-service candidates articulated that the sustained participation enabled them to gain long-term planning skills that they could not have acquired in the traditional model. They developed stronger relationships with students, which enabled them to gain a clearer understanding of students' learning needs. As well, many student spoke of developing stronger formative assessment and differentiated instruction skills, experiencing a wider-array of curricula, and acquiring a stronger understanding of teaching duties due to the spreading out of course work and practicum time over a five-month period.

5. How did ongoing formative feedback from PDS stakeholders, over an extended period of time, influence PDS pre-service teacher candidates' perceptions of readiness, compared to their first term experience with the traditional model?

The sustained time period of the PDS model facilitated more opportunity to collaborate, to access feedback from a wide variety of stakeholders, and to enter praxis. Some PDS pre-service teacher candidates received more feedback from a wider array of stakeholders (teacher educators, cooperating teachers, field supervisors, and fellow PDS cohort candidates), and this feedback assisted the pre-service teacher candidates to improve their skill sets. In addition, some pre-service teacher candidates spoke of having more opportunities to correct mistakes, which they perceived would not have been possible in the traditional model's rigid time schedule that excluded re-do opportunities. These pre-service teacher candidates saw these opportunities to correct and re-calibrate skills and knowledge as positively contributing to their perceptions of readiness.

6. With regards to the delivery of university coursework, how did having teacher educators who had recent classroom experience influence the PDS pre-service teacher candidates' perceptions of readiness?

Many PDS pre-service teacher candidates perceived that methodology instruction provided by traditional and PDS teacher educators who possessed recent connections to public education was more valuable than methodology instruction provided by teacher educators with limited or no recent classroom experience. PDS pre-service candidates perceived the instruction by these individuals as facilitating stronger preparation for the teaching profession and thus positively influenced their self-efficacy.

7. What specific features of the PDS had a positive correlation with pre-service teacher candidates' perceptions of readiness?

The majority of PDS pre-service teacher candidates articulated that having sustained time within an integrated learning environment was a powerful factor in acquiring deeper knowledge and skill sets, which resulted in a higher level of self-efficacy. The sustained time period was not the only component that produced deeper learning experiences. Rather, it was the integration of all four key requisite components – time, ongoing feedback, collaboration, and reflection – that enabled PDS pre-service teacher candidates to enter deeper learning domains. For many PDS pre-service teacher candidates, the integration of all four key factors led to stronger long-term planning skills, understanding and implementation of curricula, relationship development with students and staff, formative assessment and differentiated instruction skills, and understanding of job demands due to the spreading out of course work and practicum time over a five-month period.

Recommendations for Practice

- Provision of a PDS option for pre-service teacher candidates in both year one and two of their Bachelor of Education programs.
- Implementation of a PDS model in every Bachelor of Education program. The PDS sustained participation environment creates stronger theory-to-practice linkages by enabling greater collaboration, formative feedback, and reflection, which lead to stronger skill sets and conceptual understanding of best teaching practices.
- Preparation of a "Pre-service Teacher Standards of Excellence" document, which articulates essential pre-service teacher learning domains and indicators of proficiency for each domain.

This document could be used by pre-service teacher candidates as an Assessment As Learning tool to track their growth and by teacher educators to anchor their course curricula.

- Creation of major and minor methodology courses that are six credit hours in length. Teacher educators would have more coaching opportunities to develop stronger skill sets in such areas as curricula, instruction, and assessment.
- Greater emphasis on developing stronger Backwards by Design unit planning skills versus the overemphasis placed upon lesson planning.
- Development of a cohesive faculty understanding around the expectations surrounding Backwards by Design unit planning and year planning, and as well a cohesive faculty-wide implementation plan.
- Use of the PDS model to facilitate dialogue around current best practices in teaching, and to initiate co-teaching opportunities in post-secondary and public education settings. This would provide opportunities for teacher educators to work in a public education setting and for exemplary public school educators to collaborate with teacher educators in a post-secondary environment.
- Creation of more partnerships between the university and the school division that were involved in this study, in order to facilitate renewal in pre-service teacher candidate programming, as per the National Network of Educational Renewal (NNER) articulation agreement
- Tailoring of professional development to PDS cooperating teachers' needs, in order to clarify their roles and responsibilities, to enhance their formative feedback skills, and to facilitate renewal opportunities for this cohort of learners.
- Integration of the principles of adult learning theory in the design of pre-service teacher education courses.

About the Author

Ingrid Gross is the staff development specialist at Crocus Plains Regional Secondary School. She graduated from BU with a Bachelor of Arts (1991) and an After Degree in Education (1993). She has been employed with the Brandon School Division for the past 21 years. Ingrid has a passion for learning and believes that every student has immense potential to change the world.