Trends from Three Decades of Professional Development School Dissertation Scholarship

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ABSTRACT: Dissertations are considered an important part of the grey space of academic literature given that they are controlled by university faculty, not by commercial publishers. Study of doctoral dissertations provides an indication of the latest innovations and research interests of the newest generation of researchers and practitioners. Examination of dissertation research typically conveys the influence of contemporary training standards and the state-of-the-art research methodologies. Systematically investigating the grey space of professional development school dissertation research can offer insight into general PDS trends studied by emerging scholars. This study explores the grey space to identify trends from three decades of professional development school dissertation scholarship. The overarching research question for this study was, "What can we learn from the examination of doctoral dissertations that focus on professional development schools from 1990 through 2020?" To date, there has been no comprehensive analysis of the descriptive and conceptual characteristics of the PDS dissertation literature. As the PDS movement completes a third decade of inquiry, analyzing the corpus of PDS dissertation research might offer insight into what doctoral students and their advisors have regarded as important to the field across the last three decades. The findings can provide insight into the nature of the work accomplished and the degree to which PDS scholars are building on the past to determine future PDS research agendas and raise questions regarding PDS work moving forward.

NAPDS Essential 5: Research and Results

Professional development schools (PDSs) are charged with an ambitious mission that reflects complex work requiring authentic collaboration between schools and universities to support learning across all stakeholders. Almost three decades ago, Goodlad (1994) introduced PDS as a long-term solution to improving teaching and learning requiring simultaneous renewal. Almost three decades later, NAPDS released the revised Nine Essentials renewing and keenly focusing the PDS community on the core elements of school university partnership work. According to NAPDS's What it Means to Be a PDS: The Nine Essentials (2021), "The PDS research literature has blossomed" (p. 9), resulting in a revision of the Nine Essentials which reflects the corpus of scholarship of the last few decades. As a result, NAPDS continues to encourage professional development schools to renew, build, and strengthen over time through the collaborative work of simultaneous renewal. Although important progress has been made to build the PDS knowledge base, one relatively unexplored source of PDS research is the "grey literature" of dissertations.

As a body of scholarship, the dissertation grey literature provides unique insight. Donnelly (2017) refers to dissertation as the "grey literature." Grey literature is information produced outside of traditional publishing and distribution channels. Examples include dissertations, reports, policy literature, working papers, newsletters, government documents, speeches, white papers, and so on. Scholars have recognized that the grey literature, although separate from peer reviewed journals, is

important to a comprehensive synthesis given that many dissertations do not find themselves published in other forms (Andres, 2009; Hopewell, Clarke, & Mallett, 2005). Robinson and Dracup (2008) refer to the dissertation as a personal intellectual journey that includes the documentation of the road the doctoral student experienced in bringing them to the topic at hand. Typically, dissertations are situated on the cutting edge and expected to offer original contribution to the field (Robinson & Dracup, 2008).

We believed that this grey literature, PDS dissertations, would provide us with insight into the intellectual journey of the doctoral student under advisement of the research university faculty responsibility for serving graduate students investigating cutting edge problems of PDS practice. Both the National Association of Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) PDS Research Special Interest Group (SIG) have recognized outstanding dissertation work as central to the literature. Given that multiple professional organizations are simultaneously calling for more attention to PDS research and our PDS organizations are recognizing the importance of the dissertation, PDSs would benefit by understanding the trends found in PDS dissertation research as well as engaging in discussion related to the direction of future research to inform our work.

This study seeks to present the current landscape of PDS dissertation research to better understand the trends and content of the dissertations completed between 1990-2020.

Study of doctoral dissertations provides an indication of the research interests of the newest generation of researchers and practitioners. Examination of dissertation research typically conveys the influence of contemporary training standards and the state-of-the-art research methodologies. The dissertation provides a snapshot into the issues, theories, and methodologies that emerging PDS scholars and their faculty mentors identify as important to the field. For example, Davies and colleagues (2010) argued that an analysis of research topics and methods used by doctoral students in graduate school dissertations promises to provide an important perspective and update on the state of research in the field.

To date, there has been no comprehensive synthesis of the descriptive, logistical, temporal, and conceptual characteristics of the PDS dissertation literature. As the PDS movement is entering its third decade, analyzing the corpus of PDS dissertation research primarily conducted on PDSs at research universities sheds light on what newly minted doctoral students and their advisors are seeing as important to the field. This body of work is interesting given that dissertation research represents a unique document published by graduate students who successfully complete their work at doctoral granting universities that are primarily responsible for the preparation of the next generation of PDS scholars and teacher educators. As a result, our research sought to understand, "What is the nature of the corpus of 30 years of dissertation research?" We suggest that the findings from this study can provide insight into trends that might inform future PDS research agendas.

Methodological Approach

Our initial investigation of the PDS dissertations published between 1990 and 2020 searched for trends in four areas: (1) Publication Trends - What frequency and trends exist in the PDS research produced? (2) Methodological Trends - What are the research method trends utilized to study PDS? (3) Context Trends - What universities are producing PDS dissertations? (4) Content Trends - What is the focus area of the PDS dissertation research? For this study, PDS dissertation data was drawn from the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (PQDT) Global Index which provides access to the world's most comprehensive collection of dissertations and theses. We restricted each search to studies with "Professional Development School," "Professional Development Schools," or "PDS" in the title, as we anticipated that studies placing "PDS" in the title more likely positioned PDS at the forefront. In sum, the authors conducted a keyword search of the database for the years 1990-2020 and identified a total of 237 dissertations.

This search was conducted at two points in time. The first search was completed in 2018 identifying 204 dissertations. As a follow up, we conducted a second search in 2020 using the same database and search criteria. That search identified another 33 dissertations conducted between 2018 and 2020. According to the database providers, the additional dissertations found in Proquest were due to a few additional publications and the

ongoing scanning by universities to make their dissertations available to the database (personal communication, March 2021). We used a shared Microsoft Excel database to facilitate organization, analysis, and maintaining the data integrity. Four dissertations from international universities were unavailable for review and, as a result, not included.

Our analysis provides a descriptive snapshot of the nature of the PDS dissertation materials including an understanding of where the research was conducted, a timeline of the work, method, and a content analysis. The analysis required the authors to categorize the dissertations by methodology (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and evaluation) and content focus. Each dissertation was reviewed at the first level by the dissertation abstract and at the second level by the dissertation findings. At times the reviewers had to explore other parts of the dissertation to obtain clarity. Analysis required an inductive process of memoing and content analysis. Using the method of constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), the researchers gave each dissertation topic a descriptive code and then compared and contrasted the identified code with all other assigned codes. From this list of codes, a categorical structure was induced organizing the dissertation topics into the categories/sub-categories. Memoing (Birks et al., 2008) is a flexible strategy in qualitative research wherein the process of construction and nature of content is determined by the preferences and abilities of the researcher and the aims and focus of the specific research study. Content analysis serves as a valuable tool for studying educational documents, as the process allows researchers to gather data and use a systematic approach to identify emerging themes from the existing data. Adams and Schvaneveldt (1985) referred to this feature as sensitivity to context and symbolic forms. These processes made the data easier to manage given the number of dissertations studied. While some dissertations related to several categories, each dissertation was eventually assigned only to the most representative category. To ensure trustworthiness of the inductive coding process, we used the strategy of peer examination (Creswell, 2007) to reach consensus in assigning categorical codes.

Findings

This study investigated the publication, methodological, context, and content of 237 dissertations to identify trends over time. Specifically, we investigated: What frequency and trends exist in the PDS research produced? What are the research method trends utilized to study PDS? What universities are producing PDS dissertations? What content categories are represented in the PDS dissertation research?

Publication Trends

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of dissertations published between 1990 and 2020. The first dissertations to meet our search parameters appeared in 1991. The year 1999 was the most

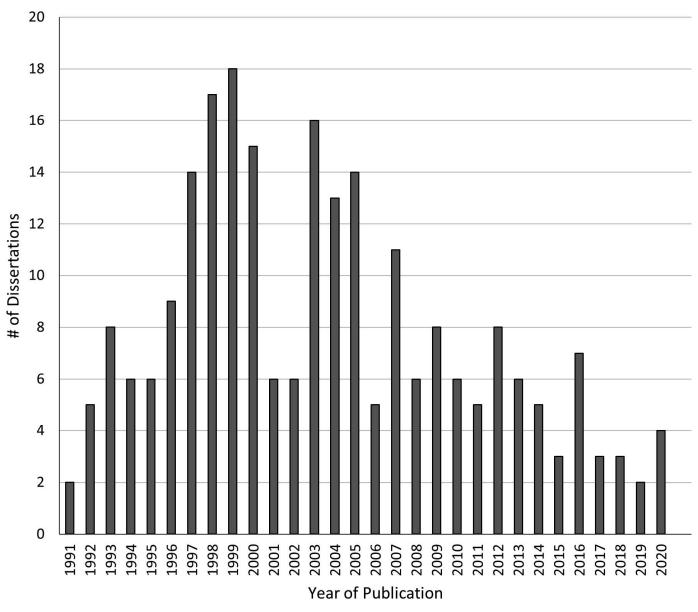


Figure 1. Publication of PDS Dissertations

productive year with 18 dissertations. The figure shows a higher level of PDS dissertation publication between 1997 and 2005 with a steep decline occurring after 2008. The seven most productive years occurred across a nine-year span (1997-2005). There were 119 dissertations during this time period, which is a mean of 13 dissertations per year. Since 2008, or over the past 13 years, there have been 66 dissertations published for a mean of 5 per year. It is important to note that the least productive years were at the beginning and the end of our search period with 1991 and 2019 having only 2 dissertations published.

The data shared in Figure 1 raise a number of interesting questions. Why do we see a decline after 1999? Could this be a result of institutional shifts in program design, leadership or

resource allocation changes? Is there a movement away from Research universities after PDS as an innovation experienced its first decade of implementation? Is PDS implementation spreading to less intensive research contexts or master's degree granting institutions? Or is the bell-shaped curve representing a natural research story line characterized by a rise, mid-point, and decline of an innovation with the beginning experiencing increasing attention, followed by a decline or shift in the research focus? Another option is that the decline may be an artifact of the search. Perhaps there is a movement away from using PDS as a centerpiece of the research with PDS not being a part of the title. Could it be that the elements or essentials of PDS are continuing to be explored but that the elements/

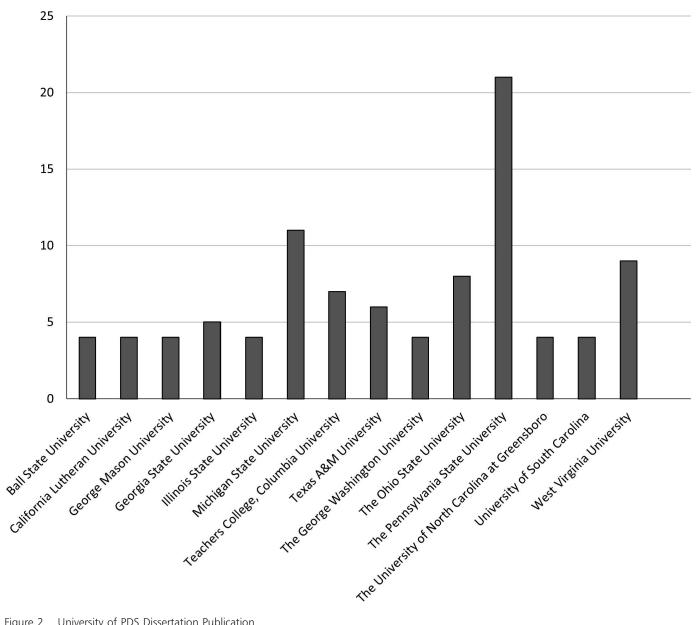


Figure 2. University of PDS Dissertation Publication

essentials are on the front, placing the PDS context at the back? Future research might investigate if the same decline in PDS dissertation publication exists in the journal publication activity given that many PDSs are a part of non-doctoral granting institutions.

University Trends

In regard to the degree granting institution, 112 different institutions published PDS dissertations between 1990 and 2020 for a total of 237 dissertations. Figure 2 lists the top institutions that awarded four or more doctoral degrees during this time period (n=14). Of the top 14 PDS dissertation producing

institutions, the Carnegie Classification included 9 Very High Research, 4 High Research, and 1 Masters College and University. When focusing further in on the top 5 dissertation producing universities, The Pennsylvania State University awarded the most doctoral degrees with a dissertation focused on PDS (n=21), followed by Michigan State University (n=11), West Virginia University (n=9), Ohio State University (n=8), and Teachers College, Columbia University (n=7). Four of these five universities are recognized as Doctoral University-Very High Research according to the Carnegie Classification and the fifth is considered a Doctoral University- High Research according to Carnegie.

Table 1. Active Publication Period

University	Publication Span	# of Years	Active Period
Michigan State University	1993-2000	7	Early
The Ohio State University	1992-1999	7	Early
West Virginia University	1992-2012	20	Early/Mid
Teachers College	1991-2005	14	Early/Mid
The Pennsylvania State University	1999-2017	18	Mid/Late

As a third level of analysis, we sought to understand the publication span of PDS dissertations at the top five universities. Table 1 illustrates the publication span, number of years, and the period of time most active within the 3-decade period. Michigan State University's publications occurred between 1993 and 2000. The Ohio State University's publications occurred between 1992 and 1999. West Virginia University's publications occurred between 1992 and 2012. Teachers College, Columbia University's publications occurred between 1991 and 2005. The Pennsylvania State University's dissertations were published between 1999 to 2017.

In looking at the trajectories of dissertations completed at Michigan State and the Ohio State University, activity ceased by the end of the first decade. West Virginia University and Teachers College showed little activity after the second decade of implementation. Finally, the Pennsylvania State University, having started in the second decade, demonstrated a marked

drop in dissertation publication by 2017. These top research institutions seem to no longer emphasize professional development schools as a central component of their preparation programs. Hints of the impetus for this decline can be found in Elizabeth Green's work (2015) where she outlines the challenges faced by PDS supporters at Michigan State University. These included lack of universal support for overhauling the ed school, the time intensive nature of PDS work which did not align with the traditions of the professoriate, and resistance from uninterested faculty. The tensions (e.g., resistance, promotion and tenure concerns, identity threat) described early on at Michigan State University have been evidenced in the literature over the decades (Campoy, 2007; Mills, 2010; Tom, 1997). These tensions coupled with leadership shifts at the other four institutions have been aligned with the decline in PDS (personal communication). Although shifts have been made away from Research 1 institutions due to a multitude of tensions and

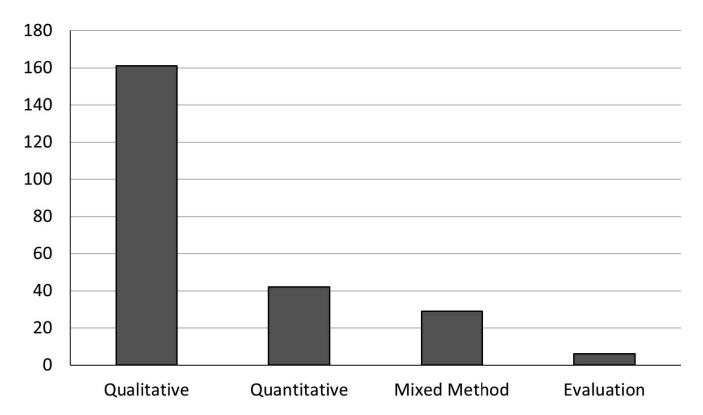


Figure 3. PDS Dissertation Methodology Publication

leadership shifts, perhaps school-university partnership innovation has today become the work of less research intensive and masters granting institutions.

Methodological Trends

During the last 30 years, 161 qualitative, 42 quantitative, 29 mixed methods, and 5 evaluation dissertations were published (see Figure 3). Given that qualitative research is used when the researcher is trying to capture what is going on within a complex situation and is used to define a problem or develop an approach to the problem, the emphasis on qualitative methods is not unexpected. PDSs introduced a complex innovation that required both development and observation of what happened to stakeholders while simultaneously developing a third space setting for learning and renewal (Beck, 2020). Qualitative research serves as a useful tool for exploring ideation, concept and organizational development, role shifts, new pedagogy, as well as capturing perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about the PDS. Additionally, qualitative studies can provide detailed accounts of the complex work and give voice to the participants involved in the work. The body of qualitative work was an important step as it helped position the PDSs to identify key and potentially measurable constructs that could be explored using quantitative methodology. The qualitative work focused on "how something could be done" has positioned the PDS research community to identify specific hypotheses or predictions that PDS practitioners may want to test, as well as develop or identify the appropriate measurement tools that would capture the concepts or variables.

A subset of dissertations focused on quantitative and mixed methods. Of these studies, 13 compared the impact of PDS to non-PDS in relation to learning to teach, teaching quality, and PK-12 student learning. Examples of the focus of these quantitative studies include topics such as teacher efficacy regarding classroom management, instructional strategies, student engagement, Principals' perceptions of teacher performance, promise and effectiveness, support for diverse learners, use of assessment to guide learning and teaching, impact on math and science instruction, scores on initial licensure examinations, and attitudes towards professional development. Moving forward, the PDS community might benefit by asking additional questions such as "how many" or "how often" to validate assumptions we may be seeing to understand the proportion of stakeholders who engage a certain way, or possess certain attitudes or beliefs. We might also consider additional questions focused on identifying patterns and correlations between different components of PDS work.

Finally, a handful of evaluation studies exist. The program evaluation efforts related to professional development work offers insight into how to strengthen program quality and improve outcomes. Examples of evaluation studies included a pilot evaluation of a university-school partnership, focusing on teacher candidates, inservice teachers, and P-5 students that was used to provide the College of Education with data on its first

university-school partnership. Other evaluation studies included sharing how to generate findings related to program outcomes, comparing the current program to the functions illuminated in the PDS literature, making recommendations and outlining a plan for a self-study to determine the level of development of this partnership, improve data collection, and set new goals. Together these studies provide examples of how to create a comprehensive PDS evaluation plan. These types of evaluation efforts can provide formative data that helps build programs, assess achievements, and improve effectiveness. The PDS community would likely benefit by increasing both formative and summative evaluation work that serves as a built-in monitor for reviewing progress over time. One of the most recent evaluation dissertation studies, written by Wade (2020), used Q methodology to develop and explore a participatory process for collecting, organizing and examining educator perspectives regarding the strengths of their current PDS implementation stage. The goal of this dissertation was to focus partnerships on formative evaluation.

Category of Research Trends

As a final step of our analysis, we searched for categorical trends. We believed that identifying the categories of research topics studied by emerging PDS scholars within their dissertation work would help describe the breadth of PDS research to date. Table 2 provides an overview of 5 categories, many of which include subcategories, used to illustrate the work: (1) PDS Development, (2) Impact, (3) Pedagogical Tools, (4) Personnel, and (5) Learning. Important to recognize was that these dissertations often included content that crossed categories and subcategories. When we identified overlapping content, we gave preference to the two most predominant categories.

In addition to delineating the different categories of research, our analysis also allowed us to identify category trends. For example, in Figure 4, the most frequent dissertations focused on learning (intern and teacher) as well as PDS Development in general. These were followed by impact related to curricular/instructional changes and the personnel category (sub-category of mentor). In many cases, teacher and mentor learning overlapped.

Conclusion

What does this mean for current PDS researchers? What does this mean for doctoral students? The discussion focuses on the trends identified within this analysis of PDS dissertations. While it is difficult to judge the quality of the research from examination of abstracts, nor was it the goal of this study, a variety of important discussion items emerged. Finally, limitations of this investigation exist. Although the dissertations were explored in full, more focus was placed on the research attributes and broad topical categories than what the research promotes in new understandings and application of findings.

Table 2. Category and Sub-category of PDS Research

Categories/ Sub-Categories	Definition	Example
PDS DEVELOPMENT	Studies that focused on how PDSs emerged and evolved over time	An account of a school/university collaboration Gail Denise Brooks University of Pennsylvania 1997
IMPACT		
Retention	Studies that focused on retention during preparation and after becoming a teacher of record	The effects of teacher preparation model on persistence in elementary education employment Nancy Latham Illinois State University 2004
Teacher Performance	Studies that focused on teacher and teacher candidate performance	An empirical study of the promise and effectiveness of teachers from professional development vs. traditional models of education Tanya Coffelt Drake University 2013
Induction	Studies that focused on PDS graduate success during the induction period	A case study of one midwestern elementary Professional Development School's experiences in hiring student teachers upon graduation Nicholas Morgan Kansas State University 2019
PK-12 Curriculum & Instruction Change	Studies that captured shifts in curriculum and instruction within the PDS	Empowered students / engaged parents: A case study of student-led conferences in middle level education Troy A. Monroe Central Connecticut State University 2009
Beliefs/Dispositions	Studies that investigated beliefs/ dispositions of educators within the PDS	Middle school culture and teacher efficacy: An examination of relationships in two professional development schools Kimberly Jeane Hartman University of North Carolina, Greensboro 1996
Teacher Education Program Change	Studies that identified programmatic change due to PDS	Renewing institutions: An investigation of the influence of the Professional Development School partnership on teacher education programs Malqueen H. Richardson University of South Carolina 1997
PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS		
Inquiry	Studies that investigated inquiry as a pedagogical tool	Enacting an inquiry stance: Examining the long -term impact of learning to teach in a Professional Development School that fosters teacher inquiry Mary Beth Amond The Pennsylvania State University 2008
Supervision	Studies that investigated supervision as a pedagogical tool	Conceptualizing supervision in the Professional Development School context: A case analysis Rebecca West Burns The Pennsylvania State University 2012

Table 2. Continued

Categories/ Sub-Categories	Definition	Example
PERSONNEL		
Role Development	Studies that investigated new roles and shifts in roles	A case study of the ways individuals conceptualized and participated in a Professional Development School Jami Bice Frost Auburn University 2000
Principal Leadership	Studies that investigated the role of the principal in the PDS	The attitudes and opinions of South Carolina principals toward the six principles of the Holmes Group on the organization of Professional Development Schools Sandra L. Leslie University of South Carolina
Hybrid Educators	Studies that investigated the new role of hybrid educator that emerged as a result of PDS	1993 The role of school-based site coordinator in Professional Development Schools: The impact on teacher professionalism Deborah Ann Kess University of Connecticut
Mentor	Studies that investigated how mentoring was enacted and evolved within a PDS	2002 Mentor teachers' perceptions of their own professional development within a secondary science Professional Development School Sherry Maureen Kreamer The Pennsylvania State University
School Counselors	Studies that examined the role of school counselors in the PDS	2003 Designated helper: Counselor role in an urban Professional Development School Lonnetta E. Wade-White Michigan State University 1997
LEARNING		1337
PK-12 Student Learning	Studies that focused on changes in PK-12 student learning	Student achievement in science and mathematics in urban Professional Development Schools during first year of implementation Susan L. Ogletree Georgia State University 2007
Intern Learning	Studies that focused on changes in intern/ teacher candidate learning	Preparation, perceptions, & professional paths: A mixed-methods study of East Stroudsburg University's elementary education Professional Development School beginning teachers Jodi A. Sponchiado Indiana University of Pennsylvania 2011
Teacher Learning	Studies that focused on practicing teacher learning	Mentor teachers' perceptions of their own professional development within a secondary science Professional Development School Sherry Maureen Kreamer 2003
Teacher Educator Learning	Studies that focused on teacher educator learning	The Pennsylvania State University Perceptions and beliefs of teacher educators who work in Professional Development Schools Larry Glenn Julian The University of North Carolina at Greensboro 1995

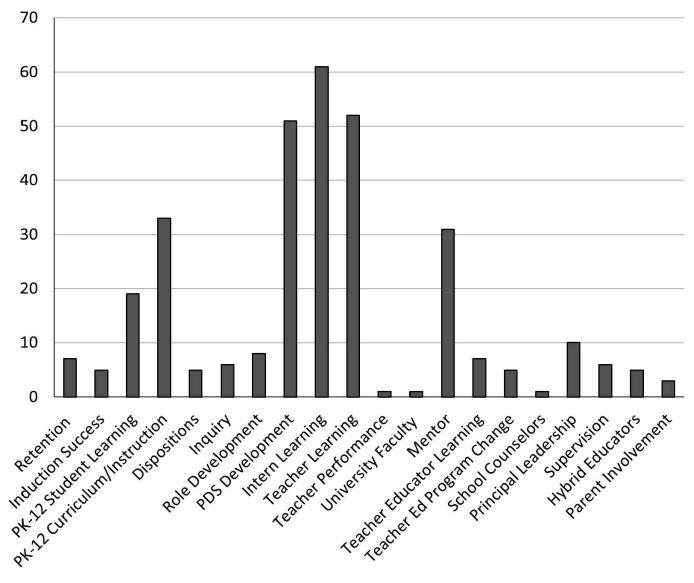


Figure 4. Categories of PDS Dissertations

Several limitations within this study should be noted. First, the process by which dissertations were categorized was largely subjective as professional development school studies do not necessarily fall neatly into specific, well-defined categories, and not all dissertations offer clear, detailed results. In many cases, the decision to pick a category for a particular dissertation over another category relied upon the researcher's personal judgment. Additionally, our search for dissertations was limited by our choice to require the search term "Professional Development School" being a part of the title. As a result, we recognize that there are other dissertations focused on PDS that were omitted. A search of dissertations with PDS in the abstract yielded 349 rather than the 237 used in this study. Additionally, researchers relied on the title and abstracts to provide the necessary information to accurately determine if

the dissertation focused primarily on PDS and should be included in the study.

Perhaps the work has moved to non-dissertation colleges of education

This is an exciting time for professional development schools as PDS researchers and organizational stakeholders are collaborating to envision future and shared research agendas (Garin et al., 2018). In this study, the authors propose setting the stage for that work by looking at the overall body of PDS research from the perspective of "past as prologue" (Shakespeare, 1611/1958) to set the stage for future of PDS research. The "past as prologue" metaphor refers to the idea that history sets the context for the present. Although we began this effort by examining the trends in doctoral dissertation PDS research from the past twenty-eight

years, we have begun expanding our analysis within content/topic areas to provide a meta-analysis of what we know from the corpus of dissertation studies. Future research will include expanding the investigation within this particular data set as well as examining streams of research published in peer reviewed education journals found in the ERIC database. This further study will help provide a clearer illustration of the data and trends of the literature in PDS as a way of identifying areas of future research.

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