Finding Graduate Student Voices Through the Deconstruction of Democratic Relationships in a PDS

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Abstract

Much has been written about how K-12 teachers and university faculty come to understand their roles within Professional Development Schools (PDSs). However, there is not a clear body of research that addresses the role of graduate students who represent a valuable force in PDSs. This paper aims to explore the dynamics of relationship building in a PDS culture that honors collaboration and democratic norms among university supervisors, mentor teachers and pre-service teacher interns. These dynamics are explored from the perspectives of three graduate students (future teacher educators) working in a Pennsylvania PDS. The issues that arise from their dialogue are developed through and around a critical lens that questions the notions of collaboration, democracy, power and voice. The authors conclude that relationship building is no easy feat. They contend, however, that the process of building relationships and establishing mutual support is made optimal through dialogue based in trust and candor.

Effective Professional Development School (PDS) partnerships have successfully produced collaborative cultures between K-12 schools and Universities (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Levine, 1997; Campoy, 2000). The collaborative unions between these two institutions transform their traditional relationships. Traditionally, K-12 and university relations are defined by a culture based on hierarchical norms that promote separation and contrived collegiality (Saranson, 1990; Johnston, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1994). As such, university faculty tend to hold an unquestioned position of superiority over K-12 members, both socially and politically. The collaborative culture of PDS partnerships aims to unravel such traditions through persistent negotiations and dialogue.

Johnston (2000), who speaks from the perspective of university faculty, explains the dynamics of collaboration between university and K-12 partnerships by reflecting upon her work in PDSs:

The norms of collaboration are often antithetical to the ways power and decision making occur within schools and universities. For this reason, working in PDSs often times makes us feel schizophrenic. We move back and forth adjusting our psychologies to the differences in expectations, relationships, and reward systems. (p. 8)

Johnston's description demonstrates that the relationships between PDS partners evolve within and through a struggle. This struggle to collaborate often positions real people in a place that is intricate (Dickens, 2000). Such intricacy brings about tensions that can slow the process of relationship building. Yet, the collaborative nature of PDS partnerships affords a synergism between universities and public schools that result in professional renewal (Dana et al, 2001; Campoy, 2000).

The potential for PDSs to transform the culture of the public school/university relationships is

heavily documented in PDS literature (Su, 1999; Robinson & Darling-Hammond, 1994; Dana et al, 2002). While most accounts of PDS work are written from the university's perspective, the voices of graduate students who work as assistants to university professors are often absent from this body of literature. When graduate students do speak, however, their voices most likely resemble the perspectives of university faculty. This style of research often fails to capture the unique position of graduate students who are expert laborers in PDSs. Like teachers' voices (the way they make sense of their work) are often taken for granted by external educational researchers (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), a similar argument can be made for graduate assistants working in PDSs. Teachers have often been objectified through research but have been ignored as theorists, interpreters, meaning makers and critics of their own practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). For graduate students working in public school/university collaboratives, the ways in which they make sense of their work have often been ignored as well, though perhaps not intentionally. While they are affiliated with the university, graduate students are neither faculty members nor do they belong to the K-12 community. Graduate students are the fibers of a cultural tapestry that are not readily seen by the naked eye but are essential to the beauty found in the collaborative relationships between universities and public schools.

This paper specifically addresses the influences of graduate students as integral members in an elementary level PDS partnership. By giving rise to the voice of graduate students, we will argue that relationship building within PDSs is dynamic. As three graduate students, we explore the tensions felt after joining a PDS collaboration. We reflect on our work as research assistants, teaching assistants, and supervisors in a PDS. Through our findings, we invite all other PDS communities to dialogue about the role of graduate students as theorists, interpreters, meaning makers and critics of their work within these communities.

The Context of the PDS

This paper emerges from an exploration of graduate students' beliefs about their roles and relationships a Profession Development School partnership that holds a high regard for collaboration and community (Dana, 1998; Dana, Silva, & Snow-Gerono, 2002). In its fourth year as a formally recognized PDS, the year in which this paper took form, a cadre of graduate students (who had not previously participated in the organization of this PDS) joined the collaborative. Each of us had come to the PDS without prior PDS experiences and because of deeply rooted beliefs about and commitments to enhancing the teaching profession. Each of us had completed at least one full year of a doctoral program and had spent some time in the previous year visiting the PDS and engaging in dialogue about it. We had opportunities to observe several PDS classrooms and read literature germane to PDS collaborations, and we each spoke with one of the PDS co-directors about the possibility of working within the collaborative. We each joined the PDS with some theoretical understanding of the PDS's structure and culture. Nevertheless, we still saw ourselves as fledglings who had inherited a community of existing relationships between mentor teachers, administrators, and university faculty; we were also aware of many of the challenges ahead of us in the PDS before we began our assistantships. Not only were we faced with the challenge of making inroads toward understanding the cultural and social dynamics of an existing network of people, but we also needed to find ways to build our own professional relationships with those involved in this work. Our responsibilities in the PDS were unique, although each of us was identified as a Professional Development Associate (PDA). On the surface, a PDA is somewhat comparable to a traditional student teacher supervisor. However, the PDA role is much more diverse and complex. A PDA does much more than supervise the year-long, pre-service teaching experience of interns. PDAs serve as resources to all members of the public school community. PDAs engage in collaborative decision making with mentor teachers and other PDAs, assist in

teaching classes for interns, and support other PDS members in professional development endeavors. Each of us, as graduate student PDAs, had a somewhat different responsibility. Barbara, an elementary level principal on leave from her district to complete doctoral coursework, supervised six interns throughout the year and helped to lead weekly building meetings for interns and monthly building meetings with mentor teachers. Mary Beth taught the social studies methods course with a team of school personnel on site (in the public schools) and supervised three interns. As a final requirement for her graduate work, Mary Beth simultaneously completed her dissertation by studying the social studies planning team for the PDS. Jacob held the Holmes Scholar's[1] position, assisted with research in the PDS, and acted as a participant observer in supervising interns. All of us participated in weekly meetings with other PDAs. This group included university faculty (course instructors, PDS co-directors), public school representatives, and graduate students responsible for supervising interns. These meetings generally lasted two hours each week and generally focused on individual intern's difficulties or the mechanics of class assignments.

Our admission into the PDS partnership was made increasingly problematic by the different learning goals we each brought with us. Coming from various academic and professional backgrounds, we each sought to advance the profession of teacher education in varied capacities. Our individual professional goals included positions as a future public school administrator within a PDS partnership (Barbara), a university professor in social studies/teacher education (Mary Beth) and an urban school reform developer (Jacob). These goals added another level of tension toward relationship building as we yearned to draw insights from our work in the PDS. We hoped that these insights would inform our professional goals.

Our PDS is defined by partners working collaboratively within a triad that consists of an intern, a mentor teacher and a university PDA. This reconceptualized notion of supervision for yearlong interns seeks to flatten the traditional hierarchy of student teacher supervision (Silva & Dana, 2001). The triad structure consists of the mentor (traditionally referred to as the cooperating classroom teacher), the PDA (traditionally referred to as the university supervisor and includes university faculty, district persons as well as graduate student assistants), and the intern (traditionally referred to as the student teacher). Dana and Silva (2001) explain the change in terminology as a celebration of collaborative relationships. Similarly, Nolan (1989) explains that the reconceptualization of supervisory terminology must imply recognition of equity, mutual vulnerability, and leadership. These are characteristics promoted by the collaborative PDS relationship.

Methodology

This paper synthesizes an on-going reflective dialogue shared by graduate students who were new to the PDA position in an elementary level PDS. This dialogue came about as an extension of a research assignment proposed to one of the authors by a co-director of the PDS. While the initial project sought to globalize relationship building throughout the PDS, we soon discovered a unique trait. We soon realized that being new to the PDS, we each faced similar struggles. After several informal conversations, we voluntarily decided to formalize our interactions. We engaged in several thought-provoking discussions over a twelve-month period. We each shared various roles in the same culture of collaboration, and our work overlapped in the same classrooms, meetings, and inquiry projects. However, we found both congruence and incongruence in our experiences. Four times throughout the year, we sat around the table in the apartment of one of the participating graduate students and tape-recorded our professional conversations. As we posed questions to each other, we found ourselves trans-

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[1] The Holmes Scholars Program (HSP) is a nationally recognized network of under-represented graduate level students supported by the Holmes Partnership. One goal of the HSP is to have Holmes Scholars engage in teacher education such as PDS work.

ormed by each other's responses. In this regard, our dialogue hinged on the notion of reflexivity in research (Steier, 1991). By bearing witness to theses stories, we hope to challenge other graduate students to interrogate their own positions in teacher education.

Our conversations evolved from a foundation of previously conducted classroom/building level observations and one-on-one discussions with each other. We took turns observing each other in classroom supervision and in PDS meetings. For the purpose of this project, the classroom/building level observations provided a context from which to better understand the nature of each graduate student's interactions with other PDS partners—classroom teachers, undergraduate students and university personnel. These observations also served as conversation starters for the one-on-one reflective discussions that followed shortly after each observation. The reflections and questions applied during these discussions were context specific and varied according to the circumstances of each classroom level observation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This level of questioning lead us to broader wonderings as well. For example, we asked how our experiences would have been different had we been part of the first "formal" year of this PDS; we questioned the ways in which our experiences in this PDS affect our understanding of and development into "educators of future teachers" and supporters of practicing teachers' professional development; and we problematized the dynamics of democracy within our PDS. Our first group discussion was designed to uncover our reactions to the process of developing relationships within the PDS. Subsequent conversations specifically explored the notion of power in relationship development.

Each of our formally recorded conversations was transcribed verbatim and coded. We collectively agreed upon three dominant themes. These are:

1. long-established relationships and norms within a PDS sometimes constrain the professional development of newly arrived graduate students,

2. collaborative relationships are bound by power structures, and
3. peer reflection is an effective tool for evaluating a collaborative relationship's effectiveness.

These themes will be further developed in the context of our process of acculturating into an existing elementary PDS. Also, they represent how our ways of thinking about relationships within the PDS were transformed. As a result of our dialogues, these themes represent a language —a way understanding and explaining—that clarifies our individual and collective experiences throughout the PDS.

Discussion of Findings
Dynamic Relationships

Each of us entered the PDS triad with a long history of working in schools in both a personal and professional context—team planning, teaching, assessing students, engaging in professional development innovations, etc. Hence, we each had come to understand and had internalized the meaning of collaboration in various ways. This work derives from our task of learning to build relationships within a specific PDS—a collaborative in which established members already hold specific conceptualizations and expectations about what it means to collaborate with PDAs. In some regard, we, as new PDAs, were charged to "go forth" into a wilderness with no road map, no compass, and no rations for nourishment.

To describe the process of building PDS relationships, Johnston (2000) asserts, "We had to learn how to work collaboratively. This required overcoming previous stereotypes and perceptions. The process took time, trust, and a willingness to change" (p. 8). Mentor teachers, PDAs, and interns all come to the PDS with specific perceptions about relationships based on their past experiences within collaborative relationships. Also, through information meetings, informal conversations, and literature, each PDS member joins the collaborative with some theoretical understanding of the PDS structure and culture. These various understandings and perceptions directly affect the

capacity for relationship building. Yet, while assumptions were made about the worth of each of our professional backgrounds as a benefit to the PDS, no consideration was given to our conceptualizations of collaboration or to whether or not these conceptualizations actually meshed with those of an existing PDS culture.

Through our conversations, however, a clearer understanding and expectation about key elements of collaboration evolved. We each recognized the need for trust, commitment, time, and dialogue—common characteristics noted in PDS literature (Johnston & Thomas, 1997; Clark, 1999; Lyons, Stroble, & Fischetti, 1997). A major component of our dialogue focused on the engagement of strengths and weakness among different PDAs. We came to embrace and value the notion of mutual growth and transformation as supported through collaboration. In this regard, relationships transform the closed-door ethic (Darling-Hammond, 1994) that holds fast to isolation and traditional boundaries of where one's work stops before infringing upon the space of others. We used this frame of reference to describe how cultural norms based on isolation, traditional stereotypes, and power relations impede upon the process of relationship building. We came to recognize that our critique of these norms contribute to our outsider status when we are not participating in collaborative dialogue with all PDAs. We eventually recognized the need to become more forward in expressing our needs to other PDS members. Our discussions, however, allowed us to appreciate each other as individuals and enabled us to share our passions about PDS work in a way that was not always honored by the full group of PDAs. These new shared understandings and insights began to impact the ways we each viewed the PDS culture and our participation in this culture.

For example, much of our time in PDS meetings was spent discussing the challenges presented by interns. No specific space was made during these meetings to openly and collaboratively discuss the particular interests of graduate students' research agendas nor professional growth. We each felt that such space would have advanced the notion of mutual growth and transformation within a supportive culture. Our discussions revealed a clear gap in the routine and collaborative support provided to interns and mentors compared to the lack of support for new graduate students' professional growth. For example, we each would have like to have learned more about the administrative role of PDS work from various perspectives. Whether those consisted of the role of principals or university co-directors, or the general process for establishing a PDS from the ground up, these goals were not fulfilled. Even limited access to communication channels between the PDS co-directors, principals and university faculty would have met this aim.

Many factors can attribute to the marginalization of graduate students' interests. One such factor lies in the resource of time. Finding time to collaborate in specific ways around each PDS member's goals, needs, strengths, and weaknesses often proves challenging. Another factor evolves from the commonly understood (core) purpose of PDS partnerships. This purpose is to transform the professional life and growth of universities and public schools while jointly working to develop the next generations of teachers (Holmes Group, 1986; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2001). As such, PDAs typically begin the academic year seeking to build relationships with mentor teachers and interns. Much of this relationship building is positioned around dialogue related to teaching, in general, and intern growth, in particular.

As newly arrived PDAs, each us began the year by visiting the classrooms of intern/mentor teacher pairs. We entered this task with the conscious decision not to appear obtrusive, not to make judgments upon the mentors' teaching, and not to impose a presence that might be interpreted by the mentor teachers as the "university experts coming in to fix us." We each understood and honored the initial need to be seen by mentor teachers as a support figure and colleague. This is particularly important for new graduate students who have yet to develop a relationship of trust, candor and respect with established PDS members.

Yet, time became a challenge to the goal of understanding mentors' needs as part of the relationship building process. We often felt as though we were breezing in and out of classrooms and always needing more time for opening the doors of collaboration with mentor teachers. This constraint, however, is not uncommon in most school-related initiatives. Morris, Harrison, Byrd, and Robinson (2000) describe similar time constraints placed upon pre-K-12 PDS work. They recognize the need for changes in school time to support planning, mentoring student teachers (interns), reflecting, and collaborating with university partners (PDAs). Time, in our case, was needed to learn the mutual needs, expectations, strengths, and weaknesses of fellow PDS members as a path toward developing relationships based on trust.

For example, when certain mentor teachers learned that Barbara was a school principal (though on leave), she sensed reluctance on their part to immediately trust her intentions as a PDA. This tension could have been attributed to Barbara's role as a newcomer. Perhaps being new to the PDS and being a principal stimulates what Hargreaves (1994) defines as a culture of balkanization between teachers and administrators that traditionally places these groups in a dichotomy of "them" vs. "us." Because of balkanization, teachers typically view administrators' actions as suspect. In response, Barbara's attempts to build trust developed through persistent efforts to dialogue with mentor teachers. She purposefully initiated conversations around non-threatening topics like teaching, in general, and by focusing on the development of interns, in particular. Similarly for Mary Beth, one mentor teacher demonstrated nervous behavior by fidgeting with a stack of textbooks and avoiding eye contact when she attempted to compliment one of his early social studies lessons. This mentor teacher's response was quick and short, "Well, that [social studies] is your area of specialization." He turned and left the room without engaging in any sort of dialogue about the lesson or the compliment. Perhaps he interpreted Mary Beth's comment as judgmental, particularly since she was new to the

PDS. Perhaps his actions could have been attributed to the fact that Mary Beth was also the methods instructor for social studies or that she was already well known by the interns as having a strong understanding of and beliefs about social studies. In both cases, however, these tensions were smoothed and trust was garnered through frequent classroom visits in which each PDA often provided some sort of assistance (usually working with individual students), through both formal and informal conversations with mentor teachers, and over time.

We came to understand that while PDS partnerships aim toward transforming the traditional relations between universities and public schools through collaborative ties in pre-service teacher development, graduate assistants can easily become defined as invisible fibers if their interests are left unattended. Traditionally, full-time graduate students in PDSs are neither part of the university faculty nor the public school staff. As such, their roles are often relegated to the level of expert laborers who assist university faculty, mentor teachers and interns. This limited view ignores the rudimentary fact that graduate students also need the support of other PDA members in order to actualize their own professional development. Furthermore, graduate students play a significant role in how limited views of their positions are formed and become fixed. For example, we embarked upon the goal of understanding mentors' and interns' needs and goals without question. By doing so, graduate students run the risk of being seen as "helpmates" or "an extra pair of hands" rather than as colleagues in mentor teachers' classrooms. Without dialogue that questions the notion of what it means be an "assistant," graduate assistants' interests, needs, goals, and voices may easily become marginalized.

Collaborative Relationships are Bound by Power Structures

Furthermore, our reflective dialogues uncovered a political domain of relationship building within the PDS. Power manifested itself through tension. In this regard, power relates to the notion of who is invited into conversations, who has

access to certain information, etc. One case in point arose during the first PDA meeting we jointly attended. We were obviously the newcomers to join an existing PDS culture. We were among the first graduate students who had not been part of the organizing of this PDS. While the meeting developed through lengthy deliberations between university and public school PDAs, two of us (Jacob and Barbara) sat quietly throughout the process. We began to share our reflections about the meeting only during this project and concluded that our silence was warranted by the notion of power. Trapped in a traditional belief about power related to the hierarchy between university faculty and their students, we (Jacob and Barbara) were both uncertain as to our status within the PDS. We were uncertain how our comments would be valued, and we were not sure license to speak had been granted to us.

Licensure to speak rises to a level of grave importance in a PDS partnership that espouses a culture of collaboration. In some regards, perhaps because of a pre-established culture within the PDS, our voices were naturally expected to be heard. However, there had been no overt clues (that we could recognize) inviting our voices. Being asked to join a meeting, as exemplified by this example, may not necessarily translate into an invitation to participate by adding verbal input. As graduate students, and in the absence of any signs or symbols to direct us otherwise, we (Jacob and Barbara) reverted to a safe place that ranks graduate students subordinate to university faculty.

Mary Beth, on the other hand, was much more vocal during this meeting. She had the unique position of teaching one of the interns' methods courses. Thus, she may have had a more equal footing with the other course instructors who were university faculty members. This could be because teaching a course insures a certain level of power over what and how to teach. Also, there are certain understood and commonly shared perceptions about teaching among educators that naturally opens doors for dialogue. However, such understandings do not necessarily accompany the roles of graduate students who serve as intern

supervisors and research assistants, as was the case for the rest of us (Jacob and Barbara). Yet, Mary Beth's tentative approaches at finding spaces for integration in the course syllabi were rebuffed. Much time during the first PDA meetings was consumed by finding agreement on a student participation policy for the methods courses. Mary Beth felt that university faculty would appreciate her listening ear more than her questioning voice. Thus, she felt her voice silenced.

Johnston (Kerper & Johnston, 1997) takes up this issue of voice from the perspective of a PDS university coordinator. She addresses the notion of democratic voice throughout the collaborative process—a possibility that she contends is strained by hierarchal power roles that place university faculty at the top. Johnston chronicles her early, yet continuous, struggles not to silence K-12 partners by imposing university standards and norms. In order to give voice to non-university partners, Johnston consciously decided to silence herself. A clear correlation can be made between Johnston's deliberate choice as well as our choice to remain silent. While Johnston's decision extended from a position of power that allowed her to advocate for democracy through her own voicelessness, our voicelessness emerged from an internalized lack of power that supports democracy.

One can pose the question as to whether or not deliberate silence is a true stance toward collaboration. While Johnston initially conceptualized self-imposed silence as a vehicle for empowering others, this stance, however, does necessarily predict collaboration and the rise of voice. Such a stance fails to capture the reality that silence does not erode the conscious recognition of Johnston's position by school level partners. With or without a decision to silence her own voice, Johnston remains to be seen as a university representative by her public school colleagues. In our case, as graduate students, university faculty hold a particular hierarchical position that engenders power. In this regard, university faculty hold the power to support graduate students' funding, to provide professional recommendations toward

future employment, and to offer certain insights into the culture and work of PDS collaborations. This perception of power may also affect the behaviors of other new graduate students who have not yet developed professional and/or personal relationships with university faculty as PDAs. This perception of power, to some degree, directly affected our (Jacob and Barbara) own decision to remain silent during the first PDS meeting.

While Johnston reported a change in her stance by finding silence to be counter-productive to the democratic process of collaboration (Kerper & Johnston, 1997), Cooper (1988, p. 50) explains that, "empowerment is less than power." She contends that the construct of empowerment rests upon the notion of given or earned power that can be seized or taken away by those who have given power to the other. The goal then should be to openly embrace one's position. Only through dialogue—the engagement of voice—can the dynamics of each partner's positions become engaged for the purpose of building upon and developing of each other's strengths. This point is particularly significant in relation to the acculturation of new graduate students into an existing PDS culture. Dialogue that unravels the notion of power within PDSs needs to emerge.

Critical Peer Reflection

A key ingredient to actualizing ideal collaborative relationships within the PDS depends upon dialogue developed around candor and critical reflection. The themes that have evolved from our conversations result from wonderings, questions, prompts, and collective reflection. As identified in the various sections of this paper, our reflections generated new wonderings, shaped our individual and collective thinking about the dynamics of relationship building, and examined the representation of our voices within the PDS. There is no guarantee, however, that these findings would have arisen in the absence of our desires to explore issues with candor and to make ourselves vulnerable to critique. Therefore, reflective dialogue is best served through purposeful enactment and engagement. We have come to recog-

nize such dialogue as the act in which our PDS members actively and purposefully engage in questioning and problematizing the processes and results of relationship development.

Through reflective dialogue, we learned about each other's wonderings, victories, and struggles toward developing relationships with other PDS members. Yet, without our willingness to reflect critically and collectively, we would have been less able to understand each other's challenges. Our reflections helped us to conceptualize hidden norms and practices that impede upon relationship development and the rise of voice for graduate students in the PDS. Here again, coming to understand the dynamic of power within the PDS serves as an example of how critical peer reflection transforms one's thinking. Before our dialogues none of us had recognized the dynamic of power by name. We came to understand that being a PDA (e.g., methods instructor, a former principal, a research assistant and university affiliate) engenders a certain amount of real and perceived power. For example, while classroom PDAs and mentor teachers conference about interns' grades, the final decision rests solely with the PDA. This level of power often presents a problem when PDAs and mentor teachers interpret interns' competency and performance incongruently. Even when Barbara and Mary Beth's intentions to build relationships may have been viewed as suspect by mentor teachers, mentor teachers' "perceptions" of PDA's power (power of authority and/or expert power) translate into "real" feelings. And these feelings influence relationship development among PDS members.

Thus, reflective dialogue is important at any stage of relationship development. However, reflective dialogue is particularly valuable for the acculturation of newly arrived graduate students into an existing culture of collaboration. This is true because the understandings, actions and wonderings of each new member promise to change the fiber of PDS relationships to some degree. These changes add to the complexity of relationship building in PDSs. These changes need to be acknowledged and understood in order to forge healthy, democratic relationships. Reflective

dialogue, in this regard, advances the development of a PDS culture that is relationship oriented, collaborative, risk-taking, reflective, and antithetical to traditional norms of working in isolation.

Conclusion and Implications

While the examples provided here are bound solely by our particular context, the same cannot be said for the themes:

1) long-established relationships and norms within a PDS sometimes constrain the professional development of newly arrived graduate students,

2) collaborative relationships are bound by power structures, and

3) peer reflection is an effective tool for evaluating a collaborative relationship's effectiveness.

These themes are not static and may very well exist in other PDS collaborations. Further conversations around these themes may bring about new insights to the development of PDS relationships, in general, and the acculturation of newly arrived graduate assistants, in particular. Not only might our PDS benefit from such conversations but others as well. Therefore, we challenge other graduate students to write publicly about their own experiences as graduate assistants in PDSs.

As the movement for PDSs grow, we believe that PDSs will play a more important role in the socialization of future teacher educators. As school administrators, faculty members, and education reformists, we will be searching for better ways to promote democratic relationships in teacher education. We know that the voices of graduate students are generally not heard from in PDS literature. We also wonder how such voicelessness may also exist within other PDSs—a voicelessness that places a limit on discussions about the professional growth of graduate assistants.

Through the writing of this article, each of us better understands how issues of power influence the work of graduate students and other PDS members. Whether power is real or perceived,

PDS decisions are developed around this dynamic. Graduate students need to learn ways to navigate through power issues in order to maximize their abilities to develop relationships as well as possibilities for their own professional growth. We have come to recognize that graduate students cannot fall victim to voicelessness if they expect to develop their own research interests and professional goals in relation to PDS work. When graduate students silence themselves, they add to their outsider status. They lose the opportunity to create new avenues for communication. These avenues are vital to the health of collaborative cultures, and graduate students must seek ways to break the silent barriers that impede upon democratic relationship building.

Individually, graduate students need to build personal pathways to collaboration and communication. One way we have found to successfully improve communication between university faculty and graduate students is through collaboratively teaching with a university supervisor and building on discussions around that teaching. Collectively, graduate students can amplify each other's voices and help each other to interpret their individual experiences by engaging in reflective dialogues as illustrated in this paper. We believe that collaborative research or informal group meetings among graduate students may also serve as promising paths to creating dialogic relationships. In fact, we benefitted from developing continuous conversations. These conversations provided a form of peer support. Yet, we realized that by not expressing the need for support to other PDS members, we promoted our own voicelessness.

We believe that organizations need to frequently evaluate their growth—growth brought on by positive and effective relationships. This level of evaluation is made possible only through reflective dialogue that is built upon candor and the willingness to change. By listening to others, particularly newly arrived stakeholders who bring new and multiple perspectives, partnerships and organizations open themselves to the possibility of seeing themselves in a different light. As organizations like our PDS collaborative begin to feel the

effects of momentum brought on by several years of culture building, they often begin to conduct themselves as if on automatic pilot. Certain traditions, communication patterns, and cultural norms go unquestioned. They in turn become status quo among a group of people who know each other well within a specific context and in relation to (a) specific agenda(s). Yet, those new arrivals bring with them new ideas, a new energy and the potential for a new level of culture making, and the benefits of these cannot be fully actualized in the absence of dialogue, democracy and relationship building.

The goal of Professional Development School collaborations is to stimulate and renew the continued growth among all members. Professional learning and student learning can be made richer through collaborations among university faculty, graduate assistants, K-12 school personnel, interns and students. While schooling and teacher preparation in the PDS context are complex, the learning goals and voices of these partners need not be in conflict or ignored. Strong relationships developed through dialogue based on trust, candor, critical reflection, and democratic ideals endorse the goals of learning and professional development for all.

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