

# *PDS Work at a Small University: Solutions to Common Problems*

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**Abstract:** Small universities deal with two primary issues when beginning to use the Professional Development School model: Adequate Funding and Faculty Support. Possible solutions are discussed, including ways to provide adequate funding through grants, enrichment/tutoring programs, reallocation of existing funds, and university priority money, as well as ways to provide more faculty support through various arrangements of current positions, release time, and graduate assistants.

Over the last 10 years, our teacher education program has moved toward a Professional Development School model. In spite of the normal setbacks from which all universities struggle, such as budget cuts and administrator turnover, we have persevered and achieved impressive results. Along the way, we have learned some valuable lessons to share with other small universities who wish to move in this direction. There are two primary issues that need to be addressed if a small university wishes to fully implement PDS work: adequate funding and faculty support.

## **Adequate Funding**

Sustainable funding for PDS can seem daunting at first. However, there are ways to work around this issue, even at a small university. The following funding sources have been used at our university at different times in our development.

### **Federal or State Grants**

This is an area that typically produces much stress on faculty members at small universities because they already are overextended. However, there is money available, especially with President Obama's stimulus plan, for partnership activities with the public schools. It might be worth hiring someone to write grants because of the great potential these grants have for enhancing your teacher education program.

Grants usually allow faculty members to experiment with a plan and see if the value of the plan is worthy enough to continue. Twelve years ago we were able to secure funding for two Professional Development Schools, with teacher mentors for new school faculty and released time for a liaison between the university and each of the schools. These liaisons taught their methods courses on the school campuses and the teachers at the schools were heavily involved in the instruction of those courses. Classrooms at the schools were used for field experiences and the liaisons conducted professional development activities on a regular basis for the classroom teachers. Sometimes, if grants are discontinued, the work of the grant is deemed so valuable the university administration or the school system will continue funding it. Portions of our original grant are still in existence today through university funding.

### **Enrichment/Tutoring Programs**

If you are located in a metropolitan area, such as ours, there is always a need for tutors or enrichment programs in the community. To fill this gap, our department, has instituted two summer camps and two night tutoring programs to provide instruction at an economical price for approximately 200 children annually. These programs serve as field sites for teacher education candidates enrolled in methods courses offered at night and during the summer and the programs can be run fairly inexpensively due to the unpaid contributions from teacher education candidates. The primary expense of these programs is the purchase of classroom supplies. We have run these programs in local schools and on the university

campus in rooms that are infrequently used, and have never paid room rental. Sometimes we secure maid services if a school is used during the summer. Many times we have also hired graduate assistants to help the instructors buy materials, set up classrooms, and handle registration. Even those costs can be eliminated if there are graduate students who need to complete leadership activities as part of their coursework. Other times, the departmental secretary has handled registration and supply purchases. Profits from these programs are approximately \$8,000–11,000 annually.

### Reallocation of Existing Funds

Small universities usually spend a great deal of money on adjunct salaries. We have used these funds in different ways over the years. Twenty years ago we used the adjunct fund to hire traditional intern supervisors. Then, we shifted adjunct funds to hiring instructors for undergraduate methods courses. Of course, dissatisfaction with this plan occurred almost immediately because many of these instructors could only teach at night, as they were public school teachers during the day. Obviously, it is difficult to establish effective field experiences in schools when the methods courses are taught exclusively at night. Five years ago we shifted adjunct funds to the Mentor Teacher Intern Project, where we hire mentor teachers to serve in the capacity of intern supervisors in our partnership schools. These intern supervisors, or mentor teachers, were originally mentored and supervised by our Professor-in-Residence (PIR), who met with the teachers in all the schools bi-weekly during the school year and once during the summer. The PIR also spent many hours working with the teachers through email and phone calls between the school visits. Approximately, \$27,000 in adjunct funds are currently used for our Mentor Teacher Intern Project for the supervision of 60 interns annually. Supervision travel is not required as much with this program and that has saved us money that has been reallocated to other programs.

### University Priority Funds

An obvious way to create new funding is to submit a plan to the university administration. Of course, it is often helpful to emphasize the research behind PDS,. However, when submitting to most university administrators it is very helpful to mention national standards in this plan and how PDS work is expected

by outside accreditation agencies, such as NCATE and the state department. Most university administrators do not want the School of Education to look unfavorable to these organizations. Also, one might look at the university strategic plan or regional university accreditation standards in order to tailor the proposal to address community involvement goals that are common in these plans or standards. Ten years ago, these tactics helped us secure annual priority funding of \$22,000 from the university, in addition to the funds normally allocated to departmental operations and management.

Of course, more financial resources are desired. However, revenue from the sources above (\$60,000 annually) is used to:

- pay additional travel expenses for 10 faculty members associated with the supervision of field and clinical experiences in the PDS sites,
- buy professional books and teaching materials for university faculty so that they have updated materials to use when they model effective teaching strategies,
- purchase teaching supplies so that school faculty and interns have what they need to implement effective instruction in poorly funded schools,
- hire substitute teachers so that our faculty can meet with PDS school faculty during the school day,
- pay for luncheons/refreshments at workshops/meetings,
- send interested university and school faculty members to the National Association of Professional Development Schools conference every year, and
- furnish scholarships for a few mentor teachers to work on advanced degrees at our university.

We have also established a Resource Center on campus, with the help of a small grant, and maintained it with existing funds. This Center has an extensive leveled text collection, math games, and other materials for teacher education candidates to check out for field/clinical experiences. The Center also provides laminating services and the use of other consumable materials for a small fee and and at no cost to faculty.

### Faculty Support

Without offering some type of support for university faculty, PDS work will not succeed. Unfortunately,

the tenure and promotion process discourages PDS work at many universities, even small ones, like ours. New tenure track faculty members are overwhelmed with the requirements for making tenure, especially in the area of scholarship. These requirements leave little time for heavy clinical work, especially at small universities when the teaching load is sometimes heavier and certainly more varied. Of course, it is possible to combine scholarship and clinical work, but it is not easy. Usually, it is necessary to either provide extensive release time to tenure-track faculty or hire non-tenure track faculty to conduct the heavy clinical responsibilities of PDS work. This is probably the hardest thing to manage, but it can be done. Over the last ten years our department has experimented with different arrangements.

*Teacher-in-Residence Program.* Fifteen years ago our School of Education established an arrangement with a large metropolitan school district to provide partial funding for a Teacher-in-Residence (TIR) program. Two teachers from the school system were released from their school duties to work at the university full time for two - three years, teaching undergraduate methods courses and supervising interns. They were jointly paid by the university and school district. Many times a grant can be used for this sort of activity and its success is dependent on a strong relationship between the university and the school district, unless the university wishes to pay the TIR salaries completely. Even so, it is imperative that the TIRs keep their tenured status and benefits package that they have with the school district or interest in this position is doomed from the beginning.

*Professor-in-Residence Program.* When our School of Education received the grant for two professional development schools, the Professor-in-Residence (PIR) program was established. The PIRs served as liaisons between the university and the two PDS sites. As stated earlier, they taught methods courses on the school campuses and coordinated professional development with the principal for the teachers in those schools. The PIRs, who also occupied tenure track positions at the university, received one release course annually to serve in this position. Of course, in order to receive the full benefit from this type of program, it is recommended that faculty members in these roles be awarded more release time if the number of schools increases over the years.

When the grant for the PDS sites ended 12 years ago, the School of Education decided to continue

funding the PIR program in some departments. Our department chose to keep this program and the PIR became the chief liaison with all of our partnership schools and was responsible for setting up all field placements for upper level methods courses. The PIR developed a close relationship with the school administrators and teachers and did much to encourage and support other university faculty members as they began to integrate their courses with the field more intensively and extensively. It was during this time that the tutoring/enrichment programs were established and university priority fund for the Mentor Teacher Project was secured.

*Mentor Teacher Intern Project.* Five years ago the PIR initiated the Mentor Teacher Intern Project, which was described earlier, whereby mentor teachers are hired by the School of Education to serve as intern supervisors. The program began in two schools of one school district and expanded quickly within three years. As the program expanded to its current size, the PIR was given half-time release to serve as a liaison between the department and the partner school systems. The PIR at that time also coordinated all tutoring/enrichment programs, supervised the graduate assistants helping with field experiences, and established most of the field placements for the department.

*Alabama State Teacher Education Report Card.* Our state teacher education report card has provided support for PDS work by giving credit to teacher education institutions who embrace work in the public schools. Thirty percent of the report card grade is allocated to the quantity and quality of clinical experiences for teacher education candidates. There is also a state standard that requires all teacher education instructors who have not taught in the public schools over the last five years to have recent classroom experience in those schools every semester. The report card emphasizes the role of faculty in partnering with the public schools and close supervision of field/clinical experiences. This movement was a turning point at our university and an avenue that is worthy of exploration by teacher education units in other states. At our university it prompted the addition of state report card expectations to the evaluation instrument used annually for faculty members. The essence of the PDS movement and the understanding of the importance of PDS work were soon realized by all faculty members and it has produced more work in the field because of evaluation expectations.

*Clinical Faculty.* Non-tenure track faculty have been used in medical and veterinarian schools for years and have recently found a home in Schools of Nursing and Education or any degree program that requires extensive field/clinical work. Our university went through a process of securing approval for hiring faculty for this type of position and our department converted three tenure track positions to non-tenure track positions. These positions are now occupied with Clinical Assistant Professors, who are hired on an initial one-year contract, with the option to have three-year contracts thereafter. They are not required to conduct scholarly work or complete a doctoral program. However, they do have at least seven years of teaching experience in the public schools and Masters degrees. They may pursue doctoral and/or scholarly work if they wish and may be promoted to Associate Clinical and Full Clinical Professor ranks. These faculty members were hired because they have exemplary classroom instructional competencies and all have recent classroom experience. They are primarily responsible for teaching almost all the undergraduate courses in the department and are required to teach their methods courses on school campuses at least once annually and in the summer enrichment and some tutoring programs at night. They supervise all field experiences for the undergraduate program and conduct professional development activities in the PDS sites. They jointly operate all tutoring/summer enrichment programs and supervise the Mentor Teacher Intern Project in 18 schools in seven school districts. Now, 99% of the interns in this department are supervised through mentor teachers in PDS sites. Clinical faculty members also support tenure track faculty members by securing appropriate sites for

graduate field experiences and helping graduate faculty members supervise those experiences.

*Graduate Assistants.* Graduate assistants at a small university are not usually enrolled in Ph.D. programs. Our graduate assistants are part-time workers who are enrolled in Master degree programs, usually for initial certification in the field. These graduate students, even though they are still beginners, can be used quite effectively in the field to support clinical faculty members who work with undergraduates. The graduate assistants also learn a great deal about teaching as they work in the field alongside the undergraduate instructors. Graduate assistants provide an economical way to support PDS work and are invaluable to clinical faculty members as they provide the tutoring/enrichment programs to the community.

Now, because we have sustainable financial resources and support for faculty, we are ready to move to the next level of PDS work by following the NCATE and NAPDS standards to produce more effective PDS sites and better relationships to impact student learning. We stand as a testament to all small universities with limited financial resources and faculty support that it can be done. <sup>SUP</sup>



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