

NCATE's Blue Ribbon Panel Report and NAPDS:

Working Together

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ABSTRACT: An expert panel including representatives from schools/districts, teacher education, and professional education associations was convened by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) to make recommendations regarding clinical preparation in teacher education. This article presents an analysis of how the ten design principles that frame the panel's report compare to the Nine Essentials required for a high quality professional development school developed by the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS). While panel recommendations focus on teacher education as a whole and the NAPDS Essentials focus on the definition of PDSs, both offer guidance related to meaningful, effective school-university partnerships focused on improving teacher education and P-12 student learning. Four categories encompassing key aspects of both reports are discussed here: deliberate planned partnerships, comprehensive clinical preparation, high standards for all, and data-driven practice. The authors conclude by noting the need for supportive policies (i.e., institutional, district, state, association) and the potential role of NAPDS members as a resource for accredited institutions, districts, state agencies, and other stakeholders.

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has been a nationally recognized accreditor of educator preparation programs since 1954. Its standards and processes are collaboratively developed by education professionals from higher education, P-12 schools, state agencies, and professional associations with a dual focus: (1) ensuring programs meet high standards for educator preparation and (2) supporting programs in continuous improvement and innovation. NCATE has always emphasized the inclusion

of teacher voices with university faculty and professional association representatives in the development of standards and as fully participating members on accreditation teams that evaluate the quality of institutions and their education programs.

As part of its ongoing work in assisting the education community in developing goals and standards for teacher preparation, NCATE convened a Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning. The panel included experts

representing schools, colleges, and professional education associations who worked for 10 months and published their recommendations in November 2010. The report was cited by United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan as marking “the most sweeping recommendations of reforming the accreditation of teacher preparation programs in the more than the century-long history of our nations’ education schools” (Duncan, 2010).

The Blue Ribbon Panel Report clearly calls for reform and, in fact, leads with the statement that teacher education needs to be “turned upside down.” The Panel recommends that instead of being comprised primarily of courses (with loosely affiliated experiences in schools), teacher preparation programs should become “fully grounded in clinical practice” (NCATE, 2010, pp. ii). This means, for example, building teacher education programs by *starting* with clinical experiences and building courses around learning in school settings (instead of the typical approach in which courses are designed first with clinical practice added on).

The Blue Ribbon Panel Report emphasizes that one of the primary vehicles for the transformation of teacher education programs must be intensive and extensive partnerships between higher education and P-12 schools. One might describe the report as a *renewed* call for school-university collaboration following in the footsteps of other major initiatives such as the early work of the Holmes Group (later the Holmes’ Partnership) which originated the term *professional development schools* in 1990 (The Holmes Partnership, 2006). Other major initiatives, including that of the National Network for Educational Renewal, advocated for strong school-university partnerships and public policy support to simultaneously renew schools and educator preparation (Goodlad, 1994). NCATE established standards for professional development schools in 2001 that have been used by many education programs as guidelines for developing and evaluating professional development school efforts. It is from such movements that professional development schools, and eventually the National Association for Profes-

sional Development Schools (NAPDS), began to flourish.

This paper explores the Blue Ribbon Panel’s current recommendations, compares how their conclusions relate to the work of the NAPDS, and considers what the report adds to the national conversation on clinical preparation in teacher education. What can we learn from the Blue Ribbon Panel Report? How can we use it to help us move teacher education and school-university collaboration forward? Should and can NCATE and NAPDS work more closely together?

Comparing the NCATE Report on Clinically Based Teacher Education and NAPDS

The Blue Ribbon Panel Report (BRPR) highlights ten design principles for clinically-based teacher preparation programs. Table 1 aligns these principles with the *Nine Essentials* that define a professional development school as described by the NAPDS (Brindley, Field & Lessen, 2008). The two documents serve somewhat different purposes, but still lend themselves to comparison. The Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations focus on teacher education as a whole and the NAPDS Essentials concentrate on the definition of professional development schools. However, they both offer guidance related to meaningful, effective school-university partnerships focused on improving teacher education and P-12 student learning.

As seen in the table, an analysis of the documents led to the conceptualization of four major categories found in the principles (BRPR) and Essentials (NAPDS): deliberate planned partnerships, comprehensive clinical preparation, high standards for all, and data-driven practice. In brief, the alignment demonstrates considerable consistency between the NCATE Panel recommendations and the essence of professional development schools as defined by NAPDS. We offer further detail regarding each category below.

Table 1. Alignment of NCATE Blue Ribbon Panel Report's (BRPR) Ten Principles for Clinically-Based Programs and NAPDS Nine Essentials

<i>Major Categories</i>	<i>Clinically Based Program (BRPR 10 Design Principles)*</i>	<i>Professional Development Schools (NAPDS 9 Essentials)*</i>
Deliberate, Planned Partnerships	Strategic partnerships including shared responsibility and authority (10) with specific schools designated/supported as clinical practice sites (7)	Comprehensive mission, broader than mission of any one partner (1) with an identified structure that supports collaboration (7) and including dedicated resources and formal recognition (9)
Comprehensive Clinical Preparation	Clinical preparation integrated throughout program (2) and occurring in an interactive professional community (5)	School-university culture embraces candidates' active involvement in <i>all</i> aspects of school community (2) with clearly articulated roles for P-12 and IHE faculty (6) whose work spans institutional boundaries (8)
High Standards for All	P-12 and IHE faculty are effective practitioners who are rigorously selected (6) and prepare candidates who are experts in content and pedagogy (4) including use of state-of-the-art technologies (8)	Shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice (4) with ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all (3)
Data-driven Practice	Focus on student learning (1); candidates evaluated on data (3); and data-driven improvement in teacher education (9)	Deliberate investigation and public sharing of results related to impact on P-12 students and teacher candidates (5)

*Note: The number of the principle/essential is listed in parentheses following the phrase created to summarize that principle/essential. See the full reports for more information on each element.

Deliberate, planned partnerships

Both the NAPDS Essentials and the BRPR call for clear and comprehensive definitions of the commitment and responsibilities of all parties involved with and impacted by teacher education programs. In both cases, the documents describe the deliberate creation of mutually reinforcing partnerships among schools and teacher education programs with all parties sharing a commitment to teacher education and P-12 student learning. The NAPDS Essentials include recognition that the mission of any such partnership is broader than the mission of any one partner. Similarly, the BRPR (NCATE, 2010) notes that “teacher preparation programs and districts have to start thinking about teacher preparation as a responsibility they share, working together” (p. 3). The first NAPDS Essential focuses on the “comprehensive mission” of a professional development school and notes that the involvement of “local businesses,

agencies, and policymakers . . . P-12 parents and families . . . strengthen the PDS” (p. 4). The BRPR places even greater emphasis on the importance of teacher unions and state policymakers as active partners in creating the environment needed for clinically-based teacher education.

Comprehensive clinical preparation

Clinically based teacher education is at the heart of both documents. The NAPDS Essentials focus on the comprehensive integration of teacher candidates into all aspects of the school while the BRPR emphasizes that clinical practice is the core experience of the overall teacher education program. The BRPR (NCATE, 2010) notes that “teaching, like medicine, is a profession of practice, and prospective teachers must be prepared to become expert practitioners . . . In order to

achieve this we must place practice at the center of teaching preparation” (p. 2). The NAPDS Essentials (Brindley, et. al., 2008) note that PDSs “are more than simply places where teacher candidates complete their clinical experiences. Instead, they are schools whose faculty and staff as a collective whole are committed to working with college/university faculty to offer a meaningful introduction to the profession [and] create a school-wide culture that incorporates teacher candidates as full participants of the school community.” (p. 4) The NAPDS Essentials go on to describe how this work must span institutional boundaries and leads to the creation of new roles for both school- and university-based educators (e.g., site coordinators and site liaisons).

High standards for all

Both the BRPR and the NAPDS Essentials emphasize the high quality that is expected of all teacher education program participants. The BRPR (NCATE, 2010) notes that school- and university-based faculty involved in clinical practice must be experts in their fields who are “skilled in differentiating instruction, proficient in using assessment . . . , persistent searchers for data . . . , and exhibitors of the skills of clinical educators” (p. 6). The NAPDS Essentials emphasize the need for “a shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice” including “reciprocal professional development for all participants” with “data-based (qualitative and quantitative) state-of-the-art content” (pp. 4–5). The expertise of school- and university-based teacher educators is viewed as equally important in the NAPDS Essentials with all such educators being important contributors to their shared development of best practice. Similarly, the BRPR emphasizes the extensive collaboration needed to develop and sustain high quality clinical settings and transform teacher education.

Data-driven practice

The BRPR and the NAPDS Essentials reflect the importance of accountability and the need

to focus on data in assessment of all aspects of clinical practice including assessment of candidates and evaluation and improvement of programs (whether an entire teacher education program or a professional development school). As stated in the BRPR (NCATE, 2010, p. 5), P-12 student learning must serve as the focal point for the design and implementation of clinical based teacher education. The NAPDS Essentials (Brindley, et. al., 2008) focus on two overarching goals “the advancement of the education profession and *the improvement of P-12 learning* [emphasis added]” (p. 3). The Essentials go on to state that “the tenet that all students can learn becomes the sine qua non of the PDS work that must be conducted in ways that are unbiased, fair, and just for everyone in the school community” (p. 4). Moving beyond the provision of instruction to the assessment of programs and student learning, the Essentials deal explicitly with “engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice” (p. 6).

The Blue Ribbon Panel Report and Professional Development Schools

NCATE is a long-standing and nationally and internationally recognized leader in the development and improvement of teacher education programs. As such, it is well established to help lead the national conversation on clinically-based teacher education. NAPDS, while technically much “younger,” has members who have been involved in transforming teacher education into a clinically-based approach since the early discussions of professional development schools facilitated by the Holmes Group and others. Newer voices within the NAPDS add insights and innovations to this work that we have engaged in collectively over the last 25 years.

The Blue Ribbon Panel Report provides exemplars of programs from around the country that are implementing innovative practices consistent with the report’s recommendations. Although it does not specifically cite professional development schools, as can be seen through

this brief analysis, professional development schools as defined by the NAPDS and implemented by many NAPDS members include many of the key components in the transformation of teacher education programs cited in the BRPR.

Insights from the Blue Ribbon Panel Report

Professional associations and experienced educators continually reach the same conclusion: It is only through collaborative efforts of schools/districts and universities that we can truly change teacher education to meet the needs of today's students. This conclusion, reflected most recently in the BRPR, validates those who have been involved in professional development schools and working on the front lines of school-university collaboration. While their efforts have had very significant impact on individual programs and the quality of their teacher education graduates, the question may remain as to why these efforts have not been successful in changing the national culture of teacher preparation.

One point clearly made in the BRPR is that school- and university-based educators work within the context of their greater communities. Change can be limited or supported by the power of state, district, professional association, and university policies. In order to move school-university collaboration to new levels, these institutions and agencies must provide a supportive context for educators willing to lead the way in the design and implementation of teacher education programs that are *truly* clinically-based. This supportive context could mean establishing the parameters of and rationale for flexibility in the roles of all parties as part of a memorandum of understanding (MOU); envisioning and providing rewards, incentives or more formal institutional/organizational recognition of work that has previously been unacknowledged in a work culture; allocating specific segments of time and dedicated space for engaging in collaboration, including virtual space to keep collaborations moving forward productively; and actively

seeking, envisioning, and implementing new ways of preparing teachers and educating P-12 students.

Working together

Professional development schools and the NAPDS are in a unique position to contribute to the implementation of strategies recommended by the Blue Ribbon Panel. We are pleased to report that NAPDS is engaged in dialogue with NCATE regarding implementation of the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations. We are exploring how NAPDS and our experienced membership can share their expertise with NCATE accredited institutions, its Alliance states, and stakeholder agencies that are also working to make the words of the BRPR paper come to life. ^{SUP}

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