

Assessing a Professional Development School Approach To Preparing Teachers for Urban Schools Serving Low-Income, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities¹

By Pia Lindquist Wong & Ronald David Glass

Pia Lindquist Wong is an associate professor in the College of Education at California State University, Sacramento, California; Ronald David Glass is an associate professor in the College of Teacher Education and Leadership at Arizona State University at the West Campus, Phoenix, Arizona.

Some colleges of education and urban school districts have established collaborative Professional Development Schools (PDSs) to prepare teachers across the learning-to-teach continuum (pre-service to in-service to instructional leaders) to address the particular needs of low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse (LI/CLD) students (www.holmespartnership.org/UNITE/). Outcomes, either in regard to K-12 pupils or to pre-service and in-service teachers, have been infrequently examined despite the proliferation of these reforms (Hoffman, Reed, & Rosenbluth, 1997; Johnston, Brosnan, Cramer, & Dove, 2000). Urban PDS experiments encounter many challenges that obstruct efforts to create learning environments that embody the 'engaged pedagogy' necessary for

LI/CLD students to succeed (Glass & Wong, 2003). The difficulties within these K-12 classrooms and university programs are exacerbated by and connected to broader social, economic, and political problems that are endemic to these schools' communities, and that afflict their families as they struggle to survive and progress against formidable odds (Anyon, 1997).

In contexts marked by these innovations and challenges, assessment becomes a key activity to understand the impact of the reform in relation to its established goals and to identify where the work is falling short so that interventions can be revised. Structured evaluation cycles and opportunities to reflect on practice and build grounded knowledge are critical to sustaining momentum for innovation. Insights gained through assessment processes, even when not positive, increase the kinds of institutional and practitioner understanding of the innovations that are necessary to deepen support.

Though all PDS stakeholders affirm the importance of assessment cycles, questions immediately arise about how to evaluate the outcomes of a reform as complex as a PDS, with multiple institutional partners each impacting it at various levels. University PDS components include actions and effects at many levels: faculty member, teacher candidate, course, program, department, college, and campus. K-12 components also include actions and effects at many levels: individual teacher, pupil, grade-level, subject matter, school, union, and district. Moreover, all of these actions and effects interact with and are partially shaped by external factors, particularly the new national and statewide professional and instructional standards and associated tests. This larger policy environment highlights the difficulty of assessing the PDS approach.

Further, external pressures contradict many PDS aims for more innovative instructional methods and deeper involvement of the parents and community in the school, and they drive districts and schools toward increasingly scripted teacher-centered curricula that purport to improve test scores (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003). Because the preponderance of research demonstrates that the focus on high stakes testing yields more pronounced outcome inequalities that reinforce social barriers rather than increase opportunity (Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001), and PDSs seek to overcome these precise effects, the participating university faculty and K-12 teachers are caught in a bind. Their understanding of teaching and learning leads them to search for 'authentic' forms of instruction and assessment geared into formative feedback loops designed to tailor instruction to the specific needs of their LI/CLD pupils who historically have been low-performers on standardized tests. Yet they are forced into compromises by intense pressures to raise test scores rapidly. PDS teachers across the learning-to-teach continuum know that standardized tests, however inappropriately, will be used as a significant measure of their success. Thus, the assessment of the PDS reform has to take into account that what actually is being evaluated is a bowdlerized model distorted by ideologically driven policy agendas originating outside the PDS work.

Even focusing more narrowly on particular aspects of the PDS reform, many difficulties remain that undermine the possibility of sound and valid approaches to determining and evaluating the results. Nevertheless, a systematic cycle of assessment, even if the tools are imperfect, is fundamental to maintaining quality in any innovative effort. Thus, this article examines the findings from preliminary assessments developed for a large-scale PDS experiment undertaken by a California state university and its partner urban schools. Despite the limitations, these have provided important information that has sustained the innovative work unfolding in the PDSs. In addition to reviewing the approaches to assessment undertaken by this PDS project, this article considers the links between assessment and program development and innovation.²

The Equity Network, A PDS Reform Project

Educators and policy makers have long urged reforms of teacher education to address widely perceived failures to prepare teachers adequately for schools serving the poor and those without proficiency in Standard English (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990; Holmes Group, 1995), and PDSs are among the responses. Many programs that claim the PDS label fall short of the associated national standards (NCATE, 2001) because the expected new forms of relationship and practice are at odds with the existing institutional cultures, and broader political forces inhibit or conflict with the change effort (Hoffman, Reed, & Rosenbluth, 1997; Johnston, Brosnan, Cramer, & Dove, 2000). Since substantive institutional change is required of both universities and schools in order to achieve the major goals of PDS programs — professional development across the learning-to-teach continuum, action research linked to instructional practice, school-level reform, and reflective practice, all leading towards improved pupil achievement and teacher preparation — progress toward their realization is generally uneven. This is all the more true in the Equity Network, with twelve PDSs in five districts serving the poorer neighborhoods of the greater metropolitan area of Sacramento, California.

The Equity Network was formed in early 2001 from pre-existing university-school partnerships. Through the PDS model, Equity Network k-16 faculty and student teachers engage in a wide range of activities that create opportunities for both novice and experienced educators to work together to enhance the academic and social development of LI/CLD children: cooperating teacher workshops, teacher research projects, collaborative lesson study, research reading clubs, k-16 co-instruction of teacher preparation courses, k-16 curriculum development projects, before and after school tutoring programs, and school-community events (Science and Literacy Days, Teaching Open House Days, Renaissance Fairs, and Community Health Fairs). The Equity Network also maintains a website, publishes a quarterly newsletter, and makes presentations at local, state and national conferences.

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In 10 of the 12 Equity Network schools, students of color constitute a majority, with Latinos, South-East Asians, and African Americans predominating. The White population includes significant numbers of recent Russian and Ukrainian immigrants. At least 20% of the students in the Network schools are English Learners (ELs); over 40% of the students are ELs in 5 of the schools. In 11 schools, over 50% of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunches; in 7 schools, over 80% of students qualify. The one Network PDS that does not fit this profile focuses on mainstreaming students qualifying for special education.

As Equity Network innovations become institutionalized at the university, school, and district levels, taking stock of the outcomes and processes becomes crucial to sustaining the reform momentum. The interplay between practice, assessment, and innovation are examined through the following discussion of assessment activities concerning students, student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university faculty. The assessment data sources are shown in Table 1.

Assessing Pupil Achievement

Questions about how best to understand, impact, and measure pupil learning permeate discussions in classrooms, schools, districts, boards of education, state and federal departments of education, business roundtables and the halls and classrooms of higher education. Those who study pupil learning are confounded by and in disagreement about how best to measure it in order to isolate and reproduce those factors that contribute to it (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Popham, 2001; Stiggins, 1997). Not surprisingly, then, an assessment strategy that conceptualizes

Table 1
The Equity Network Assessment Sources of Data

- 1.0 Pupil Learning
 - 1.1 SAT-9 and California Standards test scores over time
 - 1.2 Pre/post tests for those involved in tutoring programs
 - 1.3 Academic language production
 - 1.4 Changes in adult contact time
- 2.0 Student Teacher Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions
 - 2.1 Reflections on local PDS activities
 - 2.2 Exit survey
 - 2.3 Performance assessments by cooperating teachers and university supervisors
- 3.0 K-12 Teacher Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions
 - 3.1 Annual writing prompt
 - 3.2 Annual survey
 - 3.3 Reflections on local PDS activities
- 4.0 University Faculty Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions
 - 4.1 Monthly meeting minutes
 - 4.2 Course syllabi over time

and disentangles the effect of the Equity Network PDSs on pupil learning has been the most vexing to develop. Nonetheless, Network practitioners do not equivocate on the importance of understanding the impacts of their work on pupil learning. If the PDS reforms do not also strengthen academic achievement for LI/CLD pupils, then claims to have created a better model of teacher preparation ring hollow.

SAT 9 Scores Over Time

Given the current legal, political, and policy contexts, data on pupil standardized test scores during the first three years of the PDS partnership are necessary though unreliable measures. All of the Network schools made gains during this period, though the scores fluctuate to some degree depending on the grade and subject matter and do not establish any apparent pattern. Most Network schools met their district/state test score targets; target shortfalls were generally in relation to a particular pupil subgroup (e.g., a specific ethnicity or English proficiency level). The overall trend of test score gains has contributed to an increase in the teachers' level of satisfaction and a decrease in the pressure they feel to conform to prescribed test-driven instructional and curricular guidelines. However, the Network interventions are too initial and varied to be considered a reliable "treatment" and classroom and pupil level data, needed to reliably study achievement gains, are either unavailable or inaccessible at this time; thus correlation or causality, positive or negative, between test scores and Network efforts cannot be determined. The Network is working to enable these types of analyses in the future.

Assessment of On-Site Tutoring Programs

In some Equity Network PDSs, teacher candidates tutor pupils over the course of a semester or academic year. In two schools, they are the primary instructors in a before/after-school program that reinforces concepts and skills taught during the day and also pre-teaches curriculum that will be introduced later in the week. In other schools, candidates provide one-on-one tutoring and mentor specific pupils.

Systematic data collected in 2002 on 88 pupils in the before/after-school program indicates considerable gains. Between 12 and 16 pupils participated in each two-month intervention period, and pre/post diagnostic grade level readiness tests were administered. The average gains ranged from a low of 9% among the 3rd grade pupils to a high of 29% among the 4th grade pupils. The clear success of this effort elicited a firm commitment to the maintenance of the program. A new focus has also been added that concentrates on including pupils who are close to moving into a higher SAT 9 achievement band.

The Equity Network is expanding such interventions because they are fairly easy to establish and they align well with the PDS commitment to increased accountability for pupil learning as part of the teacher preparation program. The positive outcome for LI/CLD pupils offers concrete evidence of the benefits of incorporating tutoring activities into the requirements for both a methods course

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and for student teaching. These positive assessments led additional Network sites and university faculty to integrate tutoring approaches into pupil supports and course assignments.

Changes in Adult Contact Time

Two Equity Network initiatives result in increased adult contact time with LI/CLD pupils. In one, cooperating teachers take a 15-hour on-site supervision and mentoring skills course that includes innovative practices for working with teacher candidates to maximize pupil learning, such as by using team teaching, large group/small group interactions, or focused tutorials. These instructional configurations enable cooperating teachers and teacher candidates to redesign classroom routines to increase the individualized attention each pupil receives and to target the specific learning needs of small groups of pupils. To help understand the impact of these changes, the Network is developing an assessment tool to quantify increases in contact time and to identify the qualitative aspects of the instructional interactions.

The second initiative changed the methods coursework in three of the PDSs to enable a very high level of collaboration between the site-based teachers and the university instructors. The schools' curricular themes are woven into university coursework and exemplary approaches for teaching the themes' skills and content are demonstrated on-site by both university faculty and cooperating teachers. Teacher candidates then use project-based lessons to teach the same skills and content to small groups of pupils. This approach to methods coursework increases highly interactive and meaningful adult instructional contact time. An initial effort for assessing this work is described next.

Academic Language Production

In a pilot project, one PDS that utilizes the classroom-based methods coursework model described above is investigating pupils' academic language production in science. Using a pre/post evaluation tool and discourse and content analysis techniques, faculty and teachers identify and quantify changes in pupils' knowledge and application of academic science language, as exhibited through inventories of science vocabulary and in pupils' ability to use science language forms (lab reports) correctly. Should this assessment approach prove to be a valid measure of pupil learning, it could improve teachers' and candidates' understandings of the ways that pupil knowledge changes in a context of intensive, interactive, and sustained small group instruction. If substantive gains are demonstrated, similar strategies can be rapidly integrated into the other Network PDSs.

Overall Impressions about the Impact of PDSs on Student Learning

In 2002-2003, Equity Network teachers responded to a general writing prompt that asked how the PDS work impacted their particular school and classroom. 16 of the 30 respondents specifically described an effect on pupil learning, and many of

their examples confirmed other Network data. Specifically, they affirmed the importance of focused individual and small group instruction for low-achieving or EL students, and they recognized the impact of the ‘fresh’ teaching approaches modeled by teacher candidates. This kind of anecdotal assessment data encourages all the PDS stakeholders to continue their efforts and also clarifies the values and aims shared across institutions.

Assessing PDS Program Graduates’ Experiences and Outcomes

The Equity Network PDS approach has pushed far beyond recent calls by accreditation and credentialing bodies to intensify field experiences for pre-service teachers. Network PDSs additionally emphasize professional development linkages across the learning-to-teach continuum and deeper integration of K-12 teachers into the teacher preparation process. These changes are easily documented at a structural level though they are much more challenging to evaluate in terms of the quality of the teacher candidates’ formative experiences and in relation to the knowledge base and skill outcomes. Equity Network candidates write reflections on their PDS experience and respond to a program exit survey, and their classroom performances are assessed by cooperating teachers and university supervisors. Taken together, these measures provide some insight into the ways that PDS activities shape knowledge, skills and dispositions.

Candidate Reflections

Network PDS teacher candidates participate in a broad range of activities including: tutoring programs, home visits, family education nights, focused curriculum enrichment days (e.g., on multicultural literature), community health fairs, professional book clubs, action research, and classroom-based methods courses. Each activity has an associated structured reflection, and the analysis of responses to these reveals a high value placed on experiences related more directly to pupil learning, such as tutoring, classroom-based methods courses, and action research. The positive results of their efforts and even small successes produce a felt deeper level of commitment to their chosen profession and a greater sense of efficacy about their ability to positively affect pupil learning. Their written reflections also reveal increasing knowledge and understanding of the socio-political context of schooling and a more comprehensive picture of their pupils’ lives through home visits, family education nights, and community activities. The data indicate increasing levels of compassion, sensitivity, and socio-political consciousness and greater sophistication in candidates’ capacities to operate in diverse contexts. Finally, the candidates’ reflections (confirmed by survey results discussed below) point to a budding sense of professionalism and a strong commitment to collaborative work within a professional community of learner-teachers. These glimpses

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at different points in time into the development of the next generation of teachers for LI/CLD communities, though largely anecdotal, have encouraged the hardworking teacher educators in the PDSs who struggle to find the time and energy to continue with the often-messy negotiations and frenzied preparations that make such PDS activities a reality.

Program Exit Surveys

Based on program exit surveys conducted by the College of Education, the Network collected two years of comparative data on PDS and non-PDS teacher preparation. Some interesting differences between the PDS and non-PDS graduates were revealed, though the analysis of these trends must be considered provisional since the surveys have procedural and statistical limits (e.g., the response rate was just over 50%, and the difference in sample sizes may skew the data).

In both cohorts, the PDS graduates consistently gave higher average positive ratings than their non-PDS peers to their classroom teachers, student teaching experience, supervision experiences, and to items related to pupils' cultural and linguistic diversity. These results support the efficacy of the PDS efforts that target sustained professional development for the site-based teachers and collaboration among teachers and university faculty on the field experiences connected to the program. However, there was some inconsistency related to individual items collated within the index on student teaching; namely, non-PDS graduates gave higher positive scores to their feelings of being welcomed by the school staff and being clear about their responsibilities. Thus this index suggested program areas that warranted further investigation and perhaps some modifications.

As part of the survey, the College of Education graduates provided narrative responses to several open-ended questions about their experience. The themes that emerged from the analysis of the PDS graduates' responses directly reflected the structural reforms of that program. For example, the PDS graduates strongly valued the high quality of the cooperating teachers as well as their partnership relationship with them, and they also appreciated that the majority of classes and activities were held at the school site with diversity themes prevalent throughout their experience. A less positive outcome of the structural reform was indicated by the PDS graduates' unease with the intensity of the one-year program and their call for clearer expectations for all parties.

In both administrations of the survey, the exiting graduates additionally responded to a question that asked them to predict the length of time that they would spend as teachers. The graduates' predictions about the length of their teaching careers demonstrated the widely noted idealism of beginning teachers (given the known rate of attrition for teachers), though PDS graduates were notably less optimistic about the prospects for their careers. In Cohort One, 38% of PDS graduates versus 69% of non-PDS graduates viewed teaching as a lifetime career. This difference may reflect greater realism, but it did raise some alarms with university

faculty members participating in the PDSs. However, because the survey results for Cohort 2 were not as markedly different, the Network can only monitor the ongoing survey results to clarify this finding.

The second cohort also responded to a further question about the kind of student population that they were most interested in working with as new teachers. The difference between the PDS and non-PDS graduates' preferences for their initial teaching assignment student populations is striking. These early results suggest that the Equity Network is successfully fostering stronger initial commitments to LI/CLD schools, but it remains to be seen if the career trajectories of the graduates of the two programs differ. These responses are summarized in Table 2.

Cooperating Teachers' (CTs) Assessment of Candidates

In addition to the data on the College of Education graduates' perceptions of the quality of their preparation and experiences in either the PDS or non-PDS programs, the Equity Network asked PDS CTs to assess the candidates using various tools. The Network developed and administered an annual CT survey with items aligned with its activities, including the mentoring of candidates. The CTs who completed the survey worked in various capacities with the PDS teacher candidates, and responded to items about student teachers' content knowledge, dispositions towards low income and diverse pupils, teaching skills, and capacity for self-reflection.

In the first administration of the survey, eighty-two CTs responded and 72% strongly agreed or agreed that the teacher candidates with whom they had worked possessed the expected or requisite knowledge, dispositions, skills and capacities that were the focus of the program. The 28% who disagreed or strongly disagreed (most responses in the former category) reflected the influence of a single respondent per PDS site, perhaps indicating that one particularly weak candidate may have been the focus of the judgment in each case. Results from the second administration of the survey were not yet available at the time of publication.

In addition to these surveys, three PDSs have been developing and piloting an evaluation tool for student teaching that is tied to new state standards (Teacher Performance Expectations) for candidates. This innovative assessment endeavor

Table 2
Summary of Student Teacher Responses to Question
on Student Population Preferences

	Non-PDS N=75	PDS N=27
Low income & diverse	19%	36%
Diverse	36%	50%
Middle income & diverse	30%	0%
Not sure/Blank	15%	14%

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has already generated productive discussions among all PDS participants about developmentally appropriate expectations for candidates, about how to define important professional knowledge, and about the kind of evidence that constitutes an adequate demonstration of required skills and knowledge. It also appears that this tool aimed at the assessment of teacher candidates in their final stages of professional preparation is a highly effective mechanism for CTs to structure critical reflection on their own teaching.

The Equity Network has discovered that deeply integrating CTs into the processes of assessment of teacher candidates, and drawing on their expertise in the creation of innovative tools for this purpose, has contributed to an important and sustained conversation on teaching and learning in LI/CLD settings. As more stakeholders in the PDSs become drawn into this assessment dialogue, they can begin to take more intentional responsibility for their own role in enabling strengthened academic achievement for the pupils.

Future Efforts To Assess Candidates and Graduates

While these initial indicators of PDS graduates' experiences are encouraging, ultimately the test of their preparation will be found in their performance as teachers in classrooms and as future leaders in schools, and in the achievements of their pupils. The Equity Network has graduated three cohorts of teachers who completed the bulk of their field placements and student teaching in a PDS setting, and it is now developing follow-up mechanisms to address issues of retention, professional performance, and professional growth. The Network will pursue these and additional research questions with alumni surveys (the first of which was mailed in summer 2003), focus groups, and surveys of administrators who employ PDS and non-PDS graduates.

Assessing the PDS from the Perspective of Cooperating Teachers (CTs)

Just as the Equity Network made CTs central players in the creation and delivery of the PDS teacher preparation program and in the assessment of teacher candidates, it also sought the CTs' input in the program assessment process. An abundance of anecdotal information with its own themes and concerns emerges from the intensive collaborative work among PDS university faculty members and K-12 teachers, but more reliable data is drawn from CTs' responses to the annual survey mentioned earlier, and also to an annual writing prompt and to evaluation forms distributed at Network activities. The survey has been administered twice (although only data and analyses from the first administration in spring 2002 are available for inclusion in this article) and the writing prompt has been issued twice, though only the first set of responses are discussed here. As noted earlier, roughly 70% (N=82) of the teachers active in the Network responded to the first survey. About 20% (N=24) of the Network teachers responded to the first prompt about ways

in which the PDS impacted various aspects of their classroom and school.

Text analysis of the narrative responses to the first writing prompt yielded a number of shared themes. Many teachers commented on their own improved practice provoked by the many structured opportunities to reflect critically on their experience and to gain access to current ideas and research. The teachers noted the improved learning environments for their pupils due to the enriched curriculum being developed through the Network activities and also due to the reduced teacher/pupil ratios. Network teachers connected the multiple and appropriately focused professional development opportunities to their improved instructional strategies and their capacity to provide enhanced learning environments for their pupils. The final common theme that emerged from the narratives concerned the teachers' appreciation for the ways that the PDS transformed the professional environment of their school through strengthened norms of collaboration and professional learning. The quotations below are representative:

[My] own practice improves as a result of ongoing conversations about purpose, strategy, standards, assessment, and classroom management... [T]he opportunity to reflect on [my] own practice, ... is so critical with the implementation of standards-based instruction. (PDS teacher #13)

[B]eing a PDS has allowed our staff to teach professional development that is relevant to what our classroom teachers are eager to learn, which in turn has motivated them to expand their horizons. (PDS teacher #17)

The PDS teachers' narratives describe superior conditions for teacher candidates to be learning their skills, and contrast sharply with the anecdotal evidence from other college-based programs about difficulties finding high quality placements. This lament is commonly made in reference to establishing connections simply with individual cooperating teachers and not entire schools, and it assumes the virtual impossibility of productive collaborations with LI/CLD schools that often have a demoralized teaching staff. In marked contrast, the data collected from Network teachers indicates that PDS activities (working as a CT, conducting action research, piloting new tools and strategies, collaborating with university faculty, engaging with current research and literature) promote a school culture and professional values that honor local knowledge, promote collaboration, support risk taking and reflection, and reward persistence and commitment. As PDS teacher candidates experience these kinds of energized LI/CLD schools, they may more likely carry these positive and transformative values and expectations to their own formal teaching assignments, and this bodes well for education in these settings.

The survey responses align with many of the themes articulated in the narratives. This survey asked CTs and others at the sites who participated in the PDS to evaluate the quality of the teacher candidates with whom they had worked, of the professional development activities, and of the collaboration with university faculty members. In addition, the survey included an open-ended solicitation to describe any perceived

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benefits of the PDS and also any suggestions for change. Respondents judged the professional development activities in two broad domains: content and pedagogical knowledge, particularly as related to working with LI/CLD pupils, and also the skills and knowledge needed for mentoring the teacher candidates.

Respondents were overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of the professional development offered for working with teacher candidates, identifying it as both informative and immediately helpful in fulfilling their PDS responsibilities. The respondents' agreement was not as strong in regard to the usefulness of the activities to strengthen their own content or pedagogical knowledge. In all but one school the teachers provided a mixed review of the professional development related to educational equity issues, particularly concerning LI/CLD pupils and English learners. This was a troubling finding since the major focus of the Network programs is on these very issues.

Finally, PDS teachers' assessment of the quality of the collaboration was generally positive though there was variation among sites, to be expected given the significant variation in the PDS formation across the Network. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements relating to the positive nature of collaboration with university faculty members, level of input into the teacher preparation program, and amount of support (monetary and personnel) for PDS activities at the site. The major point of dissatisfaction was with the level of teachers' input about student teacher placements and activities. This is an area of ongoing tension related to jurisdictional issues (the university is ultimately liable for candidates), variances in administrative styles at different sites, and difficulties associated with the nascent integration of very different institutional cultures and norms. Fortunately the formal assessment raises these issues in a structural way that permits creative problem solving somewhat independent of personalities or institutional inertia.

PDS teachers also provided feedback on Network-wide, as opposed to site-specific, events. All members of the PDS teams had increased opportunities for professional development because of the Network collaborative, and this enabled both university faculty members and k-12 teachers to explore new domains. University faculty members participated in workshops in content-based strategies that addressed educational equity issues that were made available through district and site-based offerings, and were further enriched through their increased access to classrooms and collaborative work with k-12 teachers. Several joint projects enabled numerous teachers to give presentations or poster sessions at state and national conferences, which opened doors not usually accessible for school-based practitioners. Written feedback and anecdotal reports indicate that these conferences were valuable occasions to reflect critically on the work in the Network PDSs, to learn about PDS and teacher preparation work in other regions of the country, to extend intellectual and professional contacts, and, in some cases, to validate the quality of the Equity Network endeavors.

The k-12 teachers' assessments not only highlighted aspects of the collabora-

tion that were providing significant benefits, but they also identified important areas where substantial improvements were needed. For example, the Network increased support to teacher research and pedagogy workshops and initiated lesson study groups based on weak ratings of previous professional development offerings at the core of the Network's mission, effective teaching and school organizational practices related to ELs and students living in poverty. In this instance, assessment provided committed educators with reliable information about where their efforts are succeeding (even if modestly) and where additional attention and resources should be targeted. This process is inclusive and based on the assumption that assessment data can help stakeholders better understand their efforts, and it contrasts significantly with processes that lead to stakeholders being chastised for failing to meet benchmarks or goals.

Assessing Changes in University Programs

The Network's assessment efforts in regard to the PDS-induced changes in the university-based elements of the teacher preparation program have focused primarily on overall program and individual course content, particularly the ten courses taught on-site at the PDSs. These courses evolved in ways that were uniquely articulated to the PDS context, and decisions were discussed thoroughly among k-16 PDS instructors. Major course activities were designed to correspond to topics and projects covered in the k-12 classrooms and to incorporate issues of significance to the local community. Further, the delivery of these courses became iterative: that is, theoretical and factual information was presented at both university and k-12 levels with age-appropriate strategies discussed among instructors and teacher candidates, the strategies were modeled, the candidates were coached as they implemented the strategies with small groups of pupils, and finally all PDS instructors across the learning-to-teach continuum debriefed the effectiveness of the lesson. A content analysis pre/post redesign is being used to ascertain more specifically the ways in which content and pedagogy in university coursework have been transformed. In addition, because some candidates do not complete their student teaching in a PDS and take course sections offered at the university, the Network's assessment efforts will eventually extend to a comparative analysis of student work across these sections (PDS vs. university) to identify the similarities and differences in the candidates' knowledge, skills and/or dispositions evoked in the course content and activities that may be revealed.

College-wide program changes derived from Network experiences have occurred. A re-accreditation process resulted in a major reconceptualization of methods courses in all programs so that credits were added for field-based labs. Much of the impetus for this change came from Network faculty members who were given leadership roles in the re-accreditation work. The Network's preliminary assessment results definitely contributed to the perceived value and validity of the PDS-linked changes.

Concluding Reflections

While the Equity Network has diligently tried to construct a systematic and comprehensive assessment system to track the effects of its innovations in teacher education, the necessary tasks have not been simple or straightforward. The cost of undertaking such assessments is significant, and in an era of budget tightening, it has been difficult to secure adequate financial and human resources. Moreover, despite recent pressures to change the bias, there is a tendency in k-12 schools and colleges of education alike to treat assessment as an add-on rather than integral activity. The Network's relatively cohesive and committed group of k-16 educators is strongly committed to meaningful evaluation of its work, yet it still struggles to achieve uniform and comprehensive implementation of its collaboratively designed assessment tools. The limited response rates to some assessments ultimately hinder the Network's ability to collect rigorous data to inform its decisions about the efficacy of its programs.

Assessment is essential to experimenting with PDS forms intended to enable the success of LI/CLD students and their teachers. Only ongoing investigations of a wide range of indicators geared into the particular conditions of each context will yield the kinds of information needed for direct feedback to improve teaching and learning. Without the critiques that properly designed assessment projects can generate, well-meaning K-16 educators are bound to reproduce their mistakes as much as they do their achievements. It has certainly been the experience of the Equity Network that efforts to assess the PDS activities, no matter how rudimentary, consistently provided valuable information that led to improved or extended benefits and that identified areas of work that needed concentrated attention. Assessment data not only amplified the knowledge base of the Network educators, but it also proved to be strategically useful in resolving the negotiations and tensions that inevitably surface when multiple institutions attempt to collaborate on common goals.

Members of the Equity Network value assessment as a tool for improving teaching and augmenting learning, and they also recognize its importance in sustaining dispositions towards innovation even when threatened by institutional inertia. Nonetheless, the complexities inherent in PDSs and the limits of assessment technologies cannot be sufficiently overcome to enable findings that identify programmatic or instructional strategies that can provide learning outcome guarantees. The Equity Network concentrates its efforts on developing tools to support ongoing refinements of its innovative practices, and it explicitly rejects the search for a final model of teacher education that can be wholly replicated or required in other contexts. Effective assessment, just like effective teaching, must creatively translate general principles into specific situations. It is important that teacher preparation programs not become subjected to the dominant "one best" dogma that now drives k-12 schools toward a singular definition of a "good" school, with traditional forms of teacher-centered instruction and "bottom-line" outcomes

measured by standardized tests (Cuban, 2003). To some degree, the teacher education reform debate has become mired in its own hardened ideological camps, each determined to reign supreme at the end of the battle (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001), but this can only stifle the innovative potential of PDSs. One certainty, of which the Equity Network is convinced, however, is that innovative and organic assessments have to be part of the central ongoing processes of any PDS that hopes to be successful in urban schools serving low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

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