

## **School Characteristics Leading to Successful Professional Development School (PDS) Collaboration**

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**Abstract:** PDS (Professional Development School) represents a collaborative framework between schools and teacher training institutions whose significance is that it links theory to practice. Additionally, it promotes renewal processes in both schools and teacher training institutions by sharing different types of knowledge. The PDS model was adopted by Beit Berl College in 2000. During the years few schools joined the project and in 2005 a new high school joined the project. That school is now a successful paradigm for PDS collaboration. The partnership was constructed based on the conclusions drawn from research on PDS in different schools. We identified the characteristics of a school leading to successful PDS collaboration, while relating to Teitel's model that merges the principal standards of collaboration with the stages necessary for developing PDS. When we examined the school's success and the achievement of its targets, which occurred over a much shorter period than that of other participating schools, we attempted to identify the school's characteristics and consequently to learn what preconditions must exist for a school to be accepted as a partner in the PDS project. The following qualities were discerned: a school administration that acknowledges the project's merit and gives it organizational and pedagogical priority; a willingness on the part of all the school authorities to operate the PDS project and to construct a relationship of cooperation and trust between the participants; a positive school climate, and good teamwork within that climate; and skilled, professional, and self-confident mentor teachers. In order to achieve success during the first year of operation, greater emphasis must be placed on the realization of school's special interests. School's special needs and the enhancement of students' achievements must take priority from the first year of the collaboration, and most of human resources must be oriented toward the achievement of this objective.

**Keywords:** Professional Development School, teacher training, School Characteristics, student teachers, mentor teachers.

### **Introduction**

The concept behind the idea of PDS is that collaboration between teacher training institutions and schools facilitates change and improvement to both and draws them closer together. Full, meaningful collaboration between academia and the field – narrowing the distance between them and linking theory to practice – is an essential prerequisite for good teacher training and for improved teaching-learning in schools. The professional development of all the participants – student teachers, method instructors, mentor teachers and school teachers – occurs intensively in school together with collaborative learning and research. The connections established between theory and practice develop both learning communities, and help create a collaborative culture.

### **Considerations Involved in Choosing a PDS School**

Opinions differ over what kind of school lends itself to the PDS model. At the beginning of the 1990s, when the PDS model first appeared in the United States, it was assumed that not every school would prove to be suitable for collaboration (Silberstein, Back & Ariav, 2001; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). It was claimed that because students tend to learn from role

models, only schools demonstrating appropriate models for emulation could be considered (Robinson & Darling – Hammond, 1994). By contrast, in England the Council For Accreditation of Teacher Education, recommended that every school in the country should become involved in teacher training. (Maynard & Furlong, 1995).

Schools join the PDS project for either ideological or practical reasons, but either way the joint interests of each side – school and college – must be taken into consideration in order to achieve collaboration (Robinson & Darling – Hammond, 1994).

### **Standards and Targets in PDS Development**

Teitel's "pyramid model" (Teitel, 2003) combines the main standards of collaboration with the stages necessary for developing PDS. Partnership is dependent on two standards that constitute its very foundation:

1. Collaboration: creating collaboration and developing it into a relationship of mutual commitment and interaction.
2. Structures, resources, and roles: methods of organization and operation of the partnership (new roles, responsibilities, decision-making processes, organizational structures, resources, and resource allocation processes).

The third standard, based on the above standards, is the "learning community": the core of PDS. The learning community contributes to the professional development of all participants. Academic college faculty contributes their academic-theoretical knowledge and school staff, especially the mentor teachers, contribute their practical knowledge. The student teachers contribute their outlook and experiences. The final and most important stage is the outcome: the enhancement of the students' learning, the ultimate objective of PDS.

Two other standards must also be in place throughout the various processes:

1. Accountability and quality assurance: evaluation of the partnership and of its results through methods that obligate the participants to account for their actions.
2. Diversity and equity: evaluation and training of a diverse group of teachers who will provide learning opportunities to all the learners.

We adapted Teitel's model to achieve viable targets (see Figure 1).

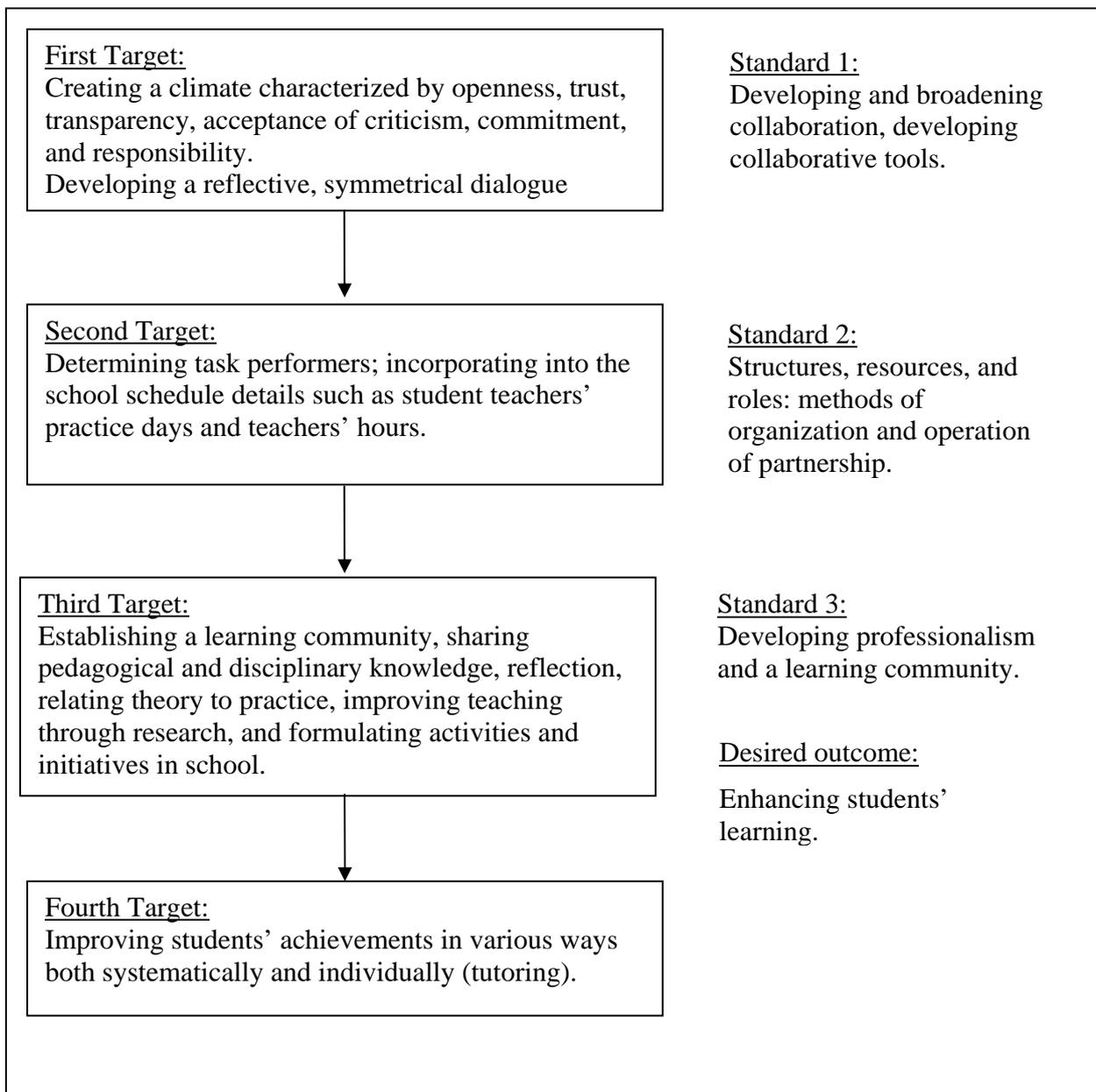


Figure 1: *Targets Based on Teitel's Pyramid*

Achieving the four targets will lead to a fundamental improvement in teacher training practices, contribute significantly to mentor teachers' professional development, and enhance teaching-learning processes and students' learning.

### **Characteristics of the PDS Project**

Over the years of its operation, the PDS project has been accompanied by an external evaluation system that has spirally examined the different aspects of two schools that joined the PDS system at the outset. The research, which was conducted over approximately five years, indicated that over the years there was an improvement in the participants' understanding of the objectives and a rise in their expectations. It took a few years to achieve some of the objectives; some have still not been achieved, or have only just begun the process (Ariav, & Emanuel, 2003; Ariav, & Emanuel, 2004).

In 2005 another academic high school became affiliated with the PDS project, which by now had been in existence for five years, but none of its staff – school and college partners – had any experience with the PDS partnership. The PDS in operation in the high school was based on conclusions drawn from research findings that had guided the process since its inception.

### **The High School Characteristics**

One high school with 800 pupils and 93 teachers that joined the PDS system in 2005 has been classified as one of the ten best schools in the country. The teachers have excellent academic qualifications: all hold Bachelor's degrees in their main subjects, some have Master's degrees, and a few have Doctorates. In this school there is hardly ever any turnover of teachers apart from a limited number who leave for objective reasons. The fact that the staff is permanent is an indication of satisfaction.

### **Objectives and Targets**

The objectives that were established were designed to advance the mutual interests of the college and of the high school, while promoting each institution's special interests.

- The first target was the construction of the system from an organizational stance; to define the roles of task performers, such as school liaison and college liaison; to decide on times for staff meetings; to plan the school timetable in accordance with the student teachers' practice days; to organize administration meetings, the steering committees, and the school administration meetings; and to determine criteria for student teachers' evaluation.
- The second target was the creation of a relationship of trust and cooperation.
- The third target was the development of a learning community comprised of all the participants, while relating to all their interests.
- The fourth target was determined in the social-ethical area.

### **Methodology**

A questionnaire was given to four mentor teachers (two from Social Sciences and two from Computer Sciences) and to four student teachers (two from Social Sciences and two from Computer Sciences). Before completing the questionnaire, the targets based on Teitel's pyramid were shown to both mentor teachers and student teachers. They were asked to indicate which of the four targets in the illustration they thought had been achieved through the PDS project and to what extent.

### **Findings on Target Achievement**

Both the mentor teachers and the student teachers' questionnaires revealed that at the end of the first year all the targets, including those whose attainment was anticipated only during later stages, were achieved to different degrees.

- The first target was concerned with the development of collaboration, the expansion of the collaboration, and the development of collaborative tools: creating a climate characterized by openness, trust, transparency, acceptance of criticism, truthfulness, commitment; and the development of a reflective and symmetrical dialogue between all the participants. All the teachers responded that the first target had been achieved in full. The student teachers also responded that the first target was achieved in full.

- The second target was concerned with structures, resources, roles, and methods of organizing and operating the collaborative system: determining task performers, incorporating into the school schedule details such as student teachers' practice days and teachers' hours. All the mentor teachers responded that the second target was achieved, although one claimed that the planning process of the PDS had been too rapid. However, the student teachers responded that the second target was achieved in full.
- The third target was concerned with professional development and the learning community: the establishment of a learning community, sharing pedagogical and disciplinary knowledge, reflection, relating theory to practice, improving teaching through research, and devising activities and initiatives in school. Two mentor teachers responded that the third target was achieved in full and two answered that it was partially achieved. The teachers mentioned that collaboration had occurred in several areas: constructing an online lesson; providing guidance in studying methods; organizing a joint educational trip; devising tests in cooperation; and arranging specialist lectures for all the team. One student teacher claimed that the third target was achieved in full and three said it was partially achieved.
- The fourth target was concerned with the enhancement of students' learning by improving their achievements in various ways both systematically and individually (tutoring). Three mentor teachers responded that the fourth target was partially achieved and one teacher said that it was too early to know whether it had been achieved or not. Those who claimed that the target was partially achieved explained that the students' learning achievements improved after the student teachers assisted them with research work and tutored them individually. Two of the student teachers responded that the fourth target was achieved in full and two said that it was partially achieved.

### **School Characteristics Contributing to the PDS Project**

Because of the uncertainty felt toward collaboration in schools in general, it must show signs of success in the first year so that all those involved (method instructors, mentor teachers, and school administrators) will have an incentive to continue the process into the second year.

We identified the characteristics of a school and other factors that are instrumental in transforming PDS collaboration into a success in its first year of operation.

### **School Characteristics**

1. Motivation and readiness on the part of the administration to accept the partnership and the conditions it entails.
2. Support of senior school staff and the classification of collaboration as a top priority.
3. Placing the school's special interests clearly and viably within a broader vision of the contribution they make to their partner's special interests.
4. Prioritization in both the organizational and pedagogical senses such as, arranging the school schedule to accord with the student teachers' practice days, drawing up the supervision duty roster to include the student teachers, allocating time for staff meetings, investing time

resources, and finding quick solutions to logistical problems (Abdal-Haqq, 1998).

5. A systematic vision of the integration of student teachers in school, starting with their participation in the supervision duty roster, and continuing with school projects, conducting lessons, and individual tuition.
6. School climate. Good teamwork in school and friendly relations of mutual respect are significant factors contributing to the PDS success and are taken into serious consideration when deciding on a school's suitability as a partner
7. Holding up the teachers and management staff as role models for the student teachers.
8. The professionalism of the mentor teachers. The mentor teachers in the high school are all academics with degrees. Their professionalism facilitated three important and essential qualities: openness to change, flexibility, and self-confidence.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

When we examined the school's success and the achievement of its targets, we attempted to identify the school's characteristics and consequently to learn what preconditions must exist for a school to be accepted as a partner in the PDS project.

The following qualities were discerned: a school administration that acknowledges the project's merit and gives it organizational and pedagogical priority; a willingness on the part of all the school authorities to operate the PDS project and to construct a relationship of cooperation and trust between the participants; a positive school climate, and good teamwork within that climate; and skilled, professional, and self-confident mentor teachers.

There are additional factors that play a significant role regarding the extent of the project's success such as the fulfillment of the school's special interests.

If we examine the consolidation of the standards and the outcomes according to Teitel's model, the evaluative research findings accompanying the PDS project conducted in other schools connected to the college seem to indicate that Teitel's first standard – collaboration: its creation and development in a relationship of mutual commitment and interaction – took several years to achieve (Putnam, 1992; Silva, 1999). The process of building trust and a partnership requires a period of approximately four years to establish and improvements may be discerned as each year passes. According to the mentor teachers and the student teachers, consolidation of the first standard was completed during the school's first year as a partner in the PDS.

With regard to the consolidation of the second standard – structures, resources and roles: methods of organization and operation of collaboration (the structure of the system, utilization of resources, and task performance) – schools participating in the PDS generally began operating efficiently during the second year of the partnership (Ariav, & Emanuel, 2003; Ariav, & Emanuel, 2004). However, in the schools under observation, the second standard was established during the first year of operation; the process of creating a learning community was also begun during this first year and, according to the research, it was established in other schools only during the PDS's third year of operation and was considered an achievement.

The consolidation of the third standard– developing professionalism and a learning community – was generally only partially achieved in the first two years of the schools' collaboration in the PDS. A learning community was established in the third year of operation and this was considered an achievement (Ariav, & Emanuel, 2003; Ariav, & Emanuel, 2004). However, in the school under examination, the consolidation of this third standard had already begun in the first year of operation.

According to the research, the consolidation of the outcome– enhancing students' learning – generally, improvements in the students' learning were only evident in later years and information concerning the students' learning achievements is of an indirect nature, it is difficult to receive any direct information. As indicated by the teachers' testimony, in the school under observation, a partial improvement was identified in the students' learning achievements during the first year of collaboration, while according to research, enhanced learning usually only occurs after several years of collaboration.

We reached the conclusion that in order to achieve success in the PDS project during the first year of operation, greater emphasis must be placed on the realization of school's special interests. In other words, school's special needs and the enhancement of students' achievements must take priority from the first year of the collaboration, and most of human resources – student teachers and academic college faculty – must be oriented toward the achievement of this objective.

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