

REPORT FROM THE FIELD

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL IN CANADA: ONE PARTNERSHIP EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT. This paper describes a professional development school project in which a faculty of education and a large secondary school cooperate in preservice teacher education. In this case, one university faculty member was incorporated for two units of study into the high school's history department. This approach to improving teaching practice is described, along with its impact on the university faculty member, school staff, students, and curriculum. Some conclusions are drawn about the necessary conditions for such projects to achieve success in Canada.

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article rend compte d'un projet de perfectionnement professionnel en milieu scolaire, dans le cadre duquel une faculté de sciences de l'éducation et une grande école secondaire dispensent de concert une formation préalable à des enseignants. Dans le cas présent, un professeur d'université a été détaché auprès du département d'histoire de l'école pour la durée de deux unités. L'article présente cette approche de perfectionnement de l'intervention pédagogique et en décrit l'effet sur le professeur d'université et le personnel, les étudiants et le programme de l'école. Certaines conclusions sont présentées quant aux conditions nécessaires à la bonne réalisation de tels projets au Canada.

In its 1990 analysis of American education, the Holmes Group underscored the value of close partnerships between faculties of education and community schools in order to improve educational practice. Specifically, it called for the establishment of "Professional Development Schools" where school personnel would actively participate in preservice teacher education in a university faculty of education, for preservice student teachers to be massed in a single school site, and for the reciprocal involvement of university faculty in the Professional Development School's teaching programmes. It did so, recognizing that the roles of school and university teachers would need to be altered, a process made more difficult by institutional restrictions. The commissioners noted that

[i]f there are difficulties in expanding the roles and responsibilities for school teachers, there are equal difficulties in engaging university faculty in working in the Professional Development School. . . . The university will have to change existing rules, roles, relationships and reward systems for faculty who want to collaborate in the Professional Development School. This will be one aspect of a broad organizational change process that will ultimately reconfigure the university school of education. (Holmes Group, 1990, p. 94)

Sadly, the promise of this vision of collaboration between faculties of education and local schools has not been realized. In a recent survey of twenty-nine colleges of education in eight American states, Goodlad (1990) finds that there is a **reduced** rather than an increased commitment to teaching by faculties of education, whether at the university or school level.

The rapid expansion of higher education, together with unprecedented changes in academic life, have left professors confused over the mission of higher education and uncertain of their role in it. Although the effects of these changes in academic life transcend schools and departments, the decline of teaching in favor of research in most institutions of higher education has helped lower the status of teacher education. In regional public universities, once normal schools and teachers colleges, the situation has become so bad that covering up their historic focus on teacher education is virtually an institutional rite of passage. Teaching in the schools and teacher education seem unable to shake their condition of status deprivation. (Goodlad, 1990, pp. 700-701)

The notion of the Professional Development School sites in Canada has recently received signal support in the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning which recommends that faculties of education establish partnerships with school boards and schools that agree "to work with faculties in preparing student teachers" (Ministry of Education and Training, 1994, p. 72). While the Royal Commission Report is silent on other components of the Professional Development School model, the goals of improving instruction through university faculty/school staff cooperation are consistent with its support for shared responsibility in the training of teachers. Further, Canadian educational research has documented the connections between educational reform and changing role descriptions (Fullan, 1991; Fullan, 1990; Fullan, Connelly, & Watson, 1987; Leithwood, 1986; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1986; Russell & Munby, 1992). At the heart of educational reform, argues Michael Fullan, is an understanding of the deteriorating "conditions of teaching" grounded in increased teacher stress, sustained community criticism, a proliferation of goals and expectations for schools, and an

ambivalence on the part of youth about the value of education. "When teachers do get help, the most effective source tends to be fellow teachers, and secondly administrators and specialists" (Fullan, 1991, p. 120). The challenge for faculties of education is obvious: if they are to contribute in any effective way to educational reform, and particularly instructional reform, they must resituate themselves in schools. However, the prevailing "rules, roles, relationships and reward systems" of the Canadian university community, as in the United States, discourages such partnerships.

The purpose of this paper is to consider how Canadian members of faculties of education might reasonably participate in the complex experiences contained in school culture, forging productive collaborative relationships with school staff members. In such partnerships, there is much to gain: at the very least, a reformed teacher education programme and improvement in instruction amongst experienced teachers.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

For several years, a major Canadian university faculty of education has worked closely in a modified Professional Development School project with a large secondary school. A corps of between ten and twenty-one preservice student teachers has been placed in the school for an extended practicum for the past five years. During this time, various school departments worked closely with the university faculty members to coordinate the project, and none more closely than the history department. At various times, the history department has provided associate or supervising teachers for preservice student teachers; it has organized and presented full-day workshops at the university for all history students in the pre-service programme; and it has offered small-group seminars in the school for these same students on special-interest topics. In the words of Ontario's Royal Commission on Learning, the school staff has had a well-established role in "guiding student teachers through their learning" during the preservice phase (Ministry of Education and Training [Ontario], 1994, p. 72). But until the experiment reported here, there had been no attempt to extend the terms of the Professional Development School to the incorporation of a university faculty person into the school's teaching staff. In doing so, several of the Holmes Group's conclusions were confirmed, some of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Learning were tested, and conclusions about the dangers and considerable potential of closer university-school teaching partnerships in a Canadian context can be drawn.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

One tenured faculty of education member was incorporated into a high school history department to teach two units of study to an anglophone academic class of intermediate level students. The university faculty member temporarily replaced the head of the department in his teaching duties with this one class of students. The units of study were: Canada's Role in World War Two and the Research/Thesis Essay. Five other teachers shared the teaching of this compulsory Canadian history course. It was understood that all students would complete several assignments and a major research paper during the units of study. In addition, a common examination would be written by all students at the termination of the course. Because the university faculty member is a certified teacher in the province of Ontario, and well known in the school, the high school administration was agreeable to this unofficial partnership. It undertook to contact the board of education.

Data Collection

Throughout the experiment, the university faculty member maintained a journal of her goals, observations, and conclusions. The five cooperating history teachers were interviewed by the department head throughout the process and at the end of the project. The students' observations were collected through a written evaluation and analyzed at the end of the process. The department head and university faculty member maintained regular contact, and a joint report was written at the conclusion.

Procedures

The process which the university faculty member and the five other teachers involved in the course pursued in developing a working relationship was the following. Tentative units of study had previously been outlined by a curriculum committee; the university faculty member added topics, found the resources to support these additions, and submitted the resulting revised unit outlines to the committee and to the other teachers who would need to follow the same unit of study. In due course, enough common territory was agreed upon that the students could all write the same final examination.

The university faculty member identified four specific questions, all of which related to possible changing conditions of teaching in the six years since she had left high school teaching. They were:

1. How has French Immersion, as the program of choice in secondary schools, affected the anglophone history program? (Conventional wisdom suggests that parents in the area served by the school and university choose French Immersion whenever possible. Hence, more able students gravitate to French Immersion programs in which history is a staple, while student "problem cases" are relegated to the English history program. The university instructor wanted personal contact with an anglophone history classroom to assess the validity of this common belief, and further, to identify other effects of the popular French Immersion programmes on the curriculum.)

2. To what degree have Socratic/lecturette methodologies been replaced by student-centred ones? (Ministry of Education and Training documents, pedagogical literature, and course textbooks assume a preponderance of group work and activity-centred strategies. She wanted to see how common such methodologies were in the school at large and in this classroom in particular. What were student expectations of appropriate methodologies? Did students possess adequate comprehension and work skills to complete a good deal of work independent of the teacher's direct instruction?)

3. Has the balance between social history, as opposed to political and economic history, been altered? (Recent curricular documents stress that social history has greater relevance and interest for students than does history predicated on political, economic, or constitutional principles. The university instructor was eager to see how today's high school students understand the intersection of these strands of history, and the degree of validity ascribed by students to different historical lenses. Most particularly, she was interested to see the impact of women's history on the high school curriculum and classroom process.)

4. Has the emotional "baggage" which many students carry into the classroom increased? Is this a more stressed generation of learners than teachers encountered in the past? To what degree has this stress added to the deterioration of the "conditions of teaching" identified by Michael Fullan?

The high school host teacher also identified several questions:

1. Are intermediate level students better served through teacher continuity, or through the variety of styles and materials provided by two competent teachers?

2. How “transferable” is curriculum developed on-site by teachers, and how “closed” is teacher culture to outside agents? (Two of the department’s younger members had worked assiduously to retool the history course in question to make it conform to the rigours of a newly-implemented semester system. There was some concern that any alterations to the course suggested by the university faculty member might be perceived as an affront to their diligent efforts. This concern was further magnified by other factors. It had been agreed by the five teachers involved with the course that similar cognitive and skill objectives would be taught at about the same time and that there would be a common final examination. The revised World War II unit proposed by the university faculty member emphasized a shift away from a military and political interpretation of the period to a social one; she also suggested an alternative topic for the research/thesis essay than the one that had been agreed upon. How amenable to further change would staff members prove to be?)

3. Are teacher-university faculty partnerships one possible approach to experienced teachers’ professional development?

Results

Both the university professor and the host teacher were enabled to answer their respective research questions. In particular, the university partner concluded that:

1. The extension of French Immersion to the secondary level has indeed had a profound impact on the quality of scholarship that can be carried out in a typical anglophone classroom. The students in this classroom included: (a) recent arrivals with insufficient French to be able to undertake an *histoire* course, (b) students with a wide range of learning difficulties, (c) English as a Second Language (ESL) students, and (d) those with behavioural problems who could or would not focus their attentions long enough to receive instruction in various subjects in French. The university partner concluded that today’s classroom teacher is presented with a wider array of (and more deep-seated) problems amongst anglophone students in French Immersion schools than had been true just a few years ago. This single factor caused the university partner to restructure her history pedagogy course at the university in order to equip new teachers with the requisite skills to cope with such classrooms.

2. While she observed a great deal of student-centred teaching in the host school at large and in this classroom in particular, including group projects and small group simulations, direct instruction continued to be a mainstay of this and other classrooms. Students expected that important concepts, debatable points, and critical supporting information would be provided and underscored by the teacher. Furthermore, because of the range of abilities and behaviours in this classroom, many students lacked the necessary skills to operate independently in completing tasks with any degree of complexity. One area in which student skills had obviously declined was in contextual reading. When assigned the task of constructing a timeline from narrative accounts, many students had great difficulty. Several approached the task by deciding to take capitalized words (hence, important words, in their view) from the narrative and search for decontextualized definitions on the new CD-ROM in the library.

3. The university faculty member observed a good deal of social history being taught in such units as "Life in the 1920s" or "Depression Canada." Social history was accorded much less attention, however, in the "war units." Women's history seemed still to be regarded as an "add on" to the main narrative. Yet, there are signs that this is changing with the introduction of usable resources.

4. The answer to the final research question remains ambiguous. It was not apparent to the university faculty member that these students were more emotionally freighted or fragile than a previous generation had been. Nevertheless, there seemed to be an unwillingness to work very hard at any task. Undoubtedly, this was due in large part to the trouble many students experience in reading selections of any length. On the whole, teachers' common complaint that they are witnessing the death of the "work ethic" in their classrooms was largely borne out in this teaching experiment. The consequent necessity for teachers to work exceedingly hard at motivating unwilling students clearly contributes to worsened "conditions of teaching."

The host teacher drew the following conclusions:

1. After overcoming some degree of uncertainty and uneasiness, the students happily took to the university faculty member's style of teaching and proceeded with their tasks. A survey of student opinion conducted at the conclusion of the teacher exchange revealed no unusual concerns. It seems clear that if two teachers are able to work well together, that their combined efforts will benefit students. In addition

to the enrichment of teacher resources experienced by the students, the "time out" provided to the high school host teacher by the university faculty member taking over his class meant that problem students were monitored by both teachers, and that students with serious problems now received attention from two rather than one teacher. This also permitted the host teacher additional time to contact other professionals to help students with problems beyond the classroom teacher's purview.

2. Any initial concerns over the switch in teachers on the part of other staff members quickly dissipated and in the end the pilot project could be termed successful by all the parties involved. Any teacher intransigence about proposed changes to the course content dissolved when the university faculty member delivered a wealth of teaching materials, all sorted and annotated.

3. The host teacher found that he was also able to observe some new approaches to a traditional unit, and that his department was the beneficiary of timely packages of resource materials, including some on women's history. Further, with the additional free time created by the teacher substitution, he was able to accomplish a great deal in administrative tasks and in professional coaching of younger staff members.

Four factors seem to have been important in the success of this experiment. First, the teacher substitution was preceded by a good deal of warning, permitting the parties to choose the most convenient units of study and time of year. This also allowed the host teacher to discuss the ramifications of the project with the students and other teachers in the department, particularly those who would share the teaching of the units in question. Secondly, the university and the host school have a long tradition of working together in teacher education, and both educators have held leadership positions in this working relationship from the start; this project seemed a natural extension of a well-established professional association. Thus, one common source of difficulty in such collaborative ventures – unclear, uncomplementary, and underdeveloped role descriptions (Hawley, 1990) – seems to have been avoided. Thirdly, both the high school's administrative team and the university administration were supportive of the project. Fourthly, the scope of the project, both in terms of weeks (3 1/2), classes (75 minutes), units of study (2), and people directly involved (2) seemed optimal. There was time to develop a professor-class relationship, but not so much time as to unduly hamper the host teacher-class continu-

ity. Furthermore, the dislocating effect of widespread educational change means that limited experiments of this sort are likely to be less disruptive, even if of lesser impact (Fullan, 1991, p. 19; Ministry of Education and Training, 1994, p. 72).

DISCUSSION

Throughout this process, the university faculty member was conscious of the danger of appearing to be an outside "expert" bent on making changes to a deficient curriculum. As a faculty of education professor holding a doctorate in history, it seemed to the university faculty member that the "minefield" through which she was carefully walking exposed her to possible criticism from the high school teachers on pedagogical, curricular, and social grounds. On the other hand, if additions of resources and methodology did gain acceptance with other high school teachers, the university faculty member might contribute some of the necessary ingredients towards Fullan's recipe for educational reform (Fullan, 1991, chap. 7). Fullan posits that teachers operate within severe constraints of routine, workload, and stress. Under these circumstances, innovation can either "aggravate the teachers' problems or provide a glimmer of hope. It can worsen the conditions of teaching, however unintentionally, or it can provide the support, stimulation, and pressure to improve" (Fullan, 1991, p. 126).

The university faculty member and the host high school teacher agree on several things as a result of this experiment. First, each learned a great deal that could be applied directly to their respective teaching responsibilities. The partnership resulted in fresh perspectives, not only for the two educators involved, but also for members of the high school history department, and for other faculty of education instructors. While this "test case" seems to have been successful, satisfying most of the limited objectives set for it, the team is mindful also that more such partnerships need to be forged using a variety of models. At the same time, the project exacted demands that not everyone would be prepared to tolerate. At the high school level, there was a measure of staff disruption: an extra person was wedged into already-limited space, some adjustment was necessary in topics to be covered and evaluation to be used, and this change occurred during the first year of semestering. From the standpoint of the university instructor, the major problem was finding the time to satisfy expectations of both the university and high school. If the metaphor for the high school's challenge might be cramming yet one more book into a crowded bookshelf, the university

instructor, who had no reduction in workload during the project, often thought of herself as a tennis ball ricocheting at a wild rate from site to site. Such difficulties have been found to be common in studies of differing cultural expectations and work culture between university faculty and school teachers (Abdal-Haqq, 1991; Brookhart & Loadman, 1989; Ciscell, 1993; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988; Watson & Fullan, 1992; Winitzky, Stoddard, & O'Keefe, 1992) and the magnitude of work culture dissonance suggests that Professional Development School projects are always implemented at a cost.

This experiment has confirmed the Holmes Group's warning that for Professional Development Schools to be fully realized, "roles, relationships and reward systems for faculty" must be reconsidered if they are to be fully realized. As with Goodlad's research in an American context, there is little evidence that these organizational structures are being seriously questioned yet in Canadian universities. Consequently, such projects are likely to be dependent for some time yet on the quiet commitment of interested teacher-professor teams. If the Royal Commission on Learning's enthusiasm for Professional Development Schools is to amount to more than uninformed cheerleading, all partners in such ventures – the government Ministry, school boards, administration and staffs, university administrations and faculties of education – must equip themselves with the necessary skills, relationships, and rewards to make this promising idea a reality.

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