

Prioritizing Urban Children, Teachers, and Schools Through Professional Development Schools

reviewed by Barbara Beyerbach —
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Title: Prioritizing Urban Children, Teachers, and Schools Through Professional Development Schools
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Prioritizing Urban Children, Teachers, and Schools Through Professional Development Schools, edited by Wong and Glass, makes an important contribution to the literature on how to build partnerships in urban (and other) settings that disrupt, challenge, and transform oppressive social structures. The focus is squarely on improving education and life chances for low-income, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students through engaging preservice and practicing teachers and their communities in culturally relevant educational partnerships. The editors weave many voices throughout the book, primarily those of university based educators and some K-12 teachers, reporting on the evolution of the Equity Network of about a dozen professional development schools (PDS) in the greater Sacramento metropolitan area in partnership with a group of faculty at California State University Sacramento's College of Education.

The book is divided into three sections. The authors of the first section ground their work in a broad political context focused on making visible NCLB's test driven

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- DR. BARBARA BEYERBACH is a professor of education in the department of Curriculum and Instruction, teaching Culturally Relevant Teaching and Co-directing Project SMART (Student-Centered, Multicultural, Active, Real-World Teaching), a professional development project to transform educational institutions K-16 through social justice pedagogy. Collaborating with colleagues across divisions of the University, with community partners, with schools from Oswego County, Syracuse City School District, the Onondaga Nation, New York City, and most recently with School Inspectors from Benin West Africa, Project SMART has grown from an elementary teacher inquiry science- focused professional development initiative to a multifaceted, multi subject K-16 urban rural network of teacher leaders who are actively engaged in school reform. SMART has received funding from NCLB TLQP, NSF, DDE Eisenhower Title II, and a variety of business and industry partners. Along with co-director Burrell, Beyerbach serves on the board of the national GESA (Generating Expectations for Student Achievement) Educational Alliance as Senior

“reform” pressures. They articulate a rich theoretical vision of engaged pedagogy that resists these damaging political pressures, synthesizing the research on the potential and promise of PDS partnerships in reforming urban social conditions and education K-16. The second section shares participant stories examining how teacher and teacher educator roles are recreated in the partnership, with new structures for decision making, knowledge sharing and connecting to the larger community. The third section critically analyzes the politics, promises and perils of PDSs in transforming institutions and relationships between them, with candid descriptions of the power dynamics in the partnerships and within institutions that all too often lead to setbacks, insurmountable challenges, and sometimes promising change. What I most appreciate about the book is the absolute candor in the reflections, the incredible weaving the editors have done in the introductions of each section, the rich interplay of voices, the hopeful tone of the volume, and the clear directives for future action in the development of urban PDSs that move us towards social justice.

I teach in a program framed around preparing teachers to teach for social justice, co-direct a professional development project aimed at developing urban and rural school/university/community partnerships, and have been active in our PDS initiative since its inception 7 years ago. When I read a book of this nature, I look for practical ideas I can use to strengthen the urban partnerships we are struggling to develop in our School of Education. Wong and Glass’s work does not disappoint. Here is a partial listing of ideas I gleaned from the teachers, faculty, and community voices:

The section introducing Part I, “Towards Improving Urban Children’s Lives,” can be used as a reading in *Schooling Pedagogy and Social Justice*, the foundations course in our undergraduate teacher preparation program. The chapter examines questions of power and knowledge production, and suggests learning should create for all children strong identities that allow them to act knowledgeably for themselves and for their communities. The section clearly represents issues facing urban multilingual,

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multicultural communities and schools.

Chapter 1, “Floating Boats and Solar Ovens,” and Chapter 2, “Science for Social Responsibility,” can be read in our science and mathematics methods courses to provide a history of science education in the US, articulate features of a critical science education model, and share examples of this in practice. The process of creating small learning communities of preservice candidates, mentored by a teacher and college faculty member, focused on devising and solving a series of community based problems, would be a powerful model in our PDSs. Later chapters in the book on lesson study provide concrete examples of how the model is implemented in schools at a range of grade levels and in a variety of content areas. Currently preservice teachers in our PDS use a rounds model, where they observe master teachers and then discuss and reflect on the lesson with the teacher, professor, and each other. Using the lesson study model within our “rounds” model used in the PDS general methods course would support the development and revision of curricula that would then be integrated into the host teacher’s practice.

The Community Mapping Activity in Chapter 3, “Education of the Community, by the Community, and for the Community,” can be used as part of the required context study in our Teacher Work Sample NCATE assessment, taught in *Culturally Relevant Teaching* during the third semester of our undergraduate teacher preparation program. In this activity, teams of candidates, university faculty, and cooperating teachers work with community groups to “create a visual image of significant instances and places in their daily lives” (p. 94), based on mapping and follow up interviews with various groups in the community. Insights about the community inform curriculum development at all grade levels. This process would deepen the community/school connections in our PDS and promote the development of culturally relevant teaching.

The chapters in sections II and III can be shared with teacher study groups facilitated by college faculty in

area partner schools, with our PDS School of Education Committee, and with educational leaders at both the university and our partner districts. Different chapters speak to different players but all give wonderful stories of how to develop, refine, and deepen partnerships through reshaping roles, expectations, rewards, and relationships. Many practical lessons are shared, as well as guidelines for negotiating support for PDS work from various constituencies. Though honest about challenges and mistakes, the chapters provide much evidence of success and positive directions for future growth. For example, in “Bridging the Disconnect: The promise of Lesson Study” the authors illustrate how lesson study empowers teachers to collaborate to deepen understanding of content and pedagogy, refine a lesson based on analysis of student learning, and continually adapt the curriculum to meet changing contexts. The authors assess the success of the initiative based on four criteria and reflect on where criteria were met and where there was room for growth (i.e., in teachers’ assessment of learning components).

Throughout the book, Glass and Wong synthesize the work of disparate groups in diverse contexts and articulate themes that describe new traditions and suggest future directions. They bring to life the notion of teaching for social justice, sharing that “we have learned most of all that to practice engaged pedagogy means to dream big, to act both strategically and focused on making an immediate difference, and to never cease our own critical self-reflection and professional development” (p. 244). Because of their commitment to this process, those of us engaging in PDS work have clearer visions of what is possible, and of the challenges ahead.

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