

Advocacy is contagious: the PDS effect

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Abstract

Purpose – This article, written by a multilingual learner program (MLP) specialist, provides a first-hand account of how a professional development school (PDS) (school–university partnership school) promotes teacher advocacy.

Design/methodology/approach – Due to the subject of the piece, no research methods were necessary.

Findings – Due to the subject of the piece, there are no findings.

Originality/value – The teacher details the teacher's educational journey from intern to doctoral candidate.

Keywords Action research, Professional development school, School culture, School–university partnerships, Student teaching

Paper type Column article

As our feet trace the square, white tiles of the thoughtfully decorated kindergarten hallway back to my classroom, I glance down at Franco, the five-year-old by my side, struggling to keep pace. We chat about our day, and he peers up at me with a slight smile and timidly reaches out to find my hand. I reciprocate the smile, giggling together, *mezclando English y*

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NAPDS Nine Essentials (2nd Edition) addressed in this article:

- (1) A professional development school (PDS) is a learning community guided by a comprehensive, articulated mission that is broader than the goals of any single partner and that aims to advance equity, antiracism and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities and their respective community and professional partners.
 - (2) A PDS embraces the preparation of educators through clinical practice.
 - (3) A PDS is a context for continuous professional learning and leading for all participants, guided by need and a spirit and practice of inquiry.
 - (4) A PDS makes a shared commitment to reflective practice, responsive innovation and generative knowledge.
 - (8) A PDS creates space for, advocates for and supports college/university and P-12 faculty to operate in well-defined, boundary-spanning roles that transcend institutional settings.
 - (9) A PDS provides dedicated and shared resources and establishes traditions to recognize, enhance, celebrate and sustain the work of partners and the partnership.
- This article has been subject to editorial review only.



español creating a new rhythm of speech. The pleasant exchange continues as we pass the multilingual welcome sign by my door – that is, until we sit down. His eyes glance over to the open English assessment on the table, and the mood shifts. His eager disposition turns somber.

“What’s wrong?” I ask.

I’m no good at *inglés*. I only speak normal sometimes.

I look deep into his solemn, almost-wounded eyes and attempt to reassure his apprehensions. His words are forever branded in my mind. His deficit mindset, equating Spanish as “abnormal” in this environment, revealed a problem within our school culture. As I walk him back to class, I glance again at the colorful illustrations and words on the “thoughtfully” decorated walls with a new perspective. A vital aspect of our multilingual learners (MLs)’ cultural identity is missing – their native language. This “normal” had to change.

This instance and this child are only a tiny part of the defeat I felt when advocating for my MLs. Since that interaction, my school’s population of language learners has doubled. Yet, general education teachers in this southeastern state are still not required to obtain certification to teach this population. I continue to question how these processes constitute *equitable* education for Franco and others like him. In my school district, multilingual learner program (MLP) specialists are more than teachers of English to MLs. We are also co-teachers and coaches, juggling multiple responsibilities within one role. Coaching can be overwhelming and intimidating, especially when you experience inequities in the environment. This constant feeling of overload is one reason so many teachers are fleeing education.

But what could I do? I felt isolated and alone, and I needed to find a way to reignite my passion and sustain myself in this work.

After days of contemplation and reflection, I decided to walk down to room 409 to visit my former mentor. As we stood in the room where I interned many years ago, we reflected on my concerns and the potential next steps in my journey. The PDS partnership, the uniting factor in our relationship, grounded our discussion. Tackling issues of social justice is a concept that has been introduced previously at my school. In years past, we worked with a university faculty member to discuss racial inequities in education. However, collaboration with faculty members is not the only factor in the partnership that shaped my decision to tackle advocacy efforts in my school. In addition, the network provided resources and shared traditions through book clubs and council meetings dedicated to discussing issues in education, expanding the conversation and providing a supportive environment for educators.

Therefore, why not use this connection to support my professional growth and address the injustices MLs face in our community? For the first time in months, I felt optimistic.

Before leaving room 409, I emailed our designated faculty member from the university, requesting a meeting. It was in that conversation that I learned of the doctoral degree in curriculum studies and the potential to become a PDS fellow through our network connection. She described the program’s foundation as a commitment to social justice education that supports educators in becoming activists in their practice. Teachers become researchers, identifying perceived problems within their environment. Initially, I had two thoughts: first, this program is precisely how I can elevate my knowledge to support Franco and the rest of our MLs; second, can you please write me a recommendation? She graciously obliged, and here I am, halfway through the program, deep in the trenches.

My transformation from advocate to action researcher marked a turning point in my career. The degree will enhance my skills, but, more importantly, I can leverage the data from my research in conjunction with network support to bring about the changes I aspire to see in my school, community and students. Now, my work is focused and aligned with the mission

of the PDS partnership, which seeks to advance equity, antiracism and social justice in education.

Recently, I read a quote from the dean of education at the university, which could not be more accurate to my experience: “Data convinces, and stories compel.” To this point, student achievement persuaded my administration to back co-teaching as a consistent mode of instruction, providing equitable practices when teachers do not have the necessary tools to support ML’s linguistic needs in the mainstream classroom. In this environment, students feel empowered to share their narratives, encompassing everything from intimate experiences of being overlooked in English-dominant classrooms to stories of immigration to a new country, all brimming with pride and cultural connections. These diverse portrayals of MLs within my school form a mosaic of responses that reflect their challenges, resilience and triumphant journeys. These narratives not only forge profound emotional connections with their teachers but also inspire educators to advocate for their MLs.

I no longer feel alone. Through co-teaching, I help students like Franco share their stories.

Advocacy is contagious. My school has come a long way since my interaction with Franco. Is the hierarchy of language still apparent? Sure, language learners represent only 5% of our population. Nevertheless, I catch *buenos días* drifting down the hallway from the morning news show as I walk to my classroom after morning duty. I witness students’ translanguaging in small groups, deepening their understanding in academic conversations. Teachers demand translated documents from the district promoting equal access to information, and they champion the purchase of bilingual texts when our school receives grant money for classroom libraries. My school’s culture is shifting, and my capacity to navigate inequities in my community grows daily.

The PDS effect is profound, causing a ripple that evokes change for all stakeholders in its wake. The network’s continuous support and professional learning opportunities aid my goal of advancing equity for MLs in my school. With the network behind me, I am confident in my work, elevating the unique voices of my students. As an action researcher, my work will never be complete. How could it be? There are always questions to be answered and concerns to be solved.

I want to know how Franco feels. Does he feel heard? Does he feel as if his native language is a positive part of his identity at school? Does he still believe his language is “not normal”? Luckily, I now have a way to investigate these questions. The cycle continues, and my story is not complete.

Now, imagine that *your* son, daughter, niece, nephew or friend is a ML like Franco. What assets do they bring to our society, and how will you leverage them? What decisions will you make as a parent, teacher, district or policymaker to enhance the success and happiness of future generations of families? What role will you play in advocating for a more just and equitable education system?

Just remember, advocacy is not a solitary act. Find a network or group of people that share your vision, whatever that may be and support your professional learning and growth, as I have with my PDS network.

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