About the Authors

Janet Moss, an Assistant Professor in Elementary/Early Childhood Education at Rowan, holds a B.S. in Education from Northwestern, an Ed.M. from Harvard, and a doctorate in Curriculum from UCLA.

Dr. Moss taught in suburban Chicago and received the Illinois Governor’s Master Teacher Award while coordinating her district’s gifted program.

Carol Sharp, an Associate Professor of Education in Elementary/Early Childhood Education at Rowan, has a B.A. from Rowan, an M.A. from William Paterson, and a Ph.D. from Penn State.

For the past three years, Dr. Sharp has been involved in the Cooper’s Poynt Professional Development Family School in Camden.
The Cooper's Poynt Project:  
A Collaboration between Rowan College & Camden Public Schools

Carol Sharp and Janet Moss

The School of Education and Related Professional Studies is working in partnership with Camden City Public Schools on a Professional Development School (PDS) Project. The site of this joint venture is the Cooper's Poynt School (pre-K–8) located at 3rd and State Streets in the northern section of Camden, New Jersey.

The PDS concept evolved out of the educational reform efforts of the Holmes Group, a consortium of nearly 100 research universities, which first met in the mid 1980s. The Holmes Group has continued its commitment to the goals of rigorous teacher preparation programs and the enhancement of the quality of schooling through research and development. According to the Holmes Group (1990), a Professional Development School is defined as a regular elementary, middle, or high school that works in partnership with a college or university to develop and demonstrate:

- fine learning programs for diverse students;
- new understandings and professional responsibilities for experienced educators; and
• research projects that add to all educators' knowledge about how to make schools more productive.

Rowan College of New Jersey (formerly Glassboro State College) and the Camden School District have worked together for over thirty years on projects of mutual interest. This long history of collaboration and consultation underlies the current new PDS partnership. When calls for educational reform and trends in teacher education suggested the Professional Development School as a new, comprehensive model for attaining national, state, and local educational goals, leaders at all levels in Camden and at Rowan initiated discussions. Ultimately, the Rowan Dean of the School of Education and Related Professional Studies (SERPS) and key Education faculty, the Camden School District Superintendent, key administrators, the Camden Educational Association leadership, and parents began to design the Rowan–Camden PDS Model. Throughout the 1991–92 school year, they studied existing and emerging models in the country, determined planning and organizational policies and procedures, and held the first annual planning retreat in Atlantic City. These activities were fully and enthusiastically supported by the New Jersey State Departments of Education, Higher Education, and Urban Education.

The School of Education and Related Professional Studies (SERPS) and the Camden City Public Schools have agreed to adopt the PDS principles of the Holmes Group as their goals for this collaborative endeavor. The principles are as follows:

• teaching for understanding so that students learn for a lifetime;
• organizing the school and its classrooms as a community of learning;
• setting ambitious learning goals for everybody's children;
• teaching adults as well as children;
• making reflection and inquiry a central feature of the school; and
• inventing a new organizational structure for the school.

**PDS Components**
Three major components guide the direction of the PDS towards the successful achievement of its goals. They are the Preservice Component, the Inservice Component, and the Parent/Community Component.

**The Preservice Component**
The purposes of the Preservice Component are to prepare future teachers to work in an urban environment and to provide a site so that well-planned, consistent supervision takes place. This component enables teachers, administrators, and professors to collaborate in giving future teachers experiences to connect theory to practice. For future teachers, the expected outcomes of the Preservice Component are:

• to grow in their ability to teach for understanding so that all students learn;
• to develop an understanding of the needs of a diverse student population and the factors in an urban environment that affect student performance;
• to learn how to interact with parent and community groups to help meet their students' needs; and
• to contribute to the establishment of the learning community mission of the PDS.

The Elementary/Early Childhood Education Department has been actively involved in the Preservice Component of the PDS. Currently, all elementary education majors—approximately one hundred new majors each semester—visit Cooper's Poynt for a half day as part of their initial professional course in the Program. First, they are given an informative overview of the school through presentations by the principal, assistant principal, and the PDS project manager. Next, in small groups, they are given tours of Cooper's Poynt by student teachers who share personal experiences and insights about working at the PDS, answer questions, and then take the visitors to meet
their cooperating teachers and the children in their classrooms. Finally, the elementary education visitors reconvene with the administrators and their Rowan professor for a follow-up question and answer session.

Rowan preservice elementary teacher candidates have two semester-long opportunities for fieldwork at Cooper's Poynt: Junior Field Experience (Practicum), for one and a half days each week, and Senior Student Teaching, daily for the entire semester. To date, forty-eight future teachers majoring in elementary education have chosen Cooper's Poynt for their Practicum experience, and twenty teacher candidates have completed their student teaching at Cooper's Poynt.

To achieve agreed-upon preservice outcomes, supervision of future teachers is much more intense than regular supervision of student teachers. At the PDS, a team supervision approach has been developed. This means that two college faculty members share equally the supervision responsibilities for the future teachers. Each future teacher is visited by a college professor at least once a week, and weekly seminars are held on site by the two faculty members to address concerns or critical issues. Regular meetings between the cooperating teachers and supervisors also take place so that communication is established to enhance the support that the future teachers need.

Also, as a part of the Preservice Component, PDS teachers are invited to participate in the seminars and offer suggestions for strengthening the teacher education program of the future teachers. This affords the PDS teachers the opportunity to engage in the role of teacher educator. They sharpen their own pedagogical practices as they demonstrate and model for future teachers, which leads to the enhancement of their own professional repertoire and status.

*The Inservice Component*

The Inservice Component provides teachers the opportunity to engage in reflective inquiry in order to make their practice more diverse, subtle, substantive, broad-gauged, and
ongoing. This approach is quite different from the usual staff development programs offered in public schools. The PDS allows teachers to engage in serious work to strengthen teaching practices that ultimately improve learning for all students.

For the Inservice Component to be effective, the following professional development opportunities have been offered to the teachers at Cooper's Poynt PDS:

- **Graduate Study**: Two graduate courses—Analyzing Teacher Behavior and Learning Community Classrooms have been conducted on site. Thirty-eight teachers participated.
- **Success Clinic I**: Twenty-four teachers met over a three-month period (March–May 1993) to increase their skill in teaching for understanding so that all children learn.
- **Summer Institute I**: In a four-week program (July 1993), twenty-three teachers analyzed their curriculum to develop integrated unit themes and a plan for starting the school year, entitled, "The First Eight Days in September: A Time for Initial Success."

In addition to strengthening the pedagogical practices of the PDS teachers, the Inservice Component also provides for other Camden City teachers to visit PDS teachers for professional development. This part of the Inservice Component is the Camden City Visiting Teacher Program. The nature of this program is that PDS teachers will share insights from their involvement in PDS professional activities with teachers from other Camden City schools.

In order for PDS teachers to prepare for their role as host teachers to visiting teachers, they are currently participating in Success Clinic II. The purpose of this clinic is to have host teachers develop work plans for the Visiting Teacher Program.

One other professional development opportunity offered under the auspices of the Inservice Component involves the PDS instructional assistants. These instructional assistants participate in the Saturday Success Clinic I (two Saturdays per
month) to strengthen their skills in helping Cooper's Poynt students experience increased success in school. Children's success in school will be enhanced when both classroom teachers and instructional assistants study the current knowledge base related to effective and supportive classrooms and increase their understanding of how children learn.

All of these professional development initiatives demonstrate the commitment of PDS educators to the improved learning of all children in the Cooper's Poynt PDS.

The Parent/Community Component

The School of Education and Related Professional Studies and Camden City Public Schools agree that parent/community involvement is necessary for a successful PDS to achieve its goals. To become a community of learning, to teach adults as well as children, and to invent a new organizational school structure, the program needs parental as well as community support. To facilitate this involvement, the Cooper's Poynt PDS is currently developing a program in which parents and the community can engage in schooling at the classroom, school, and district levels.

To initiate activities for the Parent/Community Component, plans have been developed to inform parents about the curriculum through a monthly curriculum overview at each grade level, which includes suggestions for assisting children at home. Next, surveys and questionnaires asked parents about their knowledge and interest in topics they would be willing to teach children in collaboration with the Cooper's Poynt PDS faculty. Also, to provide opportunities for parents and community members to enhance their own learning, another survey ascertained interests in adult learning opportunities that could be furnished by the Cooper's Poynt PDS. The survey listed classes on topics such as parenting skills, home and car repair skills, exercise programs, and job acquisition skills, among others. In addition, plans are underway to develop a videotape library for parents that provides information and suggestions about how to help children at home with schoolwork. The
Parent/Community Component highlights the commitment of the Cooper's Poynt PDS to include parents and community in the educational enterprise.

*Feedback Received Concerning the Cooper's Poynt PDS*

*Future Teachers*

Both preservice teachers who completed a semester-long field experience at Cooper's Poynt and teacher candidates who visited the PDS on only one occasion have provided positive feedback about the program. The half-day field visit has a major positive impact on future elementary teachers. The reflections of these students indicate that many stereotypes and misconceptions were dispelled as a result of the morning spent at this urban school. Many of these teacher candidates expressed an interest in returning to the PDS for their semester-long practicum or student teaching field experience. The following excerpts from their written reflections are representative of the overall feedback, capture their impressions, and indicate that the PDS goals can, in fact, be perceived by visitors to the school:

"I thoroughly enjoyed our visit to Cooper's Poynt School in Camden! I really had no idea of what to expect before I got to the school, and I started to have some doubts as we drove closer into the surrounding community. But I can honestly say, the moment I walked through the front doors, I felt a warmth and enthusiasm that is really hard to describe. Everyone was so excited about this wonderful, innovative learning program, and their strong belief in their philosophy of education was just overwhelming. The most obvious focus was their absolute love of children and the belief that each individual can succeed with proper nurturing. One aspect of this environment that really impressed me was that this school is much more than just a school—it's like an entire family or community caring about each other and working together all under one roof! The administrators, teachers, parents, and students are all interlinked and are there to help..."
their children learn and develop into responsible citizens—it’s a joint cooperative arrangement. I could see the love of children all over the faces of staff and could sense their caring devotion in their thoughts and actions.”

“To see the environment outside of the school and then go in and witness the possibilities these children have, gave me such hope that there is a way to improve lives for our youth.”

“One thing that most impressed me about Cooper’s Poynt was the attitude of the staff.... Student teachers also reflected this pride. They were very excited to be studying in a school that is always in stride with the latest teaching techniques and strategies.”

“I love how they want and call for change. They’re not afraid to try something educationally new and challenging.”

“The classrooms were so visually stimulating that everywhere I looked there was something new. I would very much like to be a participant in that environment and help to contribute to the growth of the students and also myself.”

“The interaction between Cooper’s Poynt and Rowan was equally impressive. The desire to produce quality teachers was very encouraging.”

“I was impressed with how much time went into the presentation we saw.”

“Cooper’s Poynt should certainly be proud of what they have accomplished and should arrange daily tours to business, government, and community leaders to show them what can happen when educators have a goal and they strive everyday to achieve it.”
Soon after the PDS field visit, a group of students wrote a letter expressing their desire to be placed at Cooper's Poynt for practicum and student teaching. The following excerpt is the conclusion of their letter:

If given the opportunity to teach at Cooper's Poynt, we feel we will become better teachers. We will be exposed to many things that aren't incorporated into a typical suburban school. Also, we feel we have a lot of new and interesting ideas to bring to the school to help contribute to its success.

Many of us never considered teaching in an inner city school, until visiting Cooper's Poynt. Now we feel we would be missing a great opportunity if we were unable to experience teaching there.

Feedback also addressed reasons for choosing to student teach at Cooper's Poynt. Many student teachers referred to the community feeling at Cooper's Poynt. They described the sense of community, family, and support as being created by Rowan college supervisors, administrators and staff at Cooper's Poynt, and their peers. They indicated feeling fully supported as well as truly valued. Many student teachers acknowledged the quality of teacher preparation they were receiving and the unique experience of working at a PDS. Many individuals identified the challenge of an urban setting and the opportunity for first-hand experience at this urban school as benefits of the student-teaching experience. The following excerpts were taken from written student teacher feedback:

"My experience during practicum was a small step into the exciting restructuring and innovative changes at Cooper's Poynt. I wanted to take that giant step as a student teacher at Cooper's Poynt to become a part of the learning community at Cooper's Poynt."
“Everyone takes his or her work so seriously and sincerely at the same time.... Everyone cooperates with everyone else and does not hesitate to help you no matter who you are.”

“I have never experienced going to an urban school prior to student teaching here at Cooper's Poynt. I had many misconceptions, as many people do, about inner city schools. I wanted to student teach here to see for myself what city schools were like and to broaden my horizons.”

“This school environment incorporates all that we have been taught in the education classes, such as learning community, cooperative learning, and whole language. Everyone is looked upon and treated as an equal, and respect is the only acceptable behavior for both students and adults.”

The feedback provided by Elementary Education majors at Rowan College may serve to explain why there are currently more students who wish to be placed at Cooper's Poynt for their field experience than can be accommodated.

**PDS Teachers**

The feedback received from PDS teachers has been positive. Most PDS teachers have indicated that they have modified their teaching behaviors to incorporate strategies and suggestions studied in the graduate courses and Success Clinic I. For example, the following quotes are from participant feedback forms for Success Clinic I:

“I use more divergent questioning techniques in my class now.”

“I allow my students more wait-time, and their answers are better.”

“I've changed my responsive behavior. I'm more positive now.”

108
"I am more aware of what or how I do things in the classroom. I feel more comfortable trying new things."

"I started to use more hands-on activities rather than dittos or paperwork."

"I'm more aware of my modeling strategies. Instead of telling students what is expected, I show them what I expect."

The PDS teachers also indicated that meeting with their colleagues to study and discuss educational issues was beneficial and that they hoped these opportunities would continue. One item of concern that the PDS teachers reported was that they did not want to be taken out of their classrooms for professional development activities. They suggested a reallocation of school time.

Although the professional development activities of the PDS teachers started less than a year ago, their responses to participating in these experiences have indicated that positive results are apparent in their classrooms.

Changes Needed to Refine the PDS Project

Time needs to be devoted to more communication opportunities for PDS representatives from the School of Education and Related Professional Studies and from Camden. They must clarify and plan the specific strategies for working towards the PDS principles. They must be able to explain the vision of their respective roles in this project to develop better understanding of expectations. Two huge bureaucracies need to understand each other before they can work collaboratively towards a new organizational structure for the Cooper’s Poynt PDS.

Conclusion

Collaboration for the development of a PDS is a long-term endeavor. The College, the school district, and the individuals involved are committed to educational excellence. The words
used here to describe Cooper's Poynt present merely a superficial picture; a visit to the school will convey the essence of this PDS.

Reference
