© *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, Volume 21, Number 3, p. 97, (2017)
 ISSN 1534-6104, eISSN 2164-8212

The Kemper History Project: From Historical Narrative to Institutional Legacy

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Abstract

An *institutional legacy* can be understood as knowledge, values, and shared experiences transmitted by or received from a college or university for the benefit of all who have taught, served, researched, and/or learned there. This article describes a year-long, collaborative writing project carried out by one university to chronicle two decades of an ongoing professional development school (PDS) partnership with 10 area schools. The final outcome of the project—a 155-page, informally published book—commemorated the partnership with a valuable historical record that also documented an institutional legacy. The article includes a discussion of implications for practice, including benefits of writing a historical narrative, challenges to anticipate, and suggestions for getting started.

Keywords: collaborative writing, historical narrative, institutiona legacy, professional development school (PDS), school-university partnership

Introduction

In higher education, community engagement can take the form of service-learning, clinical experiences, teaching enhancement, scholarly research, or reciprocal partnerships. Professional development school (PDS) partnerships, one means of community engagement, encompass all five. Defined as mutually beneficial relationships between colleges or universities and PK-12 schools (pre-kindergarten through high school) to enhance teaching and learning for all involved, PDS partnerships engage university and school partners through activities such as providing and/or receiving professional development; supervising and/or completing clinical experiences; and planning, implementing, and/or participating in classroom, school, and community events. PDS work has been shown to increase student achievement, enhance teacher preparation and development, and provide authentic learning experiences for both school-age and college students *(Neville, 2010; Wong & Glass, 2011)*. However, like many forms of community engagement, PDS work often goes undocumented (*Miller & Billings, 2012)*.

One team of school–university collaboration scholars asked, "Beyond test scores and retention rates, what are the markers by which PDS work is deemed worthwhile for the lives of students?" *(James, Kobe, Shealey, Foretich, & Sabatini, 2015, p. 53)*. Writing a historical narrative of PDS projects, initiatives, and accomplishments can offer insight as well as validation. This article describes a yearlong collaborative writing project carried out by one university to chronicle two decades of an ongoing PDS partnership with 10 area schools. The final outcome of the project—a 155-page, informally published book—commemorated the partnership with a valuable historical record that also documented an institutional legacy.

Theoretical Framework

Collaborative writing among college faculty has many advantages. Because collaborative writing holds writers accountable to one another, it is more likely to be productive than writing alone *(Ballard & Ballard, 2013)*. Due to its social nature, collaborative writing is often easier and more enjoyable than writing alone; due to multiple perspectives, it is likely to produce a richer outcome *(Ballard & Ballard, 2013; Stivers & Cramer, 2013)*. In addition to scholarly productivity, collaborative writing offers opportunities for professional growth and reflection, allowing individuals to refine writing and research skills that might not develop without influence from others *(Stivers & Cramer, 2013)*.

Research and writing collaborations between university faculty and school personnel also have proven fruitful. For example, after engaging in a schoolwide action research project exploring the topic of mentoring, teachers, administrators, and professors in one school–university partnership cowrote an edited book offering narrative accounts of their research experiences and outcomes *(Mullen, 2000; Mullen & Lick, 2001)*. In another project, a school–university research team of five people engaged in collaborations focused on civic mindfulness in children that evolved over time from teaching to action research to writing a research article *(James et al., 2015)*.

In addition to writing about specific community engagement projects, some colleges and universities take a holistic approach, writing about long-term and ongoing projects, initiatives, and accomplishments. To commemorate its 50th anniversary, one university's campus law enforcement agency designated an officer to research and write an account of the agency's history for internet and print publication, a process that took 4 years *(Fasl, 2008)*.

Thelin *(2009)* stated that "educational institutions that preserve, make known, and promote their history create a strong and lively institutional identity" *(p. 4)*. At the project level, documenting and publishing accounts of community engagement recognizes individuals for their service, research, and/or teaching efforts; establishes a holistic view of the efforts of many; reveals trends; provides data for project assessment; and informs strategic planning *(Miller & Billings, 2012)*. At the institutional level, demonstrating collective impact through published accounts of community engagement promotes awareness and generates community support, which in turn can bolster fund-raising efforts *(Miller & Billings, 2012; Winston, 2013)*.

Documenting institutional efforts and events over time also creates a sense of heritage *(Thelin, 2009)*. According to the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, legacy means "something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past" *("Legacy," 2015, definition 2)*. *Institution* means "an established organization or corporation (as a bank or university) especially of a public character" *("Institution," 2015, definition 2b)*. Based on these definitions, an *institutional legacy* can be understood as knowledge, values, and shared experiences transmitted by or received from a college or university for the benefit of all who have taught, served, researched, and/or learned there. Therefore, publishing a historical narrative of PDS work or other community engagement efforts is one way to document an institutional legacy.

Background and Context

Bradley University is a comprehensive private university located in Peoria, Illinois. Founded in 1897, Bradley serves 4,500 undergraduate students and 900 graduate students in business, engineering and technology, communications and fine arts, liberal arts and sciences, and education and health sciences *(Bradley University, 2017a)*. The Bradley PDS Partnership was established in 1995 by Bradley's College of Education and Health Sciences to create an extended learning environment for PK-20 (pre-kindergarten through graduate school) learners. The partnership was led by a team of six College faculty and staff called the Bradley PDS Council, and it had the following goals: (1) supporting and improving student learning and achievement; (2) preparing aspiring professionals in education and health sciences; (3) providing lifelong learning experiences and leadership opportunities; (4) promoting best practices in teaching, learning, and leadership through professional development, action research, and scholarship; and

(5) supporting the health and well-being of students, their families, and the professionals who work with them *(Bradley University, 2017b)*. Generously funded by the William T. Kemper Foundation–Commerce Bank, Trustee, the Bradley PDS Partnership served 10 different schools in the Peoria area for over two decades.

Bradley's Kemper grant was first awarded in 1996 for a 5-year term to support release time from teaching duties for a William T. Kemper Fellow for Teaching Excellence to lead the College's efforts to develop school–university partnerships with area schools. The grant also designated funding to provide ongoing professional development for College faculty and staff as well as for teachers and administrators at the College's PDS sites. During its first 5 years, the Bradley PDS Partnership established five area schools as Bradley PDS sites, launched a teaching academy for College faculty and staff, and initiated a variety of site-based PDS projects, including studies of each school's learning environment, enhanced clinical experience placements for teacher education and nursing majors, and customized workshops for teachers. Several PDS projects focused directly on students, including a college simulation project, a customized health curriculum, and a variety of academic support efforts, especially in the area of reading.

Due to ongoing need for Bradley's PDS work, the Kemper grant was renewed in 2000, 2006, 2009, 2012, and 2014. Although the basic tenets of the project remained the same with each new award (i.e., a Kemper Fellow, school–university partnerships, professional development for College and PDS personnel, and services for students), the Bradley PDS Partnership was dynamic in adapting to the changing needs of the College and its partner schools over the years. In the early 2000s, integrated education and health services, assessment of PDS outcomes, and international connections were emphasized. In the late 2000s, science, engineering, and the arts were emphasized. In the early 2010s, full-service community schools, expansion of Bradley PDS sites, and reciprocal professional development were emphasized. But all good things must come to an end. Bradley's last Kemper grant concluded in December 2016.

A short time later, in February 2017, a historical narrative of Bradley's PDS work was published in an online book titled *Bradley University's Kemper Professional Development Schools (PDS) Project: 1995–2016 (Hunzicker & Sattler, 2017)*. The following pages describe how this year-long collaborative writing project was conceptualized, implemented, and accomplished.

The Idea

The idea of collaboratively writing a historical narrative of Bradley's PDS work emerged during the completion of a long-overdue task: organizing 22 years of Kemper files. From December 2015 to February 2016, the project's current Kemper Fellow sorted through each PDS piece of paper that had been filed over the years. First, the papers were sorted into stacks by academic year. Next, the papers within each stack were organized chronologically. After duplicates were discarded and documents that did not relate directly to the Bradley PDS Partnership were set aside, the remaining archives were placed in plastic page protectors and filed into nine three-ring binders by academic year. The result was an impressive compilation of Bradley's PDS work over two decades' time. Yet even with the Kemper archives organized and accessible, it was unlikely that people would take the time to view them.

As the Bradley PDS Council pondered the usefulness of the archives, a vision began to take shape. What if we used the archives to write a project history? What if we asked people who actually had been there to write each chapter? What if we supplemented each chapter with scanned material from the archives and published the whole thing online? Such a project would allow Bradley to chronicle its PDS history, honor those who had contributed to the project over the years, and possibly attract new PDS funding sources. In February 2016, the Bradley PDS Council decided to move forward.

Launch and Recruitment

The Kemper History Project (KHP) was launched in March 2016 with a new web page added to Bradley's PDS website. Describing the scope and intended outcome of the project, the web page called for three different levels of participation. Coauthors were needed to research the Kemper archives and write chapter histories by academic year. Contributors were needed to submit quotations and write personal reflections about their involvement in the partnership over the years. Proofreaders were needed to read for historical accuracy. Individuals interested in serving as coauthors or proofreaders were invited to e-mail the Kemper Fellow, who was also the KHP lead editor. Those interested in making shorter contributions could submit quotations and reflections via a link on the project's web page.

Immediately following publication of the KHP web page, the lead editor began reaching out to key individuals, inviting them to

serve as coauthors. All former Kemper Fellows were asked to write at least one chapter. A variety of Bradley PDS Partnership stakeholders who had been deeply involved in the project over the years were also approached. Personal invitations to these stakeholders, paired with thoughtful matching of coauthors to chapters, yielded 100% acceptance. The final roster of 15 chapter coauthors included 10 Kemper Fellows, two current and former Bradley PDS site coordinators, one Bradley PDS principal, the College's dean, and a former Kemper graduate assistant. Using the same personal invitation plus a thoughtful matching process, eight of the coauthors also were invited to serve as proofreaders. Again, 100% accepted.

With the coauthors and proofreaders in place, an e-mail message was sent to all College faculty in May 2016, announcing the names of the chapter coauthors and encouraging contributions of quotations and reflections. Around the same time, a similar e-mail and an article published in the Bradley PDS Partnership's spring newsletter encouraged teachers and administrators at Bradley's current and former PDS sites to contribute.

The Writing Phase

The writing phase of the Kemper History Project took place between June and October 2016. During this time, the Kemper archives were made accessible to the project's coauthors using a check-out system monitored by one of the College's administrative support personnel. Coauthors were encouraged to review the archives while drafting and refining their chapters. They were welcomed to make photocopies, if needed, but were asked not to take the archives out of the building. For coauthors who no longer lived in the Peoria area, Kemper archives documents were photocopied and mailed through the U.S. Postal Service. Via e-mail attachment, all coauthors were provided with a sample chapter, coauthor instructions, and a list of key people, events, and projects related to the academic year(s) for their assigned chapter(s).

Throughout the summer, the coauthors individually and collaboratively wrote their chapters. They relied heavily on the Kemper archives, especially the partnership newsletters published each semester since 1996. The coauthors also relied on one another. For example, a few coauthors shared the research and writing tasks, with one person researching the archives and creating a chapter outline and another person using the chapter outline to write the assigned chapter. Other coauthors supplemented the history gleaned from the archives with personal reflections and reflections

from others. For example, at least two coauthors reached out to former colleagues as they wrote to ask for firsthand information that they could weave into their chapters. Still others referenced relevant research and/or world events that—even when not mentioned in the Kemper archives—impacted the project or its people at the time, such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

The original chapter submission deadline was August 1, 2016, and the first chapters started rolling in around mid-June. However, when several coauthors expressed a need for more time, the submission deadline was extended to early September. By early October, all 22 chapters had been submitted. Throughout the spring and summer months and into the fall, as the coauthors were writing, the KHP website link remained open for individuals to contribute quotations and reflections. Contributions, however, were slow in coming. Eventually, the lead editor began reaching out to key individuals to solicit contributions, and this turned out to be a much more fruitful approach than the website link. In the end, 11 reflections, two original poems, and 41 featured quotations focused on specific experiences, memories, and/or projects that had taken place over the years were gathered to supplement the chapter histories.

The Polishing Phase

In early October 2016, the intensity of the Kemper History Project hit. Although the original plan was to publish the historical narrative online, several people had expressed an interest in print copies as well. Additionally, the Bradley PDS Council was asked to present the first printed copy to a representative from the William T. Kemper Foundation–Commerce Bank, Trustee during a special meeting in February 2017. With the fall semester ending in mid-December, this meant that the book had to be revised, edited, formatted, and proofread in 6 weeks' time!

The first stage of the polishing phase involved revision and editing of the chapters. An editing team of five Bradley PDS Council members began by reading through all 22 chapters to gain a holistic perspective as well as to identify unintentional omissions and unnecessary repetition. For example, a signature project or event might not have been mentioned in any chapter, or a signature project or event might have been described in detail across several chapters. Consistency in language was also a goal. For example, in some chapters individuals were identified by first name, and in others they were referred to by their formal title and last name.

Capitalization and punctuation also varied significantly from chapter to chapter. As the editing team completed the read-through during two face-to-face meetings, they took notes on needed revisions for each chapter; discussed how to consistently address details such as names, titles, and capitalization; and considered where to minimize or cut description and where to add more detail.

With a holistic view of the historical narrative in mind, and equipped with notes on needed revisions for each chapter, each member of the editing team took responsibility for revising and editing four to five chapters. To provide further support, two editing team members created a GoogleDoc listing project-specific editing rules and examples that was available for the entire editing team to reference and add to as they worked. From early October through the end of November 2016, members of the editing team revised and edited their assigned chapters. Upon completion, each chapter was sent to the lead editor for a second round of revision and editing, followed by formatting.

Revision, editing, and formatting by the lead editor took place from November 2016 through January 2017. During this stage of the process, omissions, repetition, and inconsistencies continued to be identified and addressed. In addition, each chapter was formatted to look like a book chapter and supplemented with photographs, scanned documents from the Kemper archives, reflections, and featured quotations. Another important aspect of formatting was ensuring that American Psychological Association guidelines *(APA, 2010)* were consistently employed. The final, formatted chapters, which ranged from three to eight pages in length, were saved in both Microsoft Word and Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF).

Once formatted, each chapter was returned to its coauthor for proofreading. At the same time, each coauthor received a customized copyright agreement letter to document consent to assign chapter copyright to the College. Contributors of reflections were also provided with a formatted proof and a copyright agreement letter. Around the same time, bundles of five to six consecutive chapters were provided to every two proofreaders. Selected for their firsthand experience with the project during the academic years represented in their assigned chapters, the proofreaders read the formatted chapters for accuracy, flow, and consistency.

While the chapters were being proofread, the lead editor created beginning pages, a table of contents, and four appendices with supplementary information about the Bradley PDS Partnership and

the Kemper History Project. In addition, the lead editor wrote the book's preface, the second editor wrote the book's afterword and acknowledgments, and a book cover was professionally designed. As the proofread chapters were returned with edits and other suggestions, the lead editor made all appropriate corrections. Once the third round of revision and editing was completed for all 22 chapters, the lead editor and the second editor proofread the book line by line from beginning to end to identify and address lingering discrepancies. In all, 38 unique individuals contributed to the successful completion of the project by authoring chapters, submitting reflections, and/or offering quotations or poems. Forty-five percent of the project's contributors were currently or formerly affiliated with Bradley's Department of Teacher Education, 31% were currently or formerly affiliated with other departments or units on Bradley's campus, and 24% were currently or formerly affiliated with one of Bradley's 10 PDS sites (see Figure 1). With final edits made, the book was prepared for publication.

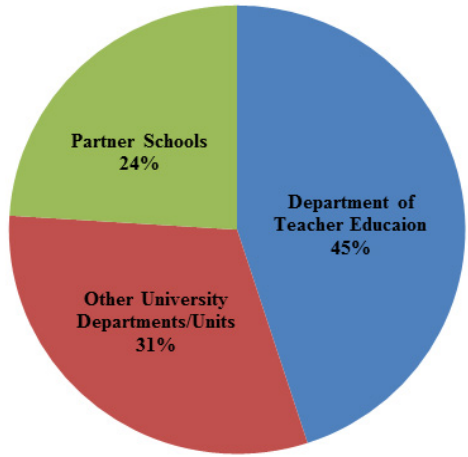

Figure 1. Percentages of school and university contributors

Publication and Distribution

In early February 2017, the historical narrative of Bradley's PDS work was published on the Kemper History Project webpage *(Kemper History Project, 2017)*. In addition, 30 print copies of the book were produced. The online version of the book was distributed through an e-mail announcement with a link to the web page. Print copies were hand-delivered to Kemper, to the College, to each of the book's coauthors, and to the principals of Bradley's 10 cur-

rent and former PDS sites. One recipient of a print copy remarked, "What a great tribute to all of the years of service to the schools!" Another commented, "This has been a monster of a project, and I suspect, a bit like herding cats!" Both statements accurately portray the experience. The final section discusses the benefits of writing a historical narrative, challenges to anticipate, and suggestions for getting started.

Implications for Practice

The year-long Kemper History Project was a lot of extra work by a lot of already-busy people. Why should colleges and universities even bother with such an add-on endeavor? For Bradley, the project chronicled the inception, development, and fruit of one college's rich and rewarding PDS work over many years. The book that resulted honored those who were involved in the partnership over the years and gathered the details together into one location. In addition, the book created an accessible record of the Bradley PDS Partnership's efforts and accomplishments, which positioned the College to serve as a PDS model for other institutions as well as to attract new funding sources for its own PDS work. Moreover, the process of collaboratively writing a historical narrative allowed the Bradley PDS Council and others to reflect holistically on the impact of the College's PDS work over the years, analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership and better understanding the dynamics of personnel and resources that kept it going for 22 years. The Kemper History Project reminded everyone who contributed to it—and will now remind everyone who takes time to read it—of the value of partnering with area schools for the benefit of all involved.

Challenges and Suggestions for Getting Started

Despite the benefits, collaboratively writing a historical narrative can be fraught with challenges, but most challenges can be easily managed with a bit of planning. First, historical narratives are dependent on the existence of complete and accurate records. In addition to the types of archives previously mentioned, paper-based records may include accreditation reports, annual reports, university catalogs, faculty publications, student theses, university and local newspapers, and state-level archives *(Howick, 1986; Thelin, 2009)*. If paper-based records are not available, oral history interviews may render an alternative—or supplemental—source of information *(Thelin, 2009; Winston, 2013)*. If possible, writing teams

can prepare in advance by digitizing and indexing community engagement efforts as they occur *(Miller & Billings, 2012; Winston, 2013)*. It is especially important to translate unstable media sources, such as cassette tapes, to more stable formats, such as written transcripts *(Winston, 2013)*. For existing documentation, writing teams should develop an organized filing system that can be referenced and added to as new archives are accumulated *(Fasl, 2008)*.

Second, it may be difficult to convince people to participate in a large-scale collaborative writing project. Reasons individuals may resist include not wanting to revisit the past, not seeing the necessity, and not knowing where to begin *(Fasl, 2008)*. It is also possible that people will be reluctant to put forth effort when they are uncertain about the quality of the final product. Thoughtfully selecting coauthors based on their areas of experience and/or expertise and approaching each one with a personal invitation to participate is one way to encourage participation. In addition, the editor(s) must ensure that the project is well planned, organized, and implemented from beginning to end. Structuring the process with specific information such as project goals or intended outcomes, a project timeline, sample chapters, and a list of participants will allow everyone involved to know what to expect. Once participants are on board, providing regular updates, remaining accessible, and offering support as needed will keep them motivated and unruffled to completion.

Third, to ensure that people will actually read the historical narrative, it must be interesting, credible, and well written. To ensure that the historical narrative is interesting, coauthors should write as storytellers and use humor where appropriate *(Howick, 1986)*. Moreover, personal accounts and memoirs by students and faculty should be viewed as "central—not peripheral—sources of data" *(Thelin, 2009, p. 11)*. To keep length in check, coauthors can mention or provide a brief summary of mundane efforts and events while elaborating those that are most exciting.

To ensure that the historical narrative is credible, coauthors, proofreaders, and editors should rely heavily on historical records, checking and double-checking details during each phase of writing and polishing. In addition, no germane records or sources should be intentionally omitted *(Thelin, 2009)*, personal reflections should be substantiated with documentable facts *(Fasl, 2008)*, and formally collected oral histories (i.e., anything beyond a personal communication or voluntary contribution) should be approved by an institutional review board *(Winston, 2013)*. Multiple people should perform credibility checks during each phase of writing and polishing;

however, primary responsibility for ensuring historical accuracy and proper data collection procedures falls to the project editor(s).

To ensure a well-written historical narrative, each coauthor should be provided with writing instructions as well as a list of key people, events, or projects and/or a model chapter. In addition, clearly communicating a multiple-stage revision and editing process up front can motivate coauthors to do their best work and prepare them for the possibility of heavy revision and editing later. At the chapter level, editor(s) and proofreaders should scrutinize, revise, and edit to ensure that each chapter is easy to follow, cohesive from beginning to end, consistent in format and language usage, and free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. At the book level, the editor(s) should scrutinize according to the same criteria a second time, making additional revisions and edits to ensure that the entire narrative is cohesive, consistent, and error-free from beginning to end. Again, primary responsibility for a well-written historical narrative falls on the shoulders of the project editor(s).

A fourth and final challenge of collaboratively writing a historical narrative is deciding how and where to publish it, as well as who holds the copyright. Although some historical narratives are worthy of a formal book contract, most can be informally published by simply printing and distributing copies. Depending on the number of pages, desired appearance, and budget, print copies can range from black-and-white or color photocopies to spiral bound or saddle stitched (i.e., stapled) booklets to perfect-bound paperback books *(Lenz, n.d.)*. If the appearance of formal publication is desired, subsidy publishing (commonly known as vanity publishing) may be an option. Although not likely to be profitable, advantages of subsidy publishing include print on demand technology and assignment of an International Standard Book Number *(ISBN; Bricker, 2013)*. For informal publication online, hypertext markup language (HTML) and/or PDF versions of the historical narrative can be posted via website or blog as open access publications, making them readily available and free of charge *(Miller & Billings, 2012)*.

If the historical narrative is collaboratively written, it is wise to require coauthors to sign over the copyright to the larger institution so that the historical narrative is preserved as a whole and future decisions about publication and distribution are the responsibility of one entity as opposed to multiple individuals. Copyright assignment can be accomplished with a letter, customized for each chapter and/or coauthor. The larger institution's office of grant

administration, publications, or institutional research should be able to assist with this process.

Conclusion

When colleges and universities neglect to write and publish historical accounts of their community engagement work, "institutional amnesia" can result *(Thelin, 2009, p. 5)*. But "when people from across institutions come together authentically, to work democratically and to inquire . . . it is a story worth telling" *(James et al., 2015, p. 54)*. How does an institution begin the process of telling its community engagement story? Fasl *(2008)* suggests asking six questions: (1) Why should this history be written? (2) How do we begin? (3) When, or how soon, should the project begin? (4) Where can pertinent information be located? (5) What information should be (and should not be) included? (6) Who should do the writing? By collaboratively writing a historical narrative, colleges and universities can chronicle institutional history, honor those who have contributed, raise community awareness, provide a model for others, and attract new funding sources. Most important, collaboratively writing and publishing a historical narrative can document an institutional legacy of community engagement, a legacy that those who follow can read, savor, and carry forward.

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Methodological Addendum

Aharonian *(2016)* recently asserted that writing about professional/life experiences, inviting others to read the writings, and engaging in interactive dialogue about the writings fosters deep

reflection and self-analysis for everyone involved. Through such collaborative inquiry, participants can "search for connections between the stories and their own practice" and "generate understandings, relevant to their unique professional contexts, in a dynamic ongoing process" *(p. 223)*. Narrative inquiry as a research method was first used by Connelly and Clandinin to describe the personal stories of teachers *(Wang & Geale, 2015; see Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)*. When Bradley University's College of Education and Health Sciences decided to collaboratively write a historical narrative chronicling 20 years of PDS work, narrative inquiry was the perfect choice.

The primary strength of this approach is the intimacy and authenticity of the narrative. On the other hand, some may consider such historical accounts to be subjective or biased because they are heavily based on participants' personal experiences. For the purposes of the Kemper History Project, however, narrative inquiry provided just the right balance of factual information and personal interpretation.

About the Author

Jana Hunzicker is an associate professor of teacher education and associate dean for the College of Education and Health Sciences at Bradley University. Her research interests include effective teaching practices, teacher learning, professional development, professional development schools, and teacher leadership. She earned her Ed.D in curriculum and instruction from Illinois State University.