Establishing Partnership Spaces: Reflections of Educational Leaders on Founding Professional Development Schools

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This qualitative study used in-depth interviews to investigate the perceptions of school leaders about developing and maintaining school-university partnerships with a local regional university in rural school districts. The professional development school (PDS) model provides meaningful learning experiences for teacher candidates by providing sustained and embedded field experiences in an authentic teaching environment. Participants were current and/or former administrators in the local/regional school-university partnership. All participants were former teachers who later became principals, superintendents, and/or district directors who were well prepared to inform the research questions. Data collected were categorically aggregated and analyzed using coding that resulted five themes: 1) development and value of early partnerships, 2) rural context, 3) school-community culture, 4) teacher perception and participation, and 5) important considerations of initiating the partnership.

Keywords: hybrid spaces, professional development schools, rural schools, school leadership, school-university partnerships

Professional development schools (PDS) create a unique partnership between local PK-12 schools and the university community (NAPDS, 2008). According to Carpenter and Sherretz (2012), "A professional development school is a learning organization focused on the learning of school students, novice and veteran teachers and university faculty" (p. 91). Such school-university partnerships involve local/regional school leaders, university faculty and administrators, and educator candidates. In many ways, these partnerships find grounding in the philosophy that professional development schools "are real public schools selected and joined in partnership with the university for their innovative spirit and serious intent to improve the quality of learning for educators and students" (Holmes Group, 1995, p. 3). Zeichner, Payne, and Bayko (2015) conceptualized this as a hybrid space and "advocate for the creation of new hybrid spaces in university teacher education where academic, school-based, and community-based knowledge come together in less hierarchical and haphazard ways to support teacher learning" (p. 124).

This study examines the experiences of six school leaders involved in establishing partnership as *hybrid spaces* in cooperation with a regional college of education in a rural Appalachian region of a Midwest state. First developed in the mid-1980s, these initial partnerships have continued until the present. Collaborations have been developed and sustained through the university's center for Professional Development School partnerships, and include licensure programs in Early Childhood, Middle Childhood, Adolescent-to-Young Adult, and Intervention Specialist programs.

Founding leaders in the university and local schools did not follow a single model, neither in structure nor in the framework of mission/purpose. Rather, structures and frameworks have evolved in line with the interests and preferences of university faculty and school-based educator leaders. As Nettleton and Barnett (2016) noted, "Each partnership reflects the social-historical context of the university and community" (p. 21). Participants in this study provided insights and shared their perceptions of the PDS model in the context of the spaces that emerged from those original collaborations.

Rationale

The PDS model is founded on a belief in strong collaborative relationships between school and university partners (NAPDS, 2008). By examining the perceptions of leaders in the development of the spaces where such early partnerships were created, researchers and curriculum designers can potentially gain an understanding of how these constructs evolve and improve over time. Findings from this study aim to improve the PDS model in the future development of school-university partnerships. Likewise, this study seeks to emphasize the work of school leaders and their involvement to better inform newly established partnerships. Additionally, this study provides insights that augment the existing literature on school-university collaborations and sheds light on the impact these programs have on teacher preparation and practice. This is relevant for a variety of educational stakeholders and across many settings.

The National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) (2008) lists nine essential components of a PDS. Of these nine, this study addresses six essentials. These are:

(1) A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that

embraces their active engagement in the school community;
(2) Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need;
(3) A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;
(4) A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration;
(5) Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; and
(6) Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures. (NAPDS, 2008)

This study examines the relationship of these essentials and the perspectives of founding school leaders through analyzing the reflections of those leaders on the early stages of the establishment of partnerships. Uniquely, the partnerships investigated in this study were established prior to 2008 and the development of the 9 Essentials (NAPDS, 2008). Therefore, we attempt to frame the perspectives of early school leaders regarding the development of these partnerships without the guidance of the nine essentials.

Context of the Study

Ohio Department of Education classifies school districts into eight typological categories. The partnership schools in this study are representative of Appalachian districts that are classified as "Rural – High Poverty & Small Student Populations," "Rural - Average Student Poverty & Very Small Student Population," and "Suburban - Low Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size" (See Figure 1.0). According to Ohio's definition, suburban is indicative of a town's "sub-urban" population and not its proximity to urban settings.

2013 School Districts Typology

2013 Typology Code	Major Grouping	Full Descriptor	Districts Within Typology	Students Within Typology
1	Rural	Rural - High Student Poverty & Small Student Population	124	170,000
2	Rural	Rural - Average Student Poverty & Very Small Student Population	107	110,000
3	Small Town	Small Town - Low Student Poverty & Small Student Population	111	185,000
4	Small Town	Small Town - High Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size	89	200,000
5	Suburban	Suburban - Low Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size	77	320,000
6	Suburban	Suburban - Very Low Student Poverty & Large Student Population	46	240,000
7	Urban	Urban - High Student Poverty & Average Student Population	47	210,000
8	Urban	Urban - Very High Student Poverty & Very Large Student Population	8	200,000

Amended January 2015

Figure 1. Typology of Ohio School Districts by ODE 2013 Code (Ohio Department of Education, 2017)

Although the context of the study was within a rural location, the focus of the study was on the perceptions of founding members of the partnership and not the context. However, the participants in this study brought to light the relevance of the rural context and is discussed in the findings.

Literature Review

The PDS Model

Professional development school partnerships provide authentic early-entry, learning experiences for teacher candidates by integrating them into a real-world teaching environment (Goodlad, 1994; Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley, & Goodlad, 2004; Henning, Gut, & Beam, 2018). Zeichner et al. (2015) stated,

> The rapidly expanding "early-entry" programs place teacher candidates in schools with very little preservice preparation and emphasize, even sometimes uncritically

> glorify, practice and practitioner knowledge, while minimizing the importance of professional education coursework that is not seen as directly connected to daily teaching practice. (p. 123)

The PDS model attempts to ameliorate this problem (Ikpeze, Broikou, Hildenbrand, & Gladstone-Brown, 2012). Ikpeze et al. (2012) proposed that such models can "transform teacher preparation through carefully structured, mentored, and coordinated field experiences, characterized by a culture of inquiry, reflection, and effective collaboration among all stakeholders" (p. 276). Teacher candidates learn from experienced teachers how to prepare class materials, mentor students, and mitigate challenging situations (Pellett & Pellett, 2009). Sustained field experiences, an understanding of school-community culture, and combined resources through school-university partnerships prepare teacher candidates to be *well-started beginners* and quality practicing teachers (Zeichner et al., 2015). Such models foster what Goodlad et al. (2004) referred to as a simultaneous renewal, creating a space in which everyone is rejuvenated by the reflective, renewing, and reciprocal practice that partnership brings.

Role of School Leadership

Kamler et al. (2009) illuminated three effective leadership strategies for school-university partnerships: (a) collaboration, (b) negotiations, and (c) decision making. Nettleton and Barnett (2016) found that active educational leaders in school-university partnerships provide support in four areas: (a) communication networks, (b) professional boundaries, (c) model partnership dispositions, and (d) nurture relationships. Scholars posited that leadership is a crucial component in creating a professional community through democratic school-university partnerships (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Goodlad, et al., 2004; Hess, Johnson, & Reynolds, 2014; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach 1999). Leithwood et al. (1999) purported that transformational leadership provides sustaining support for the school-university partnership. Transformational leaders often encourage followers to relinquish personal interest and invest in hybrid solutions in preparing teachers (Zeichner et al., 2015). However, as Clark (1999) posited, although a single, charismatic leader may have a significant impact on partnerships, the important requisite to leadership is that individuals understand the various roles in higher education and their schools that make these partnerships possible.

Rural Schools

Rural schools can experience unique challenges that include recruitment of teachers, retention concerns, and opportunities for professional development. Under-resourced schools located in rural areas face challenges to maintain professional development opportunities and recruit teachers (Barrett, Cowen, & Toma, 2015; Moeller, Moeller, & Schmidt, 2016; Monk, 2007). Some rural schools experience issues of student achievement gaps and can face concerns with the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers (Dadisman, Gravelle, Farmer, & Petrin, 2010; DeYoung, 1991; Monk, 2007; Ulferts, 2016).

While the literature reveals chronic challenges for rural schools, many studies speak to the advantages of education in rural spaces, including close community connections, access to natural spaces, and strong commitment to schools (Hartman, 2017; Howley &

Howley, 2004; Lee, 2001; Preston & Barnes, 2017). Rural schoolteachers understand the local culture and aspire to work within the rural context to ameliorate challenges that rural schools face in providing education based within the local community (Casapulla & Hess, 2016; Howley & Howley, 2004; Waller & Barrentine, 2015).

Methodology

The research study was guided by the following questions: (1) What are the perceptions of partnership school leaders in establishing spaces of collaborative professional growth opportunities for leaders, faculty, teachers, and pre-service educators?; (2) What were the benefits and challenges associated with establishing, implementing, and sustaining a PDS partnership?; (3) What were the cultural and contextual factors that impacted the establishment of an early PDS partnership?; and (4) What can be learned from leadership perspectives of early founding professional development schools that can inform new school-university partnerships?

Participants

Participants were affiliated with local/regional professional development schools. Individuals were current and/or former in the local/regional school-university partnership. All participants were former teachers who later became principals, superintendents, and/or district directors who were well prepared to inform the research questions. Participants were identified through referral of key informants from the university's center for Professional Development Schools. They represent two initial partnerships from the mid-1980s and four leaders from six partnerships that developed in the early 1990s. While this institution now has multiple partnerships across licensure areas, these participants were the earliest available adopters of the original partnerships. In accordance with Institutional Review Board approval informed consent was obtained and participation was voluntary.

The six participants included current and former school leaders (principals and/or superintendents) at PDS schools partnering with the university. Pseudonyms are used to refer to the participants. Three of the participants were leaders at the district level: a retired superintendent, who now is employed at the partnering university; a practicing superintendent; and a director of curriculum. The remaining three were building principals. Two of the principals are practicing school administrators. The third representative of the principals' voice is a former elementary school leader, now retired.

Table 1

Participants

Name	Identifies As	PDS Role	School Typology
Hillary Sanford Susan Clever	White/Female/ University Faculty /Retired Principal/ Superintendent	Founding Partner	Rural - High Student Poverty & Small Student Population

	White/Female/ District Director of Curriculum	Continuing Partner	Rural - Average Student Poverty & Very Small Student Population
Steve Crisp	White/Male/ Superintendent	Founding & Continuing Partner	Rural - High Student Poverty & Small Student Population
Donald Barber	White/Male/Retired Principal	Founding Partner	Suburban - Low Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size
Connie Short	White/Female/ Retired Principal	Founding Partner	Suburban - Low Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size
Gary Reed	White/Male/ Principal	Founding & Continuing Partner	Rural - High Student Poverty & Small Student Population

Data Collection and Analysis

This qualitative study utilized in-depth interviews with six participants from early PDS partnerships in Southeast Ohio. As semi-structured in-depth interviews, some flexibility was employed for purposes of clarification and follow-up questioning based on participants' responses (Patton, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Rationale for using this method was to ensure comprehensive responses and yet maintain a degree of consistency with three to four researchers in the field collecting data. All interviews were transcribed immediately after each individual interview was conducted. The participants were interviewed once and interviews lasted between 1.5-2.5 hours. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. The data was initially coded using a priori, emergent, and in vivo coding. These initial codes were categorically aggregated into several code families that were combined into five final thematic units: 1) development and value of early partnerships, 2) rural context, 3) school-community culture, 4) teacher perception and participation, and 5) important considerations of initiating the partnership.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is determined in large part by credibility (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Patton, 2014). Patton (2014) posited that the background qualifications and knowledge of the investigators are factors contributing to the credibility of a study, citing that the researcher credibility depends on training and experience. In this

study, researchers were experienced in qualitative research, teacher education, and school leadership conducted the collection and analysis of data. To ensure credibility further, trustworthiness techniques included inter-rater reliability, rich description of phenomenon under investigation, and reflective commentary (Patton, 2014). Finally, we additionally used peer-debriefing as a strategy (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Findings

The findings for this study represent a qualitative synthesis of the themes that emerged from participant responses. After coding responses from transcribed interviews, the data were aggregated into thematic units (Patton, 2015). The five themes included partnership development and early value, rural context, school community culture, teacher perception and participation, and important considerations. These themes related to the manner in which partnerships developed and the value the stakeholders placed on that partnership, reflections of the context of rurality in which the partnership was established, school-community relations regarding the partnership, and the way in which teachers perceived the partnership and framed their participation. Finally, the important considerations of the benefits and challenges that emerged in the early partnership. As such, they served to organize the findings and answer the research questions (see Table 2).

Table 2

Research Questions' Relationship to Themes

Research Question	**Themes**
(1) What are the perceptions of partnership school leaders in establishing spaces of collaborative professional growth opportunities for leaders, faculty, teachers, and pre-service educators?	Partnership Development and Early Value Teacher Perception and Participation
(2) What were the benefits and challenges associated with establishing, implementing, and sustaining a PDS partnership?	Rural Context Teacher Perception and Participation Important Considerations
(3) What were the cultural and contextual factors that impacted the establishment of an early PDS partnership?	Rural Context School-Community Culture Teacher Perception and Participation
(4) What can be learned from leadership perspectives of early founding professional development schools that can inform new	Partnership Development and Early Value School-Community Culture Teacher Perception and Participation

Partnership Development and Early Value

Participants communicated their perceptions of early partnerships, including their early involvement, rationale for involvement, their feelings about the involvement, and their values of the partnership and why they work to sustain it. Finally, the participants expressed the model's impact on them professionally as a school leader.

> Participants spoke to the value of the partnership in connecting to students as well as the value of the impact on professional educators. As one participant, Steve Crisp, stated,
>
> [W]hen I think about value [of the partnership], I think from 2 perspectives. One, the value to the student. Two, the value to the district. . . . You have more people working with trained professionals which benefits them and you can utilize that person in a variety of ways depending on which phase of the partnership they're in.

Steve went on to express that it not only had an impact on the interns and the classroom teachers but impacted him as a leader. He emphasized the way in which the partnership fostered his desire to be visible and connected to instruction. Steve stated, "[I]f I look at the overall picture of the educational advantage, I was very pleased. I thought it really added lot of value." While the partnership brought with it a degree of increased supervisory responsibility, Steve stated, "It made more work, which I welcome. I wouldn't have traded it."

Likewise, Connie Short noted some similar values of initiating the partnership that she viewed as integral—specifically, teacher buy in and collaboration. In her words,

> With cooperation from other people in town, other school people who thought it was not just that we had such a decrepit building, got the levy passed and were able to design the school of our choice. I was a collaborative kind of leader. We had teachers who helped on that design . . . We could have teacher discussions and collaborations. We could have university personnel and/or students there where we would have a space to begin to collaborate on our teaching.

Connie recognized the values of reflective practice as a means of making decisions relating to curriculum and instruction. This included the idea of engaging in action research. She stated,

> How can we allow teachers to be in our school and never look into their own practices? Never make any decisions about what they're doing? That needs to be an ongoing thing where you always have that. You need to do research that looks into what it is you care about. Either before or after you do your action research and then follow up. How do I get myself to do that? How do I look at my practice? You have to be reflective on it and that is what we wanted for our school.

As early adopters in these partnerships, the participants asserted that these were not laissez-faire enterprises. Stakeholders in the schools and the universities were actively engaged and consciously aware of their responsibilities. Connie offered,

> We also invited the university professors and they invited us to different conferences and seminars. When we went into our reading methods, into cooperative learning, collaboration, sight based management we included them. We included their input

> and we always welcomed them to come. They in turn would invite us to go to some of the PDS conferences.

As this quote hints, the engagement included a scholar-practitioner mindset, creating spaces to consider the "theory to practice" work of education. To a great extent, Connie valued this in that it created an additional space in which the school and the university could collaborate:

> We wanted professors who were there in our school and they did it for a while. We wanted students there. *We wanted them.* We wanted not only our teachers and the professors, but we wanted these junior level students to start to reflect on their practices.

Hillary Sanford also spoke to the value of the connection between theory and practice. She stated, "[H]ow could we impact [teacher candidates'] learning? Not only by just coming into the building, but also by providing them skills and theory and information that they would need to be effective teachers?" For Hillary, theory implied a balanced need with practical application in an innovative space that the partnership provided. She asserted,

> I felt we were giving them a much more realistic [view of the classroom], but I think at that period in time, the content that university students got was pretty much theoretically based, and there wasn't a lot of hands-on, active, really seeing what happens in schools.

The values that these school leaders placed on the development of the early partnerships reflect facilitating factors that connect in many ways with the subsequent themes. The rural context, the culture surrounding school-community relations, the perceived benefits of the partnership, and the early challenges can each be framed by the values that the leaders expressed in their interviews.

Rural Context

The rural context speaks to the impact on the work of the principal concerning the professional development schools model. Findings are impacted by concerns common in rural settings, including professional isolation, funding and resources, teacher retention and recruitment, and community involvement (Hartman, 2017; Moeller et al., 2016; Monk, 2007).

Participants offered an important understanding of the dynamics that exist for rural schools engaging in PDS work, including the initially tenuous perceptions that exist between public K-12 educators their communities and perceptions of the "university." As a school leader, Hillary Sanford had to manage the negative experiences her staff had regarding university faculty. Specifically, she noted,

> There is a belief by some university professors that teachers in rural schools aren't good teachers, so they [professors] don't want to give their university students experiences with people [local teachers] who aren't strong. And I think that's just a lack of knowledge [about our rural schools and rural teachers] and a lack of understanding of the world we live in."

The importance of initial relationship building between the university and K-12 educators can both elevate these negative perceptions and help all players in the partnership gain a sense connectedness that allows the PDS partnership to fully engage the school and surrounding community. Donald Barber explained that the PDS partnership experience,

> helped me keep a relationship with the university. You get to know the faculty and

> you get the university students in. Parents like having more small group instruction. The kids are performing well on tests, our kids, so you're seeing a result. We're also giving them an avenue for the [university] students to deliver best practices and that's one thing [as a building leader] you want to see more of."

Connie Short argued that the PDS partnership helped her rural students in two ways: it improved the overall classroom instruction and helped them develop a new and deeper understanding of the university and people associated with the university. Specifically, she shared that the students in her school ". . . got better instruction, and also I think [they understood that] the university and university students were real people and that this is something that they and their parents might aspire to and be comfortable with."

Several participants discussed their initial involvement in the PDS partnership in the context of increased resources available to them as leaders working in under-funded, under-resourced and often under-staffed rural schools. In a pragmatic tone Steve Crisp factually stated,

> It meant more bodies, more people to help. I don't mean to put that in a cold way, like anybody will do, but it meant more trained people helping teach the kids . . . My first year as a principal, we were instructed by our superintendent and interim superintendent . . . and properly so, he said, "You have to cut 11 staff members." This was out of 65.

Gary Reed noted that the PDS partnership helped his rural school better recruit teachers,

> When we have teacher vacancies the number one [question] is, "Have we had any good student teachers?" The big thing is, "Are they local?" . . . When we know they're from somewhere close by that they're planning on sticking around. They're sometimes one of our first contacts [we make].

He also stressed the issue specific professional development provided to teacher candidates as they worked in his high poverty and under resourced rural schools. He firmly believed that it was

> . . . impactful for the [student teachers] to come in here [rural school]when they may have been from one of the large suburban schools where they do not see a lot of [the poverty related issues]. And being exposed to that in a student teaching setting and then determining okay, I fit here or I fit here, you know where the students are coming from."

These early partnerships provided mutually beneficial opportunity for educational leaders, teachers, university faculty, and all students (K-12 and university) in the rural school settings. The Professional Development School Partnerships in this study offered all stakeholders the spaces in which to better serve rural students and communities.

School-Community Culture

This theme relates to the way in which the PDS model impacts the culture and climate of the school building, as well as the school community perceptions of the people affiliated with the partnership, for example university staff and educator candidates. School-community culture represents the confluence of efforts and the spectrum of stakeholders that make partnerships work.

Specifically, participants touched on parental perceptions of partnerships and the way in which partnerships and student teachers/candidates were initially integrated into

the school culture. Donald Barber, a retired elementary principal, spoke extensively to these aspects, stating,

> When [new parents] coming in one of their questions is how does the university impact, in this case, the elementary level? And so we ask them what grade is your child in? We [explain that] we have here an early childhood and a middle child partnership program, and the student [candidates] come in usually twice a week. The [candidates] spend a lot of time in not only the classroom observing and getting lessons planned but they'll do small instruction. We try to have partnership students get involved with the school community culture [through these] after school programs [dinner theater, school carnival, soup night, game night, etc.].

Likewise, participant, Gary Reed, noted that students would immerse themselves into the school and community culture. He reminisced about the way the teachers worked to involve the candidates in everything they did. As well, he recalled advising student teachers,

> Don't come in at 7:30 and start teaching and I leave at 2:30, you know be involved in everything else. The duties before school, the duties after school, the afterschool activities, come to a basketball game and try to immerse yourself in everything so you get the full feel of what the culture is.

Furthermore, Steve Crisp, a practicing superintendent, reflected on how the partnership provided continuity between the school community and university campus in regards to culture. He stated that the partnership provided "knowledge of the culture, the background. I mean, even little things. Who's the mascot? What are school colors? Things that the children would expect that you would know."

Unanimously, participants acknowledged the important role that culture played in the development of school-university partnerships. In many ways, this theme related to the undercurrent of mentoring required on the part of practicing educators and educational leaders to induct candidates into the culture of the school and community.

Teacher Perception and Participation

The theme of teacher perception and participation included teacher buy in, innovative ideas, and serial reciprocity of knowledge and skills of teachers working within the PDS model. As well, this involved perceptions of the contribution to mentoring teacher's professional development through participating in the partnership.

Connie Short elaborated on the early perceptions of teachers participating in the partnership. Her reflections highlighted the perceived potential of the school-university collaboration to provide research-based efforts and best practices. As she detailed, "The vision was this wonderful, utopic school where university professors and classroom teachers have time to collaborate and to grow." Specifically, she discussed the different perceptions of university professors and classroom teachers on the potential of the partnerships to navigate misconceptions on behalf of both. She continued, "Our research is looked at and appreciated. We're not jealous and envious. We're not nitpicking. We have students [K-12 and university] that learn from our methods. We wanted to do better. We wanted all students to learn." Teachers and teacher candidates were being exposed to actual best practices and instructional strategies and not being expected to simply "love teaching."

Overall, leaders framed the perceptions of teachers of partnerships as positive, noting that typically classroom teachers were supportive of the work required to engage in these

partnerships. However, what may be more important was the way in which teachers selected candidates and then worked with that student in their practice. The relationship that developed would reveal an underlying aspect that may have had a great impact on how teachers perceived the partnership. One participant, Susan Clever, a district level curriculum director, stated,

> I was very thankful that we had that partnership because the [classroom] teachers talked a lot about how it was so helpful for them in the classroom. And really, what I came to learn is that there was kind of a picking and choosing. Like students [i.e. teacher candidates] would come [and I'd] do observations and then students that fit into the culture of the building or exhibited the skills that teachers were looking for were then picked for the next step.

Finding a good *fit* between classroom teachers and student candidates could likely help increase teacher buy-in as well.

Along this same thought, Donald Barber indicated, "This type of model helped with teacher buy in. As a principal, I had to listen to what their needs were." Barber explained that one concern that classroom teachers often noted a desire to make the most of their investment of time in candidates. He asserted that classroom teachers wanted to bring candidates into their classroom in order to get to know them and to develop mentor relationships. In his words, "You're not going to do me any good if I see you a semester [in my class] and then you take off [to another placement], I already had that [in earlier student teaching models]." Being able to nurture student candidates and see them develop through co-teaching opportunities established trust and a sense of commitment on the part of teachers. As Barber reflected, teachers would say, "I've already spent how much time nurturing and working with you; I want you here for the whole semester or the whole year if you can."

In addition to building trust, principal Gary Reed also recognized that teacher participation in the partnership would lead to developing leadership capacity. Reed stated,

> What I've seen is the building of leadership capacity [in teachers] . . . and I think especially having a student teacher in their classroom. I think that instills leadership in [the teachers]. I think it builds a lot of trust and it builds leadership skills within that teacher because a lot of times teachers, okay, they're leaders of the kids but also building them up as teacher leaders within other staff. And I think that's where it's definitely beneficial to where they've got another teacher working with them in that mentoring capacity.

These leaders addressed the professional skills and competencies that teachers develop and their perceived efficacy that comes with mentoring and guiding teacher candidates within the spaces created by the partnerships. The positive impact that partnership collaborations have on the teacher as well as the influence on the educational space in which they practice has a broad reaching influence on the candidate and their own ability to develop as an educator.

Important Considerations

Important considerations covers perceived benefits and challenges that leaders of early partnerships noted in their qualitative interviews. Challenges were expressed as issues concerning time commitment, barriers to innovation, teacher evaluation concerns, lack of

resource support, and teacher management of potential burnout.

Participants noted the effort needed to maintain innovative programs such as the PDS model. They recognized that these endeavors are often perceived as things that take more time away from teacher's already busy schedule. Connie Short shared, "Keeping any kind of innovation going, that takes more time from people's busy lives." Likewise, leaders recalled challenges to effecting any change or new innovation in their respective buildings and districts. These obstacles created concerns for leaders as they worked to improve and initiate new programs in their educational spaces. In general, some teachers were resistant to change. As Connie Short mentioned, "The number of people who don't want change, who like their routines and don't want to have their current routines interrupted. These people don't want to change their own perceptions. Those perceptions can be so stuck in the mud." This demanded important consideration for leaders in implementing new PDS partnerships.

Hillary Sanford shared that a number of teachers held initial concerns about being evaluated on the performance of others, in this case the performance of the student candidates. In her exact words, teachers' sentiments were,

> I don't want to be evaluated on something that a university student does in my classroom . . . So I want to have control of student learning, so if I'm going to be evaluated on student learning, it's truly my impact that's being evaluated and not that of a university student.

Sanford noted that now as many classroom teachers in these partnerships are products of that same partnership this perception has been diminished.

Donald Barber shared that early on there were some concerns with resources to support the partnership, citing parking at the university as an issue for collaborating teachers as well as compensation. Barber stated,

> The question came up regarding money that the university could provide to teachers for reimbursement. That was an underlying issue that you'd hear because they weren't giving us any credit. It was reimbursement and I forget how much depending how many students you would take on. And that's where you had to watch so that the classroom didn't have too many students because then it would be over inundated with university students so we tried to get a balance.

According to Barber, as the partnerships increased and improved, the university began awarding schools and districts credits for working with students that could then be used to further continued learning and professional development for teachers.

Hillary Sanford reported that some of the teachers working with her initially viewed taking on students as "one more thing" that they had to do. However, this reflected more on the state of expectations placed on teachers overall and not only the addition of the partnership. As Sanford informed,

> Teachers sometimes would get burdened down with all the new expectations that are put on them with testing and evaluation, all these kind of things that they have to deal with every day. Sometimes they can see university students coming into their classrooms as one more thing they need to do . . . [Occasionally] a teacher would say, "You know, I don't want a student teacher this semester."

While a realistic consideration of new endeavors will likely include challenges such as those noted above, the school leaders interviewed had the vision to recognize the advantages to implementing and sustaining these partnerships. Among these benefits were research-based learning and improved learning and instructional time with smaller student-

teacher ratios. Additionally participants cited the advantages of building strong relationships between teachers and teacher candidates as well as teacher candidates and classroom students.

Connie Short stated the partnership provided a beneficial opportunity "to link scholarly research with real practice and to instill the mindset of reflection among teachers. Whether you're a professor; whether you are a classroom teacher—reflecting on your teaching, asking questions about it means you're doing research on it." By creating this space in which to engage in reflective practice lead to cultivating an appreciation for action research. She purported,

> We did action research . . . We had more personnel to work with our students, so I think the feeling of fulfillment that you had a real role with adults [classroom teachers and teacher candidates] and children was important. Our teachers and candidates got graduate degrees. At that point you didn't have to have a Master's, but we found a way for them to get Master's Degree. They had a way to share their knowledge in a classroom situation.

By moving from a schedule based on a university semester to one dependent on a public school year, teacher candidates could then have the benefit of prolonged placements in schools. Donald Barber noted,

> With the partnership model they start from beginning to end, and so as teacher candidates they got to know the kids' names, they got to work with them in a meaningful manner, and sometimes they had the opportunity to participate in parent teacher conferences, to talk or listen to what's going on. Students look forward to the time they're coming to their classroom and that's a pretty good compliment.

A final benefit noted among participants was the improvement to smaller student-teacher ratios. This provided an innovative space for added teaching time and small-group instruction. Steve Crisp noted,

> There'll be another adult there. I can differentiate. I can do a small group. They can supervise a computer usage. I think knowing well ahead of time how I may and may not use them could make it more likely that I have the positive reaction.

Donald Barber further acknowledged the importance of smaller instructional groupings in his school, stating,

> If the teacher has about 22-25 kids, certain lessons are difficult to deliver if you want to do an overview and then you want to be able to break it down. For some teachers, they say, "I have kids who are on the borderline, I have kids who are way too low, so where do I put my time?" So as a teacher I could spend more time bringing these kids up if I had a university teacher candidate. This would allow me to bring them up quicker and then you go from remedial work hopefully to advanced work.

These considerations reveal nuances of the issues faced and advantages encountered in the establishment of early partnerships. Reflecting on the nature of these benefits and challenges can provide leaders seeking to begin new collaborations markers in their progress in implementing the school-university partnership.

Discussion

Early partnership school leaders perceived their work as one of establishing hybrid school-university spaces, collaborative environments for professional growth opportunities for

faculty, teachers, pre-service teacher candidates, and for the leaders themselves. The values that they originally fixed to the establishment of the partnerships conveyed a sense of significance that extended beyond any single domain—the valuation to which they spoke was one that took into consideration professional development on several levels. Benefits reached to the students in the classroom, the classroom teachers, the university faculty, the teacher candidates as developing educators, and the community at large. The hybrid spaces were places of scholarly practice and lifelong learning, spaces that fostered a type of change agency and building of leadership capacity for all involved (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Zeichner et al., 2015). Thoughtful planning and collaborative leadership result in democratic spaces of positive and transformative simultaneous renewal (Goodlad et al., 2004). Noting traditional partnership arrangements, Zeichner (2018) warns, "For the most part these partnerships have been very university-centric and have replicated the power-knowledge relationships that have existed in traditional forms of university teacher education" (p. 271). While the study's participants noted some of these concerns, sustained efforts to develop strong collaborative structures helped to mitigate them.

Cultural and contextual factors had a noted impact on these early PDS partnerships. These included factors such as poverty and a lack of resources or support (Howley & Howley, 2004; Lee, 2001). As well, one can see that leaders faced concerns with the perceptions of early adopters relating to time management and teacher workloads. Nevertheless, while these were likely contributing factors to the trends and traditions that developed within the school-university partnership spaces, these were not debilitating factors. The partnerships flourished, facing challenges and change, adapting to stakeholder needs, growing in practice and philosophy at each site.

As with most new endeavors the partnerships brought with them perceived challenges. However, the school leaders represented here viewed the benefits associated with instituting, implementing, and sustaining a PDS partnership as a positive initiative that outweighed any negatives. These school leaders took active roles in the establishment of these collaborative projects, emphasizing networking with others, providing nurturing relationships, and modeling professional dispositions within each respective context (Hess et al., 2014; Nettleton & Barnett, 2016).

According to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) Clinical Practice Commission (2018), school university collaborations offer vibrant opportunities for the enhancement of professional development and research (p. 37). Partnerships provide critical spaces of practice where school districts and institutions of higher education can identify needs for teacher and leadership preparation. For this reason, it is important to note that findings implicate school leadership as a critical component of both establishing and sustaining partnerships. Therefore, licensure programs charged with preparing leaders must better understand the development and direction of spaces for school-university partnerships and the role of these partnerships in teacher preparation and practice. We recommend future research on (1) leadership understanding of the importance and implications of school-university partnerships, (2) the relationship of the clinical model of teacher preparation within the framework of professional development schools, and (3) the relationships needed to build trust in the various spaces where partnerships exist or are established.

Conclusion

According to Zeichner et al. (2015), successful, reflective, and democratic partnership models require that "classroom teachers are active participants in the planning, instruction, and evaluation activities related to a course, thereby creating more authentic, acceptable, and accessible possibilities for inclusion of teachers' expertise" (p. 127). Results obtained from the analysis of participants' perceptions and understandings of the PDS model offer important insights that could inform teacher education and preparation. While the National Association of Professional Development Schools' (2008) "9 Essentials" were not published at the time of the development of the partnerships represented in this study, the participants provide insights into the early understanding of the philosophy and practices underscored by the essentials.

Notwithstanding, there are a number of relevant takeaways that newly established partnerships or potential collaborators can learn from the leadership of early founding of PDS partnerships. In particular, the themes explored in this study reveal that mutual trust between partner stakeholders should be both a foundational goal for development and ongoing commitment. These partnerships represent unique spaces in which the best opportunity for educational innovation as well as personal satisfaction and professional growth can occur.

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