Necessary First Steps: Using Professional Development Schools to Increase the Number of Students With Disability Labels Accessing Inclusive Classrooms

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ABSTRACT: This article shows how one school in the Northeastern United States used professional development school-university relationships to create inclusive education practices to better support students with disability labels transitioning out of self-contained classrooms and into inclusive classrooms. Through this article, I address a dearth of PDS research on inclusive education by infusing a disability studies in education (DSE) lens into the small body of inclusive education PDS literature that exists. Specifically, I attempt to highlight the foundational actions a PDS steering committee took to systematically and proactively support students with disability labels inclusively.

NAPDS Nine Essentials Addressed: 1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community; 3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need; 4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; 5. Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants; 7. A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration; 8. Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; and 9. Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.

The purpose of this article is to show how one school in the Northeastern United States used professional development school (PDS)-university relationships to create inclusive education practices to better support students with disability labels[1] transitioning out of self-contained classrooms and into inclusive classrooms. Like many schools across the United States, students with disability labels are far too often given a "separate and unequal education" (Erevelles, 2000, p. 5). De facto segregation of students with disability labels prevents them from making the educational gains made by their peers without disability labels. Over 30 years of research shows that when students with and without disability labels learn together in an integrated setting and they are given appropriate instruction and supports, all students can participate and learn within grade-level general education classrooms (Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation [SWIFT] Education Center, 2019). In order to target this issue, a school district and university in the Northeastern United States developed a PDS steering committee and used their PDS partnership to begin to systematically and proactively[2] create more equitable access to inclusive classrooms for students with disability labels.

Professional development schools, attributed to John Dewey (c. 1894) at the University of Chicago, were developed as lab schools that served as sites for both teacher training and research through school-university partnerships (Colburn, 1993). Since then, PDS has been used to develop and disseminate best practices in teacher education (Zenkov, Shiveley, & Clark, 2016). According to the National Research Council (2010), the clinical practice component of PDS is one aspect of teacher education that has the highest potential to positively impact student outcomes.

Over time, PDSs have been used in a variety of ways (Snow, Flynn, Whisenand, & Mohr, 2016) including: to elevate teacher candidates' professional self-perceptions (Conaway & Mitchell, 2004; Sandholtz & Dandlez, 2000), to enhance the abilities of teacher candidates to formatively assess students (Sandholtz & Dandlez, 2000; Sandholtz & Wasserman, 2001; Conway & Mitchell, 2004; Castle, Fox, & Fuhrman, 2009), to equip teacher candidates with an increased number of demonstrable teaching skills (Castle et al., 2009; Castle, Fox, & Souder, 2006), to encourage teacher candidates to utilize reflective teaching practices, to produce more confident teacher candidates (Blocker & Mantle-Bromley, 1997; Higgins, 2002; Stairs, 2011; Yerian & Grossman, 1997), and to improve the instructional practices of cooperating teachers (Bullough, Kauchak, Crow, Hobbs, & Stoked, 1997; Edens, Shirley, & Toner, 2001; Higgins, 2002; Yendol-Silva & Dana, 2004).

[1] I purposely use phrase "students with disability labels" to acknowledge the socially constructed and subjective nature of disability, and how such labels are placed on people who deviate from an imagined norm (Taylor, 2006).

[2] By systematically, I refer to the notion that decisions to move students into more inclusive settings are team-based and continuously monitored. By proactively, I mean carefully planning out all activities students with disability labels will be engaged in, and coordinating the supports these students require to be successful in that setting. Proactive does not mean the "dump and run" approach to inclusion that was cited by some teachers in this project.

Professional development school experience is also reported to: result in higher student achievement in K-12 settings (Castle, Arends, & Rockwood, 2008; Fisher, Frey, & Farnan, 2004; Heafner & Spooner, 2008; Klingner, Leftwich, van Garderen, & Hernandez, 2004; Knight, Wiseman, & Cooner, 2000; Marchant, 2002), improve student outcomes in university teacher preparation courses (Damore, Kapustka, & McDevitt, 2011; Higgins, 2002; Mitchel & Hindin, 2008), and produce high-quality teachers (Neapolitan et al., 2008; Reinhartz & Stetson, 1999; Ridley, Hurwitz, Hackett, & Miller, 2005). While these are compelling outcomes of PDS practices, there is a marked gap in the literature about how to utilize PDS to improve outcomes for students with disability labels in inclusive settings. For the purposes of this article,

> Inclusive education means everyone is included in their grade-level in their neighborhood school. Inclusion means students are given the help they need to be full members of their class. Inclusive education involves districts supporting schools as they include ALL [emphasis in original] the students who live in their communities. (SWIFT, 2019, p. 1)

The existing research on inclusive education and PDS is minimal. The research that does exist reports that PDSs can: improve attitudes of teacher candidates about inclusive education (Strieker, Gillis, & Guichun, 2013), encourage the professional growth of special educators (Voltz, 2001), and expand teacher candidate knowledge on how to teach students with disability labels (Walmsley, Bufkin, Rule, & Lewis, 2007; Yerian & Grossman, 1997). While outside of traditional PDS literature, Waitoller and Artiles (2013) call for a more intersectional approach to professional development so educators can better understand how various factors (e.g., gender, race, class) influence how disability and difference impact inclusive practices in schools. This gap underscores the need for more research on how to better support students with disability labels in inclusive settings through PDS partnerships.

In this article, I address this dearth of PDS research on inclusive education by infusing a disability studies in education (DSE) lens into the small body of inclusive education PDS literature that exists. Specifically, in this article, I attempt to highlight the foundational actions a PDS steering committee took to systematically and proactively support students with disability labels, most of whom were students of color, as they move out of self-contained classrooms and into inclusive classrooms. The foundational steps the PDS steering committee steps outlined are not intended to be prescriptive. Rather, the goal of this work is to clearly articulate the actions the PDS steering committee took so that others wishing to engage in similar processes may be able to replicate this work at their respective school sites.

In order to address this gap in the literature, the following research questions informed this project:

1. What foundational steps can PDS steering committees take to systematically and proactively increase the number of students with disability labels accessing inclusive classrooms?
2. How can these foundational steps be leveraged to improve inclusive education practices and positively impact educational outcomes for students with disability labels?

Theoretical Foundation

Disability Studies

Disability studies scholars understand disability as a natural variation of the human condition (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2010; Hehir 2002; Linton 2005, 2006; Shapiro 1999). When viewed through a disability studies lens, disability is understood as a "social phenomenon" (Taylor, 2006, p. xiii). In opposition to the traditional medical or deficit model of disability, which positions disability as abnormal and in need of a medical fix, disability studies scholars do not locate disability within people with disability labels. Rather, they locate disability within related inaccessible and oppressive social, political, contextual, and environmental factors (Marks, 1997; Oliver, 1990). Through this perspective, people with disability labels *become* disabled when they encounter inaccessible spaces (e.g., no captions on television, no curb cuts for wheelchair users, and crosswalks without audio signals).

Disability Studies in Education

Disability studies in education (DSE), which is the educational component of disability studies, provides a space where "constructions of disability are questioned and special education assumptions and practices are challenged (Taylor, 2006, p. xix). According to Gabel (2005),

> disability studies in education is concerned with issues and problems of education, broadly construed, that affect or are affected by disablement[3] in educational contexts. Disability studies in education is primarily concerned with the view of issues and problems as defined by disabled people as they relate to social exclusion and oppression. (p. 17)

Infusing a DSE perspective in this project placed the onus on teachers, administrators, and staff to create a more inclusive campus (e.g., providing students with disability labels modified school work, training school staff on inclusive education), rather than on students in self-contained classrooms who would

[3] Disablement- "Disabling" economic, political, and cultural barriers that prevent people with impairments form participating in mainstream society (Oliver & Barnes, 2012, p. 12).

otherwise have had to earn their way into more inclusive classrooms.

Community-Based Participatory Research

Freire's (1970) work on cycles of participatory research and anti-oppressive pedagogy informed our study. Informed by Freire (1970), regular cycles of interviews and participant reflection helped me to respect the knowledge and experience of teachers and administrators in the building, to value diversity and expertise present in the PDS steering committee, and to promote the co-construction of how to best support the students with disability labels accessing inclusive classrooms. Specifically, teachers acted as experts of their own classroom contexts and were encouraged to use strategies to fit their students' needs.

In addition to members of the administration and teachers, I plan to invite other local stakeholders in inclusive education (i.e., students with disability labels, parents of students with disability labels, community members with and without disability labels) over subsequent cycles of research to help identify and remove barriers to inclusion. At the start of the project, the PDS steering committee helped identify these barriers and created plans of action to increase the number of students with disability labels accessing inclusive primary education. This collective approach to research is grounded in community-based participatory research (CBPR). Community-based participatory research engages project participants, but not necessarily in all phases of the project (e.g. analysis and publication) (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). This project emphasized community collaboration and promoted collaborative practices with the ultimate goal of initiating actions with immediate and clear application and to local communities (e.g., students with disability labels accessing inclusive classrooms) (Israel, Shulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Stanton 2014).

Methods

Site of Study

The initial year-long application of a continuing PDS project is summarized in this article. The PDS practices were implemented at a public elementary school in the northeast region of the United States which services fourth through sixth graders. The "high needs" school is a Title I institution and enrolls about 500 students, almost half of whom (44.2%) live below the poverty line. Of this population, 85 are students with disability labels and have individualized education plans (IEPs), including 14 with IEPs solely for speech, and eight who are labeled as students with multiple disabilities (MD). The school houses several special education classrooms – four of which are self-contained (SC). Three of these SC classrooms support students with "learning disability" labels, and one serves students with labels of MD. The remaining six special education classrooms are co-taught and categorized as "inclusion classrooms," integrating students with disability labels.

Participants

The PDS steering committee included 24 total members who comprised two sub-committees to address the varying professional development needs of teachers during year one of the project. Participants included four administrators, three PDS leaders, nine teachers on the special education sub-committee, and seven teachers on the English-language arts (ELA) sub-committee. Two of the administrators worked at the district-level, and two were assigned to specific buildings in the district. During the year, one PDS teacher liaison who taught sixth grade was reassigned to the role of district instructional technology coordinator. Although participants formally aligned with either the special education or the ELA sub-committee, there was regular cross-pollination in meetings and PDS activities. Members of this PDS steering committee attended PDS committee meetings monthly, collaborated to design professional development activities for teachers, administrators, and staff, and engaged in 1:1 semi-structured qualitative interviews at the close of year one. Table 1 gives a summary of participants' tasks.

Data Sources

I collected data in the form of collaboratively written special education and ELA sub-committee PDS action plans, mid- and end-of-year PDS progress reports, teacher and instructional assistant surveys, memos collected after every PDS event, and audio-recorded semi-structured interviews. The special education and ELA sub-committee PDS action plans were collaboratively written at the start of the 2016-17 school year and revisited throughout the school year as a way to monitor PDS steering committee progress. Teachers on the PDS steering committee created and distributed teacher and instructional assistant surveys to assess school needs for professional development. Following each PDS event, I detailed project happenings in memos. At the end of the first year of the project, I conducted 18 1:1 interviews that lasted roughly 30-minutes each. These interviews represent the end of the first cycle of research at the end of the first year of the project.

Data Analysis

The constant comparison method coupled with the constructivist grounded theory approach was the basis for analyzing data (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). Data were collected and evaluated simultaneously, through continual comparative analysis. This process allowed me to complicate his understanding of what was emerging from the data throughout the analysis (Charmaz, 2005). Transcriptions of interviews were analyzed according to the techniques of specific coding summarized by Bogdan and Biklen (2007). Three stages of coding (open, axial, and selective) were employed to extract important themes and results (Creswell, 2013). Data analysis followed the protocol of a fixed coding matrix which secured inter-coder reliability (Patton, 2002). I analyzed data which were stored in Dedoose, a web-

Table 1. PDS Steering Committee Members

Participant	PDS Role	Grade(s) Taught	Years in Education
1. Administrator 1	Chief academic officer		14
2. Administrator 2	Special education supervisor		21
3. Administrator 3	Building principal		10
4. Administrator 4	Building assistant principal		12
5. PDS liaison 1	PDS teacher liaison, district instructional technology coordinator		29
6. PDS liaison 2	PDS teacher liaison, basic skills instruction (BSI) teacher	4-6	21
7. Elder[a]	Professor-in-residence (PIR)		18
8. Teacher 1	Child study team, case manager, learning disabilities teacher consultant		37
9. Teacher 2	MD classroom teacher	4-6	30
10. Teacher 3	Self-contained classroom teacher	4	15
11. Teacher 4	Inclusion classroom teacher	4	20
12. Teacher 5	Self-contained classroom teacher	5	28
13. Teacher 6	Inclusion classroom teacher	5	4
14. Teacher 7	Self-contained classroom teacher	6	32
15. Teacher 8	General education classroom teacher	6	23
16. Teacher 9	Inclusion classroom teacher	6	24
17. Teacher 10	20-year veteran teacher	K-8	20
18. Teacher 11	BSI teacher	4-6	18
19. Teacher 12	Inclusion classroom teacher	4	13
20. Teacher 13	General education classroom teacher	4	17
21. Teacher 14	General education classroom teacher	5	14
22. Teacher 15	General education classroom ELA teacher	6	23
23. Teacher 16	General education classroom math teacher	6	23
24. Teacher 17	General education classroom ELA teacher	6	25

[a]Elder was not interviewed.

based qualitative data analysis computer program (Lieber & Weisner, 2015). Special attention was given to data that contributed to better comprehension of the best use of PDS to more effectively serve students with disability labels in inclusive classrooms. Participants were given the opportunity to edit and approve their quotes highlighted in this article. In order to protect participants' identities, I asked participants to provide feedback on how they wanted to be described in Table 1.

Findings

From my analysis, three thematic categories emerged as salient. They are (a) administration and communication, (b) teacher collaboration, and (c) building trust. Each theme is discussed in detail below with supporting excerpts from participant interviews.

Theme 1: Administration and Communication

As the first round of interviews began near the end of the school year, it was very clear that in order to systematically and proactively support students with disability labels moving from self-contained classrooms into more inclusive classrooms, effective systems of communication first needed to be established between teachers and administration. Almost every teacher participant identified the need for better communication as the highest priority at the beginning of their respective interviews. In this first excerpt, Teacher 11 describes how she did not have much input as to where she would be placed each school year.

> Elder: As we're looking to become more inclusive, what does that look like in terms of special education faculty, knowing that you're a part of that, in terms of teachers faculty-wide? In terms of student placements, and how classes get developed? What needs to happen?
> Teacher 11: I'll tell you what. From my experience in the past what shouldn't happen. . .when I was the inclusion teacher, I got bounced around a lot which happens every year depending on what the need is, grade level, class-wise. But I was never kept in the loop as far as if I was moving. I was usually the last one to know. . .I think in the past teachers were just told this is where you're going. So there was no communication. . .It was just this is what you're doing, this is where you're going.

This lack of administrative transparency related to teacher placement is something that many teachers at this school cited as something they wished happened less frequently. According to Guzmán (1997) and Shogren, McCart, Lyon, and Sailor (2015), successful inclusive administrators need to establish a system of

communication that allows teachers and staff to disagree with policies and practices, allows them to make recommendations for changes, and cultivates an atmosphere of willing engagement. While there may have not been much administrative transparency in the recent past at this school, a veteran teacher recalls a time when there was more teacher input when it came to making decisions that impacted the campus.

> Teacher 14: You know we had PAC and DAC, and now we just don't seem to have. . .
> Elder: When you say PAC. . .?
> Teacher 14: PAC was the 'principal's action committee' and the DAC was the 'district's action committee. . .' Like one of the things for PAC would be the heating in this school. You know when we really, really needed to do something. It was a committee that kind of moved things forward for everyone's best interests. We don't have those committees anymore.

In this excerpt, Teacher 14 recalls a time when the administration actively solicited teacher input for decisions that impacted the entire school. Seemingly mundane decisions about the school heating system were collective decisions. According to McLeskey and Waldron (2006), effective inclusive administrators share decision-making with teachers and engage in various behaviors that demonstrate their support for the core values of the school. This acknowledgment of the importance of teacher input is evident in the following excerpt when Administrator 2 is asked about a meeting where the administration asked teachers about their thoughts on the future directions for PDS.

> Elder: So, you mentioned you like the teacher-centered piece of PDS, and you mentioned our school-wide meeting the other day. What about that meeting did you like?
> Administrator 2: I liked that all the special ed teachers were there. I like that their point of view got to be heard. I like that they were able to bring up some concerns that they had particularly with collaborating a little bit more with [the school] as far as the students that are moving [into more inclusive classrooms].

This bottom-up approach to creating inclusive schools aligns with research acknowledging that a top-down approach alone to school change has been shown ineffective, and that an approach that meaningfully engages school stakeholders at various levels (e.g., teachers and administration) is more effective (Gersten & Brengelman, 1996; Roach & Salisbury, 2006). While garnering teacher input is an important piece of building inclusive schools, the work absolutely requires a supportive administration. The role of administration within inclusive school reform is highlighted in the next excerpt.

> Elder: What are your thoughts on how you feel PDS is perceived with the upper administration?
> PDS Liaison 1: I think that upper administration is thrilled to have [the university] here and thrilled to have the PDS. . .And for a full explanation and again full disclosure, transparency, you know we won't make a move without their seal of approval. So I think that's just something that we know going in. It's something that. . .it's a dynamic we have here so we recognize it and we honor it. . .I also like that we were able to just communicate what we were trying to accomplish. I am glad that we worked through that. I mean I think that that struggle was a positive thing because I think we made great strides in transparency in this district. And that is something historically that has been a problem. That a lot of teachers feel very, you know, like an impossible kind of a wall between administration and themselves. So, I'm glad that we kind of chipped away at that.

While previous excerpts showed the importance of bottom-up inclusive school change, here, PDS Liaison 1 recognizes the complexities and potential struggles involved in building communication and collaboration with administration while striving for inclusive change. McLeskey and Waldron (2006) also acknowledge that both top-down and bottom-up approaches are necessary if there is to be comprehensive inclusive school reform.

Throughout Theme 1, participants discussed the pivotal roles that communication plays in inclusive school reform. They also highlighted the need for both top-down and bottom-up approaches when attempting to enact inclusive school change. In Theme 2, participants underscore the importance of teacher-to-teacher collaboration when supporting students with disability labels in inclusive classrooms.

Theme 2: Teacher Collaboration

While most teachers and administrators discussed the critical role of communication in inclusive school reform, many teachers discussed the need to collaborate with other teachers. In this first excerpt, a teacher discusses how she and another grade-level colleague naturally collaborated to move a student from her self-contained classroom into an inclusive ELA class.

> Elder: What structures do you wish were in place to improve that communication, because almost every single person has mentioned communication in the interviews?
> Teacher 7: Like I said you know if you're going to be an inclusion teacher, you should be asked or offered if you would like to do it. Like even when I went to [a sixth grade English teacher] and I said, 'I have this girl she's way above my class this year.' And he took her, we tried her out in language arts, she did well. He said, 'I talked to [a sixth grade math teacher], we're putting her out for math.' You know and I just checked in every once in a while and she's been great, you know?

Here, this teacher recognizes that a student would be better served in an inclusive setting and naturally approaches an ELA teacher to see if he would be open to including this student. Not only was this student successful in ELA, but the teachers decided to include her in math as well since the new student placement worked so well. This student's success in the inclusive classroom supports research that cites teacher and IEP team collaboration as foundational to the implementation of inclusive education practices (Bui, Quirk, Almazan, & Valenti, 2010; Jackson, Ryndak, & Billingsley, 2000). While teacher-to-teacher collaboration is important for the success of inclusive practices, teachers also need to work with administrators to construct heterogeneous class lists where a wide variety of student needs can be strategically met (Causton & Theoharis, 2014). A PDS Teacher Liaison discusses the importance of such collaboration in the next excerpt.

> PDS Liaison 1: I just think [teacher input] would make for a more equitable setup as far as how the classes are constructed and what input the teachers are allowed to give. You know what I mean? Because in the past, like I said, I've been through cycles where the teachers have had zero input other than the class sheet that they fill out. Even then, when you note, 'Please do not put with student with student A and student B,' and then you come back and all three of them are together again. You know it's just a bad dynamic when teachers are saying, 'I'm completely overwhelmed. I have 17 different levels for 24 kids. How do I group these kids? How do I best put these kids together in reading groups?' I think [through teacher input] all of that could be at least minimized. I mean we're not going to solve the world's problems, but at least minimize that by giving the teachers input.

In this quote, the Teacher Liaison speaks of her wish to help construct classes with forethought that prevents teachers from being overloaded with complex student support needs. To avoid such pitfalls, Theoharis (2009) suggests that in successful inclusive schools, teachers and administration must collaborate to facilitate an inclusive delivery plan, to create effective instructional teams, and to set parameters for class placement. In the next excerpt, a sixth grade special education co-teacher discusses a time when teachers used to provide input as to where students with disability labels should be included.

> Teacher 9: We'll see what happens as far as placement because years and years ago we had some say. The fifth grade teachers used to sit down together and they would kind of make up the classes for the sixth grade. And the special ed teachers would get together and we would group the special ed kids and we haven't done that for I don't know many, many years. Now for the past several years we have had no choice over who we're working with, where we're placed, and the same thing with the kids. We know them the best, but we are the last ones they ask.

In this excerpt, this teacher speaks of a time when teacher input was sought for placement of students in inclusive classrooms. In addition to reinstating such student placement practices at this school, Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, and Dempf-Aldrich (2011) also suggest: creating a visual representation of all possible classroom placements for students, then placing all students with disability labels in inclusive classrooms first, then balancing classrooms with all other students being mindful of gender and ability, then assigning special education teachers and aides to specific classrooms. In addition to all of these considerations for student placement, below, this same teacher underscores the importance of co-teaching when including students with disability labels in inclusive classrooms.

> Teacher 9: So, yes it's great to get up there and be the math teacher or be the reading teacher, but if [students with disability labels] aren't succeeding, then I need to let the regular ed teacher do what they have to do with curriculum, and I have to work with [struggling students] and I have to pull back. I can't take the lead all the time if these kids are not succeeding. . .So, if I'm leading if the regular ed teacher isn't capable of working with [students with disability labels], then I have to do it. Then I have to say, 'Well then you have to teach and I have to work with [students with disability labels].'
> And I think through PDS we just have to keep reiterating that, 'Yes it's co-teaching,' and 'Yes, you're both teaching,' but we have to be there for the special ed kids first because if they're failing then that's a reflection on us. You have to look and see why. You're going to get resistance putting these self-contained kids in inclusion because most people think well if they can't do the work then why are they there. But that's why you have a job. You're supposed to make it so they are successful. If [students] aren't getting it, then that's your job.
> Elder: The onus is on you as a teacher.
> Teacher 9: Yes, that is your job to change it or make it so they are successful.

When this teacher says, ". . .if the regular education teacher isn't capable of working with [students with disability labels], then I have to do it" she is referencing the importance of parity in co-teaching relationships. Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, and Shamberger (2010) describe what each co-teacher should bring to the classroom, "In co-teaching, the general educator holds these critical pieces, but the special educator adds expertise related to the process of learning, the highly individualized nature of some students' needs, and an emphasis on teaching until mastery" (p.15). Through a DSE lens, what this teacher is

saying is that it is the responsibility of the teachers to modify their teaching and/or learning environment to create physical and intellectual access to academic content, rather than locate the problem within the student (Gabel, 2005).

In Theme 2, participants shared their views on the importance of teacher-to-teacher collaboration in order to support students with disability labels in inclusive settings. Theme 3 will expand on this need for collaboration and highlight the critical importance of trust and communication when developing successful inclusive school structures.

Theme 3: Building Trust

In previous themes, participants spoke extensively about the importance of the balance of bottom-up and top-down school reform, developing effective communication systems, and the critical nature of collaboration. These components of inclusive school reform are all important, however, none would be possible without building trust between teachers and administration. The excerpts presented in Theme 3 explore participants' perspectives on trust and how building it impacts the development of inclusive supports at their school. In this first excerpt, Teacher 10 discusses what she believes to be foundational aspects of building trust between teachers and administrators.

> Teacher 10: Trust is absolutely key for me, from the top down leadership in our district or in any district for that matter. Having a person in a district leadership role visit a building 'unannounced' to say 'thank you' to a staff member, goes a long, long way. Too often, our staff members feel under-appreciated and acknowledgement does not always happen when it is most needed. Making time to walk through buildings, even just once a semester, says so much. I have found that sometimes, even the personalities of people in these leadership roles are seen differently from their day-to-day persona. This is pretty refreshing, especially if revealed in a one to one situation. These kinds of efforts build trust with staff, knowing that someone actually believes in and appreciates what they are doing.

When this teacher speaks of trust, she is connecting with what Hart, Dixon, Drummond, and McIntyre (2004) refer to as transformability, co-agency, and trust. According to Hart et al. (2004), transformability requires a foundational understanding that "all children's capacity to learn can change and be changed for the better as a result of what happens and what people do in the present" (p. 166). Furthermore, for learning to occur, there must be co-agency. That is, teachers are powerless without their students. Ultimately, all of this requires trust, which allows students and teachers to create meaning and purpose in their shared educational experiences (Hart et al., 2004). Following this reasoning, administrators are powerless without their students and their teachers. Thus, all members of a learning community need to be actively working on building trusting relationships that are conducive to learning.

Highlighting what Teacher 10 said in the previous excerpt, Teacher 13, underscores the notion that learning is an outcome of transformability and trust (Florian & Linklater, 2010). Building trust requires openness in communication among those within a learning community and the assurance that there will be no repercussions, even when there are disagreements (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). The best interests of children must always be the primary focus.

> Teacher 13: I feel people are apprehensive, like you said, in being transparent, and I feel that's where a lot of our problems lie. If you are not okay with something that another teacher is doing, how are you helping that child be successful in reaching their full potential?
> Elder: Sure.
> Teacher 13: So, people do need to. . .I hate to say relax, but because we feel sometimes we always have to be on our toes we need to feel that comfortability with each other and know that it's between us. It stays within the classroom and it's about us meeting the child's needs.

While Teachers 10 and 13 in the previous excerpts clearly note that developing trusting relationships with administration is vital to creating inclusive schools. If teachers do not feel comfortable, communication and establishing trust will be hindered. Most importantly, as Theoharis (2009) asserts, teachers cannot build trust with administrators if administrators only remain in their positions for brief periods.

> Teacher 17: We went through a barrage of interim superintendents. We got [a new] principal. He's now at [a different] school. He was very different than [the previous principal]. Very different style of leadership. People didn't like him. . .But he knew his limits, he knew his staff, he knew who he had to go to for help, and he did that. You know he utilized everybody. . .He made us feel like he appreciated our professionalism, you know? So, I liked [this principal] and then he left, and then the whole debacle with [two other administrators]. . .Just total disruption of everything for several years. Then we had an interim principal and then we had [another new principal] and now we have [the current principal].

What this teacher describes above is a significant amount of administrative turnover, and the effects of this turnover were disrupted school systems and eroded trust of administration. As cited above, for inclusion to be successful in schools, collaboration with administration is critical. Without consistent leadership, emerging inclusive practices will not sustain (Shogren et al., 2015; Theoharis, 2009).

In the final excerpt, Teacher 10 concurs and further explains that trust stems from making the effort to build and

sustain effective relationships with administration. To achieve some measure of this, there must be mutual understanding, respect, and communication. But this requires time and if the tenure of an administrator is too short-lived, as Teacher 17 stated above, this poses even more difficult in the process to create an inclusive environment. The importance of teacher autonomy is also highlighted in this excerpt. For administrators to allow teachers the freedom to make decisions they believe are necessary and effective in the learning process for their students, there must be a level of trust (Hallam, Smith, Hite, Hite, & Wilcox, 2015; Hart et al., 2004; Shogren et al., 2015). This is not realized when there is a revolving door of administrators.

> Teacher 10: Trust breeds strong relationships and helps to 'make better' communication between so many levels of individuals. It is just necessary to be successful in achieving goals. Unfortunately, this particular building has seen its share of leadership changes and as a result, trust, relationships and communication become fractured. It is really sad to see since this has happened more times than I care to count. Perceptions, whether true or not, start to hatch and new building leadership has to contend with this. The veteran leaders of the PDS committee need to then be trusted to continue the vision that's already been established and put in motion. This is where trust is key.

The participants highlighted in Theme 3 all emphasized the critical role of trust and communication between teachers and administrators, especially in the building of an inclusive learning environment. To cultivate a relationship of trust, communication and mutual respect for the ideas and perceptions of others are necessary. Stability in the administration of a school is helpful in achieving this relationship of trust. Trust is foundational for the degree of collaboration that must be present and active as schools move towards building a culture of inclusion (Hallam et al., 2015).

Discussion

While teachers and administrators of this school were committed to increasing the number of students with disability labels in inclusive classrooms, there were significant barriers to this goal to negotiate. Following the first cycle of CBPR participant interviews, it was evident that establishing communication, collaboration, and trust were foundational first steps in the inclusive process at this school. As noted by Hart et al. (2004), these teachers and administrators recognized that in order to support students with disability labels in inclusive classrooms, trust was foundational. Without necessarily having DSE language to describe their inclusive goals for students, the teachers and administrators on the PDS steering committee routinely expressed their desire to remove structural barriers in the school (e.g., inconsistent communication systems, lack of trust between teachers and administration) and to improve inclusive supports for students with disability labels. By identifying these barriers as teacher and administration capacity issues, PDS steering committee members recognized the onus was on them to create inclusive change rather than make students with disability labels earn membership in classrooms that are not built on solid foundations of communication, collaboration, and trust. Students with disability labels not having to earn their way into inclusive classrooms is foundational to infusing a DSE perspective into school reform (Baglieri, 2012).

At the start of this project and the 2016-17 school year, the barriers to inclusion were more abstract as they related to the establishing of communication, collaboration, and trust. Through iterative cycles of CBPR and regular periods of reflection, communicative norms, collaborative practices, and trust began to evolve. This allowed the PDS steering committee to work with the teachers, administration, and staff to co-construct a unified definition of inclusive education (SWIFT, 2019), and to infuse a DSE perspective into the project – a perspective that acknowledges barriers to inclusion are situated in inaccessible school spaces rather than within the students with disability labels themselves (Gabel, 2005). These DSE-based professional development experiences eventually led teachers, administration, and staff to questions like, "What does this actually *look like* in my class?" and "How would this work with this specific student?" Addressing these foundational barriers eventually allowed the PDS steering committee to survey teachers, administration, and staff to ascertain their needs in order to systematically and proactively support students with disability labels as they move into inclusive classrooms.

As the foundational barriers to communication, collaboration, and trust were partially removed over time, by the end of the 2016-17 school year, the PDS steering committee was focused on *how* to systematically and proactively support six students with disability labels as they transition into inclusive classrooms at the start of the following school year. This entailed establishing communicative routines (e.g., scheduling regular planning meetings for these six students throughout the 2017-18 school year), instituting consistent data collection practices (e.g., developing IEP goal data sheets), the sending and receiving teachers co-creating class lists for the following school year, and special education and general education teachers to determine the needs of the students exiting self-contained classrooms and entering inclusive classrooms.

While teachers acknowledged that their class lists may change over the summer as students move in and out of the district, by setting up an effective communication system (Guzmán, 1997; McLeskey & Waldron, 2006), teachers reported that they felt more prepared for the next school year by knowing they could communicate their support needs for students with disability labels who would be transitioning into inclusive classrooms. Further, establishing effective communication allowed teachers to proactively collaborate with one another and developed trust between teachers and administration. This helped to promote a more bottom-up approach that Gersten and

Brengelman (1996) and Roach and Salisbury (2006) have noted promotes meaningful teacher-to-administrator collaboration. By infusing a DSE perspective into these inclusive school reform efforts, the PDS steering committee took action with the intention of questioning existing special education norms, and pushed back against deficit-based assumptions about disability on the campus (Taylor, 2006).

Limitations

While this article is meant to provide one example of how teacher and administrators on a PDS steering committee used PDS-university relationships to infuse a DSE perspective into their school reform efforts, the work is not without its limitations. In this article, I highlight the actions of only one PDS steering committee. Similarly, the location, special education practices and district resources, and school and student demographics are specific to this one region and may not be generalizable to other regions in the United States and beyond. However, I hope that the foundational inclusive education approaches outlined in this article can be easily modified to meet the needs of schools with similar resources around the world.

Another limitation is that at this school, there are "inclusion classrooms," or classrooms where some, but not all, students belong. The existence of these classrooms signifies the presence of "exclusion classrooms," where students with more complex support needs are educated until they can earn their "right" into more inclusive classrooms. For some students at this school, this will never happen. This is not a judgment on teachers and administrators at the school, as they cannot be expected to support all students with disability labels inclusively without being given the resources to do so. This is an acknowledgment of the need for more resources (e.g., trainings, teacher planning time, fiscal resources, adequately trained aides) to assist teachers, administration, and staff to proactively support the needs of more diverse learners in inclusive classrooms.

Also, while not the main focus of this article, it is worth mentioning that only six students with disability labels were chosen to transition out of self-contained classrooms into more inclusive classrooms. Acknowledging that transitioning six students out of segregated classrooms is better than transitioning no students at all, I recognize the scope of the project is focused on moving a very small number of students out of self-contained classrooms. However, I believe there is value in building effective systems of communication, collaboration, and trust while simultaneously making purposeful decisions for those six students that can translate into sustainable practices that will impact more students on the campus over time.

Finally, though not an exhaustive list of limitations, the teachers and administration only chose students who were considered "good candidates" for the inclusive transitions. This means that students with more complex support needs (e.g., students labeled with significant behavioral support needs, students with multiple disability labels) were not considered as initial candidates to transition into inclusive classrooms. At this school, supporting *all* students with disability labels in inclusive classrooms is a future goal, however, at the time of writing, appropriate inclusive supports were not in place to systematically and proactively support all students during such transitions.

Conclusions and Implications

I conclude this article by revisiting the research questions and discussing the implications and future of such research.

1. What foundational steps can PDS steering committees take to systematically and proactively increase the number of students with disability labels accessing inclusive classrooms?

The foundational work done by the PDS steering committee on communication, collaboration, and trust, led to the partial removal of structural barriers resulting in six students with disability labels beginning to access inclusive classrooms. Establishing effective systems of communication, collaboration, and trust were pivotal first steps in order for teachers, administration, and staff to better meet the needs of students with disability labels in inclusive classrooms. As these students begin accessing more inclusive classrooms, it is imperative that the systems of communication, collaboration, and trust are sustained in order to meet the ever-evolving needs of the students, teachers, administration, and staff.

2. How can these foundational steps be leveraged to improve inclusive education practices and positively impact educational outcomes for students with disability labels?

Reflecting on the first year of this project, I have found that PDS can be used to infuse a DSE perspective into school reform and provide teachers, administration, and staff a common language through which to discuss inclusive school reform and disability. By resisting deficit models of disability and questioning traditional segregated approaches to special education practices, at the start of the 2017-18 academic year, this school will have six students, with the prospect of more in the future, who will access more inclusive classrooms. Additionally, these students' classroom membership will be anticipated and welcomed due to the proactive planning measures taken by the PDS steering committee.

The actions of the PDS steering committee outlined in this article have implications that are more far reaching than this one school, district, and region. At this school, the PDS steering committee hopes that transitioning these six students eventually leads to their full-time membership in inclusive classrooms. Additionally, the PDS steering committee anticipates that the development of communication, collaboration, and trust will lead to more students transitioning into more inclusive classrooms. Over time, I hope that there are no longer "inclusion classes" and "self-contained classes." Rather, the goal is that all students learn together in classrooms that support,

celebrate, and anticipate disability in all forms, ultimately leading to better learning outcomes for all students and increased capacity for teachers, administration, and staff to support all students inclusively.

At the district level, the PDS steering committee anticipates these foundations of inclusive education will be adopted by the two elementary schools that feed into this school of focus, and all district special education services will be delivered in an articulated and cohesive manner. If supports are articulated between schools, while students and families will transition between school buildings, the delivery of services would remain consistent, emphasizing the notion that special education is a service rather than a place (Kluth, 2015). As these inclusive elementary supports become embedded in district culture, the PDS steering committee anticipates similar practices expanding to the intermediate and high school campuses. This would take the district from a cluster of PDSs and turn it into a professional development district (PDD). Simultaneously during PDS expansion, the PDS steering committee plans to continue this line of research, and fine-tune and revise their inclusive PDS practices with the hopes that they become a model school district through which other schools and districts across the nation (and beyond) can develop similar inclusive practices. SUP

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