A Retrospective Account of Intensive School-University Collaboration: Misconceptions Revealed, Mistakes Made and Lessons Learned

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ABSTRACT: School-university partnerships not only take time and care to establish and develop but also need sensitivity and acknowledgement of work accomplished if the partnership disbands. What are the repercussions of ending the partnership abruptly with little advance notice? This article examines this question by looking at the school participants' point of views. Their retrospective acknowledgments of the lasting effects of the partnership were surprisingly positive and rewarding to the university participants even though the disbandment was unexpected and painful. Lessons can be learned by all participants from the experiences examined in this article.

Nine Essentials addressed in this article: 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; 2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school 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; 8. Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings

What was learned in a rustbelt city with a suffering economy when school and university people came together to change its urban schools at elementary, middle, and high school levels? What went on in the encounter and clash between a large Midwestern university and an urban public school system when two such different cultures decided to work together (see Johnston, Brosnan, Cramer, & Dove, 2000)? On the one side, the aspiring university partners were driven by a "publish or perish" ethic in which research production was all important. In building their individualistic careers, they were used to going public with what they had been doing. They went to conferences and wrote about their work in scholarly journals and academic books. All this was foreign to the K-12 teachers and administrators in inner city schools where their primary concern was maintaining order while trying to achieve high test scores. They were used to closing classroom doors to keep others from knowing what was going on (as in Cuban, 2013). How, then, did a large research university and a medium sized urban school district find common ground in order to achieve the goals of a Professional Development School (PDS) as defined by the ambitious manifestos of the Holmes Group (1990) (see also, Dixon & Ishler, 1992; Kochan & Kunkel, 1998; Metcalf-Turner & Fischetti, 1996; Yopp, Guillaume, & Savage, 1994)?

This article addresses what we, as researchers and teacher educators, learned from our school and university colleagues as together we reflected on our joint work back in the 80s and early 90s. It is a story of mistakes, misconceptions, and misunderstandings and how we learned to overcome them (cf. Johnston, 2000). This research examines both the pitfalls and the eventual successes of this endeavor to build a productive learning culture that encompassed the participants from these disparate cultures. In the end, we were amazed that two greatly different cultures could come together to work as successfully as we were able to do (Rushcamp & Roehler, 1992).

One of the motivations for this research was to find out the residual effects of the abrupt pull out by the university to the PDS work. We were curious about the extent to which the school district participants were resentful about being abandoned by the university with no opportunity to respond or bring joint closure to the work together. Although we did not set out to intentionally conduct a research study, after talking with the school district participants who spoke about their experiences working with university professors and graduate students under the auspices of a PDS, we realized that we had information and insights that could help other university and school district personnel establish productive working relationships. In this article, we share what we learned in order to support others who attempt similar partnerships between university and school district participants.

Data

The retrospective data were collected informally through interviews with 2 teachers, a principal, a central office

administrator, a former teacher education intern, and two university professors who worked in the initial PDSs. In selecting these participants, we looked for people who were not only highly involved in the PDS work but also reflective about their efforts to change classroom practices and school culture. In our opinion, they were the best placed to report on their experiences. We explained to each participant that we were curious about their thoughts on the means, productivity, and outcomes of the PDS work for them personally as well as for the school(s) in which they worked.

Individual interviews began with an overall non-directive question, giving participants freedom to talk about how they thought about the PDS experience. We had little idea beforehand how the participants might respond to these questions. Follow-up probes included questions about their recollection of how the PDS effort started, why they joined, what was good about the experience, what was not, and whether they continued to use and/or build on what they learned after the university pulled out.

Since our purpose was solely to document the retrospective views of the participants at the present time about which nothing was known, information that could serve as the basis for further inquiry, we made no use of data collected earlier. We relied, instead, on what we remembered as participant observers, modified by what we were told by our district colleagues retrospectively.

Although the data set is small, not representative of the whole staff at each school studied, instead only reflecting a minority of the PDS participants in the district in which we worked, we did interview at the elementary, middle, and high school level. We included school and central administrative personnel as well as teachers. We share what we learned in order to support others who attempt similar partnerships between university and school district participants. The data revealed important attitudes, assumptions, perceptions, and learnings we did not anticipate.

To analyze the data we made transcripts of each interview. Both authors read them carefully to identify common themes, unexpected insights as well as positive and negative comments about the PDS work. We looked for contradictions but found none. Then we agreed on the overall organization of the paper, with each of us drafting sections. In general, we discussed the work before and after everything we did, including extensive revisions of our drafts. In presenting our findings, we focus on three major themes that emerged: (a) the necessity to establish trust between the university participants (university participants include professors, an academic specialist, graduate assistants and field instructors) and the school district participants ranging from the district office personnel to the school administrators and teachers (see Sasaki & Marsh, 2012); (b) the building of multiple learning communities in and outside the classrooms, schools and district partners as arenas for study, learning and ultimately changing practices and norms in the city's PDSs (see Jones, L., Stall, G. & Yarbrough, D. (2013); Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008); (c) the importance of changes in teacher talk, time management, and power sharing to support the achievement of PDS goals.

Rust-Belt Inner City Context

The city in question provided the context for the university's most ambitious effort to create a PDS within the most challenging of inner-city conditions, in a rust-belt city where white flight and a deteriorating economy had created a steady decline in school district enrollments over the previous 20 years. When the middle school discussed below began the PDS work, it had a 99% African-American student population and a teaching staff divided about equally between White and African-American. Seventy-five percent of the students in the school were eligible for free or reduced cost lunch. Most of the students lived in households headed by a single female. In the surrounding neighborhoods, violence and other inner-city afflictions were common. Many of the school's more academically oriented students had already transferred to magnet schools elsewhere in the district. Within this school, classroom teaching before the PDS had been generally very traditional, relying heavily on textbooks, worksheets, and teacher-centered instruction. Isolated in their classrooms, teachers did not collaborate among themselves while, at school level, decisions affecting teachers were made in top-down fashion (Schwille, forthcoming).

The Beginnings of Partnership

To create a professional development school under these conditions required negotiating a formal partnership between the university and the school district. Negotiations involved the district superintendent, union president, school board president and board members, associate superintendent as well as university deans, department chairs, and faculty leaders in the school of education working together. These initial leaders had to settle on the agreements, policies, locations, and resources necessary for the teachers, principals, professors, community members, and teacher education interns to collaborate on a more or less daily basis.

Top-down Decisions to Create the First PDSs

We asked all of our respondents about how the PDS work got started in their district and schools. We found no agreement even on what came first. A central office administrator told us.

> I remember going to a meeting at the University Club. People from about eight other districts were introduced as well as ours. I was with our new superintendent and some of his central office people. The College of Education Dean and some of the faculty sat up front and the Dean talked about a new direction for the college and for school districts. She called it Professional Development Schools. I didn't really understand what this was about and I don't think our superinten-

> dent did either but it sounded good. When our superintendent said he was interested and wanted to sign up, I about fell off my chair.

After the superintendent and university agreed to work together, the university dean met with the urban superintendent and his cabinet in order to create a formal district-university partnership and support team. According to one respondent, the cabinet members were initially mainly concerned with maintaining control over their department budgets as this was the source of their power. They believed they had the right to determine what was done and/or supported in the schools. Nevertheless, although it took some time, the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, and the head of curriculum and development were able to bring the cabinet members on board in supporting the PDS work.

As so often happens in other public school projects (see Hulme, Menter, Kelly, & Rusby, 2010), the teachers, principals, and members of the local community who would have to do the day-to-day work, were not invited to participate in these formal negotiations to form a district-university partnership. Instead, it was the central office staff that selected which zone and which schools would participate. That is, the four schools selected to participate did not volunteer to be PDSs; there was no opportunity to say no. The individual teachers did get to decide yes or no, but the schools themselves were to be PDSs no matter what the teachers initially decided. None of the four schools selected (high school, middle school, and two elementary schools) entered the program with 100% teacher participation. Fortunately, one of the initial successes was that within two years all the teachers in two of the four buildings were participating and participation in the other schools had greatly increased. Still later, three other schools from the district started PDS work, this time with all the teachers on board (see Dixon & Ishler, 1992; El-Amin, Cristol & Hammond, 1999; Johnston, 2000).

University Perspectives at the Beginning

University professors first became aware of this partnership when they started to design a new teacher preparation program in which PDSs were supposed to be an integral part. They understood collaboration with schools to be one important step in the implementation of a program to improve teacher education and ultimately teaching and learning in urban as well as suburban and rural districts.

To create a new five-year teacher preparation curriculum within a Holmes Group framework, these professors began working in teams and in schools with K-12 teachers and with 3rd and 4th year teacher preparation students from the traditional program that was in existence at the time. As part of this early effort, the professors themselves taught lessons in K-12 classrooms and conducted research on the university's teacher education courses and the program's impact on college students preparing to be teachers. The professors studied the college students' implementation of specific lessons traditionally taught during their third-year field experiences. Unexpectedly, they found out these assignments were not consistent with the classroom curriculum, leading to anomalies in what the pupils were currently learning. These lessons were found to be just exercises in "following the directions" given by a professor. In that sense they lacked authenticity in the context of desired reforms. In addition, the classroom responsibilities and lessons assigned to student teachers by their collaborating teachers were frequently incongruent with the overall philosophy of the teacher preparation program in which the students were enrolled (see, e.g., Levine, 2011; Putnam & Duffy, 1984). These revelations weighed into the design of the new program.

Once the new teacher education program curriculum was developed and the university faculty gained entry into the urban schools, it was time for another important process which before that time had not been a routine part of teacher education program development. The professors responsible for campus coursework began to work together with university field instructors and collaborating teachers. They tried to integrate their coursework, co-taught classes, and regularly demonstrated teaching practices that were consistent with what was required in K-12 classrooms. Professors changed the curriculum and practices in their university courses to reflect what they learned from their participation in the partnership and schools. For instance, a professor of literacy education changed his reading methods courses to include ways to teach reading through subject matter areas and ways to provide for flexible student groupings so that children were not confined to learning in a single reading group. A mathematics teacher education professor incorporated methods on the use of a variety of manipulative materials and problem solving rather than rote learning of mathematical procedures (Putnam & Duffy, 1984).

Retrospectively, not only did the perceptions of these beginnings differ between the K-12 and university participants, but there were also misunderstandings about the nature of the work and the initial investments that would be required. The professors thought they had a clear sense of what the PDSs were intended to be and do while the K-12 teachers and principals initially had no idea what to expect (see Sykes, Wheeler, Scott, & Wilcox, 1995, for a contemporary view of how this effort was going.)

Dealing with Lack of Trust at All Levels

Once the formal partnerships were created, the university had to put this official access to schools into practice and to build effective relationships based on trust.

"Here Today, Gone Tomorrow" or Something Else?

Initiating entry. Introductions to the schools took place one at a time over the fall semester of 1986. Since no teachers or principals had participated in the establishment of the district PDS partnership, university professors were left on their own to introduce the project. Generally, that meant that the project was

initially described in a more or less ambiguous way. According to one respondent,

> There was an announcement that people from the university were coming to a staff meeting to talk to us about something. The something was not explained. At the staff meeting we teachers kept looking at each other. We were wondering, "What is that university person saying? What does she want? Tick tock, time is wasting. Is this more work?". . .That university person would be here today and gone tomorrow.

Even the teachers who had decided to participate in the PDS were skeptical of the university's agenda, staying power, and expectations for their involvement. As the respondent above said, the teachers had already experienced "partnerships" with outside "researchers and university projects" in which researchers were there for a time, did their data gathering and then left. Rarely did the teachers see the results of the research or benefit from any related school based professional development. They assumed that the PDS partnership would be the same (cf. Dennis, 2014).

Middle school entry. The middle school was the first to start the program. Initially, a small group of College of Education faculty went to the middle school to find teachers to work with them. A middle school teacher talked about her memories of this first meeting.

> A professor came to our school and told us the university wanted to partner with school districts in order to work directly with teachers on school and teaching practice reforms that were being promoted at the time. They mentioned developing teachers' learning and working together across grades rather than in isolation and working with teacher interns as a mentor rather than just a host in the classroom. All of this did sound exciting, but I also began to wonder how all this could actually happen.

When seven teachers, four of whom worked in a sixth-grade team, said they would like to be a part of the PDS effort, the work began in earnest. Since this occurred in January, other teachers on the staff had the opportunity to watch and listen to the initial participants for the rest of the school year to see what happened. When the university participants (professors, graduate assistants, specialists, and field instructors) returned the following fall, after spending additional time working with the initial seven teachers over the summer, more teachers were interested and invited university people into their classrooms.

Elementary schools' entry. Following the entry into the middle school in the spring, the entry into the first two elementary schools began in November 1987. According to one respondent, the university faculty just appeared at a regularly scheduled staff meeting with no advance notice. But this was not surprising inasmuch as the teachers were never given the staff meeting agenda in advance. Teachers asked themselves whether this PDS effort was just another waste of time with university faculty in the schools for their own purposes and then leaving. Although the attitude of "here today, gone tomorrow," as one respondent said, was prevalent, the consistent presence of the university participants every week in the schools and their keen interest in participating with the teachers in classroom life eventually convinced teachers that the university, for the time being at least, was earnest in its commitment to continue work until learning was improved for everyone.

High school entry. The advantage to adding the high school a year and a half after the other three schools was that the high school teachers had already heard about the work in the other three schools. They had seen evidence that the university faculty were truly committed to collective work and that this work was focused on the needs of the teachers and their students. The university participants had given no sign that they would exit PDS work any time soon. Also, the university's 5th year interns assigned to the school had proved themselves unexpectedly capable and the high school teachers were excited about working with them. Interns were teacher preparation students in the last year of the university's new 5-year program, which culminated in an academic year-long internship with an assigned classroom mentor teacher. The interns made a major contribution to meeting a primary PDS goal of ending teacher isolation and making teaching more public, open to colleagues, administrators, and community members alike (Johnson, Reinhorn, & Simon, 2016; Lortie, 1975).

Principals' entry. When the PDS work started, two of the principals did not volunteer. They were simply told that they would be working with the university. In the case of a third principal, he had actually been assigned to his school because he had agreed to work with the university. The fourth principal joined work at the beginning of the second year of PDS involvement, which was her first year as a principal. In that sense she, also, was not a volunteer.

At the beginning, the only principal to be truly supportive of the work was at the high school. The other three principals saw university participants as "guests" in their buildings. In each of the buildings, it was evident that neither the principal nor university participants had any idea how important the presence of the university could be to the principals and to their role as administrators and to what principals needed to do to make the PDS work a success (cf. Bredeson, 2000; Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2017).

Trust building among and with teachers. When the PDS effort was first introduced at one of the elementary schools, only a few teachers were ready to work with university participants. These teachers listed several topics that they wanted to resolve before they would be willing to move forward. These concerns focused, for example, on changes in office procedures and use of agendas for staff meetings. In effect, the teachers were testing the waters to see if the university participants could and would be helpful with on-going issues that had exasperated the teachers for years.

Once these issues were resolved, the next meetings focused on the classroom concepts and the practices the teachers wanted to adopt. As these teachers and university participants talked, the classroom door was purposefully and literally left open so others could hear, and as a result, other teachers began to "hang out" outside the classroom and listen. Whenever they were spotted, it became the custom to ask them to join the group, even if only to listen.

A teacher who joined the group later reported that she became curious when she heard her colleagues talking about "learning communities" as an approach to improving classroom organization and culture (Easton, 2011; Putnam, 2012). By the end of one semester, all except one of the teachers in the building had joined the PDS work. This action was, by itself, a change in the school culture. One respondent noted that earlier, if the teachers had made a decision not to join, they would have never publicly changed their minds.

The next step in building trust for each of the teachers interviewed was to develop an individual relationship with a university participant. But this was not the only challenge in terms of relationships. As they talked with a university participant about their individual relationships, these respondents reported that they had come to realize that they did not trust their own K-12 colleagues or administrators either (cf. University of Chicago, June 2008). The authors of this article, for their part, were already aware during the first year of working in the building that trust was lacking—among the teachers, between teachers and administrators, and among the administrators. One teacher said that, before the PDS, the teachers in her building did not share ideas, did not talk to each other about teaching and learning, and did not visit each other's classrooms. It took the first year of PDS work to make this lack of trust visible and known to everyone (cf. Easton, 2011).

During the first semester of working together, the middle school teachers and university faculty decided they needed to do something proactively to improve relationships. A summer program was expressly designed to build trusting relationships. For instance, university and school participants engaged in activities such as trust walks, carrying a colleague over an imaginary mine field, and traversing a high ropes course with encouragement from a buddy on the ground (e.g., Newstrom & Scannell, 1998). That program helped to get everyone on the same "playing field." It resulted in everyone becoming more comfortable with one another and gaining some understanding of each person's strengths and vulnerabilities. As the teachers and the university participants learned to take risks in front of and with each other, they became better able to try out new teaching approaches and adopt new ways of thinking.

The second summer, members of each of the schools created and participated in team building activities. By the third summer, the work had changed from trust building to study and development of classroom learning communities, improvement of teaching and learning, and leadership work across the schools. For example, pairs of a university participant and a classroom teacher designed and implemented physical changes in classroom arrangements in order to facilitate more student group work. One pair created schoolwide projects, such as having students design and install a large mosaic in the school entry hall under the direction of a local artist. One middle school pair designed and implemented a classroom program to address the needs of disruptive students. The learning activities involved active student engagement, work in pairs and small groups, and activities to improve self-esteem.

The Importance of Race and Race Relations in these PDSs

In discussing the necessity of building trust throughout this initiative, one has to acknowledge the pervasive impact of race and race relations. It was a situation in which there was all too much likelihood of reinforcing long-standing stereotypes about "white saviors" coming to "fix" urban schools for Black children (e.g., Downs, 2016). One of the African-American professors recalls the "layers of skepticism" that existed at the onset of our partnership efforts. At the emerging PDS, the African-Americans who made up a large part of the K-12 educators were quick to question the intent and integrity of the White university faculty, giving the African-Americans from the university the added burden of defending both themselves and their White colleagues. Some (both African-American and White) were convinced that genuine partnerships could be forged only within homogenous racial groups, but purposeful and concerted efforts were made to successfully overcome this outcome (We thank Dr. Sonya Gunnings for her insights regarding these relationships.)

In general, university participants understood the importance of "walking our talk." This meant understanding, respecting and valuing what others thought was important to know and understand about the students, the school setting and the urban context. It was important to demonstrate that the actions of university participants were not self-serving but rather grounded in the service of students. For example, many of university participants taught side-by-side with a classroom teacher, jointly confronting the demands of connecting students to curriculum while maintaining a classroom climate focused on learning. Both successes and failures were experienced by each participant in this joint work. All this demanded time, consistency, and commitment from the university participants.

Once a university faculty member began to have a regular and frequent presence at the PDS, the K-12 participants began to be more candid about what, in their experience, the school was really like. It was no longer a matter of treating university participants as "guests" who were allowed to see, as much as possible, only the "good stuff and smiles." K-12 teachers and principals began to be much more open and honest in their relationships with individuals from the university.

Developing Professional Learning Communities

Over time, the professional learning community (PLC) concept was used to foster trust and relationships conducive to the emergence and discussion of new ideas and efforts (Putnam, Gunnings-Moton, & Sharp, 2009; Mullen, 2009). In the earliest phase, the teachers and university faculty tended to take on several areas of work, all at the same time. This work included identifying and developing mentor teachers, creating classroom learning communities, improving teaching and learning by getting students to be more active participants rather than passive recipients of their learning, and finding ways to transform the management of their buildings. Wherever adults came together to work on aspects of the PDS, professional learning communities emerged to ground that work.

K-12 Mentor Teacher Professional Learning Community

Within the PDS, the Mentor Teacher Professional Learning Community was the first such community to emerge. It provided a model for the other PLCs to follow. Members of the Mentor Teacher PLC included: school teachers at all levels, field instructors, and the university professors who taught the teacher preparation courses and had begun to work in the PDS buildings with teachers and principals. University people were regular participants in mentor teacher meetings so that they could help the mentors not only acquire expertise in the practice of mentoring (see Schwille, 2008), but also become able and willing to participate openly and candidly in other more general discussions of teaching, learning, and mentoring practices (for another case of how a mentor teacher study group was formed and worked see Carroll, Featherstone, Featherstone, Feiman-Nemser, & Roosevelt, 2007).

One of the purposes of the PDSs was to provide an environment for teacher preparation interns to draw upon and adapt what they learned in their education courses to classroom teaching situations in an urban setting. This meant that the classroom mentor teachers were expected to take a very active role in helping their interns learn not only to be effective in classroom teaching but also how to play a productive role in other ways in the school, community and teaching culture.

The Mentor Teacher PLC began simply by studying the content of the teacher preparation program. It was critical that these teachers were knowledgeable in terms of what the program required. Without this knowledge, the mentor teachers would not have been able to help interns try out and justifiably shape teaching practices that they had spent four years learning in their preparation program. For example, the respondents explained how studying how interns would be evaluated provided a basis for linking the content of the Mentor Teachers' PLC meeting with the teacher candidate's own teaching.

Unfortunately, in the first meeting of this PLC, it was obvious that the K-12 teachers did not respect each other. The teachers in the 6th-8th grades clearly indicated that they did not think the elementary teachers had taught the K-5th graders what they should have known when they entered middle school. The high school teachers felt the same way about the middle school teachers. The elementary teachers spoke out about their beliefs that the secondary teachers did not "teach" they just lectured and didn't care about the students. But, in fact, not one of the teachers had ever been in any of the other buildings!

One of the outcomes of this loud and angry confrontation was that the teachers spoke about things that they had believed for years but had never said to teachers from one of the other levels before. One of the secondary teachers stood up shaking her finger at the elementary teachers. What was amazing was that they were all listening to each other and it seemed to clear the air. A channel of communication had been cleared that the teachers had never used before. For example, the elementary teachers had been keeping detailed records of their students over the six years they were in their schools. When students moved up and the files were sent to the middle school, the counselors simply put the files away. All of the teachers were aware of how time consuming and valuable these files were, yet no one in the middle school and high school even knew they existed.

While experiencing open conflicts with their colleagues for what may well have been the first time, these teachers became aware that, in contrast, the university participants were able to disagree, question, and challenge each other's ideas openly. One respondent recalled observing these discussions and seeing that they did not interfere with interpersonal relationships among the university participants. Such discussions fostered teacher learning. In short, the outcomes of the teachers' initial conflict with each other and their observations of how the university participants interacted led them to be more open in communicating among themselves and in understanding how others were thinking. A new group norm was taking shape.

The mentor teachers also had to learn to ask questions of their interns that would elicit deep thinking and still more questions. Since it could not be expected that everyone would know everything, it stood to reason that by sharing questions, knowledge, and lessons from experience (both positive and negative), the participants could gain more understanding of the students, the curriculum, the urban context, and how connecting all these factors could benefit children's learning (see Ogle, 2003).

Mentor Teachers and Interns Professional Learning Communities

In order to fulfill their responsibilities, the interns, the university field instructors (personnel responsible for observing, giving feedback and assessing interns in their field placement), and the mentor teachers created a second support system within each building in the form of the Mentor Teacher/Intern PLCs. As one respondent said, "Given that we had interns, we got ourselves organized to sit down and plan for our own learning as well as the interns.' This gave us the opportunity to think

through what we were doing." This teacher was referring not just to sitting down by herself with her intern but also meeting at the same time with fellow teachers. The mentor teachers within a given building began to meet regularly with the university field instructors to discuss the interns' progress and program expectations. The teachers quickly realized that over the years they had been repeating activities that had been linked to a curriculum in the past but were no longer relevant. Besides studying the curriculum and their planning and teaching, the mentor teachers developed new ways of communicating and sharing the substance of the program for the prospective teachers among themselves and the interns.

Our respondents described some of the things they had not been doing when starting the PDSs that interns were nonetheless expected to practice (e.g., long-range planning that included assessments and evaluations, integration across subject matter areas, the creation of classroom learning communities). All the teacher respondents talked about questions raised by the interns during the opening days of school. The interns wanted to know why, when and since when, related to what, and why not this rather than that. As one teacher said, "They were the hardest questions anyone ever asked me. . .They would ask, 'Why did you say that or why do you always do that?' I realized that I didn't even know why I said or did it." The mentor teacher/intern PLC provided one forum where such difficult questions could be asked and teachers could admit they didn't have all the answers. That pushed everyone's thinking.

Teaching and Learning Subject-Matter Professional Learning Communities

Once the teachers had instituted a new classroom learning community culture, they were able to focus on the specifics of teaching and learning subject matter. Having identified focal areas to work on, the teachers asked the university for experts with special knowledge of specific subject matter and child development. As a result, small groups of teachers put together subject matter PLCs. All of our respondents mentioned how the regular connections with other professionals with expertise in teaching and learning made a major difference in their thinking and performance.

As the variety of PLCs matured, their membership grew to include teachers from each of the PDS buildings and resulted in new working relationships. Initially they worked mainly on their own classroom. Eventually, however, the new relationships resulted in teachers from each school working across classrooms and schools to create new experiences for children. For instance, one of the primary teachers worked with the 9th grade science teachers creating K-1 lessons. Later the 9th graders became "buddies" for the elementary school students, especially in helping them with their literacy, math and science skills. When the cross-school activities first started, one elementary teacher respondent said that as she walked her young students over to the high school, she overheard one child ask another, "Where are we going?" and the friend responded, "To hell and back!" Although the teacher had to laugh, she realized that even her very young children had gross misconceptions about the higher level schools. She said that without the opportunities teachers had to work together across the K-12 schools, she and her students would never have ventured out and broken down their stereotypes.

Professional Learning Community for Principals

When the initial four PDSs began operating, the principals did not even know each other. Before the PDS era, according to one respondent, there had been no meetings to bring principals from different levels together. They had been isolated from one another. The different school level administrators always sat together at district wide meetings, never talking to anyone at another level about what was happening across the district. As the PDSs grew, both teachers and principals met across buildings to solve problems, create new programs and maintain new working relationships (Bredeson, 2000). Understanding each other's "turf" became a means of working together rather than reinforcing divisions. One administrator and a teacher respondent said that there were "pent up" feelings about the other schools since up to that point administrators and teachers had no idea what the other schools were like. Once they met across schools and talked about their prior negative assumptions, these feelings dissipated and participants were able to identify common issues to work on together.

One of the authors of this paper served as the initial leader for the PDS principals' group when it began meeting in each of the schools. This helped create a better relationship between the schools and the university. The high school principal recalled this author following her around from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. one day so that the author could better understand what the principal's role entailed. This experience had the added benefit of convincing the principal that this was a person who could be trusted and maybe other university faculty members could be as well.

From the beginning the principals took the meetings seriously. They took out their calendars to set the date and agenda for the next meeting. They were ready to engage, not only as leaders of their individual schools but as committed participants in cross-school communication, planning, and engagement.

After the PDS administrators started meeting, their reticence began to subside as they became less isolationist in their isolationist culture. By holding the meetings in a different school each time, the administrators could see what was happening in each other's schools and were able to understand the culture of each of the schools more fully. They began to develop across zone working relationships. Their subsequent support for teachers to work across buildings was essential to PDS success. Their collaboration led to programs which helped students feel more comfortable in all of the schools.

To achieve another desired outcome, the principals worked together to figure out ways to share power and responsibilities in

the management of each school. Their work resulted in major changes in school organization. All the respondents commented on changes they had experienced as the principals came to a new understanding of their roles as leaders. For instance, the principals became more adept at solving organizational challenges such as changing the layout of the school so that teachers on the same team were located in the same areas. The principals were also involved in remodeling one of the schools to provide more space for teachers working together and for student interaction in classroom learning communities. As the principals identified topics they wished to pursue further, they asked university participants to help find information, resources, and experts that they could use in discussing these topics (for information on the role of principals' collaboration see Cramer & Johnston, 2000.)

As this work with the four PDS principals developed, it became evident that each had different ways of developing trust and working relationships. For example, Putnam helped two of the principals work through their concerns about "being different" from the other district principals and their uneasiness with the fact that no one from central office was telling them exactly what to do. They also confronted their lack of experience in solving building-level problems. The partnership they built with the university participants provided a safe channel for them to work with the superintendent and the university to redefine their roles and feel that they were acting in ways supported by the district leadership. The principals were able to talk more openly about their questions and new ideas. This was not, however, a positive experience for all concerned. One of the principals eventually asked to be reassigned because he was unable to deal with the challenges of his interactions with other principals.

Changes Achieved and Lessons Learned

When we asked the respondents about unproductive aggravations and changes, we were surprised that they identified few of either in the PDS effort as they experienced it. The changes they identified were primarily positive changes they had observed in others or themselves. We had expected they would dwell on negative experiences as well. Instead, they were full of stories about what had changed for the better.

We were surprised that our respondents reported such a predominance of positive memories of the PDS work. We think it is largely a result of the participants' sense of working hard with colleagues to achieve what they considered better teaching and learning than had been experienced prior to the PDS effort. Recent studies on the retention of positive and negative memories reports mixed outcomes. Some studies show that negative memories are more lasting and vividly recalled than positive ones (Rozin, & Royzman, 2001; Tugend, 2012; Walker, Skowronski, & Thompson, 2003). Other studies report that positive memories are more prominent and longer lasting (Ritchie et al., 2015; Thompson, 2007). More formal research into the effects of the PDS work in the district we studied would help to clarify the extent of positive and negative results as reflected in memories of the work.

Every district respondent told us that her/his PDS involvement changed the way s/he thought about and enacted his/her teaching or administrative practices. In order to work together on a PDS, respondents believed they had to learn to talk together, manage their building organization, keep their PLCs going, create and maintain classroom learning communities, share power and decision making, carry out budget responsibilities, and find time to do all this.

Most said that the PDS culture neither looked nor sounded like what they had formerly experienced in schools within their district. Each respondent identified specific changes in the way problems were solved and decisions made. For example, one teacher said that the teachers she worked with no longer just ignored problems. Instead they looked under rocks they had avoided before, even though looking under was a shock. To cope with this, they divided up "things to worry about" rather than sticking with the usual mode of each teacher tackling similar problems in isolation. For instance, if there was a meeting that did not demand everyone's attendance, the group would designate an appropriate person to attend and then report back. When funds such as Title I became available at the last minute, these teachers were ready to apply quicker than other schools because the PDS teachers learned to consolidate and organize as a group.

Across the schools the teachers worked together to help students make the transition from one school level to the next. One respondent noted that for the first-time middle school teachers worked with elementary and high school teachers to help students with the transition from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school. Trips to schools at the next level helped to allay misconceptions and fears about what the new school would be like. The cross school academic work that the teachers and students shared contributed to the students' comfort in being in the other schools.

Changes in Talk

Teacher talk changed in radical ways. Within the first year all but two of the teachers in one of the elementary schools were working on developing classroom learning communities and creating a new classroom culture. The teachers began talking with each other about the questions they had and the problems they were confronting. They talked together about indicators that they were making progress and indicators that they were stalled (see Erickson, 2004).

Most respondents said that this PDS culture was very different from what they had formerly experienced in schools within their district. Teachers talked with and about each other with respect. Teachers no longer were so likely to blame each other, the student or the family for problems a student was having in school. Discussion of data became more prominent in teachers' talk about students and what should be happening in classrooms. Teachers read and used research in their effort to

change the cultures in their classrooms. Teachers and interns shared knowledge, both acknowledging what they knew and what they needed to learn.

One respondent said that before PDS started, she was thinking about quitting teaching. She wanted "a career, not a job" and was not feeling like she was going anywhere in her profession. When PDS was introduced in her school, she went home inspired "with tears in my eyes" because she thought that someone was going to help her figure out how to teach in ways that would reach her students. Respondents noted that university participants listened and valued what the teachers said, giving the teachers a sense of importance and power. The teachers acknowledged that the university participants' communication was an impetus to open up their own communication.

Our respondents were clear that if they had not learned new ways of talking together, it would have been impossible to change (see Florio-Ruane & deTar, 2001). They had found that strong cultural differences divided university participants from K-12 teachers. In order for the teachers to work together among themselves and for the teachers and university participants to be able to work together as well, these differences had to be bridged. As one respondent observed,

> We and the university were of two different cultures. . .We saw we were product oriented. We didn't know this process thing. For us, talking about something was only about what and how to do it. We didn't talk about why...and didn't know how to talk about it in a way that would make any difference. The university people talked before they did something.

This process created changes not only in classroom cultures, but also in the teachers themselves. The respondents first noticed these changes as they worked on the establishment of a classroom learning community in their own classrooms. According to one teacher, it was the first time she had "invited other teachers into my classroom. This was the first time I was comfortable eliciting information about what was going on in my room from my colleagues." The respondents found they were no longer hiding and no longer afraid of what other teachers thought.

Another respondent talked about how the classroom learning community culture had changed her students. In the past, her students were not concerned about whether other students were learning something. Once the culture changed, according to this respondent, all the students had learned how to work together in ways that supported learning. For example, students no longer just gave answers to peers who didn't know something—instead they worked with them and cheered them on when these other students had acquired some new knowledge. The teachers observed that when someone had a social problem, other students helped to solve the problem and to keep things calm. Running to the teacher was no longer the immediate answer. (see, e.g., Schwille, 2016).

Changes in Time Management

Time was always an issue for teachers and administrators. There was never enough. As the PDS efforts grew, time became even more precious. Teachers initially assumed they had to multi-task or just withdraw. But this was not the case. One respondent said that she soon realized that much of the time that the teachers and faculty needed was, in fact, already there but hidden. Both the teachers and the university participants could think of ways to open up time for the kind of work they wanted to do. When the district gave teachers permission to plan their own professional development, the teachers and university faculty came up with the needed time. For example, they saved time that they would have spent attending district wide meetings not relevant to their needs. There were, indeed, multiple efforts all going on at once but not everyone had to be or was involved in every effort. University participants had their involvement in one or two areas and so did the teachers, but all kept each other informed of what was happening and the direction of the work. In knowing what others were doing, participants felt supported in work on a broad array of goals to achieve a better school culture for everyone's learning. People could define their roles in the effort and proudly say, "Here is the piece I'm working on and here is how it fits with the bigger PDS vision."

One teacher respondent said that once they organized themselves as a PLC, "we realized we could delegate certain functions to the members. We split up things to worry about—no one had to worry about everything." Faculty meetings were another arena that was refashioned so teachers could become more productive and gain more time. Teachers saved time by avoiding district wide meetings not relevant to their needs.

As the school cultures changed, the three initial principals realized that their position as school administrator was not at stake—in fact, no one wanted their job. They began to feel more open to working on the reform efforts in their school. They also saw it was not always necessary to hold staff meetings, again gaining more time.

Changes in Power Sharing

The school culture changed because individual teachers not only felt empowered to change their own classroom practices, but also because of changes in the school. Before PDS, most decisions affecting how things would be done in a school were made by the principal, central office or, if the teachers were involved, they voted. One teacher said, "There were winners and losers." The learning community concept encouraged teachers to use a consensus process of decision making instead. Everyone had a voice and discussions aimed at solutions everyone could live with. Through watching and participating in lively discussions with the university people, teachers learned that looking at all aspects of an issue helped them understand the issue better and helped to reach a decision by consensus (see Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Kessler, 1992).

The PDS culture produced a different building management system. Representatives from the university participants, interns, teachers, administrators and central office personnel became members of the district management team. With the addition of new people, there were changes in role definition, in thinking, in group experiences, and in the new culture itself, all of which contributed to a complex, new building environment. In some schools, representatives of the staff and community became formal members of a building management team.

This new building management system was based on shared power. Each respondent was able to identify changes in decision-making in her/his school. One respondent described how her school created a team to meet with the principal, a team which organized and carried out staff meetings. Agendas for these meetings included reports from PLCs and students. Decisions about school-wide projects were discussed and made collectively. In one school, the teachers were able to organize and conduct staff meetings with the principal having an auxiliary role.

Post PDS: Striking Benefits and Bitter Disappointments

All respondents were disgusted with the way the university ended its formal support of the PDS partnership. One fall, university participants working with the urban PDSs were informed that they could not continue to work in the PDSs the next semester even though the university had not worked with the district to create any plan for exiting the district. Withdrawal came as a shock to everyone involved. It was experienced as a betrayal.

Our respondents said that they began to fall behind when new teachers or principals had been assigned to a PDS (see also Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; VanCleef, 2015). The teachers were expected to bring the new people into the PDS culture and integrate them into the school, study groups, and the style of leadership that had been established. One respondent noted that new principals who were placed in their schools had to be "dragged along" in part because they had had no formal introduction and no preparation for the ethos and actions that characterized the PDSs.

To the benefit of the teachers, interns continued to be placed in PDSs because internships were not funded by the PDS budget. This meant that the interns continued to influence what went on in their placement sites. Also, some university involvement continued on the part of the university faculty who were teaching interns both in the schools and on campus. Mentor teachers continued to meet regularly and use the time for professional development, both in learning to mentor and developing their own teaching practices. Some mentor teachers eventually were employed by the university as field instructors in the teacher preparation program after they retired as teachers. These practices sustained many of the distinctive interactions, both with teachers and the community that the PDS work had initiated (Griffiths, 2010). After the end of the formal partnership, one respondent became a member of a district exploratory team that looked at ways that the changes brought about by the PDSs could be sustained and transferred to other schools in the district. Using what she had learned about forming and functioning as a learning community and her skills as a mentor teacher, she helped teachers in other schools establish constructive ways to talk about teaching practices.

But much could not be sustained. School budgets were transferred back to district oversight as central office personnel, including the superintendent, changed. A time came when it was no longer possible to bring the principals along since they were reassigned to different schools and reverted back to traditional administrative practices. It was difficult for principals without PDS experience to become knowledgeable about all the different PDS ways of thinking and doing. One teacher said, "A PDS is like a garden. If you don't keep it up, what was there initially will come back. Schools get traditional, control oriented principals."

When the more authoritarian principals took over the jobs in the PDS schools, teachers who did not retire or take new jobs in other districts transferred to other buildings where the principals were willing to support their continued development as leaders. These teachers provided a model for others.

Each of our respondents said that their PDS involvement had been a constructive and positive journey. Each reported changes in how they thought about and enacted their roles and practices. Each became a strong advocate for not only better support for student learning but also for teacher, principal, and district administrator learning. Each used the voice they had developed through their PDS work to try to bring about change in whatever role they had assumed after the PDS partnership ended. In the end, even though it ended badly, they were glad they had taken the journey and were changed because of it.

Conclusion

What began as a pursuit of curiosity built on reminiscences about work the authors had found rewarding years earlier quickly evolved into a more serious research endeavor to find out how, twenty some years after the fact, our school-based PDS colleagues thought and felt about their involvement in our collaborative effort at reform. Doing this research in hindsight allowed us to see and understand more clearly the effects our efforts had on the thinking, attitudes, and work of the participants especially since PDS research was scarce at the time. This became even more important to us when no relevant post-PDS evaluations of our work were found. Naturally we were pleased to learn that all our respondents had rewarding experiences and thought they had changed their professional thinking and practices in lasting ways. As we learned, such change does not occur without sufficient time, much effort, taking risks, overcoming pitfalls, and persistence (as in Schwille, 2016). We continue to ask what it takes to pursue such a mindful but difficult to enact agenda. We hope our investigation adds to the arguments that substantive change in our educational system not only needs attention but deep and widespread support.

As we explored how the two cultures we confronted were transformed into a third shared culture, we learned that initiating, growing, and sustaining an effort like this requires people with different interests, talents, and tolerance for change. It takes a core of people who are willing to take risks, make mistakes, and keep making changes by learning from their trials and successes. It also takes expertise to continue the work once structures and direction are in place. For PDSs to endure as the participants change, the new culture, including expectations for all participants to become learners, must be well enough developed and embedded to be institutionalized. School-university partnerships, in our view, remain essential if goals to improve the learning of all parties involved are to be achieved. SUP

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