

Ed Talks: A Collaborative Professional Development Partnership

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of the current manuscript is to delineate a collaborative professional development effort between Norfolk Public Schools and Old Dominion University—a nascent school-university partnership. Ed Talks were created to build relationships between public school and university faculty, but we have encountered challenges in implementing this effort including scheduling issues. However, the effort has been supported by teacher leadership and technology. While our partnership is still growing, Ed Talks have been a catalyst for building informal relationships between the Academy for Discovery at Lakewood and Old Dominion University faculty.

NAPDS Nine Essential #3: Ongoing and reciprocal PD for all participants guided by need.

The Norfolk Public Schools (NPS)-Old Dominion University (ODU) partnership is nascent. The foundation was laid for the partnership in fall 2015 when a committee convened to draft a mission statement for the work that included an emphasis on collaboration and community-based efforts to enhance teacher preparation and retention through sustained civic engagement. Building upon this work, three ODU faculty began teaching courses on site at Academy for Discovery at Lakewood (ADL), a grade 3-8 NPS school with an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program, in fall 2017 including an elementary literacy methods course, an elementary social studies methods course, and an educational technology course. Since that time, 14 other courses have been taught on site at ADL and 3 other schools in NPS reaching over 220 teacher candidates including sections of classroom management. However, members of the partnership realized that deepening this relationship, and adhering to the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) Nine Essentials (NAPDS, 2008) would require other approaches to our partnership work.

During a “tune up” meeting, or meeting about the progress of the partnership in which we reflect on changes that need to be made, a teacher leader at ADL expressed interest in the research-based strategies that ODU faculty were using in their university courses. However, ODU faculty recognized that ADL teachers also have funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) from which ODU faculty could benefit. This request gave us an idea for how to deepen the relationship between ADL and ODU: a collaborative professional development (PD) series called Ed Talks that would allow public school and university faculty to meet up to talk about teaching and learning. This effort would not only align with the NAPDS Nine Essential, “Ongoing and reciprocal PD for all participants guided by need” (NAPDS, 2008, para. 4) but would hopefully open up new conversations about partnership work. Since implementing the first Ed Talk in

spring 2018, we have learned many lessons about this reciprocal PD effort and how to make it successful in our context. Our goal in sharing our work is analytic generalizability (Yin, 2009)—in other words, we hope that other professional development school (PDS) sites may be able to distill an idea from our own collaborative PD series that they can use or adapt to their own context.

Implementing the Vision

After generating the idea for Ed Talks, and receiving approval from the ADL principal, two ADL and one ODU faculty members met to plan the first session. We considered making Ed Talks themed around ADL’s instructional focus but decided that, for the first session, we should keep the theme open-ended to make it more accessible to participants. In the sessions that have followed, we have held one themed session on teacher feedback and checks for understanding including presentations on traffic light feedback (written feedback) and screencasting feedback (verbal feedback recorded electronically). We do not yet have data to determine the benefits of a themed session over an un-themed session, but both seemed to be appealing to faculty based on feedback they provided on internal surveys about the event.

No matter whether an Ed Talk is themed, the same structure is utilized. Each Ed Talk session is 30 minutes in length and typically there are three presenters who speak for about 5-7 minutes each and answer questions after their mini-presentations. Each speaker is asked to bring a brief handout with highlights of their strategy. An ADL faculty member facilitates each session and ODU faculty members provide light refreshments. The principal at ADL incentivizes participation through providing continuing education units. Ed Talks are open to all grade levels although, depending on when each Ed Talk is held, some grade level teachers may not

be able to participate based on their teaching schedule. When possible, we hold Ed Talks after the school day ends to make these more inclusive. Ed Talks are held in the ODU classroom at ADL.

Leveraging Teacher Leadership

Like almost any effort in a school, Ed Talks would not be successful without the work of teacher leaders. Indeed, McBee (2015) noted that the research on teacher leadership recognizes leading new initiatives as a teacher leadership role. Ed Talks would not have been launched without a teacher leader to champion the effort. In particular, the instructional specialist and International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme Coordinator at ADL was critical in drumming up interest in Ed Talks and recruiting teachers to present. Because many teachers are humble, and may assume they do not have an idea to share, having a teacher leader who could help them see the possibilities for presentations and encourage them to present was truly crucial to this effort. Indeed, this teacher leader had a deep understanding of teachers' instruction because she had been in their classrooms as an instructional specialist and, thus, could speak specifically to possibilities for presentations. The teacher leaders who presented were also instrumental in Ed Talks because they provided the content. Indeed, Bond (2015) has indicated that providing PD for colleagues is an ideal role for teacher leaders. The instructional specialist/International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme Coordinator also played an important role in recruiting participants to each session. Because she had a deep understanding of the master schedule, and which teachers had planning periods at different times, she could speak to the best time to hold Ed Talks. She then reached out to teachers who had planning periods during this time and encouraged them to come to the session. This fostered buy-in for the collaborative PD.

The Role of Technology

Since the inception of Ed Talks, we have maintained a Google Drive folder that is shared between ADL and ODU faculty and includes any resources that participants share. If faculty cannot attend an Ed Talk, they can explore the resources afterward. At our most recent Ed Talk, an ADL faculty member video recorded the session so that it could be uploaded to our shared Google Drive. Moving forward, we will continue to film each Ed Talk session and are actively seeking funding to support these filming and archiving efforts.

Challenges

No initiative is without challenges and Ed Talks has at least two. It has been difficult to get ODU faculty to participate. Two ODU faculty members have attended each Ed Talk session including the first author of this article who helped to generate

the idea for Ed Talks and who assists in scheduling and facilitating Ed Talks. An email is sent via a departmental listserv and announcements made at department meetings about each Ed Talk. However, ODU attendance pales in comparison to ADL attendance, which has been as high as 20 participants. More ODU faculty were able to participate at a May Ed Talk after the university semester ended, but finding time during the ODU semester has been difficult. Because university faculty teach at various times instead of set times—like PK-12 faculty—it is difficult to identify a consistent time that would garner the most participation. One strategy has been to prioritize days that faculty involved in partnership work are not teaching because they are more likely to participate in this effort. Although ODU doctoral students and teacher candidates are invited to Ed Talks, attendance has been low for these populations as well with only one doctoral student and one teacher candidate attending. These are also areas of attendance that we would like to grow.

Additionally, we have found that Ed Talks are easy to neglect in light of standardized testing and other demands. In the future, we intend to create the Ed Talk schedule at the beginning of the year to ensure that these sessions are on the ADL school calendar and prioritized. We are also integrating them into the existing PD plan to ensure that they are seamlessly woven into the structure and schedule of the school.

Conclusion

We still have a lot of work to do to strengthen our partnership and meaningfully enact the NAPDS Nine Essentials (2008). Ed Talks serve as a catalyst for building informal relationships between ADL and ODU faculty and, we hope, will generate collaborations for future scholarship and strengthen our own instruction and learning for PK-12 students, which is the ultimate goal of any school-university partnership. We hope other PDS sites might benefit from the practices we have shared and will be able to meaningfully adapt this reciprocal professional development practice to their own contexts. ^{SUP}

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