When Teachers Take Charge

Carrie Poulos, Thomas A. Edison School (NY)
Barbara Terracciano, Thomas A. Edison School (NY)
JoAnne Ferrara, Manhattanville College (NY)

What happens when a group of veteran PDS teachers decide to challenge a school of education's edTPA policy and take the learning outcomes for their student teachers into their own hands? This article describes our journey to transform student teaching practices at our PDS. As co-authors of this article we wanted to share our experiences with other PDS colleagues with the hope of inspiring teachers to take the lead for making impactful changes at their own sites. After several years of following the school of education's edTPA mandate, a group of us became frustrated with the ways in which our student teachers were being prepared for the real world of teaching. We wanted to provide them with additional experiences to support their growth.

We looked at teacher capacity research to inform our thinking. Several of us involved in this project consider ourselves teacher researchers and over the years have participated in PDS research with our college partners. In fact, we received the American Educational Research Association's Claudia A. Balach Professional Development Schools Special Interest Group Research Award for our work.

Synthesis of Research

Supporting teacher growth and development is an essential pillar of our PDS work. Over the years PDSs have helped universities and P-12 educators rethink how to prepare new teachers while simultaneously deepening in-service teachers' practice (Catelli, Rutter, Tunks, Neapolitan, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019). We believe PDSs create the context for rich, powerful, learning opportunities that encourage boundary spanning roles to emerge among all members of the community. Teachers learn best in collaborative, collegial school cultures where their professional growth and well-being are the norm rather than the exception. When educators come together to contribute to the success of all learners (e.g., students, pre-service teachers, in-service teachers and college faculty), collective efficacy emerges (Bandura, 1993). Against this backdrop for teacher growth PDSs create the context for practices that are inquiry based and focused on learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Within this framework, PDSs foster opportunities among field-based practitioners and university faculty to collaborate and impact teacher preparation and professional development (Zeichner, 2007).

Professional Development Schools' capacity to build teacher leadership is well documented (Ferrara, 2014). Regardless of where teachers are positioned on the career continuum, established PDSs often become the vehicle to build teachers' leadership and instructional capacity. Depending upon the type of engagement taking place, PDSs foster teachers' professional satisfaction, discipline specific competence, broaden expertise, create new roles, and sense of purpose (Keller-Mathers, 2018). Many times, the rich interactions that take place in PDSs are intentionally designed to build capacity, but often unintended consequences surface that also serve to build skills. "Engaging teachers in activities that cultivate their capacity to teach with greater consciousness, self-awareness and integrity is a necessary condition for successful professional development" (Intrator & Kunzman 2006, p.39).

Context

At Thomas A. Edison Elementary School, our PDS partnership began almost two decades ago. Since its inception, we have embraced the ethos of "What it Means to Be a PDS" and became a local leader, serving as a demonstration site for local school districts interested in pursuing the PDS model. We gained a reputation for excellence. As might be expected, our college partner established a network of PDSs to replicate our success. It is no surprise that over the years Edison was the site for sharing ideas and expanding PDS knowledge. In fact, our notoriety reached an international audience of school leaders. After visiting our site, at least four schools in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands returned home to embark upon a PDS journey. These successes could not be achieved without a strong commitment to the NAPDS 9 Essentials and a desire among stakeholders to focus on 4 principles of educator preparation, professional development, inquiry, and student achievement to guide this work.

This article focuses on two of the PDSs' guiding principles, educator preparation and professional development that stimulated our leadership capacity and self-efficacy during a year-long student teaching pilot program. A robust culture of PDS participation exists among all teachers at Edison. Several of us have taken on formal and informal leadership roles. We have sought ways to improve our PDS outcomes for the community at large. When the college started implementing edTPA in 2014, we expressed concerns about the preparedness of our student teachers. Furthermore, we felt the new format of the student teaching seminar was missing a practical application to issues facing our new teachers. During PDS leadership meetings and annual retreats, we were quite vocal about finding ways to better support student teachers (NAPDS Essentials 2, 3 ,7). Our advocacy was palpable. Given our desire to make substantive changes and our years of PDS engagement, the time was ripe. A group of us brainstormed and volunteered to pilot a new student teaching model. Coincidently, as we pondered a new model, our liaison planned to return to her campus responsibilities on a full-time basis, no longer splitting her time between the college campus and the PDS.

Institutional Support

This change could not occur without institutional willingness and commitment to the PDS framework. It was vital for the partnering college to support any prospective student teaching design changes. At the college, there was agreement that the onset of edTPA as a requirement of teacher certification created a shift in thinking regarding the preparation of student teachers. This was evidenced during the student teaching semester. To evoke needed changes to the student teaching model in partnership with such a long-standing close collaborator was a natural occurrence.

As a champion of the PDS model and of Edison, the College had long recognized our emergence as teacher-leaders. We had consistently demonstrated our strong commitment to working alongside the College in the practical preparation of student teachers. A high level of mutual respect and trust arose. The College also recognized the value of the opportunity for student teachers to receive a large amount of instruction from experienced educators in actual school settings. This set the stage for agreement on the reimagined student teaching model that ensued.

Building Teacher Capacity

The current model at the College situates all practicum responsibilities for student teaching solely with the liaison, including conducting formal observations, teaching the seminar course, and communicating with the cooperating teachers. The liaison also maintains the required student teaching documents and collects the cooperating teachers' end of semester feedback and assessments. Although the cooperating teachers are fully engaged in the day-to-day mentoring of the student teachers in their classroom, they are not the "teacher on record" for the College's data collection and documentation.

In our re-imagined student teaching model, a group of us volunteered to divide the liaison's responsibilities into two separate roles: field supervisor and seminar instructor (NAPDS Essential 2) with the PDS liaison serving as a "guide on the side." Luckily the school district permitted us to use our lunch and planning times flexibly to conduct observations, meetings, or drop-in visits. Without the willing support of the district and the Principal, this initiative could not occur. The reconfiguration of the student teaching model yielded a total of three field supervisors, six cooperating teachers, and one course instructor for three to four student teachers per semester. The field supervisor, cooperating teacher, and course instructor created a triad of support for each student teacher in our school.

Carrie served as the course instructor and the liaison for all student teaching matters. In her role, she was employed as an adjunct professor with responsibilities for collecting and disseminating all student teaching materials, finding classroom placements, teaching weekly seminars, structuring edTPA tasks, as well as facilitating communication among student teachers, field supervisors and cooperating teachers.

For those of us serving as field supervisors, we took on additional responsibilities that had previously been reserved for our college liaison. We were compensated $300 each per semester. For example, we were responsible for grading student teachers' observations and sharing this data with Carrie-the course instructor, as well as the cooperating teacher and the student teacher. Each semester we observed four lessons in English Language Arts, math, science, and social studies. We also developed a new feedback protocol highlighting both warm and cool advice, which aligns to our philosophy, which recognizes that all teachers are on a continuum of growth and development.

Our cooperating teachers' role has essentially remained the same. However, the level of collaboration among all of us in supporting our student teachers has increased tenfold. In this new model, we've gone back to working with the student teacher for seven weeks, rather than the full 14 weeks of the semester. This provides our student teachers with another opportunity to student teach with another classroom teacher and grade level in our building. We provide daily feedback, monitor lesson plans, provide guidance and foster professionalism. A high level of collegiality is modeled and encouraged as part of the Edison culture and our own professional development is nurtured in our role. We also receive a college course voucher which may be shared with other staff members at our PDS.

Daily access to all members of the triad is integral to student teachers' success. In fact, our student teachers have become advocates for themselves. They reach out to specific members of the team to address their needs and identify which team member will best support them. In the past, student teachers may have only spoken to the cooperating teacher or had to wait until the college liaison was on-site to discuss the issue. Now their concerns are addressed immediately. Our student teachers thrive with this model because they have access to a multitude of resources not limited to their cooperating teachers and supervisors. This model enables our student teachers to check in with the supervisor or the course instructor on a daily basis both formally and informally. They stop in to ask questions and clarify their lesson plans. It is truly a collaborative model because each student teacher works with at least four master teachers. All of us have very diverse teaching styles which encourages the student teachers to establish their own style of teaching. Moreover, candidates begin to develop their critical professional network.

Quotes from student teachers include:

- "The program allowed exposure to a variety of experienced teachers and styles. Each of the teachers shared a different perspective with us."
- "The entire team was committed to developing my interests and supporting opportunities for me to grow to become a more effective teacher. I was able to learn not only about the classroom, but about the community and impact the school has on all of its surroundings."
- "The program provided a diverse learning experience. I loved the support of all the teachers on the triad. I knew they worked together to help all of the student teachers."

An analysis of end of year grades and observation reports revealed that student teachers demonstrate growth most notably in InSTAC Standard Two (Knowledge of Human Development and Learning), Standard Four (Multiple Instructional Strategies), and Standard Nine (Professional Development). Student teachers appeared to understand the developmental needs of students and select appropriate strategies to address the needs. A possible explanation is that the levels of support available during the semester coupled with the inclusive PDS culture facilitated student teachers' growth.

In addition to the growth documented, the school hired one of the student teachers to be hired for the upcoming school year. The team speculated that the support that this candidate received from her field supervisor (one of the Special Education teachers) and her cooperating teachers' guidance facilitated the candidate's rapid growth and made her an appropriate candidate. The seamlessness of the relationships enhanced the student teachers' ability to connect and grow as an educator. There is an underlying sense at Edison that we support and learn from each other regardless of where you are on the career ladder, whether you are a veteran educator or pre-service teacher.

While student teachers indicated feeling supported by the triad approach, we also benefited from the boundary spanning roles and interactions. As we engaged in roles that took us beyond our typical classroom duties, we continually reflected upon the type of high-leverage instructional practices we wanted our student teachers to implement. Moreover, we question our selection of strategies, often asking ourselves why, or how, effective the strategies are for improving student outcomes. These questions led to robust discussions about instruction, assessment, and materials. Guided by the discussions, we learn together to build consensus and share collaborative practices.

The course instructor commented:

> I was able to give the student teachers hands-on knowledge about what it was like to teach now, not five or ten years ago. As a classroom teacher, I can provide insights that many college professors cannot. Some examples are DRA administration, leveling books, testing data, IEPs, how to have a struggling student serviced at a Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 Intervention before their referral for Special Education services, in addition to the daily challenges a classroom teacher faces. Teaching the seminar in our building allows me to have providers speak to the student teachers about what their job entails in a very relaxed atmosphere. This opens more doors professionally for the student teachers.

The field supervisor added:

> I have the opportunity to formally and informally observe the student teacher to provide guidance and feedback that is timely and specific to the children and curriculum. These observations make me keenly aware and reflective of my own interactions and professional development while providing insight to the student teacher.

Lastly the cooperating teacher responded:

> My training as an EdTPA scorer provided a backdrop for presenting to our student teachers during seminar. This training enhanced my ability to examine my own professional practice more critically as well as to support my student teacher's ability to reflect on what is going well in any particular lesson and where we can challenge ourselves to better support the children in our class. This intellectual contemplation is nurtured as an integral part of our educational practice at Edison. Had I not been a PDS member serving in various capacities over the years, I would not have the opportunity for this type of professional growth.

Data gathered from teacher interviews, surveys and focus groups indicated the following themes: increased capacity to understand student teachers' needs and design appropriate interventions to address the needs, increased capacity to provide meaningful feedback and follow-up, increased capacity for reflection, and increased opportunities for collaboration. Furthermore, we found that candidates demonstrated positive growth in domains 1 through 4 of Danielson's Framework for Teaching.

Final Thoughts

This article highlights ways in which PDS stakeholders were motivated to take on new boundary spanning roles to develop student teachers' pedagogy and enhance their own practices. Given the positive response from the pilot participants, we believe PDSs can build mentor teachers' capacity to engage in professional learning communities that support student teachers in innovative ways.

References

Bandura, A. (1993) Perceived Self-Efficacy in Cognitive Development and Functioning, Educational Psychologist, 28:2, 117 148, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep2802_3

Catelli, L. A., Rutter, A. L., Tunks, J., Neapolitan, J., Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2019). Advancing professional development schools research: Reflections and perspectives from PDS leaders. *School-University Partnerships, 12*(1), 57-69.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). *Powerful teacher education.* San Francisco, California: Jossey Bass.

Ferrara, J. (2014). *Professional development schools: Creative solutions for educators.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Intrator, S.A., & Kunzman, R. (2006), Starting with the soul. *Educational Leadership, 63*(60), 27-29.

Keller-Mathers, S. (2018), In K.G. York, P. Prado Hill, L., K., Day et al (Eds). *Doing PDS:Stories and strategies from successful clinically rich practice*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Zeichner, K. (2007). Professional development schools in a culture of evidence and accountability. *School-University Partnerships. 1*(1), 9-17.

Carrie Poulos (cpoulos@portchesterschools.org) is an elementary school teacher who has worked at Thomas A. Edison School in Port Chester, New York for twenty five years. She helped pioneer the PDS partnership and works as an adjunct professor for Manhattanville College teaching Seminar for student teachers. With over thirty-four years of teaching experience at the elementary, middle and graduate levels.

Barbara Terracciano currently works at Thomas Edison Elementary School in Port Chester, NY as a literacy, math and ENL specialist supporting students in grades 1-5. She is also an adjunct professor at Manhattanville College teaching social studies methods for the past ten years. Barbara has served on the PDS Steering Committee since its inception, is an editor on the NAPDS Newsletter, has co-presented and facilitated workshops both locally and nationally in various settings, including the NAPDS Conferences. She also serves as a mentor and cooperating teacher. Barbara serves on many district and school wide committees and was recognized for Outstanding Service to the College and the School of Education by Adjunct Faculty in August 2019 and received the AERA Claudia A. Balach Teacher Researcher Award in April 2018.

Joanne Ferrara is the associate dean of undergraduate programs and a professor at Manhattanville College. She is the series co-editor for Professional Development School Research Book. She is the author of books, articles, blogs and has contributed chapters to several books on professional development schools, trauma responsive schools, and community school partnerships. She presents nationally and internationally on these topics.

Side by Side: Uncovering and Discovering Voice in the Classroom

Martha Horn, Rhode Island College

I arrive at Lea Riggin's classroom early one Winter morning, as I have, once a week, throughout the previous Fall. Twenty-five third graders chat with each other as they eat breakfast and Lea and I stand, discussing what we will focus on in the lesson that day. That is why I'm there—to teach a writing lesson, but more importantly, to work with Lea on the teaching of writing.

I teach writing and reading methods courses in a teacher education program where my students' practicum is built into coursework. All of my courses take place in an urban, public elementary school. By that, I don't mean we meet in the library or the music room or another space that happens to be free on the day we hold class; we have our own classroom dedicated to university students, a space we build together as we learn about the critical role of environment in learning and teaching. In our classroom, we explore theory, research, and practices about how children learn to write and read. Occasionally groups of children come to work with us there. Most of the time, teacher candidates apply what they are learning upstairs, in classrooms, with children.

Lea and I met only twice before my students began practicum in her classroom and in those meetings she told me, "You and your students are welcome in my room as long as you don't want me to teach; I'm not comfortable being watched." I asked if she would mind if I led the first few lessons with children—before my students took over—and she welcomed the idea. During the weeks we spent in Lea's classroom I saw what she had to offer my students: An organized, safe environment. A belief in learners of all ages. A desire to learn. These were qualities I wanted prospective teachers to recognize and value. They did. One teacher candidate commented, "I just love how Mrs. Riggin interacts with her students—she's calm and she's kind and she's respectful—to her students and to us." Another said, "I wish we could have stayed longer. I know I could learn a lot more from her."

My students taught reading and writing lessons in her classroom during Fall semester and Lea met with them after each lesson. She listened and offered feedback on teaching, in general, but wasn't comfortable offering feedback on teaching writing.

"I don't think I ever learned how to teach writing," she confided to me at the end of the semester. "I'm more comfortable teaching informational writing than personal narrative. I think it's because there is a structure to it; I don't always know what to say to them when they're writing personal narrative." I must have sensed that this moment of vulnerability could lead to something good—for her, for her students, for my teacher candidates, and for me—because I immediately responded, "I'd be happy to keep coming once a week after the semester ends to work on writing with you if you want," and just as quickly she said, "I'd like that." That is how I came to be standing there with her discussing what to address in our lesson on this cold morning in February.

Wanting to Know

I have an idea that I run by her.

"Who is just starting a story?" I ask. "Someone you think will tell it at the start of writing time, and not someone who has already told one." I suggest this because for the past eight weeks I've been puzzled by the quiet of this group when they come together on the rug. During read alouds, I'd leave space for natural talk but there wasn't any. I'd pose a question such as, "What are you thinking…?" and let the silence hang, but they'd look down, avoiding eye contact. It's unusual for a group of eight-, and nine-year-olds not to engage verbally during interactive read aloud, or to say, "No" when asked if they'd like to share at the end of writing time, even when I assure them, "I'll be there next to you." It didn't make sense because the classroom was a respectful place where children seemed comfortable, and I knew they had plenty to say; when they went off to write, they were full of talk. I explain my thinking to Lea: "If we get someone to tell a story at the start of writing—a story they're just beginning and, preferably, someone we haven't heard from yet—it may open up the talk."

Lea scans the room and offers, "Maya started that story about her birthday, the one she told you in the