

A Phenomenological Study of Professional Development Schools: How Principals Make Sense of Their Role

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ABSTRACT: Despite the significant number of universities that participate in Professional Development School (PDS) collaborations, very little empirical research has been published on the role of the PDS principal. If the PDS is to be the school of the future, it is important to have leaders prepared, either within educational leadership programs or supported through PDS partnerships, to support creating a culture of professional learning. This type of preparation might require a change in structure and culture from the traditional principal preparation model. In this qualitative study, the ways in which three Professional Development School principals made sense of their roles were examined. Analysis identified six assertions that characterize the lifeworlds of the principals and their PDS roles. By studying and understanding how these assertions reflect the ways principals made sense of their work, various stakeholders can use these data to assist in the selection of quality candidates for PDS principal positions or schools for partnership work.

Since the late 20th century when organizations like the Holmes Group proposed the creation of new institutions referred to as professional development schools (PDSs), universities across the United States have entered into partnerships with PK-12 schools in the hopes of improving teacher education (The Holmes Group: 1985, 1990, 1995). In 2002, Levine reported that approximately 30% of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) colleges and universities identified their institutions as being involved in PDS work. Despite the significant number of universities that participate in PDS collaborations, very little empirical research has been published on the role of the PDS principal. If the PDS is to be the school of the future, it is important to have leaders prepared within educational leadership programs to support such entities. This type of preparation might require a change in structure and culture from the traditional principal preparation model.

Given that PDSs are an example of educational innovation, understanding the role

of the school leader in this reform is critical. Several studies have outlined the importance of the principal as a leader of change within schools. First, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) described the position of principal using such terms as "gatekeeper," highlighting the pivotal role held by these school-based leaders in implementing school reform. Additionally, Kersh and Mastal (1998) argued that the principal is a key component in any collaborative school reform effort. Also, Miles (1983) found in his study that the principal is a critical ingredient in institutionalizing change at the school level.

The motivation behind the movement for PDSs was the need to improve student achievement by creating better schools through better training of teachers. This required a new vision of what it meant to be a school principal. Lashway (2003) pointed out the challenges associated with preparing principals to lead in a way that placed a greater focus on student learning and student achievement.

Beyond the need for increased emphasis on student learning, these PDSs committed to movement were also concerned with professional learning in the schools by and for prospective teachers, practicing teachers, and principals. The PDS standards created by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (2006) outlined criteria that envisioned PDSs as schools focused on learning for all, indicating the importance of establishing a professional learning culture within schools. The impetus to create a professional learning culture within PDSs, emerged about the same time that Barth (1990) wrote about the role the principal serves as the lead learner in a school. Given the push to create professional learning cultures within schools and the key role a principal plays in the process, it is imperative that new insights into the roles and responsibilities of PDS principals be explored. By understanding the principal's role more completely, a guide for current and future school leaders as well those who prepare them for those roles might be offered. The principal is a critical ingredient in all stages of PDS work (Foster, Loving, & Shumate, 2000). To these ends, in this study the roles of three elementary PDS principals committed to creating a learning community similar to that advocated by the NCATE PDS standards were examined.

Methods

Given that the purpose of this research project was to understand the phenomenon of principal leadership within one network of elementary PDSs more fully, a phenomenological framework was used to investigate each principal in the study. Phenomenology is a research strategy designed to find the essence and meaning of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). In this case, the phenomenon was principal leadership within a PDS. A phenomenological research method was used to answer the research question, "How do principals make sense of their roles in a PDS?" This qualitative interview study was conducted using Seidman's (1998) three interview protocol for phenomenological studies. Each of the three

interviews in the series had a specific purpose. The intent of the first interview was to collect background information on the interviewee. Called a focused-life history, the goal of this session was to put the participants' experiences into context and to have them tell about themselves and the topic in the present. Interview 2 was designed to determine the contemporary experiences of the participant in detail. The goal of this session was to ask for stories to elicit details. Finally, the purpose of Interview 3 was to obtain the participant's reflection on the meaning of their experience. This session addressed the intellectual and emotional connections between the participant's work and life.

Participants were selected based on criterion sampling, a kind of purposive sampling (Patton, 2002). The selection of the three principals was purposeful in that their high level of participation in the PDS partnership work and their interest in creating a culture of professional learning improved the possibility of producing thick, rich explanations. The interviews with the principal were audio-recorded and then transcribed. The transcripts were analyzed to uncover emerging themes present in the work of the three principals. Seidman's (1998) basic structure for creating profiles was used to transform the data into portraits (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) through the process of studying, reducing, and then analyzing. The studying phase occurred as the tapes were transcribed independently. Each interview was listened to at least three times. The transcripts were then read and edited. Next, the most relevant passages were marked and then studied to determine names for emerging themes. Finally, a cross-case analysis was conducted, studying the portraits and themes in the context of the literature on professional development schools and leadership, from which the six assertions emerged.

Consistent with phenomenology, trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in this study was enhanced by maintaining an audit trail, using member checks to clarify and correct the interview transcripts, and using member checks to confirm emerging themes.

Context

The principals in this study were the leaders in three schools within a 10-school PDS network affiliated with a research-intensive university in the southeastern United States. The university's elementary education program was unified with its elementary special education program. The degree program was five years in length with the fifth year being a master's degree year. During the last semester of their fourth year, students were placed in dyads for a 14-week pre-internship. As pre-interns, the students were typically placed with one mentor teacher, spending time in the classroom four hours per day, four days per week. University personnel, most often graduate assistants referred to as field advisors, supervised the pre-interns and instructed them in seminar on the remaining weekday for a period of two to three hours. Students earned three hours of credit for the seminar and an additional three hours of credit for the four days of pre-internship work.

The study was conducted during the second year of the program in which every elementary education pre-intern from the university was placed in a PDS. The number of pre-intern dyads ranged from four to nine in each school. Two school sites were combined into one cohort. The cohorts took their elementary social studies methods course and a reading course together. These courses were held at one of the two school sites when space was available. In some cases the seminar classes were not combined into cohorts, but instead were taught by the field advisor for each school's group of pre-interns. During the fall semester, four to six PDSs worked with pre-interns and in the spring, this number rose to as many as 10 PDSs. The schools had been involved in the PDS work between two and seven years.

Participants

The three principals in this study were Brent, Rachel, and Tanya. The principals were selected based on the time and level of participation of their schools in the PDS program. One principal, Brent, had been involved with the

program since its inception. The other two principals were leaders in the schools that had recently become PDSs, but were actively involved in the program both within and outside the context of their schools. A brief description of each principal and his or her background and context is provided in the following paragraphs. Pseudonyms are used for all principals, university personnel, school staff, and schools.

Brent

Brent is the principal of Countryside Elementary School and at the time of the study had served in that role for 15 years. This rural school, located about 20 miles outside of a city of approximately 100,000, serves students in grades three through five. There were approximately 430 students in the school and 35 teachers. Countryside Elementary School is important to the community. Parents tend to be very supportive of the school and Brent. Although the community is experiencing growth, parents and grandparents of many of the children at Countryside were students at the school themselves.

Countryside Elementary School had been involved in the PDS partnership for seven years. The staff was very stable demonstrated by the fact that Brent normally hired only one to two new teachers a school year. With a minority rate of 38% and a free and reduced lunch rate of 54%, Countryside was a diverse school. Countryside failed to meet AYP during the 2005–2006 school year, but was successful in meeting the federal standards in the 2006–2007 school year.

Brent moved from south Florida to attend the university in the late 1960s. He began teaching in the early 1970s. During his 35 years in education, he has taught at the elementary, middle and high school levels in four different schools and has held positions at the district office. He has been principal at Countryside Elementary for 15 years, the only school where he has served in that capacity.

Tanya

Tanya, the second principal in the study, relocated to central Florida after growing up

and working for six years as a teacher and assistant principal in California. During her 33 years in the district, Tanya served as an elementary classroom teacher, curriculum specialist, and principal at Benton Elementary and then Parkway Elementary. Tanya served as principal at Parkway Elementary School for seven years. Parkway has participated in the PDS program for two years. Due to shifting growth in the city, the school which was previously considered a suburban school is becoming increasingly diverse and is developing characteristics of an urban school. Parkway is located approximately three miles from the university. Positioned at the corner of two busy streets, Parkway is surrounded by houses and located close to a city park and nature trail. There is a large core of veteran teachers at Parkway, but in the past several years Tanya has had to hire more than 10 teachers. There are more than 50 teachers at Parkway. Demographically, the minority rate increased to 44% and the free and reduced lunch rate is at 43%. The PK-5 school serves nearly 700 students. Parkway failed to meet AYP during the 2005–2006 school year but met the federal standards in the 2006–2007 school year.

Rachel

The third principal in the study, Rachel, was in her fourth year at a PK-5 rural elementary school serving nearly 600 students. Rachel supervises 42 teachers at Benton Elementary School. In the four years since she has been principal, the school grades have gone from a C, to one B followed by three A's. Benton serves approximately 600 PK-5 students. The school's minority rate was 29% and the free and reduced lunch rate is 49%. The community of Benton is experiencing a great deal of growth which has enabled Rachel to hire nearly one-fourth of the staff in just four years at the school. The rural school is located approximately 15 miles from the university. Benton has been involved with the PDS program for two years and met AYP during the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years. Prior to this principalship, Rachel spent four years as an assistant principal in what she

considered a large, urban school of over 800 students. Prior to that, she served as a science teacher for seven years, working in both suburban and rural middle schools all within the same district.

Results

The phenomenon explored in this study was principal leadership within a PDS; data analysis identified six assertions that characterize how principals make sense of their PDS roles.

Assertion 1: When principals willingly embrace the PDS work by seeing connections between the PDS goals and their other leadership work, these connections allow the PDS work to become “a part of” rather than “apart from” the beliefs, experiences, and goals that underlie their current leadership.

All three principals demonstrated through their work the ways in which the PDS collaborative efforts were connected to their school mission. Each principal has shaped the partnership work into a form that assists them in reaching their intended school goals, ranging from improved student learning, to empowering staff and fostering teacher leadership.

Rachel's connection to the goals of the PDS work is primarily founded in her initiative as principal to improve the instructional skills of her teachers for the benefit of student learning. As the newest of the three principals, Rachel exerted great effort to change the culture of the school to one that was more focused on accountability. She used the partnership work not only as a catalyst to initiate changes, but also as a support system to guide her teachers through the process. After describing her past experiences with interns as being disconnected from the school and its needs, with the elementary schools simply providing a “place” for the teacher candidates and the occasional reward of “tuition waivers” for the classroom teachers, Rachel shared the story of what led her

to consider letting her school become a PDS site.

But this was more. They wanted to help me with my school improvement efforts. They wanted to give me relationships with expertise. Cozette (university professor and PDS liaison) knew we were working on writing so she introduced me to Marion Green, a university professor that was an expert in writing. She gave me a supervisor for the pre-interns that had a background in writing. She quickly connected with, 'These are things we can do for the school. We can help the school.' And she encouraged me to go back to school and so it was like we had shared goals. Everybody was talking about school improvement. Yes it provided a place for them to have pre-interns and interns, but they were all working on our school improvement efforts. Having a large group meant all those extra sets of hands. We were doing full inclusion and so extra sets of hands in classrooms are wonderful. And by providing a larger group rather than just a few interns, it gave us that. (Session 2, Lines 37–52)

Rachel was able to envision how the PDS partnership could be more productive than the previous clinical model. Rachel made deliberate and sustained efforts to match the PDS work so that it supported the stated school improvement plan goals. Rachel clarified with university PDS personnel the techniques and strategies that she believed would establish the school culture she envisioned. Rachel believed that small group instruction, inclusion, and using data to guide instructional decisions were areas in which her ideas matched the university's philosophy about classroom instruction. By pushing her staff to move toward these instructional techniques, Rachel was facilitating the creation of a school culture and classroom environment that was a better fit for the types of placements the university desired for their pre-service teachers. The goals of the university in many ways mirrored Rachel's goals for her school, allowing the PDS work to become an integral part of her role as the school's leader.

Brent demonstrated his connection with goals of the PDS through his beliefs about

school renewal. Serving as principal in a school with an established culture, Brent was working to build on the strengths of his teaching staff by providing an atmosphere of continual professional development within the context of their day-to-day work.

Exposing teachers to knowledge, professional development. . . . you know, that's really what changes schools and that's what makes good teachers want to come to places. I've got a pretty good staff here, you know. In fact, I've got more teachers with advanced degrees, higher percentage in this school than in the district. Actually, this December, I'll have more teachers with specialist's degrees than any school in the district, and not a higher percentage, but more teachers. I'm not paying anything more than anybody else. What attracts, in the era of a teacher shortage . . . you know, how do I attract the kind of teachers that we want here? Everyone else wants them too. I can't pay them anymore. We're a little country school out here in the middle of nowhere. I can't offer a lot of the things that, some of the facilities, the other perks that other people can. But what I think has helped me to attract the kind of teachers I want is the professional development opportunities that excite the really good teachers and the teacher leaders, the opportunity . . . and I could not do that without the resources of the college. So if you look at what has helped this school develop over time, we were at one time academically at the bottom of the district number of years ago to where we are now. There's a lot of little things, but I think the critical factor to me, is one way or another, most of it comes back to the partnership I have with the college. It has given me resources that I couldn't get from the district. And the different kind of resources, the intellectual capital that exists over there, but I think that, kind of the stars and the moon are beginning to align with what the Dean wants to do and some different department chairs and all that. I think people are beginning to understand the power for both sides. (Session 1, Lines 512–531)

The PDS partnership provided Brent with the resources he needed for staff development.

Although he did receive resources in the form of university graduate courses and other expert assistance, the core of the professional development was tied to the daily, school-based experiences with the interns and teacher inquiry. Brent believed it was important for everyone involved in the PDS work to continue to grow and learn, including the university. The PDS partnership was utilized by Brent in a way that worked to foster deeper collaboration among his staff and with the university. Brent has used the partnership with the university to assist him in facilitating growth in himself and his faculty.

Tanya worked continually to refocus the PDS work at Parkway to ensure that it matched her primary goal for the school and its teachers; improving student learning. As a school leader, Tanya spoke of always bringing the focus back to student learning. Tanya believed the PDS partnership held the potential to improve student learning, which led her to accept the opportunity for her school to become a PDS site. Tanya shared how the partnership, accompanied with the influx of interns, impacted her school.

The family to me has just become larger. You know the pre-interns become a part of that team. So definitely the family is larger. I think there is more emphasis on what the student work looks like rather than what the teachers are doing. (Session 2, Lines 351–352)

Tanya used her affiliation with the university through the PDS work to provide her staff with learning opportunities to assist them in improving their skills as classroom instructors. The PDS collaboration, including the inquiry work of interns and interested teachers, assisted Tanya in strengthening the focus on student work.

Assertion 2: The lived experiences valued by principals throughout their career are closely tied to the leadership style they promote as PDS principals.

The past experiences of the three principals can clearly be pictured in how they operate as PDS principals. While these experiences are also

visible in their roles as principals before the PDS work, the collaboration with the university has provided more connection between their lived experiences and current roles as leaders. Beliefs about accountability, culture, and collaboration surface in their work as PDS principals.

Rachel's past experiences associated with accountability have shaped the ways in which she implements the PDS work at Benton. Rachel expects to see student learning gains. During her time as a classroom teacher, Rachel shared her frustrations with the idea that "weak teachers" were receiving positive yearly evaluations. She felt as though they were not being held accountable as teachers should be. This belief in holding teachers accountable surfaced in her role as an assistant principal.

I would say something that definitely helped make me the principal I am today was from when I was an assistant principal in sitting through grievances and union issues and mediation and I sat through several that went all the way through to terminating an employee. Those were difficult but definitely learning experiences. It definitely made me see the importance of dealing with issues. I had worked at schools when I was a teacher with administrators who did not tackle issues, who just went about day-to-day, 'Everything was happy, everybody's fine,' just didn't tackle the staff member that was ineffective or... it was just kind of turn your head. And that bothered me as an employee. ... I formed opinions watching that. If I ever became an administrator, so that my great employees' evaluations had weight to them, I would have to be willing to tackle issues and deal with the union and sit through the hard meetings. (Session 1, Lines 286–297)

Rachel's principal in this situation took on the challenges associated with ensuring teachers performed at an adequate level, often taking on the teachers' union despite a lack of district support. When Rachel assumed the reins at Benton, she worked hard to hold her teachers accountable, even when the support she felt she needed and deserved from the district was not forthcoming. She had learned in her roles as a teacher and as an assistant principal that leaders

must hold teachers to a high standard in addition to differentiating the support she provides them. As a part of her emphasis on accountability, Rachel used the partnership to improve the skills of her teachers to assist them in reaching the high standards she has set for them. Rachel viewed the collaboration with the university as a resource to assist her in helping her teachers achieve the high expectations she has set for them. Rachel used the collaboration as a way to “meet the teachers where they were” and support their individual professional development needs. Her past experience as a teacher provided an understanding of the importance of structuring professional growth around the specific needs of individuals while still working to ensure that each faculty member was continuing to learn and develop. Even strong teachers need to continue to grow.

Tanya’s commitment to curriculum manifests in her role as a PDS principal. As a former curriculum resource teacher (CRT), Tanya differed from many principals in the way she viewed the partnership activities. While many principals would consider the additional work associated with hosting pre-service teachers as a negative, Tanya’s past work as a CRT, which required her to seek additional assistance from outside sources, led her to view the pre-service teachers as a resource that could help her teachers in their goal to improve student achievement. Also, Tanya shared in the interviews how her first principal enlisted his staff to take on leadership roles in the school.

He was a good administrator. In fact he was a great administrator because he knew how to use other people’s expertise. When he put me in the curriculum job, he would make most of my assignments working with kindergarten, first, and second grade. When he had a problem teacher in first grade, which was the one that he assigned me to because he knew that I had that area of expertise. So he would delegate those kinds of responsibilities to me. . . . He was very good at delegating and empowering. I did learn that you empower people from him because he was very good at that. And then he would hold them accountable. You can’t just empower without checking on

them every six weeks. And he would do that, but in a very professional way. He appeared to be very laid-back when he was doing all of this, very relaxed. But I would find out later, of course, that he was not. He was very intense inside, but his style outside was that he was very relaxed. (Member Check, Lines 67–80)

Tanya has repeated this strategy of using the expertise of other by delegating additional leadership responsibilities to her CRT, behavior resource teacher (BRT), and especially her team leaders so that they may assist her in helping the school reach its goals related to the fostering of student learning. Tanya used her collaboration with university personnel in the same manner, striving to keep the PDS work connected to student learning. Tanya’s experiences as a teacher leader could be observed in the way she distributed power and responsibilities to her staff in order to have a team approach to improving student learning and school improvement.

Brent’s history related to school culture and teacher leadership played a significant role in his PDS work with the university. As a pre-service teacher, Brent saw how culture could negatively impact the ability of teachers to meet the needs of the children in the school. Having clinical experiences and student teaching in high schools before and during desegregation allowed him to see how school culture can contribute to or distract from the success of the students. The adults in the building set the tone for the school culture.

You’ve got a bunch of poor country kids up here. You’ve got a bunch of poor country kids in Marshall County. Kids are not really that much different anywhere. Even at Carlise [economically advantaged school] where I was, it was just different cultures. You see what’s different. Kids aren’t really that much different from one place to another. But what they encounter and how they respond to their environment I think is what makes them act different. (Session 3, Lines 268–273)

While completing his student teaching in a recently desegregated school, Brent was exposed

to the challenges associated with blending the staffs of the white and black high schools.

The same kind of rift we saw between the students, we saw in the faculty. There was the black faculty who had all been assigned there. They, for the most part, did not communicate. They were an older group. I was 20-something so they might have been 40. But it seemed to be largely a predominantly older, white group of faculty who had been there forever and then an older group of black faculty who had been at Carver or wherever they had been forever. They did not communicate. They did not acknowledge one another. Again, the black teachers did not want to be there, white teachers did not want them there. Both their whole life and career had been upset and everybody kind of knew it. (Session 1, 357-364)

While being exposed to this toxic culture that existed between seasoned faculty, Brent was able to build relationships and become part of a subculture of newer teachers who did not have strong connections to the segregated schools. This experience is apparent in Brent's role as a PDS principal. He works to build a collaborative environment where every member of the school staff is valued and appreciated. Significant efforts are made to include new faculty in the family as well as to encourage and value their knowledge and possible future contributions to the school.

In his role as a classroom teacher at several elementary and middle schools, Brent was exposed to principal leadership that fostered and often relied on teacher leadership.

At Greenberg (middle school) it was the same kind of thing [as at Balch and Carlise Elementary Schools]. We were expected to be leaders. We were taught that we were leaders but also that what was different there was the school was organized more democratically. Again, this is the late seventies, early eighties, mid-seventies when it started. But the school was built, this was the early middle school movement, under a very different kind of organizational structure. There was still a lot of talk about differentiated staffing with some people

who were half-time assistant principals, half-time teachers. But again, we were teams. We started out initially to be multi-age teams but it kind of changed back into grade level teams by the time I got there. We were allowed to manage and were kind of required to manage most of the day-to-day operations of our team. We would meet usually once every week or two weeks. When I became team leader, we would talk about what we were doing to make sure we were all on the same page so that the sixth grade isn't doing something that is going to create problems for eighth grade. Occasionally, we would have curriculum kind of meetings across grade levels. (Session 3, Lines 350-362)

Collaboration and teacher empowerment were demonstrated, in varying degrees, at the schools where Brent taught. The leadership models used by the principals of these schools were incorporated into Brent's principal leadership style.

As a result of these experiences, Brent's efforts as a PDS principal are directly connected to his beliefs about the importance of teacher leadership and collegial school cultures. Brent seeks to connect the PDS work and his beliefs by providing his staff with professional development opportunities that focus on improving their skills as teacher leaders.

Assertion 3: Being open and willing to change is important for principals if the PDS work is going to be integrated into the culture of the school.

All three PDS principals were willing to make changes in themselves or their school to facilitate the partnership work. An openness to change is important in PDS collaborative work. Once again, each of these principals was somewhat atypical in how they were willing to embrace change. In some way, the principals made some change in the culture of their school or in their personal practice as a result of the PDS work.

Rachel encouraged her staff to grow in their teaching skills and to embrace new instructional methods. From the moment she assumed leadership at Benton Elementary, Rachel

pushed for change and often found herself battling to eliminate or improve upon school traditions.

Because you are in the school, [culture] really affects everyone in the building, new staff coming on, it's a constant, it's a battle. As an administrator you try to create a positive climate. When you have often very veteran teachers who are resistant to change, who want it to be 'traditional,' they want to hang on to the traditions that sometimes are not always positive for kids. That is definitely something I have had to face here at Benton. When I got here, the average teaching experience was 26 years . . . the average. I had many 30 plus. And there were a lot of traditions in place that had passed their time, in my opinion. This school was a low "C" school, dropping rapidly to a "D" and one of the things that was brought out in the interview [for the principal position at Benton] was 'How are you going to change the school?' I had done the research to know a lot of things that needed to happen. I think that is part of the reason I got the job because they thought that I could do it. (Session 1, Lines 85-101)

In addition to insisting on change at Benton and providing support through the PDS work to make it happen, Rachel is also concentrating on her own growth by returning to the university to pursue a doctoral degree. In addition to taking on these responsibilities, Rachel has assumed more roles as a result of her work with the university such as seminar instructor and conference presenter. Rachel has used the PDS partnership to assist her in her work toward improving the school.

Tanya's move from the classroom, to curriculum resource teacher, and then to the principalship were motivated by her goal of improving instruction for the benefit of the students. Understanding the challenges and barriers associated with change, Tanya positioned herself to serve in roles that provided her with increased opportunities to positively influence the experiences provided to school children.

I could have more of an influence over what was happening in the classroom, over

children's learning than being in one classroom. . . But you can influence a lot more people and I think especially make an impact on children's learning. And the same thing again, leaving the curriculum resource job, you lead. . . I mean my CRT is definitely a leader. She is an academic leader. But she leads without authority. She leads through expertise. I guess that the curriculum resource teacher, people look at them. . . that was my feeling, that you didn't have the authority to make changes with teachers. You certainly didn't do the hiring, you didn't do evaluations. You would have to lead through expertise. (Session 1, Lines 42-51)

Tanya, as the leader of the school, has molded the partnership with the university in a way that complements her goals for Parkway. She has combined her "official" role with her expertise to incorporate changes for the school through the PDS work.

Despite the fact that Brent was the most experienced principal, he was very open to the idea of change. He shared his views on change in the context of growth and renewal.

I think there has to be a sense of continual change. I mean you don't want the wheels falling off, you don't want to be reacting to crises. But if you don't have something new to do or something you are trying to tweak or something you are trying to fix, something you are trying to start new then the school becomes flat. When you start trying to replicate what you did last year, because it is easy and predictable, then the school kind of loses its life, at least for me. (Session 1, Lines 98-103)

There were several examples of how the PDS partnership has altered Brent's role as a principal. Brent has changed by integrating inquiry into the professional development evaluation process at Countryside. Brent actually ended up taking on responsibilities that encouraged change outside of his school. Also, he has also become more involved with the university by presenting at state and national conferences.

Assertion 4: Principals can enter at multiple career points and with a variety of school conditions by adopting either a developing, integrating, or culminating stance on the PDS work.

The participants in this study were at different points in their careers as principals. Rachel had had less than five years in the role as principal. Tanya, after many years as a CRT, was finishing her 10th year as a principal, and her seventh year in a rapidly changing school context. Brent, after 15 years as a principal, was leading in a small, stable school. Despite the differences in their experiences and time as administrators, each principal utilized the partnership to enhance their work as principals.

Rachel entered the PDS partnership as a novice principal. She is an example of a PDS principal at the *developing* level, just learning her craft. Rachel used the PDS work to assist her in her own professional growth as well as the growth of her staff. Despite their concerns over previous bad experiences with university interns, Rachel had Cozette, the university liaison, explain the program to her teachers. Rachel was willing to consider participation in the PDS program because of her commitment to change and school improvement. Rachel saw the potential in the partnership to assist her teachers in meeting her expectations.

When I came I was very data-driven, had been trained that way from my assistant principal position. And so I brought that in to, that it was going to be a part of every week looking at data, looking at gains at the end of the year, 'Who gained, who didn't, why?' having all that kind of discussion. And so because of my pressure of accountability, they didn't want to turn over their classroom to interns because they needed to be assured that they got gains. So that I think, the combination of bad experiences plus my pressure on them for accountability, they didn't want any part of interns. And so I think that the model had changed and that we were pushing small-group instruction. And having the pair of pre-interns, the teachers could see, 'Okay maybe this small-group instruction could

work better with two extra sets of hands, and that maybe more individual needs could be met.' So their gains may grow. So their interest was piqued from that. And then when they saw it for one semester, they definitely bought into it. (Session 2, Lines 96-110)

The PDS work at Benton is connected to Rachel's work toward developing a school culture of accountability that embraces small group instruction and inclusion. Not only is the partnership developing through the PDS experience, but Rachel and her staff are also creating a new school culture and honing their teaching and leadership skills.

Tanya's work with the PDS could be described as *integrating* as she is incorporating the PDS work into her current approach to leadership. Tanya works to meld her school mission of focusing on the student achievement with the PDS work. Besides using the partnership to strengthen the focus on student work, Tanya also viewed the PDS partnership as a way to influence the university to create what she believes would be a stronger teacher education program.

I think I saw the collaboration as being a way to influence . . . I mean, my belief that these folks needed more of a lengthy experience in the same setting. . . . To me, if you have these people longer, there, it's a two-way collaboration. It is not just the university, because the pre-interns, the interns are collaborating with the teacher and the teacher is also collaborating and looking at student work and inquiry. So to me that was the appeal to do this. (Session 2, Lines 49-67)

While Tanya saw the benefits of inquiry, she selected and molded inquiry and staff development opportunities connected with the PDS partnership to ensure they were integrated with the mission of improving student learning.

Brent, the participant with the most experience as a principal, took a stance of *culmination* regarding the PDS work. Brent is using the partnership work to further define himself as a principal and to foster his professional growth. He used the PDS work in

the same manner with his staff. Inquiry and staff development tied to the PDS work took his teachers to the next level by empowering them to guide their own growth.

It is tough to change me first. The PDS, more than anything else, has changed the school by taking me from where I was probably six or seven years ago, which was kind of in a fairly comfortable state of, 'Okay we used to suck in a lot of stuff and now we are pretty good, we've got some ribbons and awards' so it is pretty easy to start coasting at that point. That is probably the end of that first lifecycle of principalship. And that probably would have been a good time to change schools, although I wasn't inclined to do that at that point. But, had this not come along, then I think that my growth would have kind of leveled out. And then you kind of begin to tweak things. Then all of our old changes, and innovations, and all that become the new status quo that we preserve and we protect and so then the school becomes just kind of stagnant. But I think the school is a very different kind of a place now just because of our relationship and the PDS and what's happened. Not just to the teachers, but to me too. (Session 2, Lines 57-68)

Assertion 5: When PDSs engage in inquiry into student learning, inquiry serves as a "tipping point" that increases principal commitment to the partnership.

"Simply stated, teacher inquiry is defined as a systematic, intentional study of one's own practice" (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003, p. 5). Inquiry is identified as a critical component of the PDS and for the participants in this study played a significant role in each principal's work as a PDS leader. Although they varied in how they utilized inquiry, each principal shaped the use of inquiry at their school in a way they contributed to the vision they had for their school. The point at which teacher inquiry became a central ingredient, engrained in the culture of the PDS, the more observable was the commitment of the principals to the PDS work.

As the newest two PDS principals in the study, Tanya and Rachel were just beginning to embrace teacher inquiry. Tanya valued inquiry as a tool to assist teachers in strengthening their practice, therefore improving student achievement. Tanya expressed a belief that inquiry is facilitating more reflection among herself and her faculty.

When I read some of the inquiry projects, and I've only read through about four or five of them, I'm getting my eyes opened about some of the comments that are in there. Somehow we are becoming more student oriented I think. We've always been student oriented. It seems to be keying in more on achievement of children because all the inquiry has to do either with improving the student, if you can improve the behavior of the child so that he learns more or it is an academic situation, how you improve the children's learning or maybe we have always done that and it's just that now we are, we do more reflection. (Session 2, Lines 353-360)

While Tanya is cautiously encouraging her staff to participate in formal inquiry studies, she acknowledges how the inquiry work is contributing to her school goals. The increase in reflection on practice is strengthening the focus on student achievement. Although she may "invite" teachers to conduct an inquiry, Tanya most often relies on the "each one teach one" model; teacher leaders and teams are used to assist Tanya in guiding and fostering school change.

Rachel believes the conducting of inquiry is an important strategy for building relationships between mentor teachers and prospective teachers. She also views inquiry as a tool for assisting the school in reaching its school improvement goals.

Brent values inquiry in the same ways as Tanya and Rachel, but goes one step further by conducting his own inquiry studies. The three PDS principals in this study accept the use of inquiry as a valid tool of the partnership work. Although the way they envision its use may differ, all three principals support their teachers'

efforts to conduct inquiry projects to study their practice.

You know, inquiry so what? You are supposed to be doing something and contributing something to the school. But I think that . . . I was probably stuck and probably still would be stuck into that third quadrant. And what I have done, particularly through inquiry which is a result of the PDS relationship, has really helped me get into the fourth quadrant with most of the faculty or at least the culture of the school. It is something that is kind of invisible to everyone but me and maybe a few others that come out here and work. That might be the most important thing I have contributed to this school. It is the one thing that anybody on the outside would never even know or recognize. But yet in terms of what the school is going to be like five or 10 years after I leave, that might be important. I think that might be the most useful thing that I've done. I think that's a direct result of what the PDS has done for me because you can only do so much for the school. (Session 2, Lines 46–57)

Assertion 6: Principals are motivated to participate in PDS work for multiple reasons.

Each of the three principals had somewhat different goals for participating in the partnership with the university. The vision each principal has was connected to his or her beliefs about leadership and the role of the principal. These goals were also influenced by the contexts of their schools including the readiness of their staff. Rachel's situation placed her in a position of having to be more directive with her staff. Rachel was attempting to build a school culture so she used the PDS work to assist her in creating a new school culture. Brent and Tanya were in more stable schools. Their PDS work was less about establishing school culture and instead was able to be focused on fostering the professional development of the teachers and improving student learning.

While all three principals acknowledged that the “additional hands,” resources from the university, and potential job candidates were all

important reasons for participating in the PDS program, the most telling answer was offered by each administrator.

I think the difference would be just their involvement in the PDS work, being closely involved with the students, with the UF supervisor, closely involved in their assignments . . . ensuring that the things that we want to have happen with the pre-interns, the experiences they have, are accomplished, working with the mentor teachers, being involved in the mentor meetings, being involved in their discussions and their issues so that not only are we improving our program here but their teaching is improving, their mentor relationship is improving. The things that they may be interested in exploring, I can provide resources to do that. So I think that'd all be the difference for good principal versus a good PDS principal. (Rachel - Member Check, Lines 6-13)

I think what is different is that whole idea of what the partnership is. The college has to invest in the success of my students. I have to invest in the success of theirs. I have to make teacher education, you know, it's not a priority because the education of the little people here are my priority, but I have to assume some responsibility for that. That means I have to invest time and effort into helping the people at the college do their job just like they have to invest some time and effort into helping me do my job. I think that is the difference. When you are partners, one cannot be successful without the other helping. If one partner is not willing to help complement the other and make him or her successful then it is not partnership. It is just two people doing stuff. (Brent - Session 3, Lines 552–559)

I think having that collaboration too is bringing some teachers and interns to a higher level, to being more professional because they know they are models for these folks. So when you have other people coming into your building, well it makes me want to be more professional. I think it typically brings the teachers to a higher level. Because they know that they know it is their responsibility to make an impact on

future teachers. (Tanya - Session 3, Lines 83–88)

There were other examples of how the PDS work benefited the principals in their work as leaders. Brent and Rachel shared how the partnership work through the PDS has facilitated their professional growth: Brent's work with inquiry and Rachel's return to school for her doctoral degree. All three principals have had their staff participate in professional development opportunities connected to the PDS work. Brent, Tanya, and Rachel all shared in the interviews how the partnership benefited the students by providing additional, trained adults to facilitate improved classroom instruction. The three principals also spoke of their commitment to work with the PDS program for the purpose of improving the teacher education program. Each principal has taken the opportunity to make suggestions about needed changes in the program. Also, in a time of teacher shortages, each of the three principals shared how they valued having future teachers working in their schools. This afforded them an opportunity to view potential candidates in a teaching environment and to see the prospective teacher function in the context and culture of their individual schools.

Conclusion

The researcher argues in this presentation of the data that strong principal leadership in a PDS has some common themes, yet gifted professionals use their individual talents and the context of their schools to make the partnership work best for them, their staff, and students. Each of the principals in the study embraced the partnership with the university and made connections between their current goals and philosophy to the PDS work. The way in which Rachel, Tanya, and Brent integrated the PDS work into the school culture was uniquely designed for their individual schools. The commitment of the three principals in combination with the flexibility of the university staff encouraged the development of a program that

worked not only for the pre-service teachers, but also the mentors and their school.

The six assertions proposed as a result of this study can assist stakeholders in selecting and training quality candidates for PDS leadership roles. Motivation and experience can help determine those individuals who are better suited to serve as PDS principals. First, principals should be open and motivated to participate in partnership work, which includes demonstrating a willingness to share responsibility for educating the pre-service teachers and inviting the university to assist in strengthening the skills of the in-service teachers to improve student learning. This integration of purpose seems to be critical. Also, understanding the previous leadership experiences of the principals can provide a map for how the partnership can develop. Those principals who embrace the concept "everyone learns" seem to be the best candidates for leading in PDSs. Finally, there is value in selecting principals with varying degrees of experience. Veteran principals and novices alike can make valuable contributions to the partnership. By studying and understanding the ways these assertions reflect how principals made sense of their work, practitioners and researchers can develop a framework for promoting PDS principal development. It must not be forgotten that strong principal leadership is a critical ingredient in fostering powerful school-university partnerships. ^{SUP}

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