

**Fostering Teacher Leadership for Mutually Beneficial Programs:
An Early Childhood PDS Partnership Case Study**

M. Barbara Trube, Ed.D.
Ohio University

Nancy Cryder Jones, M.A.
Ohio University

Kit E. Kinnamon, M.Ed.
Ohio University

Leslie Smith, M.Ed.
Ross-Pike Educational Service District

Susan Congrove, M.A.T., M.S.
Ohio University

Karen Corcoran, M.Ed.
Ohio University

Abstract: The professional development school (PDS) partnership described in this case study functions within systems that prepare teachers and paraprofessionals to serve children of diverse abilities in inclusive prekindergarten through third grade settings. The findings of this case study (1) identify specific teacher leadership practices that characterize the behavior of all participating educators and contribute mutual benefits to all three participating entities—the elementary school, the local school district, and the university early childhood education teacher preparation program, and (2) offer evidence of adherence to the two NAPDS Essentials regarded by this EC PDS partnership as most essential to the of development of teachers and paraprofessionals for programs that present complex challenges to recruitment and retention of qualified educators.

KEYWORDS: professional development school, transformational leadership, teacher leadership, early childhood education, mutually beneficial

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

- 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;

Professional development schools (PDS) have been an important part of the teacher preparation landscape for more than a quarter of a century. Support for partnerships between university and school systems grew out of the need for a bridge between higher education and prekindergarten through grade twelve (P-12) schools that would, among other benefits, provide more intensive clinical experiences for teacher candidates (Latham, Mertens, & Hamann, 2015). One of many partnerships resulting from the PDS movement across the United States is the early childhood (EC) PDS partnership described in this report. It manifests all nine National Association of Professional Development School essentials for successful partnerships, and it emphasizes two essentials that seem especially pertinent to complex and challenging fields, such as inclusive early childhood education programs. These two NAPDS essentials are “A school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;” and “A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants” (NAPDS, 2008, para. 4).

Context

The partners in this PDS are located within the same county in an Appalachian region of the Midwestern U. S. The partnership comprises a regional state agency program’s education service district (ESD), a rural elementary school, and an ECE educator-preparation program at a regional campus. The early childhood intervention preschool program is sponsored by an ESD that places teachers, paraprofessionals, and/or early childhood intervention service providers in prekindergarten and primary classrooms in the elementary school. The university regional-campus educator-preparation program is affiliated with the main campus and is part of a research-intensive university.

University pre-service teachers enroll in a year-long preparation program at two levels of ECE preparation (prekindergarten and primary), where they develop ECE best practices and teacher leadership skills under the guidance of mentor teachers within the early childhood classrooms and with the supervision of university-based clinical educators. University pre-service paraprofessionals enroll in a semester-long practicum. Each clinical educator acts as a liaison with the ESD and schools and is involved in the early childhood programs and school settings as an instructor and university mentor for both in-service and pre-service educators. Likewise, the school principal is an EC university faculty member. Both the ESD early childhood program coordinator and the principal serve on the university’s Education Advisory Board.

This EC PDS partnership was established to provide mutually beneficial opportunities for all partners. Educator characteristics identified in the participating university’s college of education’s (COE) conceptual core are reinforced by the PDS partnership in order that these values may develop and flourish in pre-service teachers and paraprofessionals and be validated and strengthened in professional and para-professional in-service educators who serve as mentors within the partnership. The conceptual core advocates for all educators to be teacher

leaders, conceiving leadership as integral to the educator's role. Administrators and lead teachers in the EC PDS partnership scaffold the emergence of dispositions and skills associated with teacher leadership through practices that provide mutually beneficial opportunities for engagement and learning in the PDS community. Prominent among these practices is that the in-service teacher and paraprofessional in the elementary classrooms serve as mentors to the pre-service teachers and paraprofessionals who are experiencing their practicum or internship within those classrooms. Moreover, during their internships and practica, the pre-service teachers and paraprofessionals also engage in peer mentoring.

Anecdotal evidence over a five-year period in the PDS, prior to the case study research reported below, suggested that the partnership provides benefits for all. It further indicated that EC PDS partnership leaders demonstrate transformational leadership characteristics and that educators within this early childhood school-agency-university PDS partnership demonstrate attributes of teacher leadership. Within the PDS partnership, teacher leadership was observed at each level of engagement: pre-service teachers and paraprofessionals, in-service teachers and paraprofessionals, and university supervisors and program coordinators. Members of the partnership conducting this case study sought to go beyond anecdotal evidence to discover educators' perceptions by collecting systematic data following case study protocol. The study spanned two and one-half semesters in order to take a close look at the development of teacher leadership in this partnership and to discover implications for mutual benefits to PDS partners.

Literature Review

The literature review considers the PDS model in general and in relation to early childhood education teacher preparation emphasizing teacher leadership by employing transformational leadership. The review also discusses briefly the use of the term "mutually beneficial" in the PDS literature.

Professional Development Schools

Professional development schools represent a means of educational reform and renewal used by universities to place pre-service educators in early field placements, clinical field placements, practica, and internships (Kolpin et al., 2015). By focusing on reflection in-action and on-action, PDS models improve practices of pre-service and in-service educators, and university instructors (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2016).

PDS partnerships offer an avenue for early childhood teacher candidates to develop as teachers (Gutierrez, 2017), at the same time, providing children with better early childhood classroom experiences (Clark & Huber, 2005). However, even though benefits of PDSs have been documented, a search for studies specifically citing mutually beneficial partnerships in pre-kindergarten intervention PDS programs yielded few results. According to Taylor and Clark (2015), when researchers refer to early childhood PDSs, they are referring to kindergarten and primary grade schools, not early childhood programs offering prekindergarten, preschool, and/or child care experiences. Examples of PDS PK-12 and university models exist (e. g., at Minnesota State University, North Texas State University, Buffalo State University, and George Mason

University); however, research has not focused on the prekindergarten intervention partnerships specifically (Taylor & Clark, 2015). A need for research on pre-kindergarten PDS models is evident.

Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership is defined as “the process by which teachers influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium [TLEC], 2008, p. 10). It encompasses such activities as coaching, mentoring, and modeling. These practices were once considered the domain of principals. However, the complexity of today’s schools, demands a collaborative effort (Seltz, 2015). Teacher leadership is key to schools’ success in meeting the wide range of contemporary challenges (Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2015).

A teacher leader takes on an array of formal and informal leadership roles to support teacher and student success in schools. Harrison and Killion (2007) identify roles such as learning facilitator, mentor, and committed learner. Crawford, Roberts, and Hickmann (2010) offer specific examples, including “leading professional book clubs” and “serving as instructional coaches” (p. 31). Krovetz and Arriaza (2006), and Boylan (2016) identified a variety of professional development strategies that foster teacher leadership skills, e.g., collaborating with partners. Such ongoing professional development is essential for educators in early childhood intervention classrooms, and depend on up-to-date interventions and specialized strategies. According to Lieberman and Miller (2004), teacher leaders model good practice and provide peer support. Merideth (2007) found goal setting, strategic planning, reflective practice, and team building to be essential activities and important components of teacher leadership.

When teacher leader development is an integral part of professional development activities, teacher leaders contribute positively to the overall school climate (Sebastian, Allensworth & Huang, 2016). Conversely, teacher leaders emerge as they contribute to the work within the school community (Sweeney, 2003). Moreover, Boylan (2016) suggests teacher leaders can also develop an activist identity leading to advocacy efforts that are informed by ethical and moral purposes to initiate change.

Transformational Leadership

Hoy and Miskel (2008) describe transformational leadership as a proactive form of leadership that raises the awareness levels of followers about collective interests and helps followers achieve unusually high outcomes. Transformational leaders change people, inspiring them to develop their skills and use them for beneficial purposes. Transformational leaders succeed in part because they seek to identify followers’ motives and satisfy their “higher needs” (Burns, 1978, p. 4). Fundamental to transformational leadership are building relational ties and providing “mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents” (Burns, 1978, p. 4). Clearly, transformational leadership should be

regarded as important in the development of effective new teacher leaders for the school community.

Transformational leaders build rapport and mutuality through respect and trust so that organizational missions and necessary changes can proceed collaboratively (Avolio, 1994). Four primary characteristics of transformational leaders are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012). Idealized influence emerges from the leader's caring, compassionate, confident, empathetic, genuine, and calming or passionate nature. As behavior, idealized influence is manifest in the leader's work-related capacities, such as being an effective communicator (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003). As agents of inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders provide opportunities for members of the group to learn collaboratively within a supportive environment. They see the potential in others and delegate responsibilities as a way of developing that potential so that people's talents are in use and add meaning to individual and collective efforts. Transformational leaders display individualized consideration by listening actively; by identifying individual concerns, needs, talents, and abilities; by providing constructive developmental feedback; and by mentoring, coaching, and educating (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Mutually Beneficial

The term "mutually beneficial" denotes reciprocal activities that result in "win-win" situations for all major stakeholders. As early as 1997, Lewison and Holliday wrote that mutually beneficial university-school partnerships exist when members establish trust and use flexibility in approaching traditional roles of individuals within organizations that make up the partnership. Further, they argue that for PDSs to be perceived as mutually beneficial, K-8 school educators must recognize the relevance of university projects and involvement to their own needs (Lewison & Holliday, 1997). A study of successful collaboration among a public school, a community agency, and university partnership around a health-education service-learning project found communication, shared decision making, shared resources, expertise and credibility, flexibility, and recognition of the priorities of all partners to be necessary ingredients for a mutually beneficial partnership (Bosma et al, 2010).

The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) produced a video, "PDS Partnership Benefits PK-12 Students from Many Angles," offering examples of mutual benefits, e.g., that mentor teachers learn from ideas interns bring into their classrooms and that the mentor teachers validate interns' ideas by using them in their classrooms (Gutierrez, 2017). A further example offered by the video is that schools' professional communities are enhanced by the participation of pre-service educators in workshops and meetings whereas the pre-service educators learn important concepts and skills from the workshops and meetings (Gutierrez, 2017).

EC PDS Case Study

This EC PDS partnership follows a clinically rich model of school placements resulting in opportunities for pre-service educators to develop deep understanding of the complex roles of teachers in real schools, as found in research such as that of Allen, Perl, Goodson, and Sprouse (2014), and to engage in peer mentoring and other teacher leader practices. In this model, early childhood teacher educators intentionally plan for and employ strategies and practices to promote pre-service educators' leadership skills. Pre-service teachers and paraprofessionals are prepared for their future roles as teacher leaders by developing skills of communication, collaboration, reflective practice, and peer mentoring. As pre-service teachers develop the skills and dispositions to intentionally engage in the work of teachers/paraprofessional and take on leadership roles, they are positioned to become the agents of rich experiences such as those identified by Bandura (2000) and Edwards (2007).

Based on the literature and provided with informal evidence that the PDS offers mutual benefits to all entities in the partnership, leaders from all three entities were interested in inquiring more systematically into participating educators' perceptions of the program. The case study approach made it possible to study teacher leadership and the benefits to all partners in the PDS within the context of an EC PDS partnership in the "vividness and detail" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 267) of the participants' environments (Yin, 2013).

Research Questions

Three overarching questions guided investigation of aspects of the EC PDS; specifically, the questions sought educators' perspectives about their engagement in and development of teacher leadership skills and their perspectives on whether the PSD partnership offers mutual benefits to stakeholders:

1. What are educators' perceptions of their levels of engagement in teacher-leader practices?
2. How do educators develop teacher-leadership characteristics and competencies in order to benefit the EC PDS?
3. Is the EC PDS partnership mutually beneficial to stakeholders who make up the PDS community?

Methodology

This section describes the case study participants and setting, data collection and analysis, and findings. The research design made use of established techniques such as multiple lenses (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) and member-checking (Maxwell, 2012) to ensure credibility of findings.

Participants and Setting

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, participants contributed to surveys, interviews, or samples of materials in the forms of journals or anecdotal records. A total of 22 educators participated in different aspects of the study over two and one-half semesters. In

the context of this study, “educator” refers to administrators (i.e., ES principal, ESD program coordinator, and to university supervisors, mentors, and program coordinators); to in-service teachers and paraprofessionals, and to pre-service teachers and paraprofessionals.

The setting consisted of three inclusive EC classrooms in one elementary school that hosted a total of fourteen pre-service educators over two and one-half semesters during the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years. Each classroom was staffed with an intervention specialist lead teacher, a paraprofessional, and two educator candidates enrolled in a 300-hour/fifteen-week practicum (associate degree) or internship (baccalaureate degree). The practicum candidates were studying to become paraprofessional educators, and the interns were studying to become teachers.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected consisted of surveys, anecdotal records, journals, and interviews. All educators participated in the surveys. Anecdotal records were part of feedback forms kept for all educator candidates. Journals were completed by educator candidates. Individual interviews were conducted with a small subgroup of the 22 participants.

Surveys. Survey items related to teacher leadership were distilled from studies by Boylan (2016), Krovetz and Arriaza (2006), Lieberman and Miller (2004), Merideth (2007), Sebastian, Allensworth, and Huang (2016), and Sweeney (2003) and used by the primary researcher to develop the survey instrument (see Appendix for survey). Using a 5-point scale, participants rated their perceived level of engagement in teacher leadership practices by indicating: “5” (always), “4” (frequently), “3” (sometimes), “2” (rarely), or “1” (never). Each participant was invited to elaborate on his/her perceptions of teacher-leader practices and transformational characteristics of leaders in narrative form. Moreover, participants indicated on the survey their willingness to participate in member checking through a follow-up interview.

Fourteen out of 22 volunteers participated in the survey, for a response rate of 64%. These included four administrators, three lead teachers, and seven pre-service educators. Pre-service educators volunteered to respond to surveys once during their respective PDS placements. Administrators and lead teachers volunteered to respond once over two and one-half semesters if they hosted intern or practicum students.

Anecdotal records. Data in the form of anecdotal records were collected in the classrooms by the ECE university clinical supervisor-mentors during classroom observations of teaching practices described on feedback forms over two semesters. A total of 21 anecdotal records were collected and included in evaluations during two semesters. A total of ten representative examples were chosen by the supervisor-mentors for review by the primary researcher.

Journals. Pre-service educators wrote reflective journals over the course of their respective semesters. They were asked to record the following types of entries in their journals: observation of children’s interests; planning followed by reflection; instructing followed by

reflection; and assessing/evaluating learning environments, resources, materials, and lesson plans for teaching/learning effectiveness. Pre-service educators were asked to comment on mentoring strategies used by administrators and lead teachers; teacher leadership practices engaged in by all in the classroom, including peer-mentoring activities they engaged in; professional development activities attended; extra-curricular activities attended; parent and child involvement/advocacy activities including individual education plan (IEP) meeting participation; and their perceptions of their developing teacher-leadership competencies.

Nine pre-service educators completed journals during 15 weeks over two semesters, and four pre-service educators completed journals for six weeks over one-half semester. A total of one-hundred twenty journal entries were reviewed. Nine journal entries beginning in week 4 through 12 during two semesters for a total of one-hundred and eight, plus four journal entries for weeks 4 through 6 for a total of twelve during one-half semester were reviewed and coded by the primary researcher in order to discover dominant themes pertaining to teacher leadership (Creswell & Poth, 2017). All journals are stored online in the electronic portfolio system used by the university and are part of the university database.

Interviews. Six educators (three administrators, two lead mentor teachers, and one pre-service educator) volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews conducted via e-mail or in-person meetings with the primary researcher. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. Data were collected as notes taken during the interviews by the primary researcher. Participants were invited to participate in member-checking to ensure that the primary researcher's notes accurately reported their perceptions.

Findings

Findings for each research question are presented based on analysis of surveys, anecdotal records, journals, and interviews. As indicated below, certain teacher leadership practices were perceived by participants as engaged in with a higher frequency than others mentioned in the review of literature.

Question one. What are educators' perceptions of their levels of engagement in teacher-leader practices?

Survey. Data analysis of survey results revealed that the highest percentages for all educators were engagement in "reflective practice," "based teaching practices on use of data," and "mentoring activities." Accordingly, they were identified as themes. All 14 survey respondents offered the highest possible rating ("5" on the scale of "1" to "5") for these practices. Also identified as themes, but as less dominant, were those practices which were rated "4" or "5" by at least 90% of the respondents (13 of the 14 participants). This group of themes comprised the following practices: "contributed to the school climate," "collaborated with partners," "engaged in goal setting," "engaged in team-building strategies," and "focused on equity."

Not surprisingly, there were some differences in the subgroup responses. Administrators and in-service educators gave higher ratings for how frequently they “collaborate with partners,” “engage in goal setting,” “engage in team building” “engage in conflict resolution,” “focus on equity,” “engage in professional networking,” “engage in parent advocacy,” and “participate in school reform.” In-service and pre-service educators gave higher ratings to the frequency with which they “engage in job-embedded professional development” and “engage in co-teaching strategies.”

Journals. Themes identified through analysis of journals revealed that at least 75% of entries mentioned the following specific teacher leadership practices by mentor lead teachers or paraprofessional mentors as recurring: “planning and goal setting,” “mentoring activities and modeling strategies,” and “feedback.” The following representative comment refers to all three practices:

[Teacher-Leader Mentor] has been such a great help with my lessons and bulletin board. I ask her opinions about how she thinks the kids will like things or if the kids can handle activities I am planning and she always lets me know what she thinks and I appreciate that. After doing everything I could on my bulletin board I started working on cutting up some pieces of paper for an activity [Mentor] will be doing this week. We also worked on getting my table top activity ready for next week as well. . . . I am feeling more confident in my lessons and I feel that with more practice I can be the best teacher I can be.

Anecdotal Records. Teacher-leadership concepts from anecdotal records of observations of pre-service educators by administrators and lead (in-service) teachers were identified as themes if they occurred in at least 75% of the records. The themes so identified were as follows: “co-teaching activities,” “planning and goal setting,” “and “mentoring.” A representative example contributing to the mentoring theme follows:

Her mentor is very enthusiastic and very hands on, transforming her classroom environment almost weekly with the most amazing themes. She keeps the kids very interesting and engaged. [This is] a great experience in a difficult class that has many different disabilities, everything from autism to cochlear implants, and other students not identified with unknown suspected disabilities.

Interviews. Concepts that arose in at least 75% of the interviews were as follows: “collaborating with partners,” “goal setting and planning based on reflection,” “co-teaching,” and “modeling, mentoring, and coaching activities.”

Question two. How do educators develop teacher-leadership characteristics and competencies in order to benefit the EC PDS?

The open-ended prompt from the survey, anecdotal records compiled by administrators and lead teachers, and follow-up interviews were used to address research question two.

Survey. The following section highlights seven participants' perceptions about ways they developed and demonstrated competencies in teacher leadership. These participants' responses included the following themes: "planning," "reflecting," and "mentoring."

Planning was recognized by such statements as, "planning together to come up with centers, lessons, activities, trainings, book club ideas, and structure for the students," and "working with other staff to set short term and long term goals with timelines for monitoring progress." *Reflecting* was exemplified by such statements as, "We [the intervention team] take time at the end of the day to reflect on how it went—what worked well, what didn't work so well, what we'll do again and what we'll never do again." *Mentoring* was recognized in statements such as: "Peer mentoring was helpful in deciding which resources we would get and take to the classroom;" "By peer mentoring we shared tasks so we save each other time and money;" and "Reflecting together with my mentors really helped me to see my strengths and where I need to improve."

In their comments on the survey, each administrator and in-service educator included the themes of "team building" and "networking." The following statements highlighted the importance of team building and networking: "going to PTO meetings and fundraisers;" "encouraging pre-service educators to attend school meetings and functions;" and "attending regional and state conferences – even presenting at state and national conferences."

Each administrator and in-service and pre-service teacher referred to the themes of "decision-making based on data." For example, a pre-service educator commented, "I was also able to help differentiate centers and lesson plans by helping students one on one. This did not come easily as I needed to assess each child individually to learn about them but as a leader in the classroom of children, it was a necessity and with the help of my mentor teacher I was able to accomplish this and gain a new leadership skill."

Administrators spoke of "advocacy" and "activism." Representative examples included encouraging educators to actively engage in such activities as "writing blogs," "calling and writing politicians," "fundraising for birth defects and walking in marches," and "being an officer in organizations that support early childhood education issues."

All in-service educators except administrators referred to "co-teaching" and "organizing strategies." A representative statement for co-teaching was "I do co-teaching and dual lessons with interns who come into my classroom. My aide and I also co-teach each day when we work together to plan and carry out activities and model this for students." Representative statements for "organizing" strategies are "helping with family literacy night," "writing IEPs and organizing IEP meetings," and "organizing field-trips and finding volunteers."

Half of the survey participants identified their perceptions of teacher leadership characteristics in EC PDS administrators, using descriptors that aligned with idealized influence, such as: "caring," "understanding," "seeing the big picture," and "fair." Descriptors aligning with individualized consideration were "listening," "respecting," "identifying concerns, needs, talents, and abilities," "conflict resolution," and "mentoring and teaching." All pre-service educators identified the lead teacher as having individualized consideration, saying they were given "frequent feedback." All identified their own comfort in "taking initiative" and "leadership" in aspects of planning and curriculum choices. Participants also identified the lead teacher as offering intellectual stimulation, saying, for example, that the lead teacher "saw potential in

them” and “gave them tasks and responsibilities” to help them develop as a teacher. Two referred to their lead teacher’s “creativity” and, as a result, to being encouraged to do creative constructions themselves. They indicated that their “talents were being utilized” and that they were “part of the decision-making team.” Some identified the lead teacher as offering inspirational motivation, using descriptors such as “inspirational” and “problem solver.” They indicated that the lead teacher “believed in me.”

Journals. Journal entries of pre-service educators included key words referring to teacher leadership they were engaged in, such as “communicating,” “collaborating,” “mentoring,” “inspiring,” “researching,” and “reflecting.” Effective verbal and written communication were identified in “documenting assessments,” “communicating with therapists, parents, and team members,” and “team building” to plan. Frequent comments involved “collaborating” to share resources, “co-teaching,” during centers or station teaching, during daily routine, or morning meeting; and “reflective practice” with a mentor about pre-service educators’ professional growth, using assessment results to plan for individualized/differentiated instruction, using children’s interests to plan activities, and/or reflecting about research and theory to support children’s learning.

Anecdotal records. Four administrators recorded anecdotes for nine pre-service educators during classroom visits. Several themes pertaining to teacher-leadership were identified based on these data: “taking initiative,” “contributing ideas,” “identifying with the profession,” and “taking a moral/ethical stance.”

Interviews. Participants emphasized some of the same themes during interviews. An administrator noted a pre-service teacher’s initiative-taking:

This intern leads students through various classroom activities and works on student learning outcomes. She led the students with a couple of caterpillar activities she created herself and took the initiative to learn about the SLO [student learning outcomes] process.

Another administrator wrote about contributing ideas and identifying with the profession:

In an ECIS classroom, everyone is involved in decision making and becomes accountable for the children’s progress. One pre-service teacher said, “Inquiring with my teacher-mentor and professors has helped me gain a growth mindset as I know I will reach each level of performance necessary to help children of all ages learn to the best of their abilities.”

An administrator also noted this example of leadership:

This student exhibited leadership by taking over the classroom when the mentor was absent; of course, a sub was there with the aide, and the therapists were also coming in. The situation is challenging, but she is gaining confidence and is taking a moral stance by doing what she thinks is right. She is gaining her teacher voice.

Question Three: Is the EC PDS partnership mutually beneficial to stakeholders who make up the community?

Data were collected for question three from the interviews. The following statements by two participants are representative of the language contributing to the identification of mutual benefits:

The elementary school is fortunate to be a partner in the EC PDS. This program has been a win-win for our school. Candidates are learning valuable best practices and seeing the diversity of our children's needs. The preschool teachers benefit from extra eyes, extra pair of hands, and fresh perspectives in their classrooms; the teacher candidates benefit by getting real world, hands on experience with the growing needs of our preschool students who come from all walks of life. The needs of our children are quite diverse as we are seeing more students with behaviors, autism, and/or neglect. Our valuable partnership is an essential teaching tool that helps us to intervene with our littlest learners as we give them the best necessary ingredients for a start in life. This EC PDS partnership has made our preschool one of the best in our region!

Another administrator commented as follows:

I feel that the partnership is a benefit to our preschool program through the new opportunities, ideas and assistance that the students bring into the classroom. Veteran teachers are given the opportunity to mentor new teachers that often come to work in our program. New teachers often bring new technological experiences into the classroom as well as fresh ideas. New teachers are also learning the day to day running of a classroom from a veteran teacher, which leads to invaluable classroom management skills throughout their career. By working together to develop lesson plans, the veteran teacher and new teacher are able to brainstorm ideas and incorporate more knowledge into activities. This provides interns with even more authentic experiences. Having the extra set of hands in the classroom also provides more instructional time for students.

Discussion

Findings from this study indicate that the EC PDS partnership presented in this report demonstrates qualities that characterize mutually beneficial partnerships through an emphasis on the teacher leadership practices of mentoring, collaboration, reflection, and engagement in team planning and goal-setting. These practices, which draw on and support communication, shared expertise, and recognition of the priorities of all partners, enhance the concept of the PDS as a community of practice (Gutierriz, 2017).

The findings clearly reflected this EC PDS's emphasis on NAPDS essentials two and four (2008, para. 4). In regard to NAPDS essential 2, "A school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community," this research found a teacher and paraprofessional educator program that makes consistent use of mentoring and collaboration as primary modes of engagement of pre-service teachers and paraprofessionals in inclusive early childhood classrooms. In regard to NAPDS essential 4, "A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants," this case study identified reflective practice as among the three activities rated by survey respondents as being most frequently engaged in. Reflective practice was referenced frequently in pre-service

educators' journal entries as well. However, one element of essential 4 was not supported as clearly. While the study offered some evidence of a commitment to innovative practice, as the model itself may be considered an innovation, such commitment is suggested rather than clearly demonstrated. A focus on innovation may be called for, both in future research on this EC PDS and in its program planning.

Limitations

Because case studies do not seek generalization of findings, the relatively small number of participants is not considered a limitation. The major limitation of the study, as with any solicited-response research, is that participants' responses may be less than candid. The triangulation of data using surveys, interviews, and data analysis from different sources sought to counter this possible effect.

Conclusion and Recommendations

At each level of professional practice, data revealed this EC PDS partnership to be mutually beneficial in that pre-service and in-service educators focused on teacher leadership by engaging in collaboration, reflective practice, and mentoring. Data also indicate that the PDS partnership coordinators, university supervisors, and lead teachers demonstrate transformational leadership by recognizing pre-service educators' talents, involving them in planning and decision making, and encouraging them to use their talents and skills in the interest of children's success in the classroom.

Recommendations for Further Research

The promising outcomes of this study and the paucity of literature on pre-kindergarten educator preparation PDS partnerships indicate the need for further research on similar programs. This study found stronger evidence for mentoring, reflection, and other teacher leadership skills than for the innovative practices identified as part of NAPDS essential 4. Future research on innovation in planning and pedagogy as well as in collaboration might be helpful to this EC PDS as well as others. Moreover, while some of the data collected in this research indicated benefits to children in the EC PDS partnership classrooms, the research design did not attempt to measure such benefits. Because of the importance of early intervention for children with possible sensory or learning impairments, future research on early childhood education PDSs should undertake the influence on other stakeholders than educators, including children with disabilities in EC PDS partnerships and the parents of those children.

Recommendations for Replication of the EC PDS Partnership

This EC PDS partnership offers a model for teacher and paraprofessional preparation to serve a population that schools often have difficulty serving because of a lack of qualified

educators, i.e., preschool and primary children with disabilities. Members of the partnership are connected in a network that has resulted in a “grow your own” solution to a common problem: recruiting and maintaining qualified educators at each level in all three entities of the partnership. The case study reported here and the experiences of the leaders of the elementary school, regional education service center, and university teacher-education program suggest that the model, with its mutual benefits, can be replicated through facilitation of teacher leadership practices in each of the three entities.

This EC PDS partnership formed as a result of members contributing to the Advisory Committees of each entity, a circumstance which fostered recognition by members that formalizing a PDS partnership would more readily result in sustainability. Since its formation, leaders of each entity meet each semester for the explicit purposes of reflecting on activities during the term, planning for mutually beneficial activities among the partnership during the next term, identifying participation during the term, reviewing and updating documentation that is collected by all partners, and benchmarking for the future. Other basic ingredients are trust in the partners; flexibility in sharing roles of expertise; shared decision-making; shared resources; and recognition of the needs of each partner, as pointed out years ago by Lewison and Holliday (1997) and by Bosma et al. (2010) more recently.

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Appendix

EC PDS Partnership Survey

Demographic Information: Check your primary role in the drop-down menu by clicking on the down arrow and selecting the word that most appropriately represents your role.

administrator (coordinator/university supervisor)
lead teacher
paraprofessional

pre-professional preschool intern
child development practicum student

Indicate your level of attending job-embedded professional development

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give an example of the job-embedded professional development you attend (i.e. workshops, lectures, book clubs, professional reading)

Indicate your level of collaborating with partners

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give an example of collaborating with partners (i.e. orientations, planning for instruction, writing curriculum)

Indicate your level of basing teacher practices on the use of data

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give examples of how you base your teaching practices on the use of data.

Indicate your level of focusing on equity.

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give examples of how you base your teaching practices on focusing on equity.

Indicate your level of engaging in goal setting

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give examples of engaging in goal setting.

Indicate your level of engaging in conflict resolution

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give examples of engaging in conflict resolution

Indicate your level of engaging in reflective practice

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give examples of engaging in reflective practice.

Indicate your level of engagement in team building

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 4. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give examples of engaging in team building

Indicate your level of engagement in professional networking

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely

- 1. Never

Give examples of your engagement in professional networking

Indicate your level of engagement in reading or book group as professional development

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give examples of engagement in reading or book group as professional development

Indicate your level of engagement in participating in school reform activities

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give examples of your level of engagement in participating in school reform activities

Indicate your level of engagement in mentoring

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give examples of your level of engagement in mentoring

Indicate your level of engagement in contributing to school climate

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give examples of engagement in contributing to school climate

Indicate your level of engagement in co-teaching

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give examples of co-teaching

Indicate your level for engaging parents in advocacy

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Give examples of engaging parents in advocacy

Indicate your level of engagement in leadership (transformative, shared, servant, moral/ethical)

- 5. Always
- 4. Frequently
- 3. Sometimes
- 2. Rarely
- 1. Never

Please share any other examples of how you demonstrate the characteristics of a teacher leader.

Please indicate if you would be willing to participate in an interview to extend and/or elaborate on your responses by adding your name and contact information [HERE](#).

***Susan Congrove** is an adjunct faculty member for Early Childhood Education at Ohio University, in the B.S.Ed. Program, and the Elementary Principal at Zane Trace Local Schools in Chillicothe, OH, USA. She can be reached at scongrove@ztlsd.org.*

***Karen Corcoran** is the Middle Childhood Program Coordinator and the Internship Coordinator at Ohio University, Chillicothe, Ohio, USA. She can be reached at corcoran@ohio.edu.*

***Nancy Cryder Jones** is an adjunct faculty member serving as University Clinical Educator for Child Development A.A.S. Practicum at Ohio University, Chillicothe, Ohio, USA. She can be reached at jonesn@ohio.edu.*

Kit Kinnamon is an adjunct faculty member serving as University Clinical Educator for Early Childhood Education B.S.Ed. Pre-Primary Professional Internships at Ohio University, Chillicothe, Ohio, USA. She can be reached at kinnamon@ohio.edu.

Leslie Smith is a Preschool Supervisor and PK Partnership Schools Liaison at the Ross-Pike Educational Service District, in Chillicothe, Ohio, USA. She can be reached at leslies@rpesd.org.

Mary Barbara Trube is a former Professor and Child Development and Early Childhood Education Programs Coordinator for Ohio University, Chillicothe, Ohio, USA. She is currently a contributing faculty member at Walden University. She may be reached at mbtrube@hotmail.com.