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Blurring the Boundaries: Reflecting on PDS Roles and Responsibilities through Multiple Lenses

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It is well documented that successful Professional Development School (PDS) initiatives are contingent on trusting relationships between the university and school districts (Barth, 1990; Dana et al., 2001; Trubowitz, 1986). Unfortunately, despite the promise of well-intended agreements, the notion of building trusting relationships between university and school personnel remains a persistent and common problem in many PDS partnerships. In fact, it is not uncommon for incidents of frustration, skepticism, and even hostility to occur (Dana et al., 2001), or for partner participants to experience different “hierarchical roles” without validation of colleagues as equals (Marlow, Keyed, & Connors, 2005, p. 557).

Over the past 25 years, continual efforts have been made by the Kansas State University (KSU) PDS to minimize notions of status while maintaining mutually beneficial goals and creating genuine partnerships in which “we all need to learn, improve, and grow together” (*Kansas State University Professional Development School Handbook*, 2014, n.p.). In other words, participants have aimed to establish and maintain healthy relationships and involve all stakeholders in decision-making processes, ranging from early conceptualization of the partnership to subsequent collaborative reconstruction and simultaneous renewal initiatives (Shroyer, Yahnke, Bennett, & Dunn, 2007). While these efforts have consistently supported a culture of collaboration and collegiality, it is only natural that PDS participants, too, have experienced both trials and triumphs along the way.

At KSU, the partnership is expected to “maintain written descriptions of roles, responsibilities and expectations for KSU faculty and PDS faculty involved in the partnership (clinical instructors, coordinator of PDS, faculty liaisons, mentor teachers, administration)” (*Kansas State University Professional Development School Handbook*, 2014, n.p.). While such “written descriptions” do exist, in reality, lines are often blurred as individuals frequently represent more than one role or assume different responsibilities over time. Howey (2006) suggested

that educators who cross boundaries between institutions “are blurring the lines of responsibilities traditionally assumed by those in universities, schools, and school districts” (p. 5). This blurring of boundaries, so to speak, is experienced by several individuals at KSU and in the partnership schools.

To explore this topic further, the authors, who all have worn multiple “partnership hats” over the years, were asked to reflect upon these constantly evolving roles and responsibilities. As “boundary-spanning individuals” (Joint Task Force for Urban/Metropolitan Schools, 2004), the four participants have moved within and across partnership schools and university settings, affording multiple perspectives through various roles and responsibilities (see Table 1). While the initial conversation took place in a roundtable, it quickly became apparent that utilizing an asynchronous, online discussion format would promote greater flexibility in already busy schedules, along with additional time to reflect on and respond to others’ comments. The creation of a Google document with open-ended discussion prompts to get the conversation started, facilitated the discussion.

This article, grounded in social research that often addresses questions which are “fundamentally interpretive or historical in nature—who we are and how we came to be who we are” (Ragin & Amoroso, 2012, p. 8), captures highlights from our reflective face-to-face and online dialogue, centering on KSU PSD program’s efforts to consistently support a culture of collaboration and collegiality. In particular, we focus on roles and responsibilities within the PDS partnership and the impact that PDSs have on students and teachers as well as the challenges associated with this structure. Inspired by Breault’s (2010) call for a genre of PDS literature that emphasizes the human and interpersonal dimensions of PDS work, we use dialogue as a way “of sharing what we know and learn across professional and lay cultures” in order to “free our imaginations and spark creativity” (p. 179).

Reflecting on Roles and Responsibilities Within the PDS

Naturally, the discussion started with sharing some of the participants’ past and present involvements in the partnership and reflecting on what these multiple roles have meant for each person, both personally and professionally.

Lotta: As an undergraduate student in the College of Education, I had multiple field experiences in Professional Development Schools. Later, as a classroom teacher, I mentored field experience students and interns. Eventually, I assumed the role of clinical instructor. Now, as a university faculty member, I supervise field experiences and teach both undergraduate and graduate students. I often provide professional development to the teachers in our PDSs. Serving KSU PDS program in many different capacities has helped me look at potential issues and problems from multiple points of view.

Amanda: I too have had multiple roles within the Professional Development Schools network. As an undergraduate student not yet admitted to the College of Education, I had my first exposure to the PDS system as a teacher aide during my early field experience course. Once I was officially part of the College of Education, I progressed through my block coursework and completed all of my remaining field experience at schools in our network. After graduation, my first job as an English language arts teacher was at a PDS middle school where I had been placed as a teacher candidate several times. There I served as a cooperating teacher to university students at all levels of the program—from teacher aide to internship. I left teaching to pursue graduate school full time in 2011. In my current graduate teaching assistant role, I work with secondary education students in all content areas who are just beginning their education coursework and instructional field experiences in and around the PDS network.

Table 1 | Authors' PDS Roles and Responsibilities

Name	Current PDS Role(s)	Past PDS Experiences	Definition of Roles
Lotta	Faculty member	Undergraduate student, graduate student, cooperating teacher, clinical instructor, university supervisor	Cooperating Teacher: Serves as mentor to preservice teachers; his/her classroom provides clinical setting; conducts multiple formal and informal observations.
Amanda	Doctoral student, university supervisor	Undergraduate student, cooperating teacher	Clinical Instructor: Site-based university point person; trouble-shoots daily problems; develops and maintains relationships with student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors and faculty.
Vicki	Faculty member, university supervisor	Cooperating teacher	
Deb	PDS school principal, doctoral student	Undergraduate student, graduate student, cooperating teacher, clinical instructor	University Supervisor: Content-specific point person for the university; conducts multiple observations; provides content-specific support for preservice teachers and cooperating teachers.

Vicki: Since I stepped into the role of university supervisor this past semester, I have spent a great deal of time reflecting on my journey as an educator. During my 28-year tenure as an elementary and middle school teacher, I had the opportunity to serve as a cooperating teacher to many student interns from Kansas State University. The schools in which I taught were not part of the PDS network. As a cooperating teacher, I worked closely with the interns to ensure they had the experiences they needed to develop necessary skills to become effective teachers. Without the support of a clinical instructor, I relied upon the university supervisor to make sure that my interns met all the necessary requirements for graduation. Today, as a faculty member, I work with secondary education English/Language Arts students, teaching their English, Journalism, and Speech/Theatre methods course and Block 2 practicum. In the subsequent semester, I supervise those same candidates during their internship.

Deb: Amanda, much like your journey with the PDS partnership, mine also began as an undergraduate student at Kansas State University. I went through the PDS partnership as a teacher aide, block student, and intern. I also continued on with Master's placement in a PDS. As fate would have it, it turns out that I did my internship and Master's field placement both at the elementary school that I had attended 3rd-6th grade as a child. Interestingly enough, those doors kept calling me back and when I saw an opening posted for the principalship of this school, I knew I had to give it a shot. It is a full circle for me, as I am currently in my second year as the principal of this school. In my 17 years in education, I have served in many roles in the PDS partnership. I am fortunate that most of my years in education have been at a PDS school. This journey has taken me from being a student learner, to a teacher learner, a cooperating teacher, then a coach/mentor as a clinical instructor, and now a school principal. As a principal, I have the opportunity to reap the benefits of hiring from a pool of highly qualified teachers, the direct result of the PDS partnership.

Benefits of the PDS

Vicki: As a university supervisor, I am grateful for the immense support interns receive when they are placed in PDS schools with professionals who have traveled the journey you describe, Deb. These beginning educators have opportunities to benefit from the experiences of cooperating teachers, clinical instructors, and administrators who also have worked within the PDS partnership to hone classroom management skills, plan lessons and units, compile a professional portfolio, and establish positive relationships with students. The support interns receive as they assume increased responsibility throughout the semester is critical as they develop into more confident, competent, and experienced educators.

Amanda: As someone who has been in education less than ten years, I find the PDS partnership has helped me establish a network of educators that I can call upon for support, advice, or collaboration. While this network has been in place ever since I entered the education program as an undergraduate, I have been amazed at how quickly it has grown. Before graduation, my support system consisted of

just my professors, peers, and a few teachers with whom I was placed during my field experiences. Shortly after graduation, however, my network of contacts grew to include co-workers and administrators at the PDS where I worked. Even now as a graduate teaching assistant, I continue expanding my network to include colleagues across the nation who attend the same conferences, elementary university faculty, and teachers and administrators across the state. This professional learning community has been extremely beneficial to me in my journey of becoming a teacher educator.

Lotta: I agree. It has been 15 years since I graduated as a new teacher and I find it interesting and encouraging how my support system has not only continued to grow but also evolve over the years. For example, as a student teacher I had an amazing cooperating teacher who is now serving as a principal in one of the PDS schools, and my clinical instructor is now retired but continues to supervise field experiences part time. In my first teaching job, I had a very supportive principal who now hires many of my outstanding undergraduate students. All these individuals were instrumental in my success as a budding teacher, and I love the fact that they are still part of my professional journey. Yes, it is a "small world," but more than anything, I believe the PDS approach works because it encourages building and maintaining strong relationships that develop and grow over time.

Deb: Amanda, I too recognize the growth of the relationships from the PDS partnership. Recently, I joined a College of Education math educator and a teacher from my school as we shared our collaborative professional development efforts at the World Association of Lesson Study conference in Europe. This opportunity was made possible because of the university faculty's willingness to support the PDS by reaching out to our in-service teachers to provide quality continuing education opportunities. In the process, I met a new international colleague; it would be a dream to have this principal come to Kansas to see KSU PDS in action and learn how to implement a similar program in her school district. It is a joy to share our varied experiences as administrators from different countries.

Vicki: Throughout my years serving as a cooperating teacher in the public schools, I witnessed firsthand the level of support that novice teachers require as they begin their journey as educators. Since joining the College of Education faculty last semester, my role has been to ensure that the interns under my supervision participate in high-quality field experiences and internships that fulfill the vision of our college and "prepare them to be knowledgeable, ethical, caring decision makers for a diverse and changing world." The collaborative nature of the PDS network of clinical instructor, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor supports the field experience student and intern as s/he assumes more and more responsibility in the classroom. Knowing that the cooperating teacher and clinical instructors are providing daily support for students between my observations assures me that these future teachers are developing the skills and the confidence they need to become skilled educators.

Deb: Vicki, I was one of those novice teachers who benefited from continued university support at the beginning of my teaching career. Creating a science class entirely without curriculum or materials can be a daunting task for any teacher, but especially for a new teacher. By tapping into the content knowledge and pedagogical expertise of the university faculty, I was provided with the knowledge, resources, and equipment that allowed me to collaboratively design a chemistry class that was exciting and meaningful for my students. It was this network of support from the PDS partnership that gave me the launch I needed to navigate through the unique challenges that were presented to me in that first year of teaching solo. It is quite possible if I had not had the PDS to provide the encouragement and resources I needed, my journey in education could have been a very different path from the one I celebrate today. The shifts in the benefits of the PDS partnership have moved me from being the beneficiary of the support, to being able to give back to the PDS by providing coaching and professional development to my interns as a clinical instructor. The knowledge and skills I gained as a clinical instructor are essential to my role as an administrator who regularly observes and evaluates teachers, coaching for best practices and ensuring all students are getting a quality education.

Lotta: For me, one of the greatest advantages of being involved in our PDS partnership involves the many opportunities to reflect on my own practices as an educator, as well as those of my students. Our current conversation is just one of many examples.

Vicki: I agree. Participating in the PDS partnership has helped me reflect upon the experiences I offer the students in my English/Language Arts Methods course. Collaborating with cooperating teachers and clinical instructors has given me insight into the experiences that help ensure success when field experience students and interns are in classrooms. Knowing the structure and expectations of the schools in which students will be working, I can communicate that information to the students prior to their entering the classroom.

Deb: Being involved with the PDS partnership in many different roles helps me to reflect continuously on the inclusion of our KSU students in our school and the coaching I am providing our teachers. It is exciting when an intern, block student, or aide stops in to tell me about a lesson they taught, ask a question, or seek input on a strategy. It is important for our PDS students to see their roles as valuable, integral parts of our instructional team. This encourages them to observe, model, and implement the excellence in teaching they see around them daily in our school. I continually reflect on the coaching and support I am giving to teachers to ensure excellence is evident for our PDS partnership regularly. Learning is a social process and is deeply embedded in the social context in which the learning takes place. It is important that the environment our PDS school provides is one that is inviting, encourages risk taking, allows for mistakes, provides quality opportunities for learning and growth, and celebrates success. Having the unique experience of being involved at

each level of the PDS partnership gives me the “big picture” perspective and this helps me to strive to be innovative in approach, including building relationships that promote teaching excellence.

Amanda: Besides helping me reflect on my own teaching and learning, the partnership between PDSs and KSU has truly been a support that has connected me to teachers, curricula, and instructional strategies across grade levels. This type of structure, one where “teachers, teacher candidates, and students learn from each other” (p. 76), is what Castle, Fox, and Souder (2006) refer to as collegial environment and is common in PDS collaborations. For me as a teacher, these connections assisted my planning and instruction because I was able to work with other teachers to vertically align our curricula. We would also regularly share strategies that worked—and did not work—with each other through emails and at planning meetings. Now at the university, I am able to share innovative approaches and methods that I have observed one teacher candidate employ with other students in the program.

Vicki: As you mentioned, Amanda, having the opportunity to observe and then share innovative approaches that interns are utilizing in their lessons with interns in other classrooms and schools has been incredibly beneficial. Often interns will put into practice methods that they gleaned from seminars held by the clinical instructors. This collaboration and sharing of ideas lays the groundwork for interns to establish their own professional learning communities once they are practicing in their own classrooms.

Lotta: It is important to point out that the sharing goes both ways—our interns learn from experienced mentor teachers but the mentor teachers also learn from our interns. Similarly, while our Professional Development Schools provide faculty with opportunities to conduct classroom-based research, faculty also provide professional development to teachers. The partnership truly is mutually beneficial.

Deb: That is true...the PDS partnership promotes active engagement in a multitude of capacities and perspectives. The students coming from the university to work with our in-service teachers bring some of the newest ideas and innovations in education, including technology. This collaboration allows the school community to reap the benefits of current practices as they continue to evolve.

“**The collaboration gave me a whole new perspective on the need for full collaboration between and among parties invested in quality teacher education.**”

– Dr. Emmett Wright

Professor Emeritus and Director of the NSF project that initiated the PDS Model, College of Education, Kansas State University

The additional support is palpable to anyone who walks into a classroom to observe co-teaching in progress and differentiated instruction in small groups. The PDS provides an opportunity to enhance the teacher-student ratio. Professors teaching in the PDS partnership often collaborate on research and projects with in-service teachers, continuing to promote the importance of the teacher in the role of action researcher within his or her own classroom. In addition, the professional development learning opportunities that are provided through the PDS partnership are top-notch quality from which teachers benefit regularly. This has been especially evident with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the support the PDS partnership has brought to schools through grant-funded professional development.

Impact of PDS on Students and Teachers

Lotta: We have talked a lot about how the PDS program is mutually beneficial to the schools and university. I am curious: how do you believe the PDS positively impacts individual candidates in our program?

Vicki: At the end of last semester during our final evaluation conferences, all of my interns who worked in PDS network schools shared with me how valuable the support of the clinical instructor was to them. One intern said that she “never would have made it through the portfolio” without the guidance and support of her clinical instructor. They expressed gratitude toward their cooperating teachers for the modeling and mentoring they provided, and they each noted that it helped so much to have the clinical instructor available each day to answer questions about lesson and unit development, the portfolio, licensure, and graduation.

Deb: I agree, Vicki, the PDS partnership provides valuable support needed for students to successfully meet the requirements of the College of Education. In addition, from an administrator’s perspective, it is reassuring to know and understand the rigorous process our college students have completed; this sets them apart from other applicants who have not had a PDS experience. Our pre-service students have an in-depth knowledge of Danielson’s (2007) Framework for Teaching, which is also the model our district uses for teacher evaluations, allowing for a smooth transition. Incoming teachers enter our school knowing the teaching expectations and how they will be evaluated at a professional level. In addition, many are invited to take on significant leadership roles early in their careers because of the training and knowledge they bring to a school from their PDS experience.

Amanda: Not only do pre-service teachers benefit, but so do veteran teachers...I was talking recently with two 9th grade English teachers who have been part of the KSU PDS partnership for several years; they both mentioned that working with field experience students (from aides to interns) has rejuvenated them as educators. When they share their classrooms with a preservice teacher, they are exposed to learning new activities, implementing new content approaches, and using new technology. Both also stated that this interaction with the students who are part of the PDS network motivated them to try new things and stopped

them from “getting into a rut” as experienced teachers can sometimes do. This sentiment is consistent with the research of Castle, Fox, and Souder (2006) where they discovered at five PDS sites “committee members mentioned that being part of a PDS was professionally ‘rejuvenating’” (p. 76). I can also relate to this; sharing my middle school classroom with university students at various stages of their education program not only provided me with new instructional ideas, but gave me renewed energy and enthusiasm for the profession.

Lotta: All of us have been active PDS participants for many years and in many different capacities. According to Howie (2006), the act of assuming such blended positions creates boundary spanners who recognize that what happens in P-12 schools impacts universities and vice versa. Partnerships between our schools and the College of Education “must be inextricably linked if quality learning is to occur” (p. 6). As teacher educators, we must be cognizant of ways to support candidates as they progress through the teacher training program and ultimately impact learning in P-12 classrooms.

Vicki: In an effective collaboration of the PDS partnership, everyone wins. Field experience students and interns receive support from cooperating teachers, clinical instructors, and university supervisors. Cooperating teachers and clinical instructors experience an infusion of energy and inspiration as they work with future educators. University supervisors can send field experience students and interns out with confidence knowing that they will receive encouragement, modeling, and mentorship from their cooperating teachers and clinical instructors. Together, the members of the partnership are working to ensure that these new educators fulfill the vision of the College of Education.

Deb: I like how you phrased that as “everyone wins,” Vicki—so true! The work we do as educators is regenerative as we pull energy from the rewarding experiences we have, which in turn makes us want to contribute even more. Blurring the boundaries allows our students to see that their success is our focus and is a vested interest held by everyone in the PDS partnership, no matter their roles. The success they experience will help encourage them to consider one day giving back to the future of education by mentoring others. Cooperating teachers, clinical instructors, and university supervisors often hear about the influence they have had on their students, encouraging them to continue providing the feedback and praise needed to promote growth in these budding educators. Educators benefit from the opportunity to coach and learn in a symbiotic relationship that promotes the very essence of the PDS experience. Blurring the lines encourages us all to be open to new ideas, creativity, and discovery through the process of nurturing future educators.

Facing Challenges

Lotta: One benefit of experiencing the partnership from multiple perspectives and in multiple roles is the understanding of the challenges presented within each context. As a former teacher and clinical instructor, I have a greater understanding of the school side of the partnership. On the other hand, it is easy to feel thwarted when the

university and school partners do not collaborate and communicate efficiently. I agree with Murrell (2001) who acknowledged that partners often worry about the fear of alienating or offending each other when conducting a critique of existing practices. However, to be able to move forward in a cycle of continuous improvement, it is important to openly recognize and address such frustrations.

Vicki: That is true. One frustration is that sometimes there are differing perceptions regarding the level of support interns may require at the onset of their internship. It is critical that cooperating teachers, clinical instructors, and university supervisors assume the roles of encouragers, role models, and mentors as these novice teachers transfer their learning from the university classroom to the public school classroom. Encouragement and guidance while modeling best teaching practices create an environment in which interns can develop the competencies and confidence necessary for high quality educators.

Amanda: I agree—different perceptions or inconsistencies are definitely a key cause of frustration. We all know that life is not always fair or equal, but it can sometimes be difficult to reassure an intern when their student teaching expectations are wildly different from their peers in the same PDS partnership at a school only a few miles away. While we do have rubrics to help calibrate grading of the capstone portfolio, and there are general guidelines about attendance/interviews/professionalism, some interns still voice concerns over inconsistent expectations for portfolio entries, lesson plan requirements, and service to the school. On the other hand, it is difficult for the cooperating teachers to know what to expect as interns come with different skills and abilities.

Lotta: The perceived responsibilities of PDS colleagues appear to vary greatly between districts and buildings. While our PDS handbook describes the responsibilities and expectations for each participant, little is mentioned about accountability and evaluation. For example, according to the *Kansas State University Professional Development School Handbook* (2014), clinical instructors are expected to “supervise, coordinate, and troubleshoot all PDS efforts” (n.p.)—a seemingly monumental task—and work closely with preservice teachers. However, the university has no mechanism in place for keeping clinical instructors accountable, nor to evaluate their effectiveness.

Deb: Although the PDS partnership between the university and schools can be frustrating at times, the impact and benefits far outweigh time spent overcoming any challenges presented. One challenge that I noticed as we embark upon new professional development opportunities, such as lesson study is that as the faculty of my school grow in their understanding and usage of lesson study, our interns do not have this knowledge and are new to the experience. In an effort to remedy this issue, one university faculty member has not only worked with our teachers but also has imbedded lesson study into her own methods classes on campus to help prepare them for student teaching. This includes bringing students to school to participate in their own lesson study that is designed and created in their class on campus and carried

out at our school. This is ideal because it sets the foundational support for interns prior to engaging in lesson study with their cooperating teachers. This integrated approach allows us to fill any gaps in professional knowledge, fully preparing interns for the opportunities that are offered to them. Our classroom teachers are excited to open their classroom doors to this professor and her preservice teachers because it introduces another approach to lesson study in action while building in-service teachers’ confidence. In addition, it provides an opportunity for growth in the interns to see a collaborative method for enhancing instruction. This positive impact on both preservice and in-service teachers represents and honors the essential shifts and strides we are making to provide the best quality instruction to both university and elementary students.

Final Thoughts

Lotta: While it did not surprise me that in-depth conversations often emphasize and spark deep exploration of ideas and growing relationships (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011), I left our discussion with a tremendous sense of gratitude and satisfaction. It occurred to me that having been part the KSU PDS model since the beginning of my education career, I have never really known anything else and—I must admit—take much for granted. As our discussion revealed, the authors of this article believe that blurring of boundaries and our various roles has enhanced our ability to serve the students in the PDS partnership. Specifically, Deb’s account of the partnership’s impact on her school, Amanda’s ability to build professional connections through the PDS, and Vicki’s sense of satisfaction from working closely with interns and cooperating teachers, reinforced the importance of remembering the progress made in the past 25 years. At the same time, we acknowledge the inevitable changes and challenges face K-12 school systems and teacher education programs face in the future.

After years of successful collaboration and program implementation, it is important that we remain vigilant so that minute frustrations do not fester into larger concerns. When tensions do arise, the movement toward resolution of basic differences is forwarded through discussion and understanding of perspectives. Such discursive practice, or “the deliberate and systematic articulation of foundational differences among participants” should be cultivated within the partnership (Murrell, 2001, p. 156). As new university faculty and K-12 teachers are brought on board, we need to actively share expectations for supervision, instruction, and collaboration. Furthermore, if we want new school and university faculty to become fully invested stakeholders in the PDS partnership, we need to share our personal and relational stories that have emerged over the past 25 years. According to Breault (2010), “research can tell us some of what we need to know about the effectiveness of the PDS, but stories might be able to do so more powerfully” (p. 179).

Talking to my colleagues further emphasized the benefits of experiencing the partnerships through different lenses and in different contexts. Although it is unrealistic (and unnecessary) to expect all partners to assume multiple roles within the PDS, it would be advantageous to offer university faculty diverse

opportunities to collaborate closely with cooperating teachers and clinical instructors, provide professional development for teachers, and supervise interns as we recognize that collaboration is an essential component in promoting teacher growth (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006). Similarly, teachers and administrators should have opportunities to share their expertise in new and innovative educational trends with university faculty members and preservice teachers. As emphasized in our conversation, when lines between traditional PDS roles are blurred and partners take responsibility for shared goals and actions, the partnership strengthens and mutual respect emerges.

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