

Doing More with Less: How One Professional Development School Partnership Strategically Aligned Ideals and Resources

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ABSTRACT: The Bradley PDS Partnership, about which we report in this article, was established in 1995 to promote academic and professional development for P-12 students, pre-professionals, practitioners, and professors. For twenty years, the partnership has been generously funded by the William T. Kemper Foundation-Commerce Bank, Trustee. In a grant proposal to the foundation, we sought additional funding to expand the number of Bradley PDS sites from four schools to eight. However, we received the same level of funding as during the previous three-year term. Around the same time, our university raised the base salary for adjunct faculty, increasing the expense of faculty course reductions—a significant portion of our PDS budget. It quickly became clear that our PDS would have to do more with less. This article describes our restructuring and strategic planning processes and explores the strengths and weaknesses of our newly restructured PDS model. We believe our experience will be useful to other school-university partnerships that are trying to do more with less.

NAPDS Essentials Addressed: #7/A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration.

Introduction

In 1995, the Bradley PDS Partnership was established by Bradley University's College of Education and Health Sciences to create an extended learning environment that addressed and responded to the changing needs of P-20 learners. Generously funded by the William T. Kemper Foundation-Commerce Bank, Trustee and the University for the past twenty years, the partnership promotes academic and professional development for P-12 students, pre-professionals, practitioners, and professors (Bradley University Professional Development Schools, 2014). During the first ten years of the Kemper grant, Bradley established school-university partnerships with three school districts in the Peoria Area along with a teaching academy to provide monthly professional development for College faculty collaborating with Bradley PDS sites. In 2006, the partnership tightened to four Peoria Public Schools within three miles of Bradley's campus, focusing more on specific school needs such as safe learning environments, writing instruction, inquiry-based learning, and instructional technology.

In 2010, a parochial elementary school adjacent to campus was invited to partner informally with Bradley although funding was not available. Around the same time, Bradley received a grant from the Illinois Children's Health Network to fund three full service community schools in the area. These schools partner with

community and social service agencies to provide programs and services that support the health and well-being of students and their families (Hunzicker, Schifeling, Sattler, & Lathan, 2012). Soon, the coordinators of the William T. Kemper Foundation-Commerce Bank, Trustee grant (which funded the Bradley PDS Partnership) and the Illinois Children's Health Network grant (which funded Peoria Full Service Community Schools) began considering ways to synchronize efforts to achieve the greatest benefit for students.

During fall 2011, the Bradley PDS Council, which then consisted of four PDS site coordinators (one per school) plus the William T. Kemper Fellow (who coordinates funding and efforts for the Bradley PDS Partnership), wrote a Kemper grant renewal for the 2012-2014 term of the partnership. In the grant, the Council proposed expanding Bradley's PDS sites from four to eight by adding the parochial school and the three full service community schools. Unfortunately, the William T. Kemper Foundation - Commerce Bank, Trustee awarded the same level of funding as the previous three-year term. The same year, Bradley raised its base salary for adjunct faculty, increasing the expense of faculty course reductions—a fund from which a significant portion of the PDS budget had previously been drawn. This article describes the Bradley PDS Council's restructuring and strategic planning processes and explores the strengths and weaknesses of its newly restructured PDS model.

We, the Bradley PDS Council, believe our experience will be useful to other school-university partnerships that are trying to do more with less.

Restructuring and Strategic Planning Processes

In January 2012, upon receipt of the new Kemper grant, an assessment of projected PDS expenses revealed that, under the previously established spending structure, 99% of our Kemper grant funds would go directly to faculty course reductions, leaving less than \$100 per semester for supplies and projects—even if the four new PDS sites were not added. The shift in funding meant the partnership’s projects and initiatives would be significantly limited. Because this arrangement would significantly restrict the partnership’s efforts, the Council began imagining ways to do more with less.

The Council met three times over the next few months to discuss possible options for restructuring our human and financial resources. During the first meeting, the Kemper Fellow agreed to decrease her course reduction from two courses per semester to one course per semester, allowing for 16% of the grant funds to be reallocated to PDS projects and initiatives and setting a precedent for doing more with less. Another idea proposed by the Kemper Fellow was to decrease each site coordinator’s course reduction from one course per semester to one course per academic year. The site coordinators quickly rejected this idea as they feared this would limit their availability for PDS work during the semester.

Coincidentally, at the time the restructuring discussions were happening, Council membership was changing, which ultimately facilitated the Council’s restructuring efforts. Two faculty members had already decided that the 2011-2012 academic year would be their last year as PDS site coordinators, leaving two site coordinators and the Kemper Fellow on the Council for the following year. Around this time, the College’s Clinical Experiences Coordinator joined the Council in an advisory capacity. Instead of filling the site coordinator vacancies, the two remaining site coordinators agreed to take full responsibility for all of the PDS sites as long as they retained one course reduction per semester. This effectively cut our faculty course reduction expenses in half, while still providing a course reduction each fall and spring semester for both site coordinators.

A second issue for the Council was whether to officially add the four new PDS sites. All members of the Council acknowledged the benefits for expansion, but there was concern about the feasibility for individual faculty members coordinating four sites each. This led to a series of discussions about how the role of the site coordinators could be modified from direct participation in all projects and initiatives at each PDS site to a more indirect approach focused on recruiting faculty and students to participate directly and coordinating efforts across multiple PDS sites. With new site coordinator responsibilities revised, the Council agreed to add the four new PDS sites and the two acting site coordinators decided between themselves who

would be responsible for which PDS sites based on their research interests and areas of expertise.

By March 2012, we accomplished our goal of expanding to eight PDS sites while working within our budget. Beginning with the 2012-2013 academic year, 49% of our budget was allocated for course reductions and the remaining 51% was available for PDS projects and initiatives. However, restructuring the Bradley PDS Council required sacrifices. Each PDS site coordinator became responsible for working with four PDS sites instead of one, the Kemper Fellow now managed the grant with half the compensation previously provided, and the Clinical Experiences Coordinator had a job responsibility added. But the benefits outweighed the sacrifices. We were able to add the four new Bradley PDS sites, and we cut our course reduction expenditures by 42%, freeing more grant funds for PDS projects and initiatives. Moreover, the addition of more PDS sites facilitated increased and enhanced clinical experiences, more project-based initiatives, and more stakeholder participation across PDS sites.

With the Bradley PDS Council restructured, we began a collaborative strategic planning process that involved data collection and analysis, research, creative thinking, and decision-making. In March and April 2012, a needs and interests survey was administered to teachers at all Bradley PDS sites and informal principal interviews were conducted. In May, the survey responses were compiled and analyzed, a literature review of school-university partnerships and Professional Development Schools was completed, and a strategic planning template was selected (see Appendix A).

In June 2012, the Kemper Fellow wrote a draft of the strategic plan. During September and October, the Council met several times to revise wording and articulate timelines, roles and responsibilities, measures, and resources for each strategic action. The final strategic plan, which consisted of five goals and 24 actions, was needs-based, grounded in research, and respectful of existing resources. An executive summary of the most recent strategic plan is available at <http://www.bradley.edu/academic/colleges/ehs/centers/kemper/goals/>. The plan articulates our ideas for enhancing our PDS work while offering transparency and maintaining accountability. What follows are brief summaries of some of our accomplishments demonstrating that doing more with less is possible when moving forward strategically.

Early Field Experiences and “Cluster” Pilot

School-university partnerships provide numerous opportunities for classroom field experiences. During fall 2012, a pilot was designed to maximize our PDS partnerships by “clustering” two freshmen field experience students in the same classroom. Together, student pairs built and applied their general knowledge base, utilized their understanding of educational foundations, and set personal goals for improvement by reflecting on their teaching experiences and conferencing with cooperating teachers and university faculty. Following the fall 2012 pilot, a cooperating teacher from Whittier Primary School commented,

The biggest factor at first was getting [the freshman field experience students] to feel comfortable and willing to participate. I have them work with small groups on fluency, sounds, letters, etc. I have them focus one-on-one or in small groups to work on gaps that I see as we progress through the curriculum.

During spring 2014, one freshman teacher education major commented that she appreciated having an opportunity to “bounce ideas off” the classmate with whom she was placed at Whittier. Prior to restructuring the Bradley PDS Partnership, no cluster placements existed. Now, the majority of freshman- and sophomore-level clinical experiences are clustered at two Bradley PDS sites each semester.

EdTPA Pilot

EdTPA is a subject specific, performance-based assessment for pre-service student teacher candidates. Centered on student learning, this nationwide assessment for all pre-service teachers is modeled after the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) performance assessment for experienced teachers. In addition to being required for initial teacher licensure, edTPA supports state and national accreditation for all of Bradley’s teacher education programs. During spring 2013, Bradley’s Department of Teacher Education piloted an initial trial of the process with one section of student teachers at one Bradley PDS site. Beginning in fall 2013, all novice teachers (i.e., Bradley’s junior-level clinical experience) were required to complete one section of the edTPA portfolio in preparation for “the real thing” during student teaching. Following the pilot, one novice teacher reflected, “EdTPA allowed me to think about how to direct my planning, instruction, and assessment toward the specific class of students and types of learners, rather than just creating a lesson for a subject as I had been doing in the past.” In fall 2014, following a similar phase-in for student teachers, Bradley successfully began full implementation of edTPA. Inviting Bradley’s Clinical Experiences Coordinator to join the Council and restructuring the PDS site coordinator responsibilities from one PDS site to four facilitated a smooth transition from pilot to full implementation of edTPA.

Course Connections

Another way the Council attempted to do more with less was to take successful projects that were occurring at one PDS site and replicate them across sites. One successful replication was the expansion of collaborations between faculty at PDS sites and College faculty who teach methods courses. In fall 2010, only one methods course in our department involved the collaboration between Bradley pre-service teachers and PDS classrooms. By fall 2012, this type of collaboration had expanded to three courses and was being implemented at three different PDS sites. Pre-service teachers enrolled in Literacy Methods I tutored first grade students at Whittier Primary School in phonics, fluency, and comprehension. Pre-service teachers enrolled in Literacy

Methods II taught interdisciplinary mini-lessons for sixth grade students at Roosevelt Magnet School. Pre-service teachers enrolled in Methods of Teaching English Language Learners worked with kindergarten and fourth grade English learner students at Harrison Community Learning Center.

During the 2013-2014 academic year, thirteen course connections took place across a variety of disciplines including teacher education, nursing, family and consumer sciences, science for educators, public speaking, and psychology. A teacher education major whose class interacted with kindergarten students in a bilingual classroom at Glen Oak Community Learning Center commented, “I learned that even though you may not speak the same language, you can still communicate easily and learn the other person’s language at the same time.” A Bradley nursing major whose freshman-level public speaking class presented informative speeches on topics such as respectful communication for students at Whittier Primary School commented, “Normally, we would just give these speeches by ourselves. I think this is a creative way of doing this class, and it gives me more confidence.” The proliferation of course connections between the College and Bradley PDS sites is a result of restructuring the role of site coordinator from direct participant in all site-based projects and initiatives to recruiting more faculty and students to participate and helping to coordinate their efforts. A reading interventionist at one Bradley PDS site summarized, “It’s a win-win for everyone!”

Large-scale PDS Events

Sponsoring events for all eight PDS sites is another strategy we have used to efficiently manage our resources. For the past two academic years, the Bradley PDS Council has sponsored two large-scale annual events. Each November, we charter a bus to a one-day, statewide education conference and pay the registration fee for two representatives from each Bradley PDS site. In 2013, sixteen teachers and administrators joined Bradley faculty and pre-service teachers for the conference. Following the experience, 100% of participants stated that they learned something new at the conference and learned something that they could use in their classrooms.

Each April, we organize an after school mini-conference, called the Spring Celebration, that features interactive poster sessions and roundtable discussions on a variety of PDS initiatives and other educationally relevant topics. In 2014, thirteen practicing teachers and administrators from Bradley’s PDS sites, 42 undergraduate and graduate students in teacher education, nursing, and counseling, and 26 Bradley faculty served as presenters for the 120 people in attendance. Following the event, one pre-service teacher stated, “Not only was this a great opportunity to network with different professionals, it was also a time to share experiences and hear advice and opinions from beginning and experienced educators.” A teacher-presenter from Trewyn K-8 School commented, “The Spring Celebration was very well organized, informative, and fun. Thank you for an engaging opportunity to connect with others in education.”

Table 1. Bradley PDS Partnership Stakeholder Survey Comparison: 2012 to 2014

| The Bradley PDS Partnership supports: | November 2012 | May 2013 | May 2014 |
|--|---------------|----------|----------|
| Student learning and achievement. | 69% | 75% | 79% |
| Preparation of future education professionals. | 70% | 80% | 79% |
| Preparation of future health professionals. | 40% | 44% | 47% |
| Leadership. | 58% | 66% | 71% |
| Professional development. | 60% | 66% | 66% |
| Students' health and well-being. | 58% | 62% | 60% |
| Students' families' health and well-being. | 42% | 51% | 55% |

By fall 2014, College faculty began initiating large-scale projects as well. Two faculty members worked with fifteen teacher education majors to develop a series of anti-bullying presentations for students of all ages. The presentations were so popular that the group had to create a waiting list for the next academic year. Another professor worked with special education majors to create sensory boards for students with autism, two of which were given away to teachers at Bradley PDS sites during the spring 2014 semester. Restructuring the Bradley PDS Partnership led to these large-scale projects as the Council sought ways to generate higher participation rates among all Bradley PDS stakeholders and across Bradley PDS sites. In only two years, the Spring Celebration has become a much-anticipated event among teachers and administrators at Bradley PDS sites as well as among Bradley faculty and students.

Customized PDS Projects

Even as we have adjusted to doing more with less, we have continued providing Bradley PDS sites with customized support. Some of our schools need assistance with practical tasks. For example, in September 2012 we assisted Roosevelt Magnet School in refurbishing its inner courtyard, a high priority for the stakeholders of this particular school. During spring 2013, when Manual Academy asked us to help high school seniors complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), Bradley students were trained and then assisted with this short-term yet crucial effort. Other Bradley PDS sites are interested in promoting student health. During spring 2013, dietetic students conducted nutrition assessments and follow up interventions for students at Harrison Community Learning Center, and during fall 2013 Bradley nursing students planned and implemented a health and safety fair at St. Mark Catholic School. In spring 2014 four Bradley PDS sites participated in a field trip to a local minor league baseball game as an end-of-year enrichment experience.

Our Council has discussed replicating more of these types of projects across multiple PDS sites, as we did the baseball game, but many of the projects are site-specific. Moreover, we simply do not have the human and financial resources to address as many site-specific needs as in previous grant terms. One example is our failure to consistently provide Bradley student tutors for Manual Academy's school wide tutoring program. Another is our inability to offer ongoing classroom management support at Glen Oak Community Learning Center. Our PDS principals are grateful for

the supplies and services that we continue to provide, but they recognize that out of necessity, site-specific PDS projects have become smaller-scale and fewer in number. Even so, as a Council, we continue to strive for a balance between customized projects at each PDS site and replication of projects across sites in ways that best utilize our resources.

Is it Working?

In November 2012, the Bradley PDS Council administered a stakeholder survey to all teachers, administrators, and staff at Bradley's eight PDS sites (see Appendix B). A total of 179 surveys were returned, yielding a 38% response rate. To track stakeholder perceptions as we worked to do more with less, the survey was re-administered in May 2013 and May 2014, with similar response rates each time. The survey comparisons show steadily increasing positive perceptions about the contributions of the Bradley PDS Partnership (Table 1).

The survey responses over the past three years show that stakeholders value the Bradley PDS Partnership. In all areas surveyed, the percentage of respondents who believe the partnership has promoted positive outcomes has increased. In all areas but one, the scores are now above 50% with especially high values in the areas of preparing future teachers (79%), supporting student learning and achievement (79%), leadership (71%). Stakeholders also increasingly believe that the Bradley PDS Partnership supports teacher professional development (66%). However, while many stakeholders believe that the partnership supports students' health and well-being (60%), fewer believe that it supports the health and well-being of students' *families* (55%). Even fewer recognize the Bradley PDS Partnership as supporting the preparation of future nurses, dietitians, physical therapists, etc. (47%).

These results indicate that the professionals at Bradley's eight PDS sites see benefits to our school-university partnership, yet they also believe there are areas where we could be accomplishing more. As of May 2014, more than two-thirds of the way through the grant term, sixteen actions in our strategic plan have been achieved, three have been partially achieved, four have been started, and one – now deemed outside of the Council's control – has not been achieved. During the final semester of the grant term, we will continue working toward completion of all actions in our strategic plan while continuing to make the most of our resources.

Conclusion

This article described the Bradley PDS Council's restructuring and strategic planning processes and explored the strengths and weaknesses of our newly-restructured PDS model. Our synergistic relationships with eight local schools allow us to better serve Bradley's students while providing significant service to our PDS sites, and our strategic plan offers transparency and maintains accountability for all involved. The Bradley PDS Partnership

does not stand alone; other colleges and universities also have been successful in maximizing human and financial resources to support school-university partnerships (Foster, Reed, & McGinnis, 2009; Mills, 2010). We hope that contributing our firsthand experience to the collective dialog around NAPDS Essential 7 - focused on ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration among PDS partners - will be useful to others who are also trying to do more with less. ^{SUP}

Appendix A. Strategic Planning Template*

I. Problem Statement/Rationale

II. Data Analysis

| DATA COLLECTION What data do we have? | DATA SOURCE(S) Where did we find these data? | FINDINGS/ANALYSIS What are these data telling us? | GAP ANALYSIS What are the areas for improvement? |
|--|---|--|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

III. Action Plan

| GOAL 1: | | | | |
|---|----------|--------------------------|----------|-----------|
| ACTIONS | TIMELINE | ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES | MEASURES | RESOURCES |
| Action 1.1: <hr/> Supporting research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • | | | | |
| Action 1.2: <hr/> Supporting research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • | | | | |

IV. Communication, Public Relations, Special Recognition, and Dissemination of Research

V. Monitoring, Revision, and Evaluation

VI. References

VII. Appendices

*Adapted from a school improvement planning template provided by the Illinois State Board of Education in the early 2000s.

Appendix B. Bradley PDS Partnership Stakeholder Survey

As a part of our continuing efforts to improve our school-university partnership with your school, we ask you to complete this brief survey.

School Name:

Part 1: Please complete the following statements.

1. I am a: ___ Teacher ___ Administrator ___ Professional staff member ___ Other:
2. Counting this year, I have worked ___ years at this school.
3. Counting this year, I have worked ___ years in the education profession.
4. In the past year, ___ Bradley students have been assigned to me/my classroom for an early field experience, novice teaching or student teaching.
5. Please list other Bradley-related projects with which you have been involved in the past year.

6. We are always looking for ways to improve our professional work with you. What ideas do you have to enhance the PDS relationship between your school and Bradley University?

Part 2: Using the following scale, please respond to the statements below.

6 = strongly agree 4 = agree more than disagree 2 = disagree d/k = don't know
 5 = agree 3 = disagree more than agree 1 = strongly disagree

7. Our school's involvement as a professional development school with Bradley University has:

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| a. Allowed us to support the preparation of future education professionals | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | d/k |
| b. Allowed us to support the preparation of future health professionals | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | d/k |
| c. Supported our work to improve student learning and achievement | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | d/k |
| d. Supported the work of leaders in our building | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | d/k |
| e. Promoted professional development in our building | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | d/k |
| f. Helped support the health and well-being of our students | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | d/k |
| g. Helped support the health and well-being of our students' families | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | d/k |

Thank you for your time and input!

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