

# *Professional Development School Partnerships: An Instrument for Teacher Leadership*

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**ABSTRACT:** Professional development school (PDS) partnerships have the potential for great impact on the field of education. This study examined one PDS partnership school's activities in promoting teacher leadership. The study adds a new dimension to prospective outcomes of the NAPDS essentials related to establishing ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants. The goal of the study was to understand school participants' experiences in one school setting; thus, a qualitative case-study design was used. To gain, discover, and understand the PDS partnership practices at the selected site, data collection methods included interviews, observations, and focus groups over one academic school year. Three themes that foster teacher leadership emerged: opportunities for professional development, co-teaching, and collective teacher efficacy. The study findings suggest PDS partnership activities create potential for enhancing teachers' opportunities to become leaders within their school communities. This empowerment leads teachers to take ownership and responsibility in teaching each other and advocating for their profession and students. Ultimately, such an approach increases the likelihood of enabling higher quality and stronger teachers, improved student achievement, and better schools.

## **Professional Development School Partnerships: An Instrument for Teacher Leadership**

Teacher quality has emerged as the key factor contributing to student achievement and educational improvement (Cochran-Smith, 2006). Goodlad (1984) argues that to have quality teachers, one needs quality schools in which clinical-like learning takes place. Goodlad (1984) was referring to professional development school (PDS) partnerships. Professional development school partnerships are relationships among partner institutions—universities, school districts, teachers' unions or professional education associations—with one goal of better preparing teachers (Levine, 2002). PDSs are learning organizations where schools and universities share the common goal of preparing

quality teachers through enhancing the professional development of novice and veteran teachers. Professional development opportunities include, for example, teacher participation in seminars, problem-solving groups, reflection, inquiry, skills development activities, and college and graduate level classes (AACTE, 2001; Levine, 2002). According to The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2001), "professional development schools (PDSs) are real schools, often in challenging settings, which have been redesigned and restructured to support their complex mission. PDS partnerships support professional and student learning through the use of an inquiry-oriented approach to teaching" (p. 1). PDS partnerships share common goals such as (a) improving student performance and achievement, (b) preparing high-quality teachers, and (c)

enhancing professional development for novice and experienced teachers (AACTE, 2004).

Proposed in the early 1990s by the Holmes Group, PDS partnerships have the potential to make a great impact on the field of education. *Tomorrow's Schools: Principals for the Design of Professional Development Schools* (Holmes Group, 1990) proposed school university partnerships—modeling teaching hospitals—that would promote education, research, and professional development (Harris & Van Tassell, 2005). Shortly after the Holmes publication appeared, PDS partnerships were embraced and encouraged by professional organizations such as the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). In 2004, The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) promoted PDS partnerships as avenues to enhance professional development of all teachers. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) recognized the need for professional development schools to improve the quality of teaching and enhance student achievement. NCATE (2001) developed and published the following five standards for professional development schools: (a) learning community, (b) accountability and quality assurance, (c) collaboration, (d) diversity and equity, and (e) structures, resources, and roles. Furthermore, in 2008, the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) developed nine essentials of what it means to be a professional development school, further substantiating the importance of PDSs in the education community (NAPDS, 2008).

Research in the last fifteen years has substantiated positive outcomes of PDS partnerships. Research has indicated such partnerships result in higher student achievement, reduction in pupil-teacher ratios, and higher-quality teacher candidates. For example, Pine (2000) found, over an eight-year period, that minority students in professional development schools met or exceeded average test scores in mathematics, science, and reading, compared to those of their more affluent peers in Michigan. Supporting Pine, Gill and Hoove (2000) found that students enrolled in PDS partnership schools

had higher test scores compared to students in non-PDS partnerships. Furthermore, PDSs reduce the pupil-teacher ratio. According to Levine (2002), “teacher candidates become fully integrated into instructional teams, they take on responsibilities commensurate with their experience and [they] can lighten the load for supervising teachers” (p. 67). Additionally, Houston, et al. (1999) promoted PDS partnerships as an avenue for creating higher-quality teachers. Using a consortium of four university and three school districts in Texas, Houston, et al. (1999) compared PDS teachers to their counterparts on several teacher-focused assessments including the Texas test for new teachers and classroom observations. The study results indicated that on all teacher assessment measures, PDS teacher candidates outperformed their non-PDS peers.

Much research on PDS partnerships has examined partners serving as instruments of change in teacher quality. Based on a review of extant literature it was clear that not much is known about the relationship between PDS partnerships and leadership roles teachers assume to support their schools as learning organizations. Research has substantiated leadership is one of the best learning opportunities possible for teachers; specifically, teachers improve instructional practice and grow in their organizational and decision-making perspectives (Barth, 2001; Ryan, 1999; Smylie, 1994). A study designed to better understand the relationship among PDS partnerships and teacher leadership would add significantly to this research base and to the understanding of teachers as leaders in a PDS. The purpose of this study was to examine one PDS partnerships' school's activities in promoting teacher leadership. To achieve this purpose we investigated how the principal, teachers, staff, and school context (as a learning community) fostered teacher leadership.

The concept of teacher leadership has increasingly become a part of educational reform conversations. Teacher leadership has been defined conceptually and operationally in a variety of ways in the last two decades. To guide the current study we perceive teacher

leadership as conceptualized by Childs-Bowen, Moeller, and Scrivener (2000): “We believe teachers are leaders when they function in professional learning communities to affect student learning; contribute to school improvement; inspire excellence in practice; and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement” (p. 28).

## Standard I for Professional Development Schools

A professional development school is a learning organization focused on the learning of school students, novice and veteran teachers and university faculty. In order to bring rigor to the concept of PDS and support PDS partnerships, NCATE developed five PDS Standards. In the current study, we focus on Standard I Learning Community. This standard defines a PDS as a “learning-centered community that supports the integrated learning and development of P-12 students, candidates, and PDS partners through inquiry-based practices” (NCATE, 2001, p.11). PDS partners share a common vision of teaching and learning grounded in research and practice. Work and practice in the PDS is inquiry-based and focused on learning. Inquiry-based practice is used regularly at the classroom, departmental, and school levels to inform decisions about best approaches to teaching and learning. Inquiry-based practice in the PDS is at the crossroads of professional education reform and school improvement, serving as an instrument of change. Because the PDS partners view the partnership as integral to their individual purposes, the partnership influences change (NCATE, 2011). PDS partners develop new approaches for examining and improving the practices through integrating partners’ expertise and knowledge of practice. Thus, teachers and staff assume more leadership functions in regards to developing the school as a learning organization. However, not much is known about how teacher leadership develops in a PDS; the current study aimed to add such research to the extant literature. Additionally,

the research provides an example of NAPDS essentials 3 and 8 role in the development of teachers as leaders in the PDS.

## Study Site

Housed in a metropolitan public school district, A.C. Smith Elementary (K-5) is an inner-city school located in the southeastern part of the United States with ninety-eight percent of its students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. The school provides Extended School Services, a before-and-after school program for extra educational assistance, and intervention programs in mathematics and reading. In addition, A.C. Smith has a full-time counselor, an on-site school nurse, a social agency representative, a student support team, Exceptional Child Education resource teachers, and a Jump Start program for early childhood education. Jump Start is a program that provides training to college students and volunteers who work with low-income preschool students. Moreover, it is a district Health Promotion School of Excellence. This is a comprehensive school health program that provides access to health services for parents and students such as free vision screenings, physical fitness testing, and Red Ribbon Week. Furthermore, many safe after-school programs are in place, including orchestra, basketball, cheerleading, and a government club.

In the fall of 2009, A.C. Smith Elementary School entered into a PDS partnership with a local state university as a part of the university’s Signature Partnership Initiative (SPI). The goals of the SPI focus on improving the educational attainment level, the health and well-being, and the economic viability of the community. A.C. Smith is one of five schools identified for university-wide support.

A.C. Smith’s student population draws from a community with the highest poverty levels and lowest parent education levels in the district. Every aspect of the partnership focuses on supporting the academic growth of A.C. Smith’s students and on creating a poverty-friendly school. In addition, the program targets the university teacher preparation program,

ensuring that students taking methods of teaching courses and student teachers are placed in an urban setting with a diverse student population. The PDS partnership ensures that university faculty and teacher candidates work together with A.C. Smith administrators and teachers to support the academic growth of teacher candidates. In a traditional clinical supervision model, university supervisors may visit university students two or three times a semester. In contrast, in this PDS model, a university liaison is at the school for three days a week offering extensive support to university students. The university partners with many schools to offer a clinical model but only A.C. Smith has a PDS model that promotes a collective responsibility for teacher training.

Additionally, resources across the school-university settings are consistently shared. Human resources are shared by both university and PDS faculty. One university faculty member serves as the liaison at the PDS and has a 20 percent allocation of time across the academic year dedicated to work conducted with the PDS. Additionally, a university instructor works with a cohort of teachers seeking National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification. Monetary resources are also shared between partners. During the 2010–2011 academic year, the PDS university supported six teachers to enable their participation in the NBPTS process. Furthermore, physical resources are frequently shared. The PDS offers space for the university to host professional development sessions, seminars, meetings, and presentations.

A.C. Smith Elementary was chosen as the site for this study for many reasons, all centered on school staff's opportunities to grow as leaders. First, the university has provided support for professional development for the teachers and extended services to the students. Second, as a PDS, the staff and teachers consistently work with university partners in conducting research, providing professional development, and working to mentor student and pre-service teachers. Third, previous school observations have indicated a diffusion of leadership roles among teachers, administrators,

and staff. The collaborative nature of the university-school partnership speaks to NAPDS essential 8 – “work by college/university and P-12 Faculty in formal roles across the institutional settings” (NAPDS, 2008, p. 3). Additionally, the ongoing professional development for all participants aligns with NAPDS essential 3.

## Research Methods

The current study utilized qualitative research methods to address a research problem associated with a phenomenon in a natural school setting. The aim of the study was to understand school participants' experiences; thus, a qualitative case-study design best informed the study's research question (Creswell, 2008). Specifically, this study aimed to understand and provide a broad description of how professional development activities foster teacher leadership at the elementary level using a single case, that of A.C. Smith Elementary School.

A purposeful sampling design was utilized to gain, discover, and understand the PDS partnership practice at the selected site. Specifically, a nomination technique (Hunter, 1953) delineated staff members who actively fostered leadership practices within the school. All participants took part in the case study for six months beginning in October 2009 and concluding in March 2010. Interviews, focused observations, focus groups, and an analysis of documents were all employed to help reveal the ways in which the school promoted teacher leadership.

First, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with the principal and staff, recording the interviews using a digital audio recorder and taking written notes. All school and participant identifiers were removed with pseudonyms assigned to the data during transcription. Researchers used the study's purpose as a guide to develop interview protocols (see Appendix A). Researchers interviewed the school principal on two occasions. The first interview was conducted at the beginning of the study with an interview protocol identical to that used with the staff members. The principal's second interview was conducted at the end

Table 1. Emergent Themes

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Opportunities for professional development	Gives teachers the knowledge, skills, and confidence to become leaders themselves.
Co-teaching	Teachers in the case school were actively involved in teaching and coaching other teachers in the building.
Collective teacher efficacy	Speaks to the teachers' perceptions that the faculty as a whole has a positive impact on student achievement.

of the study to clarify emerging themes found in staff interviews (see Appendix B). Staff interviews were conducted with those identified by peers as leaders in the school: the school's literacy coach, a first-grade resource teacher, the Culture/Climate/and Communications Chair, the family resource coordinator, the science coordinator, and the writing coordinator. The same questions were asked of all participants.

Second, researchers observed staff members and the principal as he or she conducted his or her daily routines, with special attention given to times when the principal and staff intentionally engaged in leadership behaviors (i.e., facilitating morning meetings and committee meetings). The field notes consisted of detailed, concrete descriptions of what had been observed, including a map of the layout of the room and where participants sat.

Third, one focus group was conducted during the research project. The focus group consisted of six teachers who were all working on National Board Certification. These teachers were deemed leaders in the building by providing professional development, chairing committees, and/or serving as mentor teachers by supervising teaching methods course students and student teachers from the partnering university (see Appendix C).

Fourth, researchers collected handouts, newsletters, emails, and meeting minutes to supplement the interviews, observations, and focus group in order to gather data for content analysis. The review of documents took place simultaneously with observations.

The study employed the constant comparative method explained by Glaser (1978). The steps in this method include the following activities: (a) begin data collection; (b) group the data into themes; (c) collect data that provide

incidents of the emerged themes; (d) discover any existing relationships between themes; and (e) code the data according to emergent themes. The steps of the constant comparative method occur simultaneously during data collection until themes are saturated. To ensure trustworthiness of the data collected, we triangulated the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Maxwell, 1996); specifically, this was done to check the validity of assumptions and explore alternate possibilities and interpretations.

## Findings

The study investigated how the principal, teachers, staff, and school as a learning community fostered teacher leadership. From information gathered during the interviews, the observations, document analysis, and focus group, three themes emerged: (1) opportunity for professional development, (2) co-teaching, and (3) a sense of collective teacher efficacy. These themes are defined in Table 1.

### Opportunities for Professional Development

Research shows that schools in which teachers have strong professional communities that include ongoing teacher learning have higher student achievement gains than do schools with weaker professional communities (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2001; Lewis, 2002; Reeves, 2002; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003), which reflects the first theme uncovered in the current study. An emergent theme from this study indicated that teachers were given the opportunity to participate in professional development that, in turn, gave teachers the knowledge, skills, and confidence to then become educational leaders within the

school. Many of these opportunities have occurred as a result of support from the local university partnership. The PDS partners collectively ensure the professional development experiences are relevant, innovative, and connected to the goals of the school. Prior to becoming an official PDS, A.C. Smith had seven teachers who participated in a statewide reading project and five that participated in a statewide writing project. After the formalization of the PDS, more teachers were given the opportunity to participate in both professional development initiatives. Because of the human and monetary resources of the PDS, a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards cohort was established, and partnerships with the university focused on conducting action research were offered to teachers.

The statewide reading project is a professional development initiative for elementary teachers funded by the state. Teachers apply for the project and must have at least one year of teaching experience to participate. Each state university holds a two-week institute in the summer where teams of teachers are immersed in research-based best practices in literacy instruction. Twenty teachers on site have participated in this professional development opportunity and received graduate credit. At the suggestion of the principal, this reading project now is held at the case study school. Teachers participating in the reading project created a Literacy Action Plan for their classroom or school, implemented their plans during the year, and worked with the university directors who provided support and coaching during site visits to each teacher's classroom.

Evidence of the effects of this professional development was apparent during data collection. For example, teachers who had participated in the reading project developed a *Books for a Buck* program in which students could purchase books for a dollar. The goal of this program was to provide students with access to books at home. *Books for a Buck* started as a class assignment in the statewide reading project and has continued because of its success. Two teachers who participated in the statewide reading project are now master teachers in special intervention classrooms for struggling readers. One of the

teachers also serves as the chair of the Demonstration Site Team, a committee that analyzes and monitors the progress of students struggling in reading. This committee examines the needs of the whole child including academic, social, and medical issues.

The statewide writing project is a network focused on developing teacher leaders in the area of writing. It seeks to help improve the writing skills of students in primary grades through college by preparing teachers who work with their own students and with other teachers during the following school year in their own and other schools. Since the inception of the partnership, ten teachers at the case study school have participated in this writing project, with more teachers now registered to attend the next session. The state writing project has worked with teachers at the school to provide and promote professional development in writing. Teachers have received graduate-level credit, participated in study groups, and attended in-school professional development and mini-conferences. Statewide writing project teachers are key leaders in the school's writing initiatives. For example, the graduates of this program make up the writing committee at the school and offer professional development opportunities for other schools within the district. This committee helps to set writing goals for the school, works on curriculum alignment, and provides professional development at their school and throughout the district.

Another opportunity for professional development that has been established is aiding teachers to become national board-certified teachers. Seven teachers on the site are national board-certified teachers (NBCT) through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The NBPTS cohort was established as an avenue to foster teacher leadership. When asked how being in the NBPTS cohort has prepared them to be leaders, many group members explained that the process made them cognizant that they were already leaders on an informal level. One teacher said, "It has helped re-emphasize that we are already leaders. We already have leadership positions in the school. I realize

more what I am doing because I am writing about it. I'm focusing on my impact on students."

Further, teachers and staff have opportunities to participate in research activities ranging from collection and analysis of data, writing of research, and presenting research to others. For example, two fourth grade teachers are collaborating with local university faculty on the study of the effectiveness of an innovative way of teaching vocabulary. These two teachers are now providing professional development on vocabulary strategies to their colleagues at the school. Other projects include fourth grade teachers working with faculty and university students on a writing resiliency project, studying the effectiveness of using reading notebooks to improve comprehension and evaluating the effectiveness of a mathematics intervention program.

### Co-Teaching

A second theme that emerged was that teachers in the case study school were actively involved in teaching each other. Most of the professional development in the school was not provided by the school district or other outside sources, but was given by the teachers themselves. Spillane, Diamond, and Jita (2003) have reported that teachers appreciate and value peers who demonstrate teaching expertise. These teachers are valued as leaders by working with colleagues and gaining the respect of their peers. Leadership was gained informally through peer relationships and interactions.

Mondays and Fridays include established times for teachers to share ideas about instructional practices. Specifically, Marvelous Mondays and Fun Fridays are times designed for any teacher to share best instructional practices, professional development in writing or reading, and other information about particular methods working in classrooms. Marvelous Mondays and Fun Fridays were both established one year prior to the start of the PDS. After the PDS was started, university faculty was utilized to complement the instruction given by classroom teachers. For example, university faculty conducted professional development related to effective ways to teach Guided Reading, using

pre-reading strategies, behavioral interventions, mathematics strategies related to the Common Core Standards, and using Reader's Notebooks. The aforementioned examples offered opportunities for teachers to gain professional development not offered to many other schools. The teachers then shared what they learned with other teachers in the building through the Marvelous Mondays and Fun Fridays framework.

Marvelous Mondays professional development opportunities are offered at least once a month after school. Fabulous Fridays are held in the morning before school begins, and they take place at least once a month. To address gaps in knowledge, staff target specific professional development initiatives. Teachers who are experts in specified areas are asked to lead the professional development seminars. Examples of this included teachers modeling the writing process, teaching vocabulary strategies, and training colleagues on reading assessments. An important aspect of the professional development is that following the experience teachers have the opportunity to go back to their classrooms and practice. Teachers are directed to their peers to ask questions and receive support. The literacy coach explained these processes in the following way:

We do our reading assessment training where we [instructional coaching team members] train teachers; they go back and practice the assessment in their classrooms and come back with questions. We use [these] as opportunities for teams to meet together and create assessments that are team based and that will work best for their students' needs.

At other times, teachers have sought out the principal to see whether they could lead PD on a specific strategy, an activity, or an idea that was working in their classroom. Many times this might include the teacher's modeling a strategy or offering to have other teachers observe the strategy or skill. The literacy coach made the following comment about the effect this has had on teachers: "We have teachers who volunteer to do professional development sessions. I think it is just building confidence, and I think it is

encouraging people to take the initiative when they have an idea.”

Marvelous Mondays and Fun Fridays are both examples of teachers teaching teachers. These two examples demonstrated how teachers were given extensive professional development because of the resources of the PDS. This professional development helped teachers to increase their senses of self-efficacy. Instead of seeking outside sources for training, the school utilized the human resources in the building that was self-actualized through the resources offered through the professional development school.

### Collective Teacher Efficacy

A third theme that emerged was collective teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Specifically, the staff expressed that together they organize and execute courses of action they believe will positively affect students’ educational outcomes—supporting the belief that as teachers they make a difference. Research has substantiated links between student achievement and collective teacher efficacy within a school (Bandura 1993; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk, 2000). Additionally, Brinson and Steiner (2007) reported collective teacher efficacy linked to creating a work environment that builds teacher commitment to a school. This commitment to the school in turn fosters teachers’ eagerness for professional development opportunities, as well as for teaching each other, as illustrated in the case study school.

The majority of the teachers interviewed expressed a collective perception that teachers in the school make an educational difference by becoming informal leaders. The staff shares in the challenges the school faces and in the tasks that must be completed. The family resource coordinator stated the following to illustrate this point: “We are all here for the same reason; we all believe in the same purpose. We know each child will learn, and it is my responsibility as a leader in doing so [helping each child learn].” Through a shared sense of learning, the saying, “It takes a village to raise a child,” was evident in the teachers’ comments.

The idea of collective teacher efficacy is very apparent in the interview, observation, and focus

group data. According to Spillane, Diamond, and Jita (2003), teachers appreciate and value peers who work with colleagues and demonstrate teaching expertise. Teachers are valued as leaders by working with colleagues and gaining the respect of their peers. At A.C. Smith, all teachers are identified as having expertise in a field, practice, or topic. The principal summarized this idea in the following way:

Together we assess the needs and gaps in our faculty knowledge and look for the “gold nuggets” in folks. When I [the principal] do teacher evaluations, I have a piece on what I would like to encourage them to be an expert in, because I already see the capability and expertise in them.

Furthermore, the Instructional Coaching Committee (ICC) gathers weekly to discuss student achievement, leading efforts to support the advancement of best instructional practices and school initiatives. The ICC team is made up of classroom teachers, the school social worker, special area teachers, and the school administrator. As a team, the committee members analyze information to determine the best next steps for individual students. During observations of the ICC meetings, a school data board was often discussed. During such meetings, committee members expressed a belief in teachers collectively leading efforts to improve student reading and, specifically, moving students from a low-performing to a high-performing level. Content analysis of interviews revealed that the data board was used as a tool to promote collective teacher efficacy, an idea the literacy coach had discovered at a national Reading First Conference. The data board was used as a tool to publicly post, celebrate, and diagnose achievement areas for growth. Every child’s progress had a place designated on the data board and was monitored consistently. All teachers made reference to the data board and assumed responsibility for posting and analyzing their classroom data, as well as school data. Teachers also used the data board to determine what professional development they needed to learn more about successful interventions. Many teachers commented during interviews that this kind of analysis of student work and progress leads to confidence in the

informal leaders' work in helping to attain the school's educational outcomes.

Additionally, content analysis of the meeting minutes was completed for a weekly Instructional Leadership Team Committee. This committee meets monthly to determine the school needs in regards to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The committee is comprised of classroom teachers, the school's reading specialist, and the principal. Committee minutes and observational notes indicated an emphasis on creating a school environment where teachers can become leaders in improving skills and knowledge in curriculum, assessment, and instruction. The committee expressed its commitment to raising and encouraging all teachers' capacities. Whether through PD, coaching, or feedback cycles, all teachers were provided opportunities to become leaders. As a result, teachers in the school began to "roll up their sleeves and get the job done" (Schechter & Tschannen-Moran, 2006, p. 480). As the family resource coordinator stated, "We work really hard here, and no one is out on an island. We work together here."

## Conclusion

Professional development schools are learning-centered organizations that support integrated learning and development of school students and teachers (Levine, 2002; NCATE, 2001). Through PDS partnerships, new approaches for examining and improving practices are gained through integrating partners' expertise and knowledge of practice. As a result, teachers are assuming more leadership functions in regards to developing the school as a learning organization. This aligns with PDS partnerships potentially serving as instruments for teacher leadership, as evidenced at A.C. Smith Elementary. This alignment is a result of the ongoing professional development and collaborative nature of the college/university faculty and P-12 faculty, which are two of the required essentials of being a PDS as reported by NAPDS.

The idea of teachers being leaders at the study site was not perceived as purposefully planned by administration but rather appeared to emanate as the PDS grew and deepened. The PDS offered

many professional development opportunities for teachers and gave teachers opportunities to participate in research and university training. The university was able to offer human resources such as faculty to do training, provide research, and work side-by-side with teachers on action research. Additionally, the university offered fiscal resources. For example, monies for the National Board Cohort were paid by the university. Other professional development that would normally cost schools, such as money to pay consultants, was offered free of charge to teachers.

Through teacher interviews and observations, it was revealed that A.C. Smith provides teachers with opportunities to participate in seminars, problem-solving groups, reflection, inquiry, and skills development activities. For example, through observations of the school's Instructional Coaching Team and Instructional Leadership Team meetings all school staff actively engaged in the meeting dialogue by asking questions and offering suggestions for school improvement. At Smith, working together served as a tool for learning and knowledge growth. As expressed by a fourth-grade teacher, "All of our committees are intertwined, and we have to work with each other to get things accomplished."

A.C. Smith's learning environment promoting teacher leadership was further revealed through the use of motivational language heard throughout the school. Specifically, during repeated observations of the instructional leadership team, researchers often noted the principal's and teachers' use of language creating a community of trust and confidence, which was supported through interview data. The principal was often quoted as saying phrases such as "empower teachers" and "all of us sit at the table." More specifically, the principal, during a follow-up interview observed, "Teachers share in our responsibilities, successes, and failures . . . all have input on getting it right."

Moreover, the schools' information-sharing process further substantiated the school as a learning community that supports teachers as leaders. For example, every Monday and Friday there are established times for teachers to share ideas about best instructional practices and professional development in writing and/or

reading. According to Spillane et al. (2004), this type of information-sharing supports a community of peer communication and breaks down the typical “egg carton” structure, ultimately fostering teacher leadership practices. In so-called egg carton structures, teachers are traditionally isolated within their classrooms, eliminating the opportunity to discuss or participate in the instructional practices within their school. Organizational structures fostering teacher leadership were also supported by the data presented in the current study’s theme of teachers co-teaching and collective teacher efficacy.

Furthermore, teacher leadership at the school is promoted informally through peer relationships and interactions emphasizing the culture of the teachers working together as a whole. We argue that without teacher leadership, Smith would be another example of the traditional egg carton structure, with leadership being offered solely by the principal.

## Implications

In 2004, NCATE promoted PDS partnerships as a way to increase professional development for teachers that in turn enhanced student achievement. Additionally, in 2008, NAPDS released nine essentials of what it means to be a PDS. Specifically, PDS partnership activities can give teachers the opportunity to become leaders in a school community, as evidenced by the work being done at A.C. Smith Elementary. Study findings showed that the resources of the PDS helped to contribute to teachers gaining the confidence and professional development to be leaders in the building. For example, teachers frequently offer to lead professional development for university students and share their knowledge and expertise in university classes. Teachers work with university student teachers on best reading practices by offering resources, modeling strategies, and observing and giving feedback. The principal also offers his time to meet with pre-service teachers, attend conferences and meetings, and collaborate with faculty on research and program initiatives. Dedicating human resources to maintaining the PDS has been essential to its success.

PDSs are also learning organizations in which partners share the common goals of preparing quality teachers and other school personnel through participation in seminars, problem-solving groups, reflection, inquiry, skills development activities, and college and graduate level classes. Study findings indicated such PDS partnership activities encourage teachers to assume leadership functions to improve their schools’ teaching and instructional strategies for student growth.

Accountability for learning in PDS is no longer the sole responsibility of the principal. In a learning community, a teacher’s role expands from one’s classroom to the entire school. Teachers, staff, and administrators can collectively work toward a common goal contributing to the schools’ success as a PDS. NAPDS essentials 3 and 8 contribute to the development of teachers as leaders. Additionally, such a context empowers teachers; specifically, teachers begin to take on more responsibility to mentor or coach each other and advocate for their profession and students. The current study demonstrated that PDS partnerships potentially serve as instruments for teachers to become leaders. Ultimately, such an approach increases the likelihood of enabling higher quality teachers, improving students’ achievement, and creating better schools. <sup>SUP</sup>

## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol for All School Staff

1. Can you tell me a little about your role?
2. What committees are you involved with?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about the Student Support Team & Student Response Team?
4. In your view, can you speak a little to leadership practices at your school?
5. Who in your mind fosters such leadership practices and why?
6. I want to you think about the term distributed leadership, what does that mean here at Smith Elementary?
7. Who do you believe are key personnel here at the school that foster distributed leadership or who advocates for it?

8. How does that play into the committee work?
9. How are decisions made?
10. How are ideas presented?
11. Can you speak a little bit about how the leadership practices at Smith Elementary extend to the students?
12. How does that relate to student achievement?
13. How has leadership changed over the years?
14. If a staff member has not been at Smith for that long, how does leadership compare to other schools, situations you have been in?
15. Do you have any other comments about leadership practices at Smith you would like to share?

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol for Follow-up Principal Interview

1. What are some ways in which you provide opportunities for leadership?
2. How do you provide intellectual stimulation for your teachers?
3. How is the sense of community fostered within the school?
4. From the various interviews conducted, the notion of “teachers teaching teachers” or “teachers coaching teachers” was revealed, how does that relate to teachers being leaders?
5. What kinds of leadership qualities have you seen in your teachers?
6. As the principal what is your mission and vision for teachers at this school?

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol for Focus Group

1. Can you tell me a little about your roles?
2. In your view, can you speak a little to leadership practices at your school?
3. How has being a part of a National Board Cohort contributed to you being a leader in your school?
4. How has leadership changed over the years?

5. If a staff member has not been at Smith for that long, how does leadership compare to other schools, situations you have been in?
6. Do you have any other comments about leadership practices at Smith you would like to share?

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