

# In-service and pre-service teachers' collaborative PDS learning walks: findings from a qualitative case study

PDS Partners:  
Bridging Research  
to Practice

17

Kimberly Rombach

School of Education, SUNY Cortland, Cortland, New York, USA, and

Jennie Guy

Homer Central School District, Homer, New York, USA

Received 24 September 2025  
Revised 1 February 2026  
6 March 2026  
Accepted 6 March 2026

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study was to explore in-service and pre-service teachers' experiences in a shared professional development experience called learning walks within a professional development school (PDS) model. The learning walks created opportunities for pre-service and in-service teachers to visit classrooms, observe teaching in action and reflect together in open, supportive conversations about what was working well.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A qualitative, observational case study approach was used to examine a group of eight pre-service and eight in-service teachers' interactions as they participated in an eight-week professional development activity called learning walks. This research design offers the ability to observe the conversations and relational phenomena between participants in their natural (i.e. school) setting and to gain greater understanding of the context of their interactions and experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Additionally, the observational case study design afforded insights into relational interactions that interviews or individual surveys could not provide. The data revealed all eight in-service and pre-service teachers were positive about their participation in the learning walks and expressed favorable perceptions about the process.

**Findings** – Findings from this study suggest learning walks contributed to (1) collegiality and countervailing power strategies; (2) collaboration and collective cognition; (3) enhanced interpersonal skills and (4) workplace positivity and strength-based mindsets.

**Originality/value** – As professional development schools continue to be used to promote school-university partnerships, initiatives such as learning walks may serve as a powerful initiative for reimagining how classroom teachers and future educators can learn from and with each other.

**Keywords** Teacher education, Teacher preparation, Professional development, Pre-service teachers

**Paper type** Research article

Teacher collaboration provides opportunities for educators to learn from each other. School districts regularly offer teachers different professional development initiatives throughout the year, and although districts are eager to identify professional development that will improve instruction, prior research suggests they often find it challenging to make a positive and lasting impact on teachers' practices (Lemons & Helsing, 2009). This is often because teachers may perceive district-planned professional development as disconnected from their needs (Christensen & Turner, 2014), and even the best laid-out plans may not include what research has found to be two essential elements: teacher ownership (Riordan, Klein, & Geynor, 2019) and teacher collaboration (De Jong, Meirink & Admiraal, 2022; Picower, 2015).

Teaching can be an overly complex job and, at times, includes challenges that cannot be solved alone. Teachers do best when they have opportunities to brainstorm ideas with each other, share wisdom gained from prior experiences and provide insight into how to best meet students' needs. Prior research suggests teachers who regularly engage in elevated levels of



© Kimberly Rombach and Jennie Guy. Published in *PDS Partners: Bridging Research to Practice*. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this license may be seen at [Link to the terms of the CC BY 4.0 licence](#).

PDS Partners: Bridging Research to  
Practice  
Vol. 21 No. 1, 2026  
pp. 17-28  
Emerald Publishing Limited  
e-ISSN: 2833-2059  
p-ISSN: 2833-2040  
DOI 10.1108/PDSP-09-2025-0017

collaboration contribute more positively to student achievement (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015). Since collaboration is seen as an essential teacher skill, how might we prepare future teachers to enter the field as skilled collaborators? What would it take? How might it look?

There are many instances when pre-service teachers are integrated into their clinical preparation as active, contributing members of their school communities (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Such involvement can provide pre-service teachers with authentic opportunities to collaborate with practicing teachers, sharing ideas and offering suggestions in respected and valued ways. When pre-service teachers are welcomed into a school culture that values their ideas as meaningful contributions, their interactions with in-service teachers and staff strengthen their collaborative skills while simultaneously benefiting all (Buelow, 2024). Which professional development initiatives could provide pre-service and in-service teachers with such collaborative opportunities?

A professional development initiative called learning walks gives teachers job-embedded opportunities to work in small collaborative teams in “non-evaluative walk-throughs” of classrooms and engage in trust-based conversations to enhance their own teaching practice and students’ outcomes (Fisher & Frey, 2014, p. 58). Since pre-service teachers are already in the school for their clinical preparation, including them in learning walks becomes a natural part of the school’s practice. Such opportunities are important to pre-service teachers, as they need to develop themselves professionally and having opportunities to practice collaborative skills (i.e. sharing ideas, active listening, compromising and positivity) is an important step in that process.

This small-scale qualitative study examines in-service and pre-service teachers’ experiences participating in collaborative learning walks within a professional development school (PDS) partnership. This study supports our PDS as a unique structure where college faculty and classroom teachers work together to promote pre-service and in-service teacher collaboration, innovation and reflection. This research was conducted to.

- (1) Examine in-service and pre-service teachers’ collaboration as they participated in professional development together and
- (2) Investigate pre-service and in-service teachers’ outcomes from participating in learning walks.

### Relevant literature

#### *Teacher collaboration*

This study positions teacher collaboration as a learning context and, as such, inquires into the structure and collaborative exchanges in-service and pre-service teachers carry out as they participate in shared professional development. Educational research has regularly reported on the importance of teacher collaboration. Findings show teachers and students benefit when teachers have frequent opportunities for collegial interactions in their typical teaching environment, especially those that (1) build relational trust (Kolleck, Schuster, Hartmann, & Grasel, 2021); (2) include participation in teaching teams (Strogilos, King-Sears, Tragoulia, & Voulagka, 2023); (3) encourage discussions about student learning (Goddard, Goddard, Kim, & Miller, 2015) and (4) offer opportunities for giving and receiving supportive collegial feedback (Allen & Topolka-Jorissen, 2013). In addition, prior research suggests teachers need time to engage in sustained discussions, especially those that create “sufficient possibilities for teachers to explore and critically analyze vital aspects of teaching and learning” (De Jong *et al.*, 2022, p. 12).

#### *Learning walks*

Learning walks has its origins in the University of Pittsburgh’s Institute for Learning with a goal of providing teachers with opportunities to visit other colleagues’ classrooms during the school day as a shared experience to talk about teaching and student learning (Ross,

Lamb, & Johnson, 2023; Steiny, 2009). Learning walks “have been widely used in classroom settings and are aimed at supporting professional learning for educators. . . [and] seek to encourage collegial conversations about teaching and learning within classroom contexts” (Baker & King, 2013, p. 35). Ross *et al.* (2023) studied a unique type of learning walks they identified as “affirming learning walks” that focus on the “productive practices that are present rather than on the absence of practices or areas of improvement when visiting colleagues’ classrooms” (p. 47). Their results suggest teachers favored affirming learning walks because of the collaborative support and encouragement they experienced, which contributed to promoting a “culture of trust” in their schools (p. 53).

#### *Pre-service and in-service teacher collaboration*

Collaboration refers to two or more people working together to reach a goal (Friend & Cook, 2020). Pre-service and in-service teachers regularly collaborate to support their students’ learning outcomes. The literature on pre-service and in-service teacher collaboration indicates there are many benefits that come from their interactions including developing pre-service teachers’ content and critical thinking skills as well as contributing to students’ outcomes. For example, AlShammari and Halimi (2020) studied pre-service and in-service teacher collaboration when implementing scaffolded reading lesson plans for ESL classrooms, and their findings suggest, “Teachers’ collaboration helps preservice teachers develop students’ critical thinking and link the theoretical knowledge gained from their college courses to the new collaborative teaching experiences” (p. 5). In addition, Ramsay-Jordan (2022) examined teachers’ experiences with collaboration when implementing culturally responsive mathematics practices and argued that “the importance of meaningful collaboration between preservice teachers and collaborating teachers is crucial, not only for the well-being of the preservice teachers but also concerning the teaching and learning of mathematics and student outcomes.” (p. 465). Bacharach, Heck and Dahlberg also studied collaborative teaching practices between student teachers and in-service teachers and reported a positive impact on their students’ learning (2010).

#### *Learning walks in the PDS*

Within school-university partnerships, collaboration between pre-service and in-service teachers is central to professional learning. However, little is yet known about how learning walks can be used as an activity within a partnership context. Unlike traditional pre-service teaching models, PDS partnerships can intentionally be used to support ongoing professional development for both pre-service and in-service teachers by creating opportunities for shared discussions about teaching and developing a reflective practice (Darling-Hammond, 2014).

Research on PDS and school-university partnerships suggests collaboration is essential for teacher learning and highlights a specific way that pre-service and in-service teachers can be positioned as co-learners rather than as novice-expert pairs (Bullough and Draper, 2004; Castle, Fox & Souder, 2006). Within such partnerships, collaborative practices include co-planning, co-teaching and even co-reflection that can contribute to enhanced instruction in the classroom and, just as important, enhanced professional growth (Zeichner, 2010). Research suggests such collaboration can help to strengthen pre-service teachers’ pedagogical understandings and their professional identity, while in-service teachers can strengthen their reflection while refreshing their own ideas about teaching (Hudson, 2013).

Prior research has also emphasized the need for school-university partnerships to have relational trust, shared goals and continued opportunities for conversations about teaching and learning, which are also essential elements for effective professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2014). These characteristics are inherent to the learning walks process, which suggests they may be a promising structure for PDS participants’ professional learning. Scholars such as Allen and Topolka-Jorissen (2013), Steiny (2009) and Fisher and Frey (2014) reported favorable results among in-service teachers’ experiences with learning walks

including improved relational interactions and communication between them. However, far less is known about the use of learning walks within a PDS, particularly as a structure to promote pre-service and in-service teachers' collaboration.

In 2022, one of our PDS schools began implementing learning walks as a whole-school professional development initiative for both in-service and pre-service teachers. The purpose of this paper is to introduce PDS learning walks as a form of PDS collaborative professional development and to share findings from qualitatively studying its implementation.

### **Methodology**

This study used qualitative methods to examine the process and outcomes that occurred at Homer Intermediate School when implementing learning walks with pre-service and in-service teachers.

#### *Research design*

A qualitative, observational case study approach was used to examine a group of eight pre-service and eight in-service teachers' interactions as they participated in an eight-week professional development activity called learning walks. This research design offers the ability to observe the conversations and relational phenomena between participants in their natural (i.e. school) setting and to gain greater understanding of the context of their interactions and experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Additionally, the observational case study design afforded insights into the relational interactions that separate interviews or individual surveys could not provide.

In alignment with the purpose of this study, the inquiry was guided by the following research question: What patterns of interaction and collaboration emerge between pre-service and in-service teachers during learning walks?

#### *Professional development school context*

*The college: SUNY Cortland.* This research was conducted within a PDS between SUNY Cortland and Homer Intermediate School. SUNY Cortland's School of Education PDS includes approximately 20 partnering childcare centers and public schools in the Central New York region. The PDS includes participation among college faculty, schoolteachers, administrators and teacher candidates. SUNY Cortland's PDS has a commitment to promoting "collaboration among college faculty, school administrators and teachers and teacher candidates to promote

- (1) Students' learning outcomes;
- (2) Effective mentoring of teacher candidates;
- (3) Shared professional development opportunities and
- (4) Ongoing innovation in educational policy and best practices in administration, teaching and learning" (SUNY Cortland, [What is a PDS \(Professional Development School\)? n.d.a](#)).

SUNY Cortland's School of Education and partnering PDS schools have been working together since 2012 to implement programs and activities that are aligned to and working toward reaching the NAPDS 9 Essentials (NASUP, 2021).

SUNY Cortland is a mid-size, predominantly residential college with a fall 2022 enrollment of approximately 6,000 undergraduate and 700 graduate students. SUNY Cortland has educated pre-service teachers for more than 150 years and "prepares more teachers than any other public university in New York State" (SUNY Cortland, [Teacher Education, n.d.b](#)).

*The school: Homer Intermediate School.* Homer Intermediate School is a long-standing PDS partner with SUNY Cortland. The school is located approximately three miles from the campus in a small, historic village named after the Greek poet, Homer. The school serves approximately 350 students in grades 3–5 who are predominately white (90%) with 48% students who come from families vulnerable to poverty ([New York State Education Department, 2022](#)). The school’s administration is committed to contributing to pre-service teachers’ learning and has in-service teachers who regularly host graduate students enrolled in the childhood education program during their practicum and student teaching experience.

Homer School District’s vision and mission statements portray partnerships and teamwork as foundational elements for both their professional community and student learning. The district emphasizes their commitment with the following: “partnerships promote collaboration among students, staff, families and the community to support student learning,” and “we work together as a team of dedicated, effective and well-supported professionals to provide a safe and nurturing learning environment” ([Homer Intermediate School Handbook for Students and Parents, 2023-2024](#), p. 3).

### *Participants*

*In-service teachers.* Eight volunteer classroom teachers from grades 3–5 participated in the study. All participants attended the same orientation to learning walks facilitated by the school’s instructional coach while school was in session during spring 2022. All in-service teachers served as host teachers to pre-service teachers enrolled in a full-time master’s program, leading to initial certification in childhood education. All classroom teachers hosted pre-service teachers in their classrooms two days per week throughout one semester and continued hosting and mentoring them during an eight-week full-time student teaching experience the following semester.

*Pre-service teachers.* Eight volunteer pre-service teachers participated in the study. All pre-service teachers had undergraduate degrees in areas other than education and were enrolled in a full-time master’s program. The program uses a cohort model that provides a structure for all pre-service teachers to complete 10 pedagogy courses (i.e. 30 credits) together prior to student teaching. Consequently, all pre-service teacher participants knew each other and had developed a sense of community prior to participating in the study. The cohort design included many shared experiences including identical coursework, assignments and pacing.

*College and PDS faculty.* This study was carried out by the first author who served as the PDS co-coordinator and the graduate program coordinator. She has 15 years’ experience as an elementary classroom teacher and 20 years as a faculty member at SUNY Cortland.

The second author serves as the school’s instructional coach and learning walks facilitator. She has 24 years’ experience as a classroom teacher and six years as an instructional coach. She is also an adjunct professor in the master’s program.

### **Data collection**

The participating PDS school’s instructional coach introduced the learning walks initiative to in-service teachers during grade-level meetings and through individual conversations with the instructional coach. The first group of learning walks participants began in spring 2022 while hosting pre-service teachers. Therefore, the pre-hosting pre-service teachers were invited to participate alongside their host teachers, and all voluntarily agreed.

The study’s data included field notes, school announcements, meeting invitations and slides, positivity posters and member cards. Data were collected throughout each of the four phases of the learning walks cycle including Phase I: Meet to go over norms where the learning walks facilitator reviewed non-negotiables, identified an area of focus and walk schedule; Phase II: Classroom visits and observations where participants went into classrooms and silently observed classroom environments and interactions; Phase III: Debrief and create

praise charts where participants reflected on observations and highlighted positives to create praise charts and Phase IV: Praise walks where participants walked back to each classroom and presented positivity charts to participating teachers.

As this was an observational case study, the researcher acted as a silent observer, handwriting field notes to document what participants did and said. This approach allowed the researcher to capture interactions as they naturally occurred, without influencing participants' behaviors. This study is grounded in interpretivism, which acknowledges the importance of understanding the study's context as an ontological experience, including recognizing the feelings, values and emotions that are inherently part of human interactions. Thomas (2003) suggests that the "interpretive paradigm portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and ever changing. . ." (Thanh & Thanh, 2015, p. 25). Through this lens, data were collected to document participants' interactions and capture and interpret the ideas and feelings of those being observed (Chowdhury, 2014).

**Data analysis**

The data analysis process included a multi-step approach. First, field notes were coded to represent data that represented pre-service teachers' and in-service teachers' experiences. All data were read multiple times, using a discourse analysis approach to identify and interpret patterns to distinguish themes and findings of the study (Paltridge, 2021). Discourse analysis affords opportunities to discover how meaning is created within social contexts. In the case of learning walks, employing a discourse analysis provided an approach to analyzing participants' spoken language, including the mood, tone and nuances participants used when interacting with each other individually and as members of the learning walks group (Gee, 2011).

Data were analyzed using an iterative qualitative coding process that included initial coding, focused coding and theme development (Saldana, 2021). The codes were grouped into categories that reflected recurring patterns across the data. Through a constant comparison approach, the categories were refined into four overarching themes to represent the central findings of the study. The following Table 1 condensed coding chart summarizes the initial codes, categories and themes to illustrate the data analysis progression.

Since this study used a qualitative case study design, the goal was to understand participants' interactions in context. The researcher focused closely on what participants said

**Table 1.** Condensed coding chart

Data (examples)	Coding categories	Emerging themes
"We're all in this together"; facilitator sets expectations; praise posters; pre-service teachers' hesitancy; "all voices are important"	Trust-building; collegial dialog; power balancing; vulnerability; affirmation practices	Collegiality and countervailing power strategies
"Did anyone else notice. . ."; guided focus ("Today we are going to focus on. . ."); recalling observations; analyzing interactions; synthesizing insights; shared language	Shared sense-making; guided observations; cognitive processing (Bloom's); professionalism; collaborative meaning-making	Collaboration and collective cognition
Paraphrasing peers; building on ideas; inclusive language; constructive feedback; group debriefing	Active listening; relationship building; developing trust; reflective feedback	Enhanced interpersonal skills
Praise charts; celebrating strengths; emotional uplift; reduced deficit language; validation of pre-service teachers	Strengths-based feedback; positivity; emotional benefits	Workplace positivity and strengths-based mindsets

---

and did, including verbal and nonverbal communication, and considered the school-based setting of the PDS. This approach ensured the analysis remained aligned with the case study design when inquiring into participants' authentic experiences and interactions during learning walks.

## Findings

The data revealed all eight in-service and pre-service teachers were positive about their participation in the learning walks and expressed favorable perceptions about the process. Findings from this study suggest that learning walks contributed to (1) collegiality and countervailing power strategies, (2) collaboration and collective cognition, (3) enhanced interpersonal skills and (4) workplace positivity and strength-based mindsets.

### *Collegiality and countervailing power strategies*

Marlow, Kyed, and Connors (2005) offer that "colleagues should ideally represent a close-knit community with an emphasis on the "connectedness" between people. As such, we believe collegiality is closely related to Harris and Harris's (1992) description of "dignity" as the recognition that everyone is a person of worth, that all have equal value in the partnership, and that equity and trust are characteristics of all collegial relationships" (p. 558).

In-service and pre-service teachers collaborated throughout the learning walks, listening and sharing their insights together. While collaboration was seen as a natural part of the in-service teachers' roles during the learning walks, data revealed collaborative conversations could not have been possible without the facilitator developing a sense of trust among participants.

Trust was observed to be created early in the learning walks process and during the initial minutes when each learning walks group convened. The facilitator used the following terminology to establish boundaries and expectations: "Trust is a very important part of this process, so we are going to focus on what the teachers are doing well." In addition, the facilitator used transparency with the group's processing by stating, "This is how we're going to do the learning walks..." Additionally, the facilitator created trust among the group by positioning herself as "one of them" with "I'm interested in this process, too. I want to find out what's happening in the classrooms and talk about it with you. . . We're all in this together." Collegiality was observed when pre-service and in-service teachers listened to each other and shared ideas openly with questions such as, "Did you notice the two students helping each other? What do you think led to them doing that?" When they created "praise posters" for the observed teachers.

While trust was seen as a contributor to in-service teachers' collegiality, they were observed interacting amongst each other more readily, more often and with a longer duration than with pre-service teachers. While pre-service teachers were observed sharing their ideas with each other during the learning walks, they were seen as hesitant when taking part in the debriefing discussions. Pre-service teachers' hesitancy was noted with their absence of comments. For example, the facilitator asked, "What were your observations of the students' interactions?" After the prompt was provided, the pre-service teachers were quiet and waited for the in-service teachers to respond. While initial data analysis suggested pre-service teachers may have wanted to be seen as polite (i.e. waiting for the more experienced teachers to respond first), further analysis suggests their silence may have origins in fear of vulnerability and with apprehensions that their opinions may not have been as valued by the in-service teachers of record.

It's important to note that this study includes participants not on equal footing (i.e. some participants were teachers with jobs, while others who were pre-service teachers were jobseekers). Therefore, even the most well-intentioned facilitator striving to create trust and collegiality would be challenged by the power dynamic among participants. Data suggest the

in-service teachers worked hard to try to dismantle the in-service and pre-service teachers' power inequities and tried to portray valuing all contributions equally:

It's important to hear from everybody because all voices are important.

What do all of you [preservice teachers] think? I don't want us to do all the talking.

Findings suggest in-service teachers portrayed attempts of countervailing power between them and pre-service teachers to create more balanced communications among pre-service and in-service teachers. In other words, in-service teachers tried to balance the power difference between them and pre-service teachers by offering supportive and value-affirming responses. While such countervailing seemed to contribute positively to the group's overall collegiality, pre-service teachers' verbal contributions remained less frequent than in-service teachers' sharing.

### *Collaboration and collective cognition*

Learning walks require participants to socially engage with each other and use individual and collective cognitive skills when doing so. Findings suggest the learning walks process requires participants to remember, understand, apply, analyze and evaluate their observations and the observations of others. The process relies on members making sense of and learning from their shared experiences.

Data revealed the facilitator guided participants through an interactive process that included (1) individual abilities of members, (2) their shared knowledge and (3) their communication structure. This process seems to align well with a collective cognition process.

Findings suggest focused observations were used to (1) swiftly gain participants' attention within the fast-paced school schedule and (2) efficiently guide participants to follow a listing of "what to look for and listen for" that could be used as starting points for their observations and subsequent discussions:

The facilitator would say: Today, we're going to focus on . . . to look for. . .

Prior to going on the learning walks, the facilitator also suggested participants make note of anything else that captured their attention. This encouragement of open-ended observation invited both pre-service and in-service teachers to use their professional intuition, making the process more authentic and less prescriptive. It also opened the door for unexpected, meaningful conversations that went beyond the formal focus area of the walk.

Participants seemed to demonstrate four specific cognitive processes throughout the learning walk cycle including (1) recalling specific moments from their classroom observations; (2) reflecting on those observations based on the suggested area of focus; (3) analyzing classroom interactions to determine what contributed to observed successes and (4) synthesizing these insights to contribute to the praise charts and group debriefs. These cognitive processes seemed to align with the framework and elements of Bloom's Taxonomy and revealed the potential for the learning walks facilitator to consciously encourage teachers' and pre-service teachers' development of higher-order thinking skills that Bloom's Taxonomy identifies.

Furthermore, collective cognition appeared through participants' use of shared language, including "Did anyone else notice. . .?" "That reminds me of. . ." and "I interpreted that moment as. . ." Such examples seemed to promote shared sense-making. These language patterns point to a collaborative processing model where individual insights were validated, extended or reframed by peers, enhancing both the depth and breadth of their individual and shared understandings.

### *Enhanced interpersonal skills*

As participants engaged in the cycle of observation, reflection, debriefing and praise, they demonstrated growth in essential interpersonal skills. These included (1) active listening – participants consistently paraphrased and/or built on others' ideas, portraying deep listening

---

and intellectual respect; (2) trust and relationship building – the repetition of inclusive language and the facilitator’s consistent modeling of mutual respect and positivity helped strengthen the group dynamic and (3) reflection and feedback – teachers reflected both independently and as a group, with feedback framed constructively and oriented toward affirmation and growth.

These findings suggest that learning walks have the potential to strengthen teaching and serve as a form of relational professional learning that can contribute to teachers’ sense of belonging and trust within their school community.

### *Workplace positivity and strengths-based mindsets*

One unanticipated finding and outcome from the study was how the learning walks promoted a culture of workplace positivity. The praise charts focused participants’ attention on what was going well in each classroom, which prompted teachers to recognize, articulate and celebrate teachers’ strengths. This act of explicitly acknowledging good practice is worth noting because findings suggest it may have social and emotional benefits that could extend beyond the learning walks themselves. For pre-service teachers, this focus on strengths offered a rare glimpse into the power of affirming professional feedback that validated their observations and emerging pedagogical understandings. For in-service teachers, it seemed that the praise charts could break patterns of deficit-focused language and reframe professional growth as a strengths-based process. These social and emotional experiences, which were centered on recognition, support and encouragement, were often shared during praise walks and described by one of the participants as “one of the best parts of the week.”

### **Implications**

This study’s findings contribute to a growing body of literature that supports the implementation of teachers’ collaborative, non-evaluative professional development models (Borko, 2004; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Desimone, 2009). The PDS learning walks initiative portrays ways that job-embedded professional development can promote shared learning (Bullough & Draper, 2004), reduce traditional hierarchies between in-service and pre-service teachers (Castle *et al.*, 2006) and work toward building strong professional communities (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Zeichner, 2010). The implications for teacher preparation are noteworthy. It is essential that we support future teachers to become reflective, collaborative and empathetic (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). One way to reach that outcome is to authentically include pre-service teachers in learning communities that model these values in practice rather than postponing it for the future.

Learning walks within a PDS partnership allow pre-service teachers to begin to develop their professional identity alongside in-service teachers, which supports their early skill development in the areas of collegial inquiry and reflective dialog. For in-service teachers, learning walks provide opportunities to hear new perspectives while contributing to future teachers’ growth. Together, these findings suggest that learning walks can be a meaningful bridge, connecting pre-service teachers’ preparation with in-service teachers’ professional development.

### **Conclusion**

PDSs are designed to support ongoing professional learning, to encourage reflective practice and to promote shared inquiry between pre-service teachers, in-service teachers and college faculty. This study’s findings reveal ways that learning walks promoted collaborative, strengths-based and relational professional development, which can benefit both pre-service and in-service teachers. The studied Learning Walks allowed participants to (1) engage in collective cognition, (2) build trusting professional relationships and (3) foster a sense of positivity in their school setting.

The learning walks conversations enhanced pre-service and in-service teachers' collective cognition by creating structured, iterative spaces for their dialog, reflection and shared inquiry. Research suggests that when educators engage in collaborative discourse around instructional practice, they deepen their own understanding of teaching and learning and collectively refine their practice (Hendrickx, Thurlings, & Den Brok, 2025). Additionally, the learning walks contributed to pre-service and in-service teachers' relational professional development that supports a cultivation of trust and collegiality, which are essential components of shared professional growth among teachers (Byrk & Schneider, 2002; Versio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). In PDS contexts, fostering trust between pre-service teachers, in-service teachers and college faculty can create a relational foundation that can enhance mentoring, reduce isolation and strengthen collaboration for future shared endeavors (Teitel, 2013). Finally, the learning walks also contributed to promoting a positive school climate, which can enhance in-service teachers' well-being and promote a productive learning culture for all. The learning walks process emphasizes attending to productive practices and building on teachers' strengths rather than deficits, which contributes to creating a more positive professional environment that can reinforce learning walks participants' sense of competence and belonging in ways that can uplift morale and optimism (Calvert, 2016; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Since the learning walks were non-evaluative in nature, they provided safety, particularly for pre-service teachers and included real-world experiences so they could practice reflective and collaborative communication skills that they will need as future teachers.

As PDSs continue to be used as a structure to promote school-university partnerships, initiatives such as learning walks may serve as a powerful initiative for reimagining how we can learn from and with each other. Future research might investigate how repeated cycles of learning walks can influence pre-service teachers' confidence as they work toward developing their professional teaching identity.

### Ethical statement

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards of SUNY Cortland and was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (No: 212,231, Date of Approval: 02/25/2022).

All participants provided informed consent prior to their participation in the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. All data were collected and stored confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

### References

- Allen, A. S., & Topolka-Jorissen, K. (2013). Using teacher learning walks to build capacity in a rural elementary school: Repurposing a supervisory tool. *Professional Development in Education*, 40(5), 822–837. doi: [10.1080/19415257.2013.851104](https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2013.851104).
- AlShammari, I., & Halimi, F. (2020). Pre-service and in-service teacher collaboration: A scaffolded reading lesson plan for ESL classrooms. *Journal of Classroom Instruction*, 55(2), 4–33.
- Bacharach, N., Heck, T., & Dahlberg, K. (2010). Changing the face of student teaching through coteaching. *Action in Teacher Education*, 32(1), 3–14. doi: [10.1080/01626620.2010.10463538](https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2010.10463538).
- Baker, W., & King, H. (2013). Participatory learning walks: Reflective practice for the conductor-music educator. *Australian Journal of Music Education*, 2, 35–45.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1998). *Qualitative research in education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 3–15. doi: [10.3102/0013189X033008003](https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033008003).
- Buelow, S. (2024). Crossing boundaries: Developing preservice teachers' professional identity through hybrid school-university partnerships. *School-University Partnerships*, 17(4), 421–430. doi: [10.1108/SUP-03-2024-0003](https://doi.org/10.1108/SUP-03-2024-0003).

- Bullough, R. V., & Draper, R. J. (2004). Making sense of a failed triad: Mentors, university supervisors and positioning theory. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(5), 407–420. doi: [10.1177/0022487104269804](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487104269804).
- Byrk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Calvert, L. (2016). The power of teacher agency: Why we must transform professional learning so that it really supports educator learning. *Journal of Staff Development*, 37(2), 51–56. Available from: <http://learningforward.org/publications/jsd/jsd-blog/jsd/2016/05/09/jsd-april-2016-literacy#.VzS5M4QrLZ4>
- Castle, S., Fox, R. K., & Souder, K. O. (2006). Do professional development schools (PDSs) make a difference? A comparative study of PDS and non-PDS teacher candidates. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57(1), 65–80. doi: [10.1177/0022487105284211](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487105284211).
- Chowdhury, M. F. (2014). Interpretivism in aiding our understanding of the contemporary social world. *Journal of Philosophy*, 4(03), 432–438. doi: [10.4236/ojpp.2014.43047](https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2014.43047).
- Christensen, E., & Turner, J. (2014). Identifying teachers attending professional development by their stages of concern: Exploring attitudes and emotions. *The Teacher Educator*, 49, 232–246.
- City, E., Elmore, R. F., Fiarman, S. E., & Teitel, L. (2009). *Instructional rounds in education: A network approach to improving teaching and learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2014). Strengthening clinical preparation: The holy grail of teacher education. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 89(4), 547–561. doi: [10.1080/0161956X.2014.939009](https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2014.939009).
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hylar, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). Effective teacher professional development. Research Brief. *Learning Policy Institute*. doi: [10.54300/122.311](https://doi.org/10.54300/122.311).
- De Jong, L., Meirink, J., & Admiraal, W. (2022). School-based collaboration as a learning context for teachers: A systematic review. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 112, 1–15. doi: [10.1016/j.ijer.2022.101927](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2022.101927).
- Desimone, L. M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Toward better conceptualizations and measures. *Educational Researcher*, 38(3), 181–199. doi: [10.3102/0013189X08331140](https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X08331140).
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2014). Using teacher learning walks to improve instruction. *Principal Leadership*, 14(5), 58–61.
- Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2020). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for professionals* (9th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Pearson.
- Gee, J. (2011). Discourse analysis: What makes it critical?. In R. Rogers (Ed.), *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis in Education* (pp. 23–45). Routledge.
- Goddard, R., Goddard, Y., Kim, E. S., & Miller, R. (2015). A theoretical and empirical analysis of the roles of instructional leadership, teacher collaboration and collective efficacy beliefs in support of student learning. *American Journal of Education*, 121(4), 501–530.
- Grossman, P., Hammerness, K., & McDonald, M. (2009). Redefining teaching, re-imagining teacher education. *Teachers and Teaching*, 15(2), 273–289. doi: [10.1080/13540600902875340](https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600902875340).
- Harris, B., & Harris, J. (1992). Respect for persons and dignity in nursing practice. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 17(6), 707–713.
- Hendrickx, M. M., Thurlings, M. C., & Den Brok, P. (2025). Teachers' collaborative knowledge building in professional learning communities: Connecting interaction patterns to learning gains. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 40(39), 39. doi: [10.1007/s10212-024-00938-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-024-00938-y).
- Hudson, P. (2013). Strategies for mentoring pedagogical knowledge. *Teachers and Teaching*, 19(4), 363–381. doi: [10.1080/13540602.2013.770226](https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2013.770226).
- Homer Intermediate School Handbook for Students and Parents (2023-2024). Available from: <https://www.homercentral.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=311&dataid=1528&FileName=2023-2024%20Student%20Handbook.pdf>

- Kolleck, N., Schuster, J., Hartmann, U., & Grasel, C. (2021). Teachers' professional collaboration and trust relationships: An inferential social network analysis of teacher teams. *Research in Education, 111*(1), 89–107. doi: [10.1177/003452372111031585](https://doi.org/10.1177/003452372111031585).
- Lemons, R., & Helsing, D. (2009). *Learning to walk: Reconsidering the walkthrough* (pp. 478–484). Arlington, VA: Phi Delta Kappan.
- Marlow, M. P., Kyed, S., & Connors, S. (2005). Collegiality, collaboration and Kuleana: Complexity in a professional development school. *Education, 125*(4), 557–568.
- New York State Education Department (2022). Homer intermediate school enrollment (2021–2022). Available from: <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2022&instid=800000053607>
- Paltridge, B. (2021). *Discourse analysis* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Bloomsbury.
- Picower, B. (2015). Nothing about us without us: Teacher-driven critical professional development. *Radical Pedagogy, 12*, 1524–6345.
- Ramsay-Jordan, N. (2022). What collaborating teachers got to do with it? Understanding the importance of pre-and in-service teacher collaborations for enacting culturally responsive mathematics teaching through critical examination of collaborating teachers' experiences. *International Journal of Educational Reform, 31*(4), 459–475. doi: [10.1177/10567879221110513](https://doi.org/10.1177/10567879221110513).
- Riordan, M., Klein, E., & Gaynor, C. (2019). Teaching for equity and deeper learning: How does professional learning transfer to teachers' practice and influence students' experiences?. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 52*(2-3), 327–345. doi: [10.1080/10665684.2019.1647808](https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2019.1647808).
- Ronfeldt, M., Farmer, S. O., McQueen, K., & Grissom, J. (2015). Teacher collaboration in instructional teams and student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 52*(3), 475–514. doi: [10.3102/0002831215585562](https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831215585562).
- Ross, D., Lamb, L., & Johnson, J. (2023). Using affirming learning walks to build capacity. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 8*(1), 47–54. doi: [10.32674/jsard.v8i1.4783](https://doi.org/10.32674/jsard.v8i1.4783).
- Saldana, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Steiny, J. (2009). Learning walks: Build appetites for professional development. *Journal of Staff Development, 30*(2), 31–32, 34, 36.
- Strogilos, V., King-Sears, M. E., Tragoulia, E., & Voulagka, A. S. (2023). A meta-synthesis of co-teaching students with and without disabilities together. *Educational Research Review, 38*, 1–19.
- SUNY Cortland (n.d.a). What is a PDS (professional development school)?. Available from: <https://www2.cortland.edu/teacher-education/pds/about/>
- SUNY Cortland (n.d.b). Teacher education. Available from: <https://www2.cortland.edu/teacher-ed/>
- Teitel, L. (2013). *School-based instructional rounds: Improving teaching and learning across classrooms*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Thanh, N., & Thanh, T. (2015). The interconnection between interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods in education. *American Journal of Educational Science, 1*(2), 24–27.
- Versio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practices and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*, 80–91. doi: [10.1016/j.tate.2007.01.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.01.004).
- Zeichner, K. (2010). University-based teacher education: Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in college- and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(1-2), 89–99. doi: [10.1177/0022487109347671](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347671).
- NASUP (2021), available at: <https://nasup.org/nine-essentials/>

**Corresponding author**

Kimberly Rombach can be contacted at: [kimberly.rombach@cortland.edu](mailto:kimberly.rombach@cortland.edu)

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

[www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)

Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)