

A metasynthesis of Professional Development School scholarship: lessons for teacher education

School-University
Partnerships

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Abstract

Purpose – This metasynthesis of Professional Development Schools (PDS) scholarship focuses on research that examines PDS as an entity – a systemic, multifaceted innovation that builds on and affects multiple dimensions of teaching and learning across educational contexts.

Design/methodology/approach – We contextualize our work within scholarship that documents the challenges and affordances of PDS, discuss previous reviews of PDS scholarship and describe our methodological metasynthesis.

Findings – Among our significant findings was the surprisingly small number of studies ($n = 4$) that focused on PDS as a layered entity. Other significant findings related to the lack of attention to cultural and linguistic diversity in comprehensive studies of PDS spaces and the methodological limits of much PDS research. We highlight the importance of circulating and boundary-spanning leadership, evolving collaboration and peer learning, challenges and benefits due to the complexity of PDS spaces and few efforts to directly measure PDS effectiveness.

Research limitations/implications – With our focus on peer-reviewed research articles, we may have overlooked book-length reports, which may have contributed to our analysis. Further, the PDS spaces described in our sample were relatively new (i.e. operating for five years at most); more established sites deserve detailed researcher attention.

Practical implications – We call for: (1) multidimensional analyses involving various PDS participants and varied data sources, (2) mixed-methods studies that merge quantitative measures with rich ethnographic data and (3) longitudinal approaches to explore PDS spaces over time to learn about the formation and sustenance of PDS spaces as well as threats to sustainability.

Social implications – We advocate for: (1) teams of researchers using parallel methods to document activities within and across PDS spaces and (2) systemic attention to community voices and equity practices in PDS spaces.

Originality/value – To counter the tendency for PDS scholarship to focus on logistics and implementation, we engaged in a metasynthesis of PDS research to explore PDS as an entity – a systemic, multi-faceted innovation that builds on and affects multiple dimensions of teaching and learning. We found very few studies that met these criteria.

Keywords Equity, Social justice, Professional Development Schools, Qualitative metasynthesis, PDS, University/school partnerships

Paper type Research paper



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While Professional Development Schools (PDS) have been described as powerful spaces for teacher learning, they remain on the margin of teacher education scholarship. PDS research is generally published in PDS-specific journals and books that rarely reach the larger teacher education community. In addition, the tendency of PDS scholars to focus on logistics and implementation often overshadows explorations of what happens in PDS sites. In short, the time and effort involved in operating and maintaining PDS sites may prevent scholars from documenting and disseminating the affordances of PDS spaces for teacher education. To address these concerns, we conducted a metasynthesis of PDS research to explore PDS as entity – a systemic, multi-faceted innovation that builds on and affects multiple dimensions of teaching and learning.

With teacher education threatened by privatization (Zeichner, 2017), assessing the contributions of PDS is critical. Universities must claim and extend their expertise to challenge corporate and financially driven educator preparation programs. Amid substantive critiques, some university teacher education programs provide promising and powerful examples of thriving PDS networks that are generally missing or marginalized in conversations about teacher education. To frame this metasynthesis, we focus our review on scholarship that documents the challenges and affordances of PDS networks and discuss previous reviews of PDS scholarship. We then describe our methodological design and present our findings. Finally, we identify lessons learned through the synthesis process and present relevant implications.

The affordances and challenges of PDS networks

The affordances of PDS structures and practices are well established. For example, many PDS teacher education programs require teacher candidates to work directly with children while engaging in mentored reflection on and analysis of their teaching (Zeichner & Bier, 2012). Darling-Hammond (2014) credited PDS models with establishing shared visions of teaching across coursework and clinical experiences as preservice teachers crafted instructional case studies of children and faculty engaged in intentional mentorship that required candidates to confront and rework their beliefs and assumptions. Specifically, “extensive and intensely supervised coursework” (Darling-Hammond, 2014, p. 550) encouraged candidates to theorize about their interactions with children from diverse cultural and linguistic communities as teacher candidates learned from and alongside experienced teachers.

Drawing on decades of research, Zeichner and Bier (2012) maintained that excellent clinical experiences could “disrupt teacher candidates’ lower expectations for the learning of students in high-need urban schools” and render graduates “more interculturally competent to teach in culturally responsive ways” (p. 164). Likewise, Zenkov and Pytash (2018) argued that embedded field experiences, including those in PDS spaces, enabled candidates “to work with students labeled as struggling learners and those traditionally disenfranchised in and by schools” (p. 5, italics in original). By coaching candidates to respond to inequity, clinical experiences can foster transformation as candidates develop “awareness of these [community] contexts and their challenges and strengths, and ultimately, take action” (Zenkov & Pytash, 2018, p. 6). However, as Darling-Hammond (2014) warned, simply placing candidates in schools serving low-income students and students of color is not enough. Novice and preservice teachers must work alongside committed teacher educators and highly skilled practitioners to make sense of their practice-based experiences and recognize inequities.

Despite early calls for PDS communities to center equity (see Murray, 1986), Abdal-Haqq (1999) worried that attention to equity was generally limited to awareness and that few PDS initiatives centered equity in their work. He reported, “diversity-related learning activities for preservice and practicing teachers in PDSs are fairly conventional and do not depart significantly from the tradition of isolated staff development workshops and courses in multicultural education” (p. 149). Similarly, Beardsley and Teitel (2004) lamented that PDS initiatives had not achieved their early goals related to equity. They advocated for a more intentional focus on equity, including the recruitment of teachers of color, closer collaboration

with families and communities and engaging preservice teachers in extracurricular activities extending beyond the school day.

Through self-reflection and analysis of teaching, candidates can attend to student diversity and implement culturally sustaining practices. Arguing that PDS provides opportunities for teacher candidates to engage in critical reflection related to race, ethnicity and culture, Howard (2003) endorsed “honest reflection” (p. 197) on teaching practices. Milner (2003) issued a similar call to “keep pedagogy connected to the students” (p. 200), while Liu (2015) advocated critical reflection and “constantly analyzing, questioning, and critiquing established assumptions of oneself, schools and the society” (p. 144).

The benefits of PDS networks extend to practicing teachers and teacher educators. Sasson *et al.* (2020) found that novice teachers who participated in PDS programs displayed more self-efficacy and more positive attitudes toward teaching. Snow-Geroni (2005) described supportive PDS communities where teachers could “ask questions,” and recognize that “uncertainty was not only valued, but [also] supported” (p. 241). These teachers increasingly noted the importance of community, collaboration and cultivating a culture of inquiry. Similarly, Ikpeze *et al.* (2012) described PDS as a third space – an “intersection, a transformative space . . . where practitioner and academic knowledge merged to facilitate the development of new knowledge and new learning opportunities” (p. 286). Opportunities for discussion and negotiation enhanced learning for both teachers and university-based teacher educators.

Across PDS scholarship, researchers have tended to focus on logistical challenges (e.g. practitioner versus university roles, leadership, supervision of teacher candidates and top-down curricula; Corbin *et al.*, 2017). For example, while Dana *et al.* (2001) described PDS as a “strong vehicle for educational change” that invited professionals to develop “genuine problem-solving skills” (p. 15), they recognized “persistent problems” (p. 17), including building/sustaining trusting relationships across school–university contexts, revising coursework for PDS spaces and centering teacher inquiry. They argued that negotiating these challenges required a continuing and “shared commitment” (Dana *et al.*, 2001, p. 23).

Allen *et al.* (2013) recognized PDS as providing programmatic coherence and alignment around shared values, alongside clear and ongoing communication that allowed flexibility. While underscoring benefits, including opportunities for professional development, increased university faculty time spent in schools and collaboration between school and university faculty, they noted that “logistical and systemic constraints” (Allen *et al.*, 2013, p. 108) called for additional funding and unrelenting attention.

Despite its benefits, PDS scholars have sometimes struggled to document promising practices due to logistical challenges and the demands of sustaining school–university partnerships (Allen *et al.*, 2013; Dana *et al.*, 2001). While PDS offers important lessons to the larger teacher education community, scholarship has been haphazard, ill-defined or relegated to the corners of conversations about teacher education (e.g. book chapters, low-impact journals and specialized conferences). Lessons learned in PDS spaces highlight possibilities grounded in schools and classrooms that involve students from different backgrounds, cultures and language communities.

Previous reviews and syntheses of PDS scholarship

While previous reviews of PDS scholarship focused on specific aspects of PDS, our synthesis highlights PDS as an entity involving multiple institutions, actors, goals and activities. In their qualitative metasynthesis, Breault and Breault (2010) focused on leadership in PDS spaces. Limiting their analysis to 49 studies with “methodological integrity and valid conclusions” (Breault & Breault, 2010, p. 440), they analyzed keywords, significant findings and relationships across the studies. Selection criteria included transparency, authenticity, trustworthiness, warrantability and the relevance of findings to practice. They identified weak research designs and shallow analyses as contributing to the limited impact of PDS research.

In a subsequent study of 250 PDS studies, Breault (2013) explicitly reviewed PDS scholarship. Only a third of the reports qualified as empirical research studies and/or presented valid conclusions. In a related study focused on scholars who had investigated PDS spaces for long periods of time, Breault (2013) described “both PDS research and the movement itself” (Breault, 2013, p. 93). Careful to avoid a “complete indictment against publishing the stories about teaching and service in PDSs,” Breault questioned whether storied forms of research were sufficient to “sustain a comprehensive research agenda” (p. 95).

In their “qualitative meta-analysis” (p. 28), Burns and Baker (2016) sought to “generate new knowledge about the boundary-spanner role in PDS” (p. 28). Focusing on findings from a small set of PDS studies ($n = 13$), they encountered multiple terms for boundary-spanning professionals and a tendency to focus on university-based rather than school-based boundary-spanners. They noted that boundary-spanners were involved in a multitude of tasks, suggesting the need for a broader understanding of their roles and responsibilities. In a second meta-analysis, Burns *et al.* (2016) explored preservice teacher supervision after the release of national PDS standards in 2001. They identified increasingly sophisticated approaches to preservice teacher supervision and increased calls for university/school collaboration.

Snow *et al.* (2016) analyzed 82 qualitative and quantitative studies of PDS spaces to identify outcomes for teachers. Based on a multistep selection process which rated studies as high, medium or low in terms of “evidentiary quality” (Snow *et al.*, 2016, p. 15), they identified promising outcomes for PDS-prepared teachers: enhanced confidence, positive self-perception as professionals, teaching skills and the increased use of formative assessments.

Most recently, Garin and Yendol-Hoppey (2023) and Yendol-Hoppey and Garin (2023) have published two reviews extending their earlier review of dissertation scholarship (Yendol-Hoppey & Garin, 2022). While the 2022 review tracked trends in PDS dissertation scholarship, asking what can be learned from this body of scholarship, their 2023 reviews highlight learning – for teacher educators, practicing teachers, teacher candidates and children in PDS schools – and differences between the learning that occurs in PDS and non-PDS schools. While both studies identify PDS schools as having some advantages, they conclude that additional studies could “more thoroughly” allow researchers to “isolate positive trends in PDS research” (Garin & Yendol-Hoppey, 2023, p. 33).

While these reviews have established the potential contribution of metasyntheses of PDS scholarship, each review focused on a specific aspect of PDS (e.g. leadership, boundary-spanners and teacher outcomes) rather than treating PDS networks as systemic partnerships. Thus, in the current review, we sought studies that spoke to the complexity and systemic nature of PDS implementations and attended to multiple institutions, actors, goals and activities.

Metasynthesis as methodology

Metasynthesis integrates findings across primary qualitative studies on a particular issue or across a body of scholarship. Our metasynthesis asked: What has research revealed about PDS as a systemic and multi-faceted innovation, and what does it offer the larger field of teacher education? Like quantitative metanalysis, qualitative metasynthesis treats findings of primary studies as data (Compton-Lilly *et al.*, 2021; Suri, 2013). However, the two approaches involve different epistemological assumptions. Whereas quantitative meta-analyses focus on measurable effect sizes, qualitative metasyntheses highlight patterns and findings from and across carefully selected studies. Thorne *et al.* (2004) described metasynthesis as “a family of methodological approaches for developing new research based on rigorous analysis of existing qualitative findings” (p. 1343). Sandelowski and Barroso (2003) described metasynthesis as the “systematic review or integration of qualitative research findings in a targeted domain that are themselves interpretative syntheses of data, including phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theories, and other integrated and coherent descriptions or explanations of phenomena, events, or cases” (p. 227). Metasynthesis have also been described as “theories, grand narratives, generalizations, or interpretive translations produced from the integration or

comparison of findings from qualitative studies” (Sandelowski *et al.*, 1997, p. 366) and as “overarching or synoptic claims on the basis of various analytic and synthetic strategies applied to the bodies of extant qualitative research” (Thorne *et al.*, 2004, p. 1342).

McCormick *et al.* (2003) described metasynthesis as “another ‘reading’ of the data, an opportunity to reflect on the data in new ways” (p. 936), whereas Beck (2009) highlighted opportunities to “delve deeper into the research to reveal some new information that may increase our understanding” (p. 702). Despite varied definitions, scholars agree that qualitative metasynthesis “is not a trivial pursuit, but rather a complex exercise in interpretation: Carefully peeling away the surface layers of studies to find their hearts and souls in a way that does the least damage to them” (Sandelowski *et al.*, 1997, p. 370). We intentionally use the term *metasynthesis* to describe our synthesis of findings from a set of primary studies focused on PDS as an entity to explore the affordances of PDS for teacher education, school–university partnerships and social justice education.

Our methodological journey

We became coauthors during a three-day working conference funded by the Spencer Foundation in 2021. The conference was designed to stimulate PDS research through cross-institutional collaboration across the southeastern USA. We represent PDS networks at three universities. To initiate our collaboration, we located, read and discussed professional texts related to PDS and sorted these texts by topic (e.g. equity, teacher education and leadership) in shared online folders. We then examined existent literature reviews, metasyntheses and meta-analyses to identify questions and foci worthy of attention and were struck by the small number of available syntheses (e.g. Breault & Breault, 2010; Burns *et al.*, 2016; Snow *et al.*, 2016) and the lack of syntheses focused on PDS as systemic entities involving multiple institutions, actors, goals and activities.

The search process

Our reading and rereading of PDS scholarship suggested preliminary selection criteria (e.g. empirical studies, conducted in PDS settings and published since 2007), which we used to identify potential studies. Despite the well-documented limitations of Google Scholar (e.g. unreported inclusion criteria and limited search options), we used it for our preliminary search as it is a “powerful tool for finding specific literature” (Haddaway *et al.*, 2015, p. 9). With Google Scholar, we piloted search terms, refined our inclusion criteria and collaboratively vetted a few studies. However, heeding advice not to treat Google Scholar as “a replacement for traditional academic citation databases” (Haddaway *et al.*, 2015, p. 9), we conducted a systematic search using the two search engines available across our respective universities: JSTOR and Academic Search Complete. Each team member analyzed 3–4 year spans between 2007 and 2022. We scanned the titles and abstracts of peer-reviewed journal articles using the search terms “PDS” and “school” or “Professional Development School” alongside methodological descriptors (e.g. qualitative, case study, ethnography, ethnographic and narrative). Our choice to include only peer-reviewed articles – rather than dissertations, books and chapters – was based on the rigorous review process for journal articles.

The selection process

While continuing to refine our search criteria, we listed articles on one of two charts in a shared online folder: (1) a chart of potentially viable candidates or (2) a chart of articles that did not meet our emerging criteria. For the latter, we noted unmet criteria, which allowed us to revisit our selection decisions and criteria. Our initial search identified 116 potential candidates, which we then subjected to much closer analysis. To move from general to specific selection criteria, we analyzed selected studies alongside our list of excluded articles. For example, our focus on findings ruled out a reflective essay on the history of action research in PDS spaces

(Tunks, 2011) and the quantitative validation of a questionnaire comparing PDS and non-PDS contexts (Vrijnsen-de Corte *et al.*, 2013). We excluded studies with a single data source: only interviews (King-McKenzie *et al.*, 2013), a survey (Sivakumaran *et al.*, 2011) or artifacts (Wasielewski & Terrell, 2014), as they did not suggest multi-dimensional ethnographic approaches.

We examined each potential article for a focus on and definition of PDS. Some studies mentioned PDS but were not conducted in PDS contexts (e.g. Colwell *et al.*, 2014; Fisher & Many, 2014). Other studies were located in PDS spaces but did not define or describe those spaces (e.g. Hall & Freeman, 2014) or focus on PDS (e.g. Barreto-Espino *et al.*, 2014; Pellegrino *et al.*, 2014). We eliminated studies that lacked thick description, methodological details and failed to consider the role practitioners played in the research process. Finally, given our location the southern US – the former Confederacy – we noted a lack of attention to equity and/or the reporting of school/university demographics across the majority of identified studies. Based on these stringent and multifaceted criteria, our sample of 116 articles was reduced to only four potential articles.

A major reason for article rejection was the requirement that studies focus on PDS as an entity. As a research team, we clarified these criteria (see Table 1) by examining the research questions posed by rejected studies and the four selected studies (see Table 2). Articles in our sample addressed multiple aspects and dimensions of a single PDS implementation (i.e. one school, one partnership). For example, Carpenter and Sherretz (2012) described a PDS partnership focused on professional development activities across multiple contexts. Hall *et al.*

Table 1. Final selection criteria

Required criterion	Explanation
Published between 2007 and 2022	This timeframe was selected to extend Breault and Breault's (2010) review
Focus on PDS as an entity	A central focus on PDS as a systemic innovation, as opposed to a PDS backdrop for other foci (e.g. literacy, novice teachers, mentoring and service learning)
Qualitative data	Metasyntheses synthesize qualitative findings. Thus, we sought empirical studies that relied significantly on qualitative data Given the complexity of PDS sites, we rejected mixed-methods studies that relied primarily on quantitative data (e.g. surveys with a few open-ended questions) and/or did not describe a ethnographic approach
Definition of PDS spaces	We expected authors to identify the study site as a PDS site and explicitly define PDS
Preferred criterion	Explanation
Multiple data sources	Given the complexity of PDS spaces, we required more than one data source, various types of data (e.g. interviews and observations) and/or data collected with different groups of participants (e.g. teachers, administrators and professors)
Attention to demographics	Given our interest in relationships between PDS spaces and equity, we expected authors to report contextual information related to race, language and SES
Thick description	Consistent with qualitative approaches, we sought detailed description of research sites and historical, political or institutional context over a reasonable period of time
Practitioner involvement or voice	We expected the presentation of the research to honor participant voices and favored studies with practitioners as coauthors
Equity lens and/or critical frame	Mindful of the concerns identified in our literature review, we expected studies to prioritize equity and/or exhibit a critical stance
Source(s): Created by authors	

Table 2. Selected studies and respective research foci

Article	Purpose/focus
Hall <i>et al.</i> (2020)	The stated goal was to: 1. “provide formative feedback to address three broad, intersecting questions: 1. How is the PDS model being carried out? 2. In what ways are key instructional practices and procedures (school self-initiated and externally mandated) being experienced? 3. What is the relationship between Synergy [Elementary School] and this community context?” (p. 391)
Carpenter and Sherretz (2012)	“The purpose of this study was to examine one PDS partnerships’ school’s activities in promoting teacher leadership” (p. 90). “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” (p. 92)
Akkerman and Bruining (2016)	“What challenges are encountered and which successive learning mechanisms are evoked in the startup of a Dutch academic PDS partnership at the institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels?” (p. 252)
Trube <i>et al.</i> (2018)	“Three overarching questions guided investigation of aspects of the [early childhood] PDS; specifically, the questions sought educators’ perspectives about their engagement in and development of teacher leadership skills and their perspectives on whether the PDS [sic] partnership offers mutual benefits to stakeholders: 1. What are educators’ perceptions of their levels of engagement in teacher-leader practices? 2. How do educators develop teacher-leadership characteristics and competencies in order to benefit the EC PDS? 3. Is the EC PDS partnership mutually beneficial to stakeholders who make up the PDS community?” (p. 7)

Source(s): Created by authors

(2020) examined both instructional practices and community outreach, and Trube *et al.* (2018) posed layered questions about educators’ perceptions, teacher leadership and benefits for various stakeholders. Finally, Akkerman and Bruining (2016) asked broad questions about learning mechanisms spanning institutional, interpersonal and intrapersonal contexts.

Most of the rejected studies did not focus on PDS as an entity or were compromised by weak or underreported methodologies. Taken aback by the small number of studies that met our emerging criteria, we combed through non-examples to confirm our rationale for rejecting studies and ensure that we did not overlook possible candidates. No additional studies were identified. Once criteria were finalized, we noted that only one study met all nine criteria (Hall *et al.*, 2020). Thus, we collaboratively agree that some criteria were required and others preferred. Table 3 presents the finalized list of criteria used to select studies for the metasynthesis. Selected studies met all required criteria and at least three of the five preferred criteria.

Identifying and synthesizing findings

Our next task was to identify and synthesize findings across the four articles. We attended to findings that were stated directly by study authors. To clarify this complex process, we chose one study (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012) to pilot our selection process and listed findings from that study, including respective page numbers. After Author 1 and Author 2 had consolidated these lists, the research team met and collaboratively conducted a grounded coding of the findings. We then drafted a definition for each code and identified illustrative findings. Table 4 presents a sampling of codes, definitions and illustrative findings that informed the analysis presented in this paper.

Once we had identified and coded the findings reported by Carpenter and Sherretz (2012), the three remaining articles were assigned to two members of the research team, who collaboratively identified and coded findings. After coding findings from all four articles, we grouped similar codes to identify themes, which are the basis of the metasynthesis presented below.

Table 3. Selected studies and final criteria

Study	Required		Preferred							Total criteria met
	1. 2007–2022	2. PDS as an entity	3. Qualitative data	4. Definition of PDS	5. Multiple data sources	6. Attention to demographics	7. Thick description	8. Practitioner involvement/ voice	9. Equity/ critical frame	
Hall <i>et al.</i> (2020)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
Carpenter and Sherretz (2012)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		8
Akkerman and Bruining (2016)	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		7
Trube <i>et al.</i> (2018)	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		7
Source(s): Created by authors										

Table 4. Sample codes, definitions and illustrative examples

Code	Definition	Illustrative finding
Teacher leadership	This set of findings speaks to teachers building leadership capacity and having informal and formal leadership and learning opportunities. This code addresses the impact PDS partnerships can have on building teacher leadership	“PDS partnership activities create potential for enhancing teachers’ opportunities to become leaders within their school communities” (p. 89)
Peer learning	This set of findings speaks to actively shared learning among PDS teachers through formal and informal peer interaction and collaboration	“A second theme that emerged was that teachers in the case study school were actively involved in teaching each other” (p. 95)
Teacher efficacy and ownership of work	This set of findings speaks to teachers’ beliefs in their own capacity to prompt student engagement and learning. These findings address the impact of PDS on teacher efficacy, which correlates with teachers’ collective “ownership” of their work and having a positive impact on student learning	“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” (p. 96)

Source(s): Created by authors

Researcher reflexivity

The authors of this metasynthesis are white women who have multiple experiences with PDS. We have served as teachers, university liaisons, directors, school-based administrators and field supervisors in PDS spaces. Author 1 has worked in PDS spaces since 1990. Most have engaged in practitioner research through practice and scholarship. We recognize these experiences as providing insight into both the challenges and affordances of PDS and recognize that our commitment to PDS may limit our criticality. We are also aware of the privileges we enjoy as white scholars and strive to recognize whiteness as being complicit in descriptions, implementations and studies of PDS. Naming silences in PDS scholarship related to race, culture and social justice raises awareness of inequities that affect teachers and students.

Findings

All studies that met our criteria focused on PDS implementation in an early childhood or elementary school. Across the four articles, we identified eight sets of findings. Two findings were reported in all four articles:

- (1) leadership and
- (2) collaboration and collegial learning,

Four additional findings were reported in two of the four articles:

- (1) complexities and challenges,
- (2) voice and ownership,
- (3) effectiveness and
- (4) opportunities and benefits.

Two sets of findings were each reported in only one article from our sample:

- (5) respect and trust and

We address these last two findings based on representation of these ideas across PDS scholarship (e.g. [Dana et al., 2001](#); [Darling-Hammond, 2014](#)).

Leadership

All four studies found that PDS partnerships nurtured teacher leadership, albeit in different ways. For example, [Carpenter and Sherretz \(2012\)](#) identified PDS as “an instrument for teacher leadership” and claimed, “partnership activities create potential for enhancing teachers’ opportunities to become leaders within their school communities” (p. 89). In their elementary school, university-led professional development “gave teachers the knowledge, skills, and confidence to... become educational leaders within the school” ([Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012](#), pp. 93–94). Specifically, they described opportunities for developing school–university expertise that supported teachers’ intellectual growth and inspired them to assume leadership roles.

While [Carpenter and Sherretz \(2012\)](#) highlighted teacher leadership, [Akkerman and Bruining \(2016\)](#) examined the “broker roles” (p. 240) of various leaders: “student teachers, the internal facilitators within the five primary schools, the school directors, the teacher educators involved in the PDS initiative, and the project coordinator of the PDS partnership” (p. 253). Recognizing the leadership contributions of multiple actors, they maintained that “broker positions are not statically connected to persons and that structural positions can be circulated in order for various actors to become involved” ([Akkerman & Bruining, 2016](#), p. 279). They argued that the regular transfer of broker roles across PDS participants contributed to PDS sustainability.

In their reflective case study of a culturally responsive school–university partnership, [Hall et al. \(2020\)](#) described the tenuous nature of partnership and the need for shared leadership. Specifically, they worried that constructive feedback from the university-based evaluation team damaged relationships with school-based colleagues, noting that “a new school, and especially one trying to navigate multiple changing curricular and instructional demands, would need time to find its footing and ... anything highlighted for conversation could inadvertently result in more friction” (p. 395). In short, the flexible brokering roles that [Akkerman and Bruining \(2016\)](#) documented at an established PDS were not yet viable at this emerging site. Thus, [Hall et al. \(2020\)](#) described the hesitancy of teachers to assert their authority, which ultimately “worked against the developmental process of the partnership itself” (p. 398) and limited researchers’ ability to “assist the PDS partners during their developmental process” (p. 397). Sharing authority and assuming collaborative roles were not automatic; instead, shared leadership required time, commitment and a continual revisiting of practice.

Extending discussions of leadership as negotiated and context-specific, [Trube et al. \(2018\)](#) described “transformational leadership” (p. 14) as PDS coordinators, university supervisors and lead teachers collaboratively set goals, planned and modeled instruction and provided feedback to colleagues. Emphasizing the “behavior of all participating educators” ([Trube et al., 2018](#), p. 1), they described individualized, intellectually stimulating, and inspirational mentoring of lead teachers, while highlighting how mentors involved candidates in “planning and decision making and encourage[ed] them to use their talents and skills in the interest of children’s success” (p. 14). This study showcased leadership through “job-embedded professional development” and “co-teaching” (p. 10) for both in-service and preservice teachers.

Across these four studies, researchers identified leadership as affordances of PDS sites. University-facilitated professional development inspired practitioners to take on leadership roles ([Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012](#)) and engage in boundary-spanning activities ([Akkerman & Bruining, 2016](#)). While [Hall et al. \(2020\)](#) revealed the tenuous nature of school–university partnerships and the challenge of establishing shared authority, [Trube et al. \(2018\)](#) witnessed

the transformational potential of PDS for stakeholders in relation to school operation, classroom planning and instructional modeling. Thus, while these studies illustrated how PDS partnerships might yield forms of leadership, the process was neither simple nor automatic, requiring time and committed collaboration.

Collaboration and collegial learning

All four studies reported findings related to collaboration and collegial learning while noting contingencies. Two articles connected collaboration and collegial learning to school culture. Drawing from survey and interview data, [Trube et al. \(2018\)](#) found that PDS culture supported candidates' engagement in early childhood classrooms through the "consistent use of mentoring and collaboration" (p. 13). They highlighted the partnership's role in fostering reflection as practicing teachers, teacher candidates and paraprofessionals collaboratively set goals, planned lessons and instructed children. [Carpenter and Sherretz \(2012\)](#) also focused on school culture, noting how positive collaboration among teachers, administrators and university partners created "a learning community [where] a teacher's role expands from one's classroom to the entire school" (p. 98). They described the overlapping work of various school committees and showcased instructional coaching and other professional development opportunities that were distinctly collaborative. Ongoing collaboration involved multiple stakeholders working toward shared goals (e.g. preparing teachers for National Board Certification, integrating research findings into instruction and facilitating professional development seminars).

Mindful of complexities involved in collaboration, [Akkerman and Bruining \(2016\)](#) referenced reflective "learning mechanisms" (p. 257) that placed brokers "at the intersection of different hierarchical levels as well as the different collaborative organizations or organizational units" ([Akkerman & Bruining, 2016](#), p. 280). Due to varied brokering roles, teacher learning was uneven: "Only particular actors learned with respect to the aspired integration of research, teacher education, and teaching, whereas the other actors in the institutions mainly came to learn about the differences between these activities" ([Akkerman & Bruining, 2016](#), p. 276).

As an evaluation team, Hall and colleagues' (2020) reported multiple forms of collaboration with and among various stakeholders (e.g. PDS steering committee, administrators, teachers, parents, community advocates and students). However, the team's inability to establish critical friendships limited them "to a formal dialogue mechanism" ([Hall et al., 2020](#), p. 399), which compromised their ability to impact instruction and left them "unable to forge a path to share the different tensions experienced by specific stakeholders" (p. 396). As Hall and colleagues concluded, advanced facilitation skills were needed to overcome power and politics.

Thus, all four studies emphasized collaboration and peer learning as evolving and contingent on PDS and school culture ([Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012](#); [Hall et al., 2020](#); [Trube et al., 2018](#)) alongside chains of brokering ([Akkerman & Bruining, 2016](#)). Less clear is the degree to which cultures and practices were established before PDS implementation and/or how PDS sites built and sustained them. Like leadership, collaboration was not automatic.

Complexity and challenges

While all four studies surfaced complexities related to leadership and educator collaboration, two directly named and addressed these complexities ([Akkerman & Bruining, 2016](#); [Hall et al., 2020](#)). The nuanced and complex nature of PDS networks was described as both a challenge and an asset, highlighting the need for multidimensional and flexible qualitative methodologies.

[Akkerman and Bruining's \(2016\)](#) discussion of various brokers referenced challenges grounded in institutional and epistemological differences. Exploring various perspectives among school personnel, they cast administrators as "concern[ed] about task descriptions, time for research, obligations to contribute, and research topics that address schoolwide issues" ([Akkerman & Bruining, 2016](#), pp. 265–266), whereas a novice teacher struggled "to

connect with other teachers in doing research and also to connect her research activities with her own concerns in the classroom” (p. 274). Involving teachers in conducting and applying research was a persistent, prominent challenge that “needed to be solved in order for the partnership to realize its ambitions” (Akkerman & Bruining, 2016, p. 277). These multileveled intricacies contributed to the partnership’s potential, reinforcing participants’ desire “to continue working in or with schools that had an academic PDS nature” (p. 274).

Hall *et al.* (2020) described PDS spaces as complex due to “cultural, political, historical, and other contextual features” (p. 398). They emphasized “the sheer magnitude of intersecting policies, practices, desires, and interests” (p. 390). Wondering whether a single study could capture these nuances, they attempted to chart this “comprehensive landscape” which they viewed as “educative for PDS stakeholders” (Hall *et al.*, 2020, p. 391). Employing and recommending qualitative methods to honor PDS complexities, they urged fellow PDS scholars to recognize the “shaky nature and history” of partnerships. Like Akkerman and Bruining (2016), Hall and colleagues argued for qualitative methods, thick description and “nested levels of analysis” (p. 258) to capture complexities inherent in establishing and maintaining a PDS – “not only technically, structurally, socially, and culturally but also personally” (p. 279).

Thus, half of our sample highlighted challenges and benefits related to PDS complexity. As Akkerman and Bruining (2016) and Carpenter and Sherretz (2012) demonstrated, challenges associated with multiple, shifting roles and various perspectives accompanied promising opportunities to improve teaching and learning. Methodologically, researchers agreed that studying cross-institutional collaborations required multidimensional approaches.

Voice and ownership

Two studies identified findings related to the potential of PDS partnerships to amplify stakeholder voices, foster collective efficacy and instill ownership – authors associated these themes with potential student outcomes. Carpenter and Sherretz (2012) recognized that participant voices should inform educational practice. They referenced the PDS focus on teacher leadership and teamwork in contrast with outsourcing teacher professional development. Formal internally designed and implemented initiatives that drew in “the resources of the PDS” (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012, p. 96) buoyed teacher learning and leadership, while informal opportunities for mentoring and coaching fostered “the belief that as teachers they [could] make a difference” (p. 96). Attributing efficacy and ownership to PDS structures, Carpenter and Sherretz (2012) showed teachers “working together as a whole” (p. 98), rather than confining their work to isolated classrooms.

Hall *et al.* (2020) extended findings related to voice, efficacy and ownership to include local communities. They intentionally engaged marginalized Latinx community members in culturally responsive data collection and analysis to invite “accurate cultural interpretations” (p. 398). This community focus undergirded PDS efforts to enhance student achievement through “improved teacher preparation, participation in inquiry-based teaching, and ongoing professional development” (Hall *et al.*, 2020, p. 388). They described the cultural and linguistic diversity of the evaluation team as having methodological and practical benefits.

While Carpenter and Sherretz (2012) attended to teacher voices and leadership roles, Hall *et al.* (2020) emphasized community voices as contributing to school improvement and student learning. Both studies highlighted the potential of PDS to support teacher efficacy and ownership. These studies illustrate how amplifying stakeholder voices, fostering collective efficacy and involving community require intentional and inclusive planning.

Effectiveness

Two studies also reported on PDS effectiveness. While Carpenter and Sherretz (2012) did not report student achievement data, they associated PDS activities with improved instruction, suggesting that “analysis of student work and progress leads to confidence in the informal leaders’ work in helping to attain the school’s educational outcomes” (pp. 96–97). As they

reported, “The current study demonstrated that PDS partnerships potentially serve as instruments for teachers to become leaders . . . increase[ing] the likelihood of enabling higher quality teachers, improving students’ achievement, and creating better schools” (p. 98).

Hall *et al.* (2020) addressed the effectiveness of PDS activities by exploring how feedback loops affected culturally responsive practices and student learning. Researchers monitored the establishment of a new PDS through detailed narrative accounts, noting that “measuring the effects of instructional practice would be premature, and potentially harmful to students, teachers, administrators, and university partners, in this closely monitored, high-stakes situation” (Hall *et al.*, 2020, p. 388). While prolonged immersion allowed researchers to track feedback loops, researchers regretted their failure to provide “critical midcourse feedback” (p. 384) to practitioners. As they noted, “Our misstep was in not positioning ourselves as a critical friend, ready to provide fair-minded and constructive feedback to their process—including their inability to turn their partnership-building activities into generative dialogue” (p. 396). These introspective findings offer guidance for PDS implementation and evaluation.

Theoretically, PDS effectiveness could highlight multiple overlapping efforts (e.g. teacher preparation, teacher learning, student learning, collaboration, inquiry and leadership). Thus, we witnessed intersectional goals in both studies, as Carpenter and Sherretz (2012) linked teacher learning to student learning, and Hall *et al.* (2020) tracked formative evaluation in support of partnership learning and growth. While these qualitative approaches did not directly measure student outcomes, these implementations were systemic and recognized multiple interacting systems that complicated the tracking of student learning.

Opportunities and benefits

Two studies addressed the opportunities and benefits that accompany PDS implementation, which in turn justified the investment of time and resources into PDS. As Carpenter and Sherretz (2012) reported, PDS implementations granted “more teachers. . . the opportunity to participate in professional development initiatives because of the human and monetary resources” (p. 94). Moreover, these affordances gave educators “the confidence and professional development to be leaders in the building” (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012, p. 98). Both administrators and teachers recognized that PDS resources enhanced school culture by focusing on teacher and student learning. Similarly, the school studied by Trube *et al.* (2018) was the site of “mutually beneficial partnerships through an emphasis on the teacher leadership practices of mentoring, collaboration, reflection, and engagement in team planning and goal-setting” (p. 13). This community of practice involved “pre-service and in-service educators . . . in collaboration, reflective practice, and mentoring” (Trube *et al.*, 2018, p. 14).

While these studies (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012; Trube *et al.*, 2018) identified PDS opportunities as enhancing the work of teachers and – in the latter case, teacher candidates – neither study delineated learning opportunities for university partners. Although such benefits may exist (e.g. authentic clinical experiences, research opportunities, knowledge of current practices and policies), the primary focus was on teachers and their work. There was also a lack of attention to administrator learning. While studies described university and administrator support as essential, reciprocal learning benefits and opportunities remained unnamed.

Trust, respect and transformation

Beyond the findings evident in at least half of our sample, two sets of findings were only reported in a single study: (1) the importance of trust and respect among PDS partners (Hall *et al.*, 2020) and (2) PDS spaces as sites of transformation (Akkerman & Bruining, 2016). While similar findings across studies would have contributed to credibility, we argue these particular sets of findings illuminate important considerations gleaned from PDS scholarship (e.g. Dana *et al.*, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2014).

Hall *et al.* (2020) identified trust and respect as foundational to PDS. As an evaluation team, they committed themselves to recursive processes that involved “changing course and trying

something new” (Hall *et al.*, 2020, p. 395) alongside recognizing “larger socioeconomic, historical, and political contexts” (Hall *et al.*, 2020, p. 397). They remained aware that “prolonged engagement was central to establishing trust” (p. 397) by creating spaces in which improvement could occur. In short, trust and respect were essential elements that enabled growth and supported long-term collaboration despite accompanying challenges.

Also attuned to relationships among stakeholders, Akkerman and Bruining (2016) described PDS spaces as transformative. Transformative possibilities involved participants who took on new roles and claimed new positions within the PDS community. Researchers reminded readers that transformations were neither “entirely neutral” (p. 278) nor inherently positive. For example, some teachers came to identify research activities as “separate from their daily teaching” (Akkerman & Bruining, 2016, p. 276). The authors worried that various roles and responsibilities “created a social and political landscape in which [brokers] felt the need to be positive, to show progress and signs of reflection and transformation” (Akkerman & Bruining, 2016, p. 278) even when positive stances might not have been warranted. They noted that the enthusiasm of some brokers prevented “others from becoming more involved.” (p. 279). Encouraged by the possibilities of PDS partnerships, Akkerman and Bruining (2016) recommended “circulating broker positions over time among various actors rather than relying too strongly on a few” (p. 280). They maintained that this structure was more conducive to sustained transformation that involved “mutual activity in research, teacher education, and teaching learning” (p. 280).

Trust, respect and transformation speak to contingencies that affect PDS success and viability. As Hall *et al.* (2020) demonstrated, teacher education, professional development and collaboration involve fragile relationships that require ongoing commitment and work. Likewise, Akkerman and Bruining (2016) revealed relationships as key to creating and sustaining transformation in schools. These findings, like those more common across our sample, extend beyond PDS to a wide range of educational spaces.

Discussion and conclusions

As we commenced this metasynthesis, we asked: What has research revealed about PDS as a systemic and multifaceted innovation and what does it offer the larger field of teacher education? Our interest in PDS implementations as networked entities framed our intentional search for studies that centered PDS and its multiple dimensions. Excluding studies that addressed only particular dimensions or presented PDS as a backdrop to highlight particular foci resulted in a markedly small sample. However, synthesizing the findings from these studies surfaced several patterns.

We believe our findings have important implications for PDS and non-PDS contexts, and particularly schools that prepare future generations of teachers. In short, findings related to leadership, collaboration and collegial learning, complexities and challenges, voice and ownership, effectiveness, opportunities and benefits and respect, trust and transformation are significant to all educators who work in schools. Important lessons from PDS scholarship include

- (1) PDS collaborations can engender circulatory leadership by university- and school-based facilitators and new boundary-spanning roles (Akkerman & Bruining, 2016; Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012). However, given the complexities of shared authority, leadership roles within school–university partnerships are tenuous and require careful, continuous effort.
- (2) Collaboration and peer learning are continuously evolving and contingent on multiple factors, including school culture, the PDS community and chains of brokering involving multiple partners (Akkerman & Bruining, 2016; Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012; Hall *et al.*, 2020; Trube *et al.*, 2018). Less clear is the degree to which collaborative cultures and practices existed before PDS implementation and how PDS

sites sustained or changed existing practices. Like leadership, collaboration in PDS spaces is not automatic; it requires time, effort and effective brokering among partners.

- (3) The complexity of PDS spaces encompasses challenges (e.g. multiple roles, varying epistemologies and competing institutional practices) and benefits (e.g. new opportunities for educators, collaboration and teacher learning) with catalyzing potential (Akkerman & Bruining, 2016; Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012). Efforts in one area (e.g. teacher leadership) can inspire positive outcomes in another (e.g. school-wide changes in instruction).
- (4) With intentional effort and planning, PDS partnerships can provide spaces for practitioner ownership (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012) and community engagement (Hall *et al.*, 2020).
- (5) While these qualitative studies did not directly measure PDS effectiveness, they suggest intersectional positive outcomes related to educator preparation, teacher learning, student learning, school culture, increased collaboration and inquiry and participant efficacy.
- (6) While PDS collaborations benefit teachers and candidates (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012; Trube *et al.*, 2018), benefits to university partners and school administrators are less clear.
- (7) Trust and respect are critical dimensions of partnerships, requiring ongoing commitment and effort. Relationships are key to creating and sustaining school change.

Across the findings from these four studies, it appears that trust and respect were both foundational and tenuous. The PDS spaces described in our sample reported ongoing efforts not only to establish and sustain trust and respect but also to expand leadership opportunities and maximize the affordances of complex collaboration. In short, multiple, intersecting practices operate in schools and across institutions, yet all are predicated on trust and respect.

In addition to the above findings, we offer two metasynthetic findings as causes for concern: (1) lack of attention to cultural and linguistic diversity in comprehensive studies of PDS spaces and (2) methodological limits of much PDS research. First, because equity is the major challenge in US K–12 schools and schools of education, preparing candidates to provide culturally and linguistically responsive instruction is essential. While Darling-Hammond (2014) described PDS networks as inviting university faculty, school-based educators and candidates to identify and examine “strong and widely shared cultural norms and practices” (p. 553), she was clear that these shared norms must consistently attend to equity and student diversity. As Murrell (1998) noted, while equity was “an original focus of the PDS movement” (p. 26), there has been an enduring lack of PDS scholarship focused on “racism and white privilege” (p. 26).

For decades, scholars have worried that the complexities that accompany establishing and maintaining PDS alliances direct attention away from equity (Beardsley & Teitel, 2004; Murrell, 1998; Reeves *et al.*, 2018; Wong & Glass, 2005). Abdal-Haqq (1999) found that attention to educator preparation, curriculum and collaborative structures left room for only “surface approaches to addressing equity” that tended to “obscure, trample, or render still-born alternate, and possibly more productive attempts” (p. 154). More broadly, a review of 95 papers published between 1999 and 2006 found little evidence of a PDS “commitment to providing equitable educational opportunities and outcomes” (Breault & Lack, 2009, p. 152). Most of the studies in their sample failed to attend to equity, and only two (McKinney *et al.*, 2004; Taylor & Sobel, 2003) directly and significantly addressed race. Similarly, only one study in the current metasynthesis explicitly attended to the voices of marginalized community

members (Hall *et al.*, 2020). While excuses for failing to address equity are never acceptable, Teitel (2004) explained, “really addressing issues of diversity and equity requires deeper and more fundamental change than almost anything else on the table,” citing “deep-seated issues of race and class [that] are both daunting and essential” (p. 413).

These findings prompted Breault and Lack (2009) to critique the “avoidance of any language that could be considered politically- or ideologically-charged” (p. 165) in PDS scholarship. Countering these silences, some scholars have found PDS sites to be fruitful spaces for equity-oriented research and practice (Beardsley & Teitel, 2004; Jeffries, 2018; Reeves *et al.*, 2018; Wong & Glass, 2005). However, these efforts have been limited to particular classrooms and school innovations rather than addressing equity across multiple PDS layers and spaces.

Finally, our synthesis revealed research designs that failed to recognize the complexity of PDS spaces. Based on the small number of articles that met our criteria for robust research methodologies, we call for:

- (1) Multidimensional analyses that include a range of PDS participant perspectives and varied data sources;
- (2) Mixed-methods studies that merge quantitative measures with rich ethnographic data;
- (3) Longitudinal approaches to explore PDS spaces over time to document the formation and sustenance of PDS spaces as well as threats to sustainability;
- (4) Teams of researchers using parallel methods to document activities within and across PDS spaces and
- (5) Systemic attention to community voices and equity practices in PDS spaces.

We view these methodological commitments as essential for considering the complexity of PDS networks from various angles, treating PDS implementations as examples of systemic change and exploring how various aspects of PDS initiatives work together to support learning for all partners.

We acknowledge limitations to our review. First, with our focus on peer-reviewed research articles, we may have overlooked important book-length reports. Further, the PDS spaces described in our sample were relatively new (i.e. operating for five years at most); more established sites deserve detailed researcher attention. Finally, we must wonder if part of the reason for the lack of PDS research that thoroughly considers the contribution of PDS to teachers’, teacher candidates’ and children’s/youths’ learning is fear of what we might find. As a community of scholars who have anecdotally witnessed the power of PDS in schools and universities, we may be hesitant to put our beliefs to the test. Thus, we argue for bravery and taking strength from our analysis and the work of others (Burns & Baker, 2016; Garin & Yendol-Hoppey, 2023; Snow *et al.*, 2016; Yendol-Hoppey & Garin, 2022, 2023) who have identified positive contributions of PDS to schools, teachers and children. Existing PDS scholarship, while not yet compelling, highlights important findings for both educators who share our commitment to PDS and all teacher educators.

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