Crisscrossing the University and Public School Contexts as Professional Development School Boundary Spanners

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Professional development schools (PDSs) consist of collaborations across institutions whose missions, organizational structures, and cultures are distinct and which, in some ways, may conflict (Sandholtz & Finan, 1998). Due to differing emphases across contexts, PDS partners may encounter hidden barriers and mismatched perspectives (Stevens, 1999). One means to improve educational partnerships is to facilitate the mutual understanding of participants and to bridge differences. A *boundary spanner*, who is an individual who bridges discourses, provides cultural guidance, and acts as change agent, can serve as a tool to accomplish this (Buxton, Carlone, & Carlone, 2005). Stevens described the PDS boundary spanner as one who commutes, both literally and figuratively, across public school and university boundaries.

The concept of a boundary spanner has its foundation in organizational theory, through which such individuals are seen as providing important links between organizations and the environments in which they are

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situated (White & Dozier, 1992). A boundary spanner's role is to relay information from outside the environment to key decision makers within the organization. Based on their links to outsiders, boundary spanners can stimulate reflection and creativity, can help to negotiate goals in light of the needs of external audiences, and can bring new meanings to the surface by interpreting the behaviors of individuals and the significance of events for both internal and external audiences (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; White & Dozier, 1992). Boundary spanners speak the languages of both contexts and are able to translate across boundary lines.

Boundary spanners play crucial roles in understanding and interpreting differing perspectives and in creating and maintaining school-university partnerships (Collay, 1995; Sandholtz & Finan, 1998). Boundary spanners can play particularly important roles within the PDS movement, given the emphasis in PDS schools on site-based, collaborative teacher preparation programs that are co-taught by public school and university faculty and that are linked to inservice teacher development and the needs of the specific PDS school population (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Wiseman & Cooner, 1996). Because boundary spanners' knowledge and experiences cross the borders of schools and universities, they are able to interpret, communicate, and extend traditional relations (Stevens, 1999).

With a background from one context that can inform experiences in the other context, boundary spanners are in a unique position to facilitate connections between the practical craft knowledge and the theoretical, research-driven knowledge that emerge when school and university faculty roles in teacher preparation converge (Miller & Silvernail, 2005). Further, boundary spanners' collaborative involvement as joint faculty members or as professionals trained to work across colleges of education, arts and sciences colleges, and public schools has the potential to transform the culture of teaching (Berry & Catoe, 2005). Having boundary spanners in place in PDSs may help educators from both sites to develop trust and understanding of others' realities, which has been identified in previous PDS research as crucial to the success of PDS initiatives (Robinson & Darling-Hammond, 2005; Wiseman & Nason, 1995).

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore the perceptions and experiences of boundary spanners who have been involved in PDS initiatives from both the public school and university perspectives. In this study, the following questions were addressed: (a) What are the experiences of PDS participants who have crossed institutional boundaries? and (b) What are PDS participants' perceptions of the PDS movement, in general, and, specifically, its current PDS initiatives?

Methodology

Individuals who had had both school-based and university-based experiences in a PDS network established by an urban research university and four metropolitan school districts were purposefully chosen to be participants in this study. Participants included: (a) 5 teachers (2 elementary, 1 middle, and 2 high school) who had been interns in a PDS school and who took positions in a PDS upon graduation; (b) 3 doctoral teaching fellows and 1 clinical faculty member who were former PDS teachers/counselors; (c) 2 former PDS graduate research assistants who had been hired as research specialists for school systems, and (d) the director of the university's PDS grant initiative, who had been a school system administrator. Research team members included two professors who worked on the design team that oversaw the overall PDS activities for the college, and two of the university-based boundary spanners who began their PDS work in the public school setting and who were participants in the study.

Data were collected first through individual interviews, which lasted approximately 1 to 1-1/2 hours. Participants also were asked to share any artifacts that they might have that illustrated their roles in either context (e.g., teaching portfolios, written reflections on activities, research logs, newsletters). Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The reading of the transcripts led to the establishment of the initial themes, which were discussed and defined by the first two authors (one professor, one boundary spanner). These themes were used to construct follow-up questions to allow for additional data collection pertinent to key issues. The themes and the follow-up questions were shared with the rest of the research team members (one professor, one boundary spanner), who acted as peer debriefers. This process allowed for the use of multiple perspectives to provide insights and further refinement of the themes and debriefing questions. Questions were then emailed to the participants who were asked to respond in writing or, if they preferred, to participate in a follow-up interview. Additional data were then coded and the findings triangulated across participants and data sources.

Results

Our analyses revealed three primary themes: (a) understanding the other; (b) deconstructing traditional power relationships through the support of and dialogue with stakeholders across contexts; and (c) drawing on prior knowledge to shape the ways that they engaged with colleagues in their new spaces. These themes were woven throughout the

data, although the participants' experiences of these constructs varied based on the specific role and context of the boundary spanner.

Understanding the Other

Participants who were initially based in one PDS context (i.e., school system or university) and moved to the other perceived their perspectives as unique in comparison to the views of their colleagues whose experiences were located in only one facet of the partnership. Two aspects of *Understanding the Other* were apparent: (a) a propensity to relate to others across boundaries, and (b) an ability to comprehend roles and responsibilities across boundaries.

Propensity to relate to others across boundaries. The boundary spanners demonstrated a clear propensity to relate to others across boundaries. For instance, the maintenance and building of relationships was a fundamental aspect of the work of Donna, the grant coordinator, who had initially worked as a school district administrator before coming to the university to navigate partnerships with districts. Donna saw her role as a "bridge builder" who helps stakeholders at the school level, school district level, and university level feel valued. Her professional experience in central office administration enabled her "to weave through the many intricacies of central office protocols and politics" (Donna, debriefing) and to build upon her previously established relationships. She explained: "I knew principals; I had done principal training, I had done executive coaching at the superintendents' level, and so I figured that I could wiggle my way into most situations" (Donna, interview). She felt strongly that "schools must not have a sense that the university is the sole leader, but that the goals, decisions, and hard work will be genuinely shared" (Donna, artifact). Her disposition enabled her to have frank conversations with her colleagues and to help them to:

> understand what the driving forces on each side are. The schools need to understand the research elements on the university side. They need to understand that it is not all theory. There are excellent practitioners on the university side. And [on] the other side of it, the university needs to be aware of the day-to-day operations and mandates and the amount of pressure that public schools are particularly under to reach such things as AYP. (Donna, artifact)

The propensity to relate to others across boundaries was evident in the work of high school-based boundary spanners as well. Based on her knowledge of PDSs, Kelsey, one of the boundary spanner researchers who worked in the district central office, knew the importance of teachers' being commended for their work and of others' providing them with support.

The greatest change that she had seen, in relation to the implementation of the PDS model, was an increased sense of "respect for teachers and the challenges that they face, particularly when they are in situations where they don't have strong administrators" (Kelsey, interview).

The university teaching fellows who had been mentor teachers in PDS schools in the past also related to others across boundaries. These instructors highly valued the contributions of school-based partners. One (Judy) described her desire to "create relationships with the collaborating teachers" so they would know that she is "there to serve as a resource, an assistant, a conversation partner to the collaborating teacher, as well [as supporting the intern.]" She further stated:

> [Having been a mentor teacher] has really made me think more about how we need to be intentional about our relationships . . . rather than . . . saying, "Here's what the grant says, here's what we need to do. We need you to place our teachers. This is part of your responsibility, and this is what you're getting paid for." . . . I think it's really important that we go in and we build those relationships with individual teachers and with groups of teachers. (Judy, interview)

Beginning PDS teachers who had been interns and student teachers in PDSs frequently mentioned the importance of building relationships. All spoke of their relationships with their own mentors as well as the relationships that they worked to build with their own interns. Shari, an elementary mentor teacher, explained that her cooperating teacher had "really made an impact" and was "not only my team member this year; she's still my mentor. She's always going to be my mentor teacher, regardless of how many years I've been teaching" (Shari, interview). Another beginning teacher, Elvira, whose mentor teacher had taken a position at a different school, stated:

> I loved the fact that my mentor teacher and I had weekly meetings because it kept us on track [during student teaching.] It really kept me on track . . . actually I still meet with my mentor teacher once a month. (Elvira interview)

These experiences shaped the types of mentors that these new PDS teachers choose to be. Shari, explained:

> I thought I was just going to go in there, do my 6 weeks and student-teach for a semester, and, okay, thanks. Give a thank-you card. But it was much more meaningful than that, and that experience, in itself, I believe, makes me want to stay in contact with the interns that I have, email them just to say, "How's the workload going?" because they need to know it is not a business in education. Like, even though there's money behind it, it's not a business because you're actually dealing with real

people and real people are [not only] the kids but also the teachers that teach those kids. (Shari, interview)

An important need that was noted by the PDS teachers was for preservice teachers to have a consistent supervisor across the entirety of their field experience. The elementary mentor teacher, Shari, stressed this practice as a means for her interns' university supervisors to see growth and development over time. She explained that this "open line of communication, as far as getting help and any form of assistance, . . . really supports the intern" (Shari, debriefing) and is a way of structuring supervision that can better support students.

In summary, these participants worked to maintain and develop relationships that spanned the traditional school-university boundaries. These relationships enabled them to "stand in the gap" (Donna, interview) and, as is seen in the next section, to draw on their own experiences to understand others' roles, responsibilities, and contexts in meaningful ways.

Ability to comprehend roles and responsibilities across boundaries. The participants also demonstrated their ability to understand roles and responsibilities across boundaries. This was particularly evident in (a) participants' recognition of others' roles, and (b) the ability of PDS mentor teachers who were former interns to share classroom space with and to provide support to the interns working alongside them in their classrooms.

All of the boundary spanners had the ability to understand and, at times, to help others understand, the roles of individuals in an alternative context. For instance, one of the researchers who had taken a position at the county level, Barbara, expressed the need for clarity between stakeholders in regard to the mutuality of benefits. She noted:

> [I have] been responsible for communicating the importance of the PDS to those key players there who perhaps did not realize the importance of this project . . . I'm able to see the PDS project from different angles, through a different lens, and not just through one lens. Well, because I started out here at [institution] and really being involved from the inside or involved intimately with the PDS as far as the data, it made me appreciate the project more, and it made me see the importance of having the school systems involved in their role. (Barbara, interview)

Donna, the PDS grant coordinator, also had an in-depth understanding of the roles and responsibilities of multiple stakeholders in the partnership that was based on her experiences in those roles. This understanding enabled her to "define concepts that were perceived differently among partners" and to support the professional learning staff who worked with the PDS grant in the districts. Her detailed understanding "allowed [her] to help partners revise and refine roles and responsibili-

ties." She recognized that, "Yes, professors need to conduct research, but the research can be planned to benefit PDS sites and professor research agendas . . . [and to] meet AYP and achieve overall improvement goals." She noted that she also helped schools to understand that the university is not all about theory; it is also filled with excellent practitioners. She was able to delineate what individuals needed to be closely engaged in the partnership. She stated, "University personnel working in schools should be those persons capable of serving as integral members of the school leadership team and who can move seamlessly beyond theory to practice" (Donna, artifact). Her in-depth understanding of the roles and responsibilities of individuals on both sides of the boundary enabled her to work with all stakeholders to find ways of collaborating that were mutually beneficial.

The university teaching fellows, who had previously been PDS teachers, recognized the challenges that practicing teachers faced. Becky, a university fellow, explained:

> Being that I am not that far removed from the classroom, I feel I can use this experience to connect with my teachers. I still remember the day-to-day concerns and what was most important to me as a classroom teacher. (Becky, debrief)

Based on her own experiences, Stacey, a university teaching fellow who had previously taught and supervised as a classroom teacher at a professional development school, noted the importance of helping school-based partners see the potential benefits of the university partnership. She stated:

> After working in a school environment that was just beginning a PDS partnership, I see how difficult it may be to get "buy in" from teachers initially and also to sustain the relationship because of all the time pressures and many other tasks that are a part of a teacher's daily life. (Stacey, debriefing)

While the theme of understanding the roles and responsibilities was seen in the work of all of the boundary spanners, this theme also was salient for the former interns and student teachers who were now PDS teachers who were mentoring preservice teachers in similar programs. These individuals related to the many hats that their interns wore and empathized with their struggles. Every one of our PDS teachers/boundary spanners believed that their perspectives were significantly different from those of their school-based colleagues who also acted as mentors to these interns. They believed this was due to their ability to understand the complexities and challenges of the multiple roles that their interns were undertaking as university students and student teachers because they had experienced those tensions associated with these role. These boundary

spanner teacher mentors described this disposition of understanding the other as an aspect of their relationship with interns and student teachers that was fundamentally different from relationships that other colleagues had with mentees. In particular, boundary spanning teacher mentors' understanding of preservice teachers' roles and responsibilities included: (a) knowing the stages of the process and what it means to be an intern in the context of a specific program; (b) recognizing the other responsibilities that the interns/student teachers had and what their schedules entailed; (c) valuing the importance of opening their classrooms to their mentees to give the interns opportunities to discover, and (d) providing necessary and timely feedback and support.

These PDS teachers knew, firsthand, the design and content of specific teacher preparation programs, and this informed their expectations of preservice teachers. For instance, they understood what the institution's programs meant by the term intern as opposed to student teacher. In many cases, internships were the first substantive opportunities for preservice teachers to work in schools. Our boundary spanner mentor teachers recognized that interns were beginning their field experiences, and, therefore, they did not expect the interns to have the expertise or preparedness of a student teacher. Shari explained:

> Your cooperating teacher may not be knowledgeable about the program; so maybe as an intern, your cooperating teacher may expect you to do the duties of a student teacher. And just understanding what their duties are week by week, realizing that when they start off in kindergarten, things are going to be very different from their internship in fifth grade. (Shari, interview)

She also explained that it is important to understand "the stages that the intern goes through in the program" (Shari, interview). In her debriefing, she added, "I know, from going through the program, that is their first or second intern experience…so I know that they are pretty much fresh in education—experience wise."

In addition, these participants explained that they knew what their interns were going through and they recognized the varied responsibilities that preservice teachers were trying to balance. Shari, the elementary mentor teacher, stated:

> It makes such a difference because I know that they're not just at [school] with me all day. I know that they have class in the evening sometimes and during the day. The other days that they are not with me, I know they're in class and that's hard for other teachers sometimes to probably comprehend in that they're not only working with you, but they have a full load aside from interning. (Shari, interview)

The middle-school mentor teacher, Sandy, explained:

> I knew exactly what they were going through. And you don't want to ask too much of them. You don't want to ask them to do things that, you know, they're volunteering to do things anyways, but you don't want to give them things . . . because you know the workload that goes along with everything else that they're doing . . . I feel like some of the other teachers were like, "Oh, we need to get this; this'll be great. We can get them to modify our tests for the rest of the semester." . . . and I thought, "No, don't ask them to do that" because they will, and they don't have the time for that. (Sandy, interview)

Jennifer, the high-school mentor teacher/boundary spanner, also described her understanding of the demands placed on her student teacher, specifically, that they were qualitatively different from those of her colleagues who had not been through the same alternative preparation program. She explained:

> Most colleagues here have been in teaching all their lives . . . and they just know how they went through it . . . and they took . . . the courses one at a time, and in [our program] I know that we were student teaching AND going to school, alright? And in the regular curriculum, you go to school, and then you have a semester when all you do is student teaching, so [other teachers are] laying things on the line to their student teachers as if this is all she has to do, but, in [our program], that's NOT all we have to do. I took two courses AND did student teaching, which meant that I was here, I left here headed straight to [campus], and, most nights, I didn't get to bed until after midnight. I was so happy to see the weekends! . . . I know that [my student teacher] was going through the same thing. She only had one course, but, on Mondays and Wednesdays, she was leaving here and going directly to school and not getting to see her kids those two days and then staying late to prepare the lessons and everything . . . Having [gone] through that myself . . . I know that I need to point out things that can be done to make the work here easier . . . basically we can get everything finished in our 7:45-4:00, so that when she LEAVES here, she'll have time to do the work that she needs for her other courses . . . I've got to show her how to work THIS within the time frame we've got . . . so that she can use the other time for her other course and her family. (Jennifer, interview)

Our PDS teacher boundary spanners noted that, because of their past experiences in the program, they were able to understand the realities of the preservice teachers' lives. In addition, their understanding led them to provide support and opportunities for interns and student teachers to find a professional voice; they also shared their classroom space in important ways. They spoke of the ways in which their own experiences informed the ways in which they engaged with interns and student teach-

ers in their classrooms. Our elementary mentor, Shari, worked to help interns "feel comfortable in the classroom setting." She explained:

> Sometimes it's hard to ask someone to teach a lesson; if that person teaches their children so well, it's hard to step in. So I try to say, "I'm teaching this great lesson; how about we do small groups together?" (Shari, interview)

The middle-school teacher, Sandy, described her own student teaching as "a frustrating experience" in which her mentor teacher "had never hosted a student teacher before, and she wasn't really positive about what my role would be." She explained that, whenever she would start teaching, her mentor "would step in and take over" and that it was very challenging as she was "trying to teach the students and [wanted] to build their trust." This experience shaped the ways that she supports interns in her classroom. She stated that it is important, when student teachers are teaching, for mentors to:

> . . . step back and trust them. Walk around and help, but let them take the students where they're going. Don't step in and try to clarify this or that. And it helps, too, when you do step back, it helps them build confidence in their teaching . . . The lessons that they taught, I sat back and the kids trusted them. [The students] look at them as teachers, too. So I think that was one thing that I made sure I did. When they were in charge, I just let them. And they did a great job. Every now and then, you think of something that they could add, but it was fine. They did a great job. So that was one thing that you have to remind yourself . . . I was in their shoes. (Sandy, interview)

Mentor teachers also discussed the ways in which they provide feedback and support to preservice teachers. Jennifer, the high-school mentor teacher, recalled how she recognized panic on her student teacher's face because she had been there herself. She stated:

> Being a student teacher . . . really helped me being a mentor because I got to experience it, I mean having the experience myself [helped] me guide other teachers through that same experience . . . I know there were a couple of things while I was student teaching that caused me stress, but I made it through, and so I could . . . point [my student teacher] through it . . . before she got there, so I could . . . relieve her from that stress before she got there. (Jennifer, interview)

Similarly, Shari, the elementary mentor teacher, explained:
> I know how to support what they have to do in my classroom. I don't resent them wanting to jump in and help or giving me paperwork to do. I understand what they need for their professors but also what they need to get out of their experiences. When they have their observed

lessons, and even when they are just teaching in front of the children, I am mindful about just reminding them: You need to do small group and large group, helping them tweak lessons . . . to give them their best experience, asking them questions that help them plan the lessons for their observations such as: How are you going to group? Are your materials ready? Do you know the materials you need? As a teacher we already know that. It's just getting them into the role of being a teacher. (Shari, debriefing)

These mentor teachers were particularly responsive to the needs and roles of the preservice teachers in their classrooms in ways that facilitated development and success. The importance of this understanding cannot be overstated; it was a robust part of the PDS teachers' conversations.

Juxtaposing Support, Space for Dialogue, and Recognition of Power Relationships

Running through many of the participants' conversations was recognition of the power relationships that shape and sometimes limit dialogue and action in PDS initiatives. Often, these references concerned the evaluative role that PDS site coordinators, university supervisors, or administrators play and the ways in which these roles inhibit critical reflection or change.

One doctoral teaching fellow, Judy, worked to create space for critical conversations in a sequence of graduate courses that she taught onsite for PDS ESOL teachers. In the courses, they discussed the severe dropout problem of ESOL students at the site, the contributing social issues, and how the school also might be contributing to the problem. Throughout the year, the teachers researched and implemented action plans to address the problem. She emphasized the importance of such PDS work, noting:

It stems from having teachers sitting down together . . . figuring out what is causing the issues and how they can make a change . . . And I don't think we can do that without building a relationship and without having the space for inquiries and really considering the needs and feelings, experiences and questions and ponderings of the teachers who we're working with . . . If we don't build upon the relationships we have and create the spaces where we can be a resource to cooperating teachers, then our interns are not going to have the type of preservice experiences they need to have. They're going to go in and have frustrated cooperating teachers to whom this is just another thing, who don't feel like they're going to get anything out of this, and who are downtrodden because of the general circumstances of the system . . . The challenge is moving from what is to what could be. (Judy, interview)

Another university teaching fellow, Stacey, described the importance of establishing a relationship of trust with teachers. She explained:

> Unfortunately, when you're a classroom teacher, you're used to adminis-
> trations kind of [acting in an evaluative capacity] ... And, unfortunately,
> a lot of times, it is not really support. I taught at three different schools;
> it was usually just for that two times a year that they had to come and
> see you ... And [as university faculty engaging in PDS classrooms], we're
> not coming in to critique or evaluate. I mean, there's no evaluation. It
> is like: Look, I'm JUST coming in, literally. (Stacey, interview)

University teaching fellows noted that teachers' not always being
given a choice about participation in PDS initiatives potentially com-
plicated the establishment of supportive relationships. One boundary
spanner noted that a "shaky start" can occur for teachers "roped in" to
the collaborative process and the need for "the PDS coordinators [to
share] the real purpose and possibilities of PDS to the staff at a school"
(Stacey, debrief). Teachers' perceived lack of power in decision making
was evident in other ways as well. Both the PDS mentor teachers who
were boundary spanners and the university teaching fellows recognized
that PDS teachers were sometimes not even informed that they would
receive an intern or student teacher, much less given the opportunity
to volunteer for one. Corrine, a university faculty member stated:

> We love being a part of adding to the profession, but we'd like to be
> able to do that when there's more choice in the matter. Like some year
> is just not a good year for somebody, and nobody ever had a say. Like
> there was the year that I was pregnant, and I can only speak from my
> personal experience. I really didn't need an intern, but I had no say
> about that. (Corrine, interview)

The person through whom the university supervisors gained entrée
into the school also affected collaboration and support. This was par-
ticularly salient for Judy, a university teaching fellow. She explained:

> The position of the gatekeeper that was my initial school contact and
> point of connection was extremely important. I am not certain that
> the schools which I entered through my relationships with assistant
> principals were ever really as open to me. If it was thought that I was
> "in with the administration," whether or not that was the case, I feel
> that the practicing teachers were afraid I was taking supervisory role
> and reporting to the administration. (Judy, debriefing)

Judy added that, at one school, she was introduced to the faculty as
someone who had ties to the new administration. Because this admin-
istration was contentious, she experienced ongoing tension when trying
to establish relationships. She stated:

> Who the gatekeeper is can really change whether I can be the collabora-
> tive resource for these teachers ... because [teachers] don't know if [they]

can really talk to you. [They] don't know who you're going to go back to and report to . . . I feel like my experience as a cooperating teacher makes me want to be a different type of supervisor, but depending on who my gatekeeper is and how I gain entry into the situation and the relationship that I'm able to quickly build with these teachers, it may or may not work the way I really hope it will. So that's my internal struggle: How I can go into a situation and very quickly be seen as a resource rather than as an evaluator? (Judy, interview)

The issue of power and the evaluative role of PDS participants were noted by others as well. One mentor teacher, Shari, specifically spoke about the problem of having an administrator, or an individual with an evaluative role, as the PDS site coordinator who connects the PDS teachers and university faculty. She explained that it is important for an individual who is supposed to support teachers' work with interns to be someone who is:

. . . able to go into classrooms with no threats and ask, what is it that you want to see, what would you like? And I think it's a very different relationship that can be fostered with the PDS schools if there is someone there that can actually make that contact. (Shari, interview)

She recommended a change from the current model of an assistant principal serving as PDS coordinator to one that calls for the integration of teacher leaders as PDS liaisons. She felt that this would enable teachers to ask for the type of help that they know they need without fear of consequences. Such a liaison could be very helpful because a teacher leader would "not [be] someone from the outside coming in to say, 'You guys are doing bad and I'm going to fix it'" (Shari, interview). A teacher-leader liaison would be "a positive change in communicative process in regards to expanding boundaries, because it allows for the teachers to play a much more active role in the PDS program/partnership" (Shari, debrief).

Judy and Becky, university teaching fellows, and Shari, a mentor teacher, found age and position to be important to deconstructing hierarchical power structures between supervisors and student teachers and between university representatives and school-based partners. Judy stated, "I'm young, and because I'm not a professor, and because I'm not yet there, I'm not very intimidating, and I'm also very available" (interview). Becky, another university teaching fellow, stated, "I'm not sure . . . that I'm seen as being in an evaluative role. I think the teachers are more comfortable with me because I am young and a [doctoral] student" (Becky, debrief).

Shari, the elementary school mentor teacher, also commented that her age made her more approachable than some other mentor teachers and that her youth facilitated the open relationships she has with preservice teachers in her building. She stated:

> I really like having people come through my classroom because I'm still young, and I think it helps when there is still someone who is young who is going through it, and they don't feel like, "I can't do it because of my age." Because I think a lot of times when I went into classrooms, I felt like it was overwhelming because the teachers had been doing it for 30-plus years. But I think when they see me, and they see someone who's only in their second year, but actually has developed a routine, has developed strategies to use with the kids that are effective, I think it helps them. (Shari, interview)

In summary, boundary spanners based in both schools and the university envisioned the creation of new roles, in which lead teachers and/or university liaisons facilitated PDS activities, supported teachers and interns, and provided opportunities for discourse communities. Also of importance is that, for some boundary spanners, there was no tension related to power within relationships. The grant coordinator and the researchers did not discuss or find salient issues of power in their work, although these issues were a marked part of the conversations of practicing teachers and the university faculty who worked closely with them in the schools.

Drawing on Prior Knowledge
In addition to an ability to build relationships in their new position because of an appreciation of roles and context in the other's site, our participants also drew on knowledge from their prior environment. Their prior, firsthand experience provided them with background information that directly informed their performance in their new positions.

Donna, the PDS grant director, was in the unique position of being able to use her knowledge to advocate for both parties. For instance, she was able to assist stakeholders in navigating differences in understandings "to solve credentialing venues and issues that were [or] are handled and defined very differently in the university and P-12 worlds" (Donna, debrief). She further explained:

> Because I have worked in teacher development for so long, many of the teachers and people who work in the curriculum instruction area do value what I have to say. So I've been able to make lots of suggestions as to the assessing of students, some of the curricular aspects to tie into our project, things that they should consider, theorists that they should consider, etc. So that differs just a little bit. And I am very, very pleased with that, that I am able to inform both sides. (Donna, interview)

Reflecting on her ability to use firsthand knowledge to inform others in both contexts, Donna further noted:

> This ability was due in large part to my years of professional develop-

> ment roles [that] allowed me to understand central office protocols needed to coordinate and move dual purposes forward in the grant-related meetings at the beginning and throughout the grant's tenure. (Donna, debriefing)

Her knowledge of school, county, and university concerns enabled her to prevent "snags in process and procedures" and to support collaboration with the "least amount of entanglement" (Donna, debrief). She also explained that her knowledge of and experience with both partnership sides allowed her to ensure that the PDS grant made wise purchases.

Other participants also discussed the ways that their prior knowledge influenced their current practice. Becky, a university teaching fellow who was working to support in-service teachers' implementation of balanced literacy instruction, explained that, as a classroom teacher, she valued a specific type of professional development. "I was taking a pragmatic and practical stance toward readings, focusing only on reading that would impact my day-to-day world." As a facilitator of professional development opportunities for in-service teachers, she believes that "it is our responsibility to make our work together beneficial to the teacher and purposefully choose reading which will benefit the teachers' practice and give them at least one idea they can use in their immediate context" (Becky, debrief). Corrine, a counseling faculty member, noted that she "definitely [knows] the real world challenges of best practices, and how they do or don't fit into that particular school's way of functioning" (Corrine, interview).

In addition, Kelsey, a school system-based research specialist who had previously worked as a PDS research assistant at the university, also drew on prior knowledge when she communicated the importance of the university and district partnerships to others who lacked knowledge of PDS initiatives. She stated:

> When we look at our teachers and administrators in our comparison schools, they have a different attitude than those that are PDS schools. And oftentimes they don't see the importance or relevance of PDS or change. They just feel like what they have been doing has been working well, and, like they say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." But sometimes things need to be broken . . . so that they can be worked better. (Kelsey, interview)

Finally, PDS mentor teachers drew on their in-depth understanding of the design and curriculum of specific university's teacher preparation programs and their own learning experiences in the school-based context to develop explicit theory into practice connections for their interns. Shari, an elementary mentor teacher, explained the cognitive dissonance that she felt as an intern when trying to reconcile the best

practices that she learned in her classes with the scripted reading curriculum that she encountered in her placements. She stated:

> I remember feeling like what we do here at [the university] is great, but I don't see it in the classroom. I would just say, "Gosh, they had great guided reading, they had great phonics skills that they taught us. And we're in the classroom, and we don't see that as much." (Shari, interview)

This understanding enabled her to support her interns, as she explained:

> I had to help my interns understand that there are a lot of things that you learn here that you have to acclimate into your day, regardless of what model you are using. Whoever is making you quote-unquote teach to the test, you have to realize what is good education and put that into your classroom. So I try to even point out, look, remember when you guys learned about literacy labs, look we have literacy labs around the classroom . . . They're looking for it to have the plain, written out signs, "literacy labs." So . . . you just show them that the things that they are learning are real and not so textbook-like. It helps them understand, "Hey, okay, what I'm doing there is not just fairy tale; it's reality." (Shari, interview)

Jennifer, a high school mentor, learned, though her own experiences as an intern, the importance of understanding the curriculum to be covered. She went through a significant portion of her student teaching before her mentor teacher showed her the county pacing guide. She explained:

> I came here [as a student teacher], thinking I had to do everything and, actually, my supervisor let me struggle before she showed me the pacing guide, and I thought, "I'm not going to let [my student teacher] go through that. I'm going to go ahead and give her the pacing guide so she has a guide—you need to go through this topic, this topic, this QCC, letting [the student teacher] know exactly where you need to be, then you can pick your activities to go with the [standards] rather than trying to go through the book and, like, 'Oh, I gotta cover the whole book!'" (Jennifer, interview)

In summary, all boundary spanners had in-depth understandings of content from previous contexts. This background knowledge significantly shaped the ways that they engaged with colleagues in their new spaces.

Discussion

Our inquiry focused on the perceptions and experiences of individuals who had been involved in our PDS work from both the university

and the school perspectives. Because their knowledge and expertise spanned both contexts, these individuals had insight into and an appreciation for the complexity of PDS relationships and initiatives. Our findings revealed that three primary themes were evident in the work of these participants: (a) their strengths in understanding the other, (b) their attempts to juxtapose support, space for dialogue, and recognition of power relationships, and (c) their ability to draw on prior knowledge to inform their new context.

As we looked across all three themes, we noted that woven throughout the findings was a pattern related to the construct of specificity. Involvement in specific contexts and programs, in which boundary spanners had worked at both at the school and university, was key to their ability to make meaningful links across organizational boundaries. In other words, their experiences in a specific teacher preparation program, in a specific PDS site, or in a specific project were shaped by and shaped the relationships that were formed, the depth of mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities of the other, the knowledge that was shared and co-constructed, and the ways in which hierarchical patterns of relating were deconstructed. Their prior experiences were not generic to any PDS experience nor easily applied to any new context; but, rather, the unique relationships and experiences in a particular PDS site or program were important to the degree to which that experience was transferable or informative to their new role. Thus, while boundary spanners had experiences and understandings that informed their understandings of the roles of their partners in the other context, they often found that they understood the roles of individuals whose context and roles most significantly matched their own previous experiences and understandings.

This specificity related not only to boundary spanners' understanding of others and to their roles but also to the degree to which they were able to draw on their prior knowledge. Data indicated that boundary spanners' knowledge was formed in particular contexts and that that knowledge was most salient and helpful when working within familiar contexts. Consequently, their ability to contribute to the knowledge base of particular institutions and to be responsive to the needs of particular situations was often dependent upon highly nuanced understandings of the workings of offices, schools, and stakeholders. When boundary spanners worked in contexts that were familiar and in which they shared a specifically situated knowledge, they were highly effective.

The degree to which the new role was linked to their specific background seemed to be foundational in the boundary spanners' abilities to develop trust and to use their understanding of others' realities, elements that are key to informing and improving PDS initiatives (Robinson &

Darling-Hammond, 2005; Wiseman & Nason, 1995). Only the work of the PDS project director, who arguably drew on a wealth of experiences across a career that encompassed multiple schools and school districts, seemed to generalize, in the broadest sense of the word, across contexts and districts in the network.

The importance of specificity as related to boundary spanners' use of prior knowledge and experiences is consistent with a situated learning perspective. A situated learning perspective toward teacher learning and teacher education emphasizes three themes: (a) cognition as situated in physical and social systems, (b) the social nature of cognition, and (c) the way in which cognition is distributed across individuals and tools (Putnam & Borko, 2000). The way in which our boundary spanners describe their knowledge emphasized these themes in terms of how their knowledge was grounded in specific school sites and ways of working with faculty and administrators in specific programs, the ways in which their learning and cognition was relationship centered and thus social in nature, and the ways in which their knowing was interconnected across their own experiences, their mentors or mentees, and their practices. As teacher education partnerships evolve, drawing on a situated learning perspective that recognizes the contextually-bound nature of boundary spanners' experiences can help collaborators understand how to make the best use of the knowledge and expertise of both partners in light of the contexts in which they have come and in which they are to work.

Our data also indicated the importance of establishing continuity across associations over time. Relationships built and maintained in specific school contexts among individuals on both sides of the boundary, with long-term collaboration, enabled university faculty to develop important bonds with school-based faculty. Our elementary school mentor teacher explained that, as she traversed the boundary and moved between being an intern at her school and a mentor teacher, she also continued her education at the university. The relationships that she constructed and nourished in each context were instrumental to her. Similarly, the university teaching fellows emphasized the importance of establishing relationships over time that were built on care and respect. Enabling supervisors and cooperating teachers to build continuity across time was seen to be key to the effectiveness of partnerships. This recognition of the importance of long-term relationships between individuals working at the university and school-based partners is an aspect of the collaboration that should be considered if boundary spanners are to navigate and negotiate in meaningful ways across contexts. Understanding the social relationships among individuals from cooperating institutions is important as we encourage PDS participants to envision new possibili-

ties for these relationships (Creswell, 1998).

Finally, the specific individuals who acted as liaisons or gatekeepers of information in the PDS relationships played a significant role in creating power differentials and/or silencing some stakeholders. The roles and responsibilities of the people placed in positions of power in the collaboration have the potential to facilitate or impede the partnership. PDS boundary spanners offered ideas for how to create new positions that disrupted power relations and that honored the voices of those most heavily involved in daily collaborative work.

In summary, by exploring the stories of PDS professionals who have crossed institutional boundaries, this inquiry can inform PDS participants whose work has been shaped in one context only. By listening to the voices of these boundary spanners, we begin to understand the unique contributions that participants from each context can bring to the creation of a new space that bridges educational communities. At the same time, we have developed a new appreciation for the importance of specificity in prior knowledge and how that can shape our plans when constructing positions that span boundaries across organizations. The importance of establishing long-term relationships and interrogating issues of power in PDS relationships also were underscored. As one PDS participant noted, "I have come to believe that this spanning can be most contributory when it is context specific and based on real, meaningful, longitudinal relationships and a commitment to a specific learning community" (Judy, debrief). By establishing positions for boundary spanners that take into account their specific knowledge, expertise, and experience, we will be best able to form long-term collaborations that allow educators to stand in the gap between universities and public schools, theory and practice, and those who feel pressured by others in power. In such ways, boundary spanners will be capable of fulfilling the aim of bridging discourse and providing cultural guidance in school-university partnerships (Buxton et al., 2005).

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