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# Teacher Leaders in Professional Development Schools

**Sandra L. Wetig**

Professional Development Schools (PDSs), first proposed by the Holmes Group in 1986, have been seen as a potentially promising approach to improving the currency of university faculty, the relevancy of pre-service teachers' experiences, and the involvement of practicing teachers in teaching and learning conversations of inquiry. Since its inception in 1986, the PDS concept has gained widespread attention among educators, legislators, policy-makers, researchers, journalists, and funders (Clark, 1999). PDSs have been viewed as innovative types of restructured schools designed to be partnerships for the "simultaneous renewal" of schools and teacher education programs (Goodlad, 1988). Restructuring efforts in the PDS have included: (a) changes in organizational and governance structures, (b) redesign of teacher work, (c) reallocation of resources, (d) improvements in the process of teaching and learning, and (e) changes in the relationships between and among teachers, administrators, school districts, pupils, parents, and higher education institutions (Abdal-Haqq, 1998).

Preparing future teachers, engaging in professional development events, and continually conducting inquiry into improving personal and professional practice are just a few of the leadership activities of teachers in Professional Development Schools (PDSs). Livingston (1992) stated that engagement in "leadership roles empowers teachers to actualize their professional worth in concrete fundamental ways..." (p. 58). For more than a century teachers have assumed informal and formal leadership roles in schools. They have served informally as study group facilitators, planners, initiators, developers, problem-solvers, nurturers, as well as catalysts for individual and school-wide improvement. Teachers have served formally as team leaders, department chairpersons, mentors, master teachers, grade level chairpersons, curriculum coordinators, consultants, and more recently as clinical instructors in PDS partnerships. Clinical instructors in a PDS have been defined as school-based educators, who, while continuing to maintain a significant role in the classroom, assume responsibilities involved in teacher preparation, entry-year support, and participate in on-going professional development at both the school and college (Collinson & Sherrill, 1996; Shroyer & Hancock, 1997; Teitel, 1997).

For many clinical instructors involved in a PDS, the "step up" to leadership has required a "step out" of the classroom (Livingston, 1992). The roles outside of the classroom involve issues of power, authority, decision making, and different kinds of collaboration. Clinical instructors in PDS partnerships serve in a multifaceted role. They take a "step out" of their traditional role as an educator of

students, and "step into" a leadership role as a teacher of teachers (Livingston, 1992). In this role, a clinical instructor's ultimate goal is to increase the knowledge and skill base of the student teachers, as well as the K-12 students within their partnership. Teachers who serve in the clinical instructor role in a PDS, often maintain a teaching assignment while also assuming the additional responsibility of several pre-service teachers in their buildings. Engagement in these roles requires extra time and effort. However, many PDS partnerships have addressed this issue and have provided the needed supports.

The study which follows is a case study of ten elementary teachers who served in the leadership role of clinical instructor in a Professional Development School (PDS) partnership between Kansas State University (KSU) and the Manhattan-Ogden School District during the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years. The purpose of this study was to identify, using a case study approach, how teachers serving in the role of clinical instructor in the KSU PDS Partnership Project (a) defined leadership, (b) described the personal/professional characteristics needed to serve in this role, (c) identified the supports and professional development opportunities, as well as (d) the benefits and challenges of involvement in a PDS partnership.

## Methodology

As the purpose of this study was to investigate the perspectives held by clinical instructors regarding their leadership role in a Professional Development School partnership, a naturalistic design was used. In a naturalistic study, one observes and senses what is occurring in the natural setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The major research questions that guided this naturalistic case study were:

*Question 1:* How do teachers serving in the role of clinical instructor define "leaders" and "leadership"?

*Question 2:* What personal and/or professional characteristics are needed to serve in the leadership role of clinical instructor?

*Question 3:* What organizational supports do clinical instructors receive to assist them in carrying out the role of clinical instructor?

*Question 4:* What professional development opportunities are available to assist clinical instructors in improving professional practice?

*Question 5:* What are the benefits and challenges of striving toward continuous improvement of practice in a PDS?

The study included two surveys in the form of questionnaires, two interviews (Patton, 1990), fieldnotes, and participant observation (Creswell, 1998). As this study focused on individuals involved in a particular program, the case study design was considered appropriate for answering the research questions.

This study focused specifically on ten elementary teachers from the KSU PDS Partnership Project who served in the role of clinical instructor during the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years. From the demographic questionnaire it was noted that the clinical instructors involved in the study shared several common factors: each of the clinical instructors had been invited by their building principals to serve in the role of clinical instructor, each clinical instructor had a minimum of fifteen years teaching experience, all participants had prior leadership experience, and all engaged in frequent in-depth professional development activities within and outside of their school districts. The common characteristics provided some homogeneity, important to reducing the impact of extraneous issues and allowing the research to be focused on the questions under study.

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## Results of the Study

Using the suggested techniques from other researchers (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998; Erickson, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1984) the overarching theme of 'Reframing Leadership in Professional Development Schools' was constructed. This overarching theme captured clinical instructors' interpretations and perspectives of their involvement in the KSU PDS Partnership Project as they: (a) engaged in the development, supervision, and monitoring of pre-service teacher candidates, (b) served as members of school-based leadership teams and instructional support teams, (c) engaged in roles as change facilitators, and (d) assisted and conducted with research.

The overarching theme *Reframing Teacher Leadership in a Professional Development School* represents the totality of three sub themes.

Sub theme I: *Defining Leadership*

Sub theme II: *Identifying Leadership Support*

Sub theme III: *Recognizing the Benefits and Challenges of Leadership*

These emergent themes answered the five research questions stated above. Sub theme I subsumed Research Questions 1 and 2, Sub theme II subsumed Research Questions 3 and 4, and Sub theme III subsumed Research Question 5. Each of the sub themes have corresponding assertions. Table I is a representation of how the overarching theme, sub themes, and assertions assisted in answering the five research questions.

## Discussion of Assertions

### Assertion 1A

Essential to understanding clinical instructors' perspectives on leadership, was the examination of the terms they used to define leadership. They described leaders as: visionaries, problem-solvers, organizers, and communicators. Following a review of leadership literature, it was noted that these terms described by clinical instructors, have also been used by many researchers (Bass, 1981; Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1992; Sergovanni, 1994, 2000) to define the roles, responsibilities, and characteristics needed by effective leaders. When researchers described visionary leaders, leaders who are effective problem-solvers and organizers, and leaders

**Table I**  
**Representation of Overarching Theme: Reframing Teacher Leadership in PDSs**

### Sub theme I: *Defining Leadership*

*Addresses Research Questions 1 and 2*

Assertion 1A: Teachers who have 'stepped out' of the classroom full time described their 'step up' to leadership in common terms (e.g., visionaries, problem-solvers, organizers, and communicators). They shared common perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, and the characteristics of the clinical instructor position in a PDS.

Assertion 1B: The 'step up' to the role of clinical instructor has not significantly changed clinical instructors' definition of leadership. However, their 'step out' of the classroom full time has changed their understanding of how leadership is enacted. Clinical instructors view themselves as leaders and believe the role has improved their leadership abilities.

Assertion 1C: The 'step up' to the role of clinical instructor has changed relationships with professional colleagues as they 'stepped out' of the classroom full time.

Assertion 1D: As teachers 'stepped up' to the role of clinical instructor and 'stepped out' of the classroom they began to view themselves as leaders. However, this viewpoint was not shared by their colleagues as they engaged in the leadership role of clinical instructor.

Assertion 1E: The personal and professional characteristics identified by clinical instructors in their 'step up' to the leadership role of clinical instructor are predominately reflective of the characteristics of 'transformational' leadership.

### Sub theme II: *Identifying Leadership Support*

*Addresses Research Questions 3 and 4*

Assertion 2A: Project Partnership has provided teachers who have 'stepped up' to the leadership role of clinical instructor with transitional supports which have assisted them as they 'stepped out' of the classroom.

Assertion 2B: As teachers 'stepped up' and served in the role of clinical instructor, boundaries blurred as who to identify as the 'informal' and 'formal' leaders, and what to identify as 'informal' and 'formal' supports.

### Sub theme III: *Recognizing the Benefits and Challenges of Leadership*

*Addresses Research Question 5*

Assertion 3A: Many benefits of involvement in a PDS were identified by the teachers who 'stepped out' of the classroom and have 'stepped up' to the leadership role of clinical instructor in Project Partnership.

Assertion 3B: Several challenges and/or obstacles of involvement in a PDS were identified by teachers who have 'stepped out' of the classroom full time and have 'stepped up' to the leadership role of clinical instructor in Project Partnership.

Assertion 3C: The benefits of preparing future teachers, opportunities to engage in professional development, and opportunities to improve professional practice, outweighed the challenges identified by clinical instructors' as they 'stepped up' to the leadership role of clinical instructor in Project Partnership.

who have the ability to effectively communicate, these terms were often linked to Burn's (1978) description of the 'transformational' leader.

Research regarding leadership styles has typically focused on building and district level leaders. However, when one reviews the roles, responsibilities and commitments expected of clinical instructors, they too are engaged in the role of improving practice for the betterment of their organization—the KSU PDS Partnership Project. Clinical instructors, much like the building level leader, are in continuous pursuit of helping their staff members foster a vision which promotes teacher development, in developing and maintaining a collaborative, professional school culture, and helping teachers solve problems together more effectively and competently. The 'teacher leaders' serving in the role of clinical instructor are visionary leaders who expend extraordinary effort to achieve goals in their organization—the KSU Partnership Project. These leaders have created the incentive for people to continuously improve their practice and, thus, the goals of the organization.

#### **Assertion 1B**

Clinical instructors in Interview II were asked if their definition of a leader had changed as they became more active in leadership roles as a clinical instructor. With the exception of one respondent, each of the clinical instructors stated that their viewpoint on leadership had not changed through their involvement in the clinical instructor role. For many of the respondents their overall definition of 'leader' had not changed, but their understanding of leadership had changed. Teachers engaged in the role of clinical found that engagement in this leadership role: (a) caused them to become better leaders, and (b) caused them to view themselves as leaders.

#### **Assertion 1C**

Engagement in a leadership role in a PDS has changed clinical instructors' relationships with professional colleagues at both the building and university setting. Clinical instructors reported that their colleagues viewed them as change agents, problem-solvers, team players, and collaborators. When asked to describe the impact of the clinical instructor role on their relationships with their professional colleagues, the clinical instructors' responses shared some commonalities. In the clinical instructors' opinion they believed their colleagues: (a) came to them for advice, expertise, and suggestions, (b) valued their contributions related to the preparation of pre-service teachers, and (c) respected them for their contributions they made as PDS participants.

#### **Assertion 1D**

Each clinical instructor in Interview II was asked if they were viewed as a 'formal' administrator/leader within their building. Interview II participants were asked to respond to the following questions: (A) Are you viewed as a formal administrator within your building, and (B) What is the difference between being an administrator and being a 'teacher leader'?

All of the Interview II participants, with the exception of one respondent stated that they were not viewed as a formal administrator within their building. She replied,

*"I am [viewed as formal administrator] when the principal is not here she puts it out on e-mail. When she [the principal] is gone, I'm in charge. She tells people that and it makes it easier [when she is gone]."*

The 'step up' to leadership has resulted in clinical instructors developing a new appreciation for those who serve as leaders. With the exception of one interview II respondent, the other seven did not believe that they were viewed as formal administrators in their buildings. Seven of the clinical instructors in Interview II did note differences between the two roles. They reported that an administrator had more responsibility than a 'teacher leader' in the following areas: evaluations, money issues, and discipline. However, it was noted that although the clinical instructors did not believe they were viewed as 'formal' administration, many of the clinical instructors believed they shared the same responsibilities as their administrators. In a teacher leadership role, clinical instructors found that much like their administrators, they too were responsible for: (a) leading others, (b) discipline, (c) instructional facilitation, (d) collaboration, (e) mentoring, and (f) supervision.

#### **Assertion 1E**

Research Questions 1 and 2 sought to clarify how clinical instructors defined 'leaders' and 'leadership' and the personal and/or professional characteristics which assisted them in carrying out their leadership role. After analyzing their responses given in Interview I and II, it was noted that their definitions and characteristics of 'leaders' and 'leadership' were reflective of a 'transformational leader.' Clinical instructors are in continuous pursuit of helping their staff members foster a vision which promotes teacher development, in developing and maintaining a collaborative, professional school culture, and helping teachers solve problems together more effectively and competently.

To assist in understanding whether these clinical instructors were 'transformational' or 'transactional' leaders participants in Interview II they were asked to complete Burke's (1994) Leadership Assessment Inventory (LAI). The assessment is based on the notion that the way power is used to empower followers is the key factor in distinguishing 'transformational' from 'transactional' leaders. The aim of the eighteen item self-scoring assessment was to capture a glimpse of each clinical instructors' perspective regarding 'leadership/transformational thinking' and 'managerial/transactional thinking'.

The eight participants in Interview II completed the LAI. Reflected through each participants' assessment scores, the personal and professional characteristics identified by clinical instructors in their 'step up' to a leadership role, are predominately reflective of the characteristics of 'transformational' leadership.' Teachers involved in the leadership role of clinical instructor in the KSU PDS Partnership Project are in continuous pursuit of helping their partnership foster a vision which promotes teacher development, in developing and maintaining a collaborative school culture, and helping pre-service teachers and colleagues in solving problems together more effectively and competently. The scores from the LAI indicated that six of the participants had leadership styles reflective of the 'transformational' leader. One participant's score indicated that her dominant leadership style was of a 'transactional' nature, and one score on the LAI indicated that a participant's leadership style fell into the 'balanced' leadership category.

#### **Assertion 2A**

Little attention has been given to the kind of support teachers need to carry out their leadership roles in PDSs. Throughout the literature regarding leadership in PDSs, frequently leaders are not even identified. Even less is written regarding the types of supports leaders

need to successfully fulfill their leadership roles. Professional Development School partnerships are comprised of many stakeholders and many complex parts. Within school-university partnership many persons serve in formal organizational leadership positions: deans, partnership coordinators, superintendents, school principals, and other school-based leaders. All PDSs have leaders, some who occupy formal leadership positions, others not. The leaders in the KSU PDS Partnership Project include the Partnership Project Coordinator, District Staff Development/PDS Coordinator, KSU PDS Partnership Project Coordinating Council, clinical instructors and principals, KSU faculty, KSU PDS Partnership Project Advisory Board, and the Professional Development Council and School Improvement Team (Shroyer, Larson, McQueen, & Yahnke, 1999). These leaders develop ideas and new practices, juggle the cross-cultural demands of PDS leadership, as well as share leadership across boundaries. PDSs create new opportunities for leadership and create structures where 'teacher leaders' can assert their knowledge and skills. PDSs that support learning, collegiality, and a problem-solving environment where all stakeholders can thrive can assist 'teacher leaders' who 'step out' of the traditional classroom and 'step up' to a more formal leadership role.

The exchange of ideas between the university and school leaders are essential to the continued growth and development of both parties. In order for teacher leaders to meet the demands of their roles as clinical instructors, they will need to engage in new ways of learning. Over the past ten years the KSU PDS Partnership Project has promoted the professional development of their participants through Grant Writing, Clinical Instructor Meetings, the Teacher Leadership Cadre, a Professional Development Council, Study Groups, Field Experiences, and Project Pride (opportunities for school and university faculty to take part in action research projects).

Goodlad (1988) noted that PDS partnerships must develop environments which foster the exchange of ideas, practices, and information. The activities listed above are examples of the support networks the KSU PDS Partnership Project has implemented to strengthen their PDS partnership.

#### **Assertion 2B**

Teachers serving in the role of clinical instructor in the KSU PDS Partnership Project noted that the organizational supports they received in their 'step out' of the classroom have assisted them in their 'step up' to the leadership role of clinical instructor. Clinical instructors identified leaders in the KSU PDS Partnership Project across both settings in the Partnership: the university, and the individual PDS sites. Interview II participants identified the following persons as leaders in Project Partnership: (1) those who served in the role of clinical instructor, (2) classroom teachers, (3) university faculty, (4) the KSU Partnership Project Coordinator, and (5) members of the Teacher Leadership Cadre. Clark (1999) noted that for a PDS to be successful

*...it is important to recognize that we are talking about leaders and not a leader. Although a successful single charismatic individual may have considerable influence on a PDS, the presence of one leader, no matter how effective, is sufficient in the long run" (p. 240).*

Clinical instructors identification of leaders across both settings reinforced Clark's notion that many leaders are needed for a successful PDS partnership. As noted in the clinical instructors' narrative in the interviews, teachers engaged in multiple roles as they served as

leaders in the Partnership. Clinical instructors engaged in the following activities: (a) pre-service teacher observations, assessments, evaluations, and seminars, (b) building level committees, (c) action research projects, and (d) classroom teaching.

To assist in carrying out this multitude of roles, clinical instructors identified numerous 'formal' and 'informal' supports which have assisted them in their transition to this leadership role. They have been supported through: (a) colleagues, (b) university personnel, (c) clinical instructor biweekly meetings, (d) opportunities for continued professional development, (e) e-mail communication, (f) stipends which sponsor continuous improvement into improving practice, and (g) time.

#### **Assertions 3A, 3B, and 3C**

Teachers who have 'stepped up' to the leadership role of clinical instructor in Partnership Project were engaged in numerous roles. These leaders served in the roles of mentors, supervisors, role-models, collaborators, researchers, and presenters. Engagement in any leadership role can be full of positive and negative experiences. In the PDS literature (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Shroyer & Hancock, 1997; Teitel, 1997) it was noted that the largest challenges teacher leaders in PDSs confront are in the areas of: (1) preparation of pre-service teachers, (2) continued professional development, and (3) continued improvement into improving practice. In PDSs teacher leaders are often responsible for the screening, placing, supervision, and evaluation of student teachers in their buildings. These activities are often time consuming and have created personal stress for teacher leaders.

Despite the many responsibilities tied to the clinical instructor role, teachers still found inherent benefits of involvement in this leadership role. Teachers serving in the clinical instructor role were rewarded through their interactions with pre-service teachers and found engagement with their professional colleagues at their buildings and university tremendously rewarding.

PDS participants have noted that they needed time to plan, prepare, collaborate, and attend professional development opportunities during their work day (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Teitel, 1997). Teitel (1997) suggested that PDSs should provide partnership participants with organizational support in the areas of time, support for role change, and a revised reward structure to assist them in their PDS roles. It was noted across the literature, that when these organizational supports were provided, PDS participants then found their PDS work enabling and empowering (Shroyer & Hancock, 1997; Jett-Simpson, Pugach, & Whipp, 1992).

The benefits of preparing future teachers, opportunities to engage in professional development, and opportunities to improve professional practice, in several cases formed a dichotomy with the identified challenges of involvement in the KSU PDS Partnership Project. For example, many clinical instructors noted that they enjoyed and were rewarded through their interactions with pre-service teachers. However, when all was not going well with the pre-service teacher, the benefit of working with that pre-service teacher then became a challenge.

#### **Conclusion**

The teachers in this study defined, identified, and then 'reframed' the roles, responsibilities, and commitments related to their leadership role in a PDS. Involvement in the KSU PDS Partnership Project broadened clinical instructors' perspectives beyond the classroom and exposed them in new and meaningful ways to the world of

leadership. As they assumed leadership roles in the areas of instructional facilitation, mentoring, research, collaboration, and problem-solving it deepened their understanding of their role as leaders. The ten participants in this study agreed that their role in the KSU PDS Partnership Project was a valuable form of job-embedded personal development which allowed them to expand their knowledge base regarding leadership. Involvement in Partnership provided for many of the clinical instructors a sense of renewal and stimulation and caused them to become engaged, in the words of Lieberman and Miller (1992), "continuous inquiry into practice" (p. 106).

Clinical instructors in this study defined 'leaders' and 'leadership' in terms very similar to those described in the literature. Much like McEwan (1998) and Bass (1981), they too defined leaders as knowledgeable visionaries who demonstrated the ability to effectively communicate and meet the needs of others while simultaneously serving as a role-model and problem-solver.

The findings in this study also support the personal and/or professional characteristics cited by Clark (1999) as essential to PDS leadership. Clark (1999) noted that successful leaders in a PDS need certain traits which included: (a) the ability to operate in the broader community in which the PDS is located, (b) an understanding of the change process, (c) knowledge regarding content and pedagogy, and (d) knowledge of good teaching when they observe it. The characteristics identified by clinical instructors in this study were consistent with the traits identified by Clark (1999) for successful PDS leadership.

Teitel (1997) noted several organizational supports that teachers need to be successful in their leadership role in a PDS. The organizational supports he identified were: (a) time, (b) support for role change, and (c) revised reward structure. Clinical instructors in this study reported that these organizational supports were evident in the KSU PDS Partnership Project and were crucial to their 'step up' to leadership.

Consistent with the findings of research conducted by Abdal-Haqq (1998), clinical instructors also reported benefits of involvement in a PDS which included: (a) exposure to new ideas, (b) collegial interactions with site colleagues, pre-service teachers, and university faculty, (c) a greater feeling of professionalism, and (d) opportunities to engage in nontraditional roles.

The challenges they noted were similar to those identified by Abdal-Haqq (1998) and Teitel (1997) which included: (a) conflict between pre-service students and teachers, (b) pre-service teacher preparation and mentoring, and (c) colleagues resistant to change.

In this study teachers were allowed to voice their perspectives as they engaged in the roles of leader, mentor, supervisor, role-model, presenter, and professional developer. These perspectives add yet another layer to the existing body of research regarding leaders in PDSs. However, it is my belief that the most prominent contribution of this study was in raising new questions: (1) Why did teachers serving in the leadership role of clinical instructor so strongly identify with the 'transformational' leadership style, and (2) Why did the role of clinical instructor so strongly impact personal and professional relationships with colleagues in Project Partnership, and (3) Why do teachers not identify these obviously transformational leadership behaviors exhibited by clinical instructors as 'formal' leaders?

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