

INTERROGATING MUTUAL BENEFIT IN URBAN SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY
PARTNERSHIPS

by

MARY LEE PATILLO-DUNN

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN LITERACY, CULTURE, & LANGUAGE

2025

Oakland University
Rochester, Michigan

Doctoral Advisory Committee:
Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon, Ph.D., Chair
Cynthia Brock, Ph.D.
Emily Caylor, Ph.D.
Jason Moore, Ph.D.
Danielle Ligocki, Ph.D.

© Copyright by Mary Lee Patillo-Dunn, 2025
All rights reserved

To my husband Marlow, my children, Micah, Makaila, Myles & Matthew; to my mom, Sandra and late father, Darcel; and to all my family, friends, and colleagues: you inspire me and give meaning to this work.

*“I can no other answer make, but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks”
-William Shakespeare*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must start by acknowledging my advisor, Dr. Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon. She has been nothing short of my coach, cheerleader, hype-man, and so much more throughout my entire doctoral journey. I feel privileged that she saw something special in me as a teacher and nurtured that into the scholar I am today. I would also like to express gratitude to my committee members who have supported me and challenged me to always give my best work - Drs. Cynthia Brock, Emily Caylor, Danielle Ligocki, and Jason Moore, I couldn't have done this without you. To my fellow doctoral students Danielle, Emily, Jennifer, Mandy, and Yong, I count it as a privilege to have learned from you and with you over these years. Your friendship, feedback, and listening ears have added joy to this process.

Thank you to my colleagues at North Saginaw Charter Academy and Michigan State University who have provided inspiration for this work. Without knowing it, they planted seeds of questions and possibilities that I plan to pursue in my research career.

Finally, to my husband Marlow, who has taken on so many additional responsibilities so I could pursue my academic and career goals. I appreciate your love and sacrifice, and your unwavering belief in me.

Mary L. Patillo-Dunn

PREFACE

In this manuscript style dissertation, I present two manuscripts on mutual benefit in school-university partnerships. The first manuscript, P-12 Literacy Needs and University Support: Exploring Educator Perceptions of Partnership, was submitted and accepted by *The School University Partnerships Journal*, on July 19, 2025. The second manuscript, Mutual Benefit in Literacy Partnerships: Understanding Principal Priorities, was submitted to *The Journal of School Leadership*, on October 7, 2025.

ABSTRACT

INTERROGATING MUTUAL BENEFIT IN URBAN SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

by

Mary Lee Patillo-Dunn

Adviser: Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon, Ph.D.

Principals prioritize the most pressing needs in the school, often with a focus on literacy achievement. Although universities establish partnerships with elementary schools to enhance the literacy development of preservice teachers in teacher education programs, these collaborations do not consistently result in measurable improvements in the school's own literacy outcomes. This study employs a multiple case study design to examine the factors that influence prioritization of mutually beneficial literacy partnerships in urban elementary schools. Guided by Social Capital Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, data were collected from principals, classroom teachers, university faculty, and preservice teachers, through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Findings revealed three central themes: the influence of school culture and climate, stakeholders' conceptualization of mutual benefit, and the strategic vision required to sustain effective partnerships. The study contributes to the growing literature on school-university collaboration by illuminating the conditions under which such partnerships can advance both school improvement and teacher education. Implications are offered for principals and university faculty seeking

to cultivate sustainable, reciprocal, literacy-focused partnerships.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
PREFACE	v
ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xiv
CHAPTER ONE	
“MUTUAL BENEFIT IN URBAN SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS	1
Principals as the Central Figure	2
Principals Prioritize Needs Most Pressing	4
Many Literacy Partnerships are not Mutually Beneficial	5
Summary	6
CHAPTER TWO	
P-12 LITERACY NEEDS AND UNIVERSITY SUPPORT: EXPLORING EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF PARTNERSHIP	7
Introduction	7
Literature Review	9
Historical use of School Partnerships	9
Partnerships for Literacy Development	11
Site-Based Partnerships	12

Field Experiences	13
Challenges of Partnerships	14
Mutually Beneficial	15
Methodology	17
Researcher Positionality	18
Contexts	19
Participants and Setting	20
Data Collection	21
Data Analysis	22
Findings	25
What Role does Power and Position Play in the Relationship?	25
Who Decides What is Mutually Beneficial?	26
What Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Partnerships?	27
Discussion	28
Conclusion	31
CHAPTER THREE	
LETTER OF ACCEPTED PUBLICATION TO THE JOURNAL OF SCHOOL UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS	33

TABLE OF CONTENTS—Continued

CHAPTER FOUR	
FINAL DRAFT OF MANUSCRIPT TWO	
MUTUAL BENEFIT IN LITERACY PARTNERSHIPS: UNDERSTANDING PRINCIPAL PRIORITIES	35
Introduction	35
Background	37
History of Partnerships in Teacher Education	38
Urban Schools as a Focus	40
Literature Review	45
Principals are the Central Figure in Determining the Prioritization of Mutually Beneficial Literacy Partnerships	45
Principals Prioritize the Needs Most Pressing	47
Many Literacy Partnerships are not Currently Mutually Beneficial and are the Responsibility of Both Principals and University Faculty	51
Theoretical Perspectives	54
Methods	56
Research Sites	57
Participants	59
Analysis	62
Findings	64
Culture and Climate Affect Partnerships in Various Ways	65
Stakeholders Have a Conceptualization of Mutual Benefit	68
Strategic Vision is Required to Sustain Effective Partnerships	72

Synthesis of Findings and Model Development	74
Conclusion	79
CHAPTER FIVE	
DISCUSSION	81
Overview of Studies	81
Dissertation Pilot Study	81
Dissertation Extended Study	83
Implications	85
Synthesis of Findings and Model Development	86
Conclusion	90
APPENDICES	
A. Confirmation of IRB Approvals	92
B. Confirmation of Journal Submission to School Leadership Journal	95
C. Dissertation Pilot Interview Questions	97
D. Dissertation Extended Study – Principal Interview Questions	99
E. Dissertation Extended Study– Classroom Teacher Interview Questions	101
F. Dissertation Extended Study – University Faculty Interview Questions	103
G. Dissertation Extended Study – Preservice Teacher Interview Questions	105
REFERENCES	107

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Participant Profiles	21
Table 2	Document Review	24
Table 3	Michigan MSTEP ELA Scores	52
Table 4	Michigan Urban School District ELA MSTEP Scores Over Time	56

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Urban Districts in Michigan and Proximity to Local Universities	42
Figure 2	Gruenert and Whitaker (023): Some Differences Between Climate and Culture	50
Figure 3	Participant List and Profile	60
Figure 4	Constant Comparative Analysis Schema	63
Figure 5	Hierarchy of Principal Prioritizations in Mutually Beneficial Literacy Partnerships	75
Figure 6	Hierarchy of Principal Prioritizations in Mutually Beneficial Literacy Partnerships	87

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAEP	Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation
EPP	Educator Preparation Programs
PST	Preservice Teachers in Teacher Education
SUP	School-University Partnerships
TPP	Teacher Preparation Programs

CHAPTER ONE

MUTUAL BENEFIT IN URBAN SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

Teacher preparation programs have a long history of partnering with local schools to support teacher education (Walsh & Backe, 2013; Winitzky & Stoddard, 1992). From the apprenticeship model where novice teachers were trained in model schools to the current iteration of pairing coursework with field experiences, teacher preparation programs (TPPs) understand the symbiotic relationship with schools to develop future teachers (Jeffrey & Pollock, 2013; Walsh & Backe, 2013). The success of future teachers is linked to the quality of field experiences where they can apply theory to practice (Cochran-Smith, 2020). Often, field placements involve urban schools and districts due to their proximity to the university. Urban schools offer an opportunity to support teacher preparation by providing space to apply instructional methods learned in TPP coursework and opportunity to learn from master teachers in the field (Lee, 2018; Walsh & Backe, 2013; Stairs et al, 2009). While urban schools offer these opportunities, they are also frequently in conversation regarding effective teacher preparation in urban schools and student literacy outcomes (Zeichner, K., 2024; Showalter & Gamboa-Turner, 2017; Catapano, S. & Huisman, S., 2010; Carter Andrews, D.J., 2009). School-university partnerships with teacher preparation programs have the potential to both support teacher education and influence student academic achievement, yet the current iteration of partnership favors the university in benefit (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016; Walsh & Backe, 2013; Jeffery & Polleck, 2010).

The research I present in this dissertation explores the idea of mutual benefit between teacher preparation programs and their urban school partners. Mutual benefit centers on reciprocity in the relationship, ensuring that both parties have their interests fulfilled (Mahar, 2025; Selland, 2021; Goodlad, 1988). However, how can mutual benefit be achieved if both parties are not aware of each other's goals? By centering mutual benefit as the work of my dissertation, I seek to interrogate how this term is understood and enacted within school-university partnerships. The manuscripts P-12 Literacy Needs and University Support: Exploring Educator Perceptions of Partnership, and Mutual Benefit in Literacy Partnerships: Understanding the Principal's Priorities, are examples of this agenda. Both manuscripts are interrelated by a) recognizing that principals are the central figure in determining the prioritization of mutual beneficial literacy partnerships b) Understanding that principals prioritize the needs that are most pressing at the moment; and finally, 3) Acknowledging that many literacy partnerships are not currently mutually beneficial based on student outcomes.

Principals as the Central Figure

One aspect of mutual benefit explored in my first dissertation manuscript, P-12 Literacy Needs and University Support: Exploring Educator Perceptions of Partnership, was the perception of benefit in the school-university partnership from various players in the school. A classroom teacher, principal and district administrator were studied to understand how each person, representative of their role, perceived the benefits in the relationship. Exploring different perspectives was important to understanding how power and position influenced perception. Bourdieu's (1993) Social Capital Theory highlights the dynamics of power in society and relationships. "Social capital enables a person to

exert power on the group or individual who mobilizes the resources” (Claridge, 2018, p. 7). Thus, different positions in a school system might experience the partnership relationship differently. Moreover, the different positions might feel obligation or pressure to oblige requests. Data from the multiple case study suggested that classroom teachers felt a responsibility to engage in partnership requests, and principals sometimes felt the district entered partnerships without the school’s consideration. However, data also revealed that the district administrator acquiesced to the school principal – deferring to them to navigate the partnership. The school principal had agency to facilitate and structure the partnership logistics (Kierstead, 2020; Plaatjes, 2019). Thus, the principal in the school-university partnership became a focus of study on how mutual benefit was prioritized.

Likewise, in the second dissertation manuscript, the principal as the central figure in the school-university partnership was further explored. This time, focusing on how they cultivate a culture of literacy within their leadership, and the factors that influence how they prioritize literacy within the school-university partnership. Principals are tasked with finding ways to meet academic needs and addressing gaps in instruction and learning (Kierstead, 2020). Additionally, other stakeholders in the school-university partnership were interviewed to understand university faculty and preservice teachers’ familiarity with mutual benefit in the partnership. Data from the second multiple case study presented evidence of the principal’s heightened urgency to address student reading challenges due to diminishing scores on standardized assessments (NAEP, 2025). Data also suggested that while principals recognized this challenge as they formed

collaborations with external partners, how they navigated partnership to address literacy concerns, differed from school to school.

Principals Prioritize the Needs Most Pressing

In the first dissertation manuscript, *P-12 Literacy Needs and University Support: Exploring Educator Perceptions of Partnership*, participants were asked about their literacy and other academic needs of the school. Participants shared the various challenges that their students faced relating to academic achievement. This included external challenges such as housing and food insecurities, health access, and job instability. These external challenges can influence student focus and achievement in school (Lee, 2018; Walsh & Backe, 2013). Participants expressed valuing the relationship with teacher preparation programs but had not considered how the relationship could assist with some of the student challenges. However, when they were probed, they were able to come up with ideas for stronger partnership. The data presents challenges as an impediment to the consideration of mutual benefit within the school-university partnership.

In the second dissertation manuscript, *Mutual Benefit in Literacy Partnerships: Understanding the Principal's Priorities*, principal priorities became a central focus. I wanted to learn how the day-to-day challenges and different roles of the principal influenced how they navigated the relationship with the teacher preparation program. The principal is part of the team that determines logistics and how the partnership will function. Yet, the data from the second multiple case study suggests that the various needs of the school compete for the principals' attention. This competition for focus can influence how the partnership is viewed and structured. If the principal's priority is on

school culture or staffing needs, they may not recognize how the partnership can support their school vision or goals.

Many Literacy Partnerships are not Mutually Beneficial

Educators of urban schools were studied in the first dissertation manuscript to learn of their perception of benefit within their current school-university partnerships. Additionally, how they centered their literacy needs within the partnership was also examined. Participants expressed muted frustration with the current iteration of partnership with their local teacher preparation program. Participants recognized the goal of the relationship was to support the development of future teachers, yet there were opportunities to support the literacy needs of students that went unmet. All the participants confessed to initiating some sort of partnership agreement with community organizations to meet the literacy needs of their students, by passing the teacher preparation program. The data indicates that the educators in the study prioritized their students' literacy needs but did not expect teacher preparation programs to support the initiatives to enhance literacy at the school.

Recognizing that some educators prioritized the literacy needs of students but did not hold university partners responsible for supporting these needs became an important component of my second dissertation manuscript: *Mutual Benefit in Literacy Partnerships: Understanding the Principal's Priorities*. Principals in the study were interviewed and observed to understand their focus on literacy. How they viewed themselves as literacy instructional leaders, and how they cultivated a culture of literacy in the school were studied to glean opportunities for strategic collaborations in the school-university partnership. The data demonstrates that while the principals studied

have strong instructional leadership identities in literacy and promote a culture of literacy, the relationship with teacher preparation programs are not contributing to their literacy goals. Additionally, the preservice teachers are learning how to effectively teach reading from their placements in the school, but the students in the school are not improving as a result of the relationship.

Summary

My research agenda includes exploring the concept of mutual benefit from the perspectives of educators in urban schools. Likewise, elementary principals of urban schools are uniquely positioned to create a vision for their school and engage in partnership with teacher preparation programs to enhance their vision (Kierstead, 2020; Plaatjes, 2019). Both manuscripts in this Manuscript Style Dissertation focus on how mutual benefit is understood and pursued within school-university partnerships with teacher preparation programs. Acknowledging how stakeholders understand and promote mutual benefit can support educators and university faculty's actual achievement of reciprocity in the relationship. This knowledge can have an impact on how partners collaborate, communicate, and evaluate mutual benefit in their relationship.

CHAPTER TWO

P-12 LITERACY NEEDS AND UNIVERSITY SUPPORT: EXPLORING EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparedness [CAEP] requires teacher preparation programs [TPP] to provide teacher candidates with a variety of experiences with diverse students and communities (CAEP, 2022). Urban schools and districts tend to be on the receiving end of requests from TPP's to partner and collaborate (Officer et al., 2013). This environment is ripe for teacher education students to observe and implement instructional practices. Urban schools encompass students with diverse backgrounds and assets they bring to the school community that support the goals of teacher preparation (Yosso, 2020). Additionally, the location is typically near local universities and can conveniently offer the convergence of the university's needs (i.e. teaching, research, service) with the typical needs of the school (i.e. curriculum and instruction, educational leadership, student support) (Walsh & Backe, 2013).

The typical school needs also include literacy support, which has long been a priority for educators and families. The nation faces concerns over reading achievement in K-12 students but became especially pronounced after 2020 when scores on the NAEP Long Term Trend Assessment declined (Carrillo, 2023). The academic needs have been exacerbated by additional challenges such as teacher shortages and curriculum development needs. While these challenges exist in schools across the country, they are even more dire in urban schools where the teacher attrition rate is around 20% (Lee,

2018). Additionally, cultural mismatch between students and potential teachers, as well as strains on school resources provide further barriers to teacher recruitment (Hilaski, 2020; Milner, 2012; Zenkov, 2018). Effective instruction is predicated on teacher quality; yet in schools where teacher retention and recruitment are lower than other schools, teaching and learning is impacted (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

School-university partnerships may contribute to developing more teachers in the field with the hope of increased teacher applicants in partner districts (Zeichner and Bier (2015). Furthermore, preservice teachers in partner schools may support some of the school efforts as it pertains to literacy achievement and instructional support for teachers. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how educators in urban schools perceived the benefits and usefulness of their school-university partnership.

To formally define “urban,” we can consider Zenkov’s (2018) discussion on urban schools as “situated in communities in proximity to large metropolises” (p. 457), and having great cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity. However, Milner (2012) defines urban schools not just by the geographic location or the racial/ethnic makeup exclusively, but in terms of resource strains. These areas are affected by contemporary and historic issues of injustice that have impacted the quality of education afforded to students. To address academic and other related needs, schools have relied on both community and university partnerships (Casto, 2016).

To further discuss these partnerships, I begin with a review of their historical use in providing clinical experiences to preservice teachers. Literature is then highlighted that examines partnerships focused on site-based courses and field experiences as a

means for preservice teachers' literacy development. The review reveals both benefits and challenges to preservice teachers. Consequently, the review also shows limited research on immediate benefits to the school. This highlights the need for more exploration into the value of clinical partnerships from the perspective of the school.

Literature Review

Historical use of School Partnerships in Teacher Preparation Programs

For more than 60 years, “universities have typically partnered with schools either to provide training sites for university students or to meet the needs of university faculty for research participants” (Walsh & Backe, 2013, p.595). This one-sided arrangement was pioneered by Dewey in the Laboratory school model and continued to evolve through various iterations of schools and universities collaborating (Winitzky & Stoddard, 1992). A new wave of focusing on schools as sites of teacher preparation and development grew out of the Holmes Group. They recognized that improving teacher education depended on collaboration with partner schools (Goodlad, 1993). Education reform movements urged teacher preparation programs to examine their programs and ensure the preparedness of their graduating teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2020). Providing clinical experiences for preservice teachers varied in quantity and quality but gained even more traction following the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Walsh & Backe, 2013). It was then “reenergized in the era of accountability” following the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2015 [ESSA] (Petti, 2013). As teachers were being held more accountable to academic outcomes of their students, pressure was put on universities to produce high quality teachers who could meet the demands of the

new education policies (Walsh & Backe, 2013) and could turn around the declining trend in reading and math achievement (Legal Information Institute, 2020).

As this shift continued, increasing emphasis was placed on teacher candidates not only having conceptual and theoretical knowledge about teaching but gaining hands-on experience in classrooms before student teaching or interning (Laman et al., 2012).

Notably, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Blue Ribbon Panel touted partnerships where teacher candidates received clinical experience in school as integral to a quality teacher education program (Overstreet & Norton-Meier, 2020). The panel also concluded that effective preparation of future teachers for the evolving classroom required a shift from preparation heavy on coursework to more school-based experiences (Ginsberg et al., 2021). According to the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (2022), intentional learning experiences in the field helps future teachers “develop the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions appropriate for their professional specialty field” (CAEP, 2022). Although each state varies on the kinds of field or clinical experiences expected of preservice teachers, all states have some kind of requirement for hours spent observing, teaching, and learning from a mentor teacher in the field (CAEP, 2022). Without supportive school partnerships, future teachers would not have access to the experiences necessary for professional development (Laman et al., 2012).

Understandably, the COVID-19 pandemic affected how preservice teachers and schools interacted (VanLone et al., 2022). The pandemic caused disruption in P-12 schools and universities and impacted preservice teachers’ ability to complete field experiences (Sparks, 2020; The College Crisis Initiative, 2020). Many state departments

of education had to waive the field experience requirement as a response to the crisis (The American Association for Teachers of Education [AACTE], 2020). The implications meant less time in the field and less opportunity for structured guidance which impacts teacher preparedness, teacher development and even early teacher retention (VanLone et al., 2022). Today, the conclusion of the Holmes group still rings true, the “professionalization of teaching depends on the contributions that teachers and professors make to the creation of knowledge about their profession and to teachers' ability to form collegial relationships beyond their immediate working environment and to grow intellectually throughout their careers.” (Murray, 1986, p. 31).

Partnerships for Literacy Development

Reading achievement is a concern in urban districts across the country (Kena et al., 2016). Literacy scores in the state of Michigan, as documented on the Nation’s Report Card [NAEP], showed only 28% of fourth graders performing at or above proficiency in 2022 (Nations Report Card, 2022). Nationwide, this trend is similar and shows achievement gaps when black and Hispanic students are compared to their white classmates (Barber & Klauda, 2020). In addition to scores on standardized reading assessments, literacy instruction is another area of challenge. Goldstein (2023) notes the need for more literacy-based instruction in teacher preparation programs to meet the needs of students and teachers.

Site-Based Partnerships

Comprehensive literacy instruction focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Minor, 2023). As a result of reform movements and student needs, Teacher Preparation Programs [TPP’s] adjusted their curriculum to

include more literacy courses to positively impact elementary achievement (Cervetti et al., 2020; Lacina & Block, 2011; Sailors et al., 2018; Shanahan & Lonigan, 2010). To do this, some TPP's embed literacy courses in local schools, also referred to as site-based courses or integrated methods courses (Degraff et al., 2015). Previous studies have cited the value of TPP's establishing partnerships between schools and site-based courses (AACTE, 2018; Masuda & Ebersole, 2013). They allow for blending of "practitioner knowledge with academic knowledge as they work in the classroom context (Nelson, 2020, p. 19). Site-based learning is a critical component to the development of teachers and provides a place for implementing or observing literacy strategies in real time with real students (Francisco & Henning Loeb, 2020). Parker et al., (2019) describes site-based courses as a continuum. The definition applies to both physically having a course at a P-12 location, as well as engaging the school educators with faculty to design and instruct a course that benefits preservice teachers and current students in the school (Parker et al., 2019). Both scenarios fit the definition of site-based but provide varying degrees of development and benefit.

Gupta & Lee (2020) researched how site-based courses helped preservice teachers [PSTs] learn about reading instruction and then implement their learning in the form of intervention for students. PSTs increased knowledge in teaching literacy and had students to learn from, in real time. In a similar study, PSTs engaged in literacy coursework almost exclusively at a local school (Nelson et al., 2020). Teacher candidates learned about literacy assessments, analyzed assessments, audited the literacy environment of the school, and developed literacy mini units. The study found that candidates "showed evidence of developing a deep understanding of the multifaceted nature of literacy

instruction” (Nelson et al., 2020). Additionally, the study (2020) demonstrated development of candidates’ ability to make quick instructional decisions in the moment based on student needs. Bass (2023) researched the effect of embedding a writing methods course with a local high school classroom. These future teachers learned how to give effective feedback on students’ writing while also getting more experience in a classroom setting.

Field Experiences

Other ways TPP’s support development of literacy instruction knowledge in preservice teachers are through the field experiences that accompany courses. Michigan State University’s College of Education requires literacy courses that include a class component and a field component. The field component serves as the opportunity to apply what is being learned in the class and directly instruct elementary students in reading (MSU College of Education, 2024). Similarly, the University of Michigan offers courses that allow their students to integrate theory and practice by working with teachers in classrooms (UM Marsal Family School of Education, 2024). University students receive experience in literacy instruction and the opportunity to apply new knowledge gained to elementary students. Literacy embedded methods courses encourage literacy activities such as interactive read-alouds, guided reading, reading assessments, implementing diagnostic tools, and engaging in recursive practices (Degraff et al., 2015). Pairing course and field work provides an opportunity to enhance literacy skills and develop efficacy around their use (Lipp et al., 2016).

Challenges of Partnerships

Benefits of site-based partnerships are evident throughout the research. Darling-Hammond (2014) notes a more supportive observation experience because of educators and college faculty collaborating. Zeichner and Bier (2015) acknowledge that site-based experiences encourage preservice teachers to develop connections with the school community. Preservice teachers can also gain more mentoring and navigational support for applying theoretical concepts and reflecting on “moments of dissonance” in their practice (Parker et al., 2019, p. 126).

However, while various benefits to preservice teachers are reported, benefits and challenges to the school with this approach are limited in research. In studies on site-based courses or field experiences, partner schools express desire for sustained and regular work between preservice teachers and elementary students (Degraff et al., 2015). An appreciation for the impact on the professional atmosphere was also an expressed benefit of partnership (Jeffrey & Polleck, 2010). At times, P-12 students are directly on the receiving end of those benefits. They may be presented with opportunities for 1:1 or small group reading intervention, feedback on writing assignments, or more effective literacy instruction (Bass, 2023; Reischl et al, 2017; Ronan et al., 2018; Walsh & Backe, 2018). Unfortunately, logistical concerns serve as a barrier to providing more sustained engagement between students and PSTs (Degraff et al., 2015). Managing schedules is necessary for ensuring teacher candidates can engage in more classrooms and work with students. However, shouldering that burden could further strain the school administration team. At the university level, student class schedules and other requirements serve as impediments for additional time spent in schools. Furthermore, in scenarios where

teacher candidates are learning from the practices of one teacher, spreading out the candidates to work in more classrooms would limit opportunities for group reflection on practices, which affects their development (Degraff et al., 2015).

Another important challenge that develops from TPP's wanting to work with schools to support teacher development is the problem of placements. Districts can have requests from multiple programs looking for placements which can strain the resources of already stretched school staff (Petti, 2013). Teachers feel obligated to accept placements, when given a choice, due to university loyalty or personal relationships (Petti, 2013). At times, the quality of mentor teacher and student-teacher matches are not properly vetted (Ruhl, 2009).

Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

Desiring more opportunities for direct benefit to elementary students is part of honoring the concept of mutually beneficial partnership. The term mutually beneficial was derived from Goodlad's (1988) characterization of how schools and universities should engage. They both should share ownership of issues and needs and are guided by "mutual satisfaction of self-interests; and sufficient selflessness on the part of each member to assure the satisfaction of self-interests on the part of all members" (Goodlad, 1988, p.14). Thus, measuring the success of a partnership should focus on the collective achievement gained through partnership (Walsh & Backe, 2013). Goodlad (1990) asserted that continuous improvement of the teaching profession lay in the way schools and universities collaborated and interacted with one another.

Mutually beneficial is an outcome of partnership that must be intentionally developed through collaboration (Selland, 2021). It exists when both university and

school representatives come together to design a partnership that supports the needs of both institutions. This is especially true in teacher education where clinical experiences are rooted in local schools. Sellend (2021) found that although collaboration is necessary, it can be messy and requires intentional focus. She offers tools to support the work, including urging collaborators to “prepare for constraints to be part of the process” and to create systems to deal with those constraints (p.46). Sullivan et al (2024) elaborates on collaboration to include co-visioning and co-planning which further emphasizes the importance of both parties coming together to ensure the relationship meets everyone's needs and expectations.

Cox (2000) work on community partnerships cautions that while mutually beneficial partnerships are an aspiration, each stakeholder enters the partnership with different interests and needs. An understanding of mutual goals and outcomes is necessary for a successful partnership and for a sustained relationship. Cox (2000) offers a set of questions that can serve as the basis for a framework to guide stakeholders in this work. While his questions stem from the community partnership needs, it can be applied to schools and universities. Starting with naming the activities to be implemented, followed by identifying who will be affected by those activities, and finally, determining the individual interests of both school and university can support a partnership that is mutually beneficial.

Multiple frameworks can guide how schools and universities interact with one another to ensure the achievement of a mutually beneficial relationship (Cox, 2000; Jones, et al., 2016; Selland, 2021; Sullivan et al., 2025). Understanding this concept is

important for schools to recognize their own power in the relationship and for universities to use their capital to mentor schools through the process.

Methodology

The purpose of this article is to discuss how educators perceive the benefits in their school-university partnership. The partnership is defined as between P-12 urban schools and faculty/students in a teacher preparation program [TPP]. Three educators in three urban districts were studied. The educators expressed the need for school support in areas such as teacher professional development and student literacy achievement. Since TPPs are already collaborating with these schools and have an established partnership, the research questions are:

- 1) How do educators perceive the relationship's impact on their literacy and instructional needs?
- 2) How are P-12 urban schools centering their own needs within these partnerships?

In this study, I employed a multiple case study design (Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995, 2006) to examine urban educators' perception of the partnership. Stake (1998) defines case study as a methodology that involves a detailed study of a specific subject or individual cases. For this study, the case in question is school-university partnerships. Case studies combine research strategies such as interviews, surveys, and observations to illuminate and allow for generalization through analysis and reasoning (Johansson, 2007).

This study is situated within Social Capital Theory, acknowledging that capital exists as a kind of power (Bourdieu, 1993). Social capital features intangible

characteristics within an organization that promote action and cooperation for mutual benefit, such as networks, relationships, agreed upon norms, and trust (Claridge, 2018). The principles of social capital theory were used as a lens to explore how urban educators perceived their school-university partnership, focusing on how they viewed the benefits to them versus the university, their experience with centering their needs, and how well they collaborated with partners.

In addition to Social Capital Theory, the conceptual framework of mutually beneficial partnership guided the work. Mutually beneficial partnership is discussed by many scholars in the field. They assert that successful partnerships can only be sustained and effective if both parties receive benefit from the relationship (Kruger, 2009; Jeffrey & Pollock, 2010; Walsh & Backe, 2013). However, who determines the benefit may impact whether mutually beneficial partnership was achieved.

Researcher Positionality

I am a former K-2 teacher and K-8 principal of an urban school. I received PSTs often for their field experiences and supported placements. This study reflects my experience as an educator working to balance the development of future teachers with the immediate needs of my school community. Hosting preservice teachers provided unique challenges to our already resource-strained environment. The school had many new teachers and alternatively certified teachers, due to the teacher shortage. Thus, finding placements was challenging without having a large pool of teachers with the experience and professional capacity to provide mentorship. We also had curriculum shifts throughout my tenure as principal which required deep focus for implementing and evaluating. However, even with these needs, preservice teachers were welcomed with the

hope of benefiting my current students, and the future hope of more teacher applicants to my school.

This positionality gives me insight into the school-university partnership realm. However, I acknowledge the potential biases that stem from my role as a host for PSTs and an advocate for my school's needs. I have a broader view of the systemic issues present in partnership, including feeling compelled to oblige requests, and prioritizing university and preservice teacher needs over my own. This sense of obligation and acquiescing to the university was directly related to my view of the university as more important. I recognize these views may offer limitations to the study. I further concede that my experience could position me to look for cases of educators expressing similar concerns. I seek to remain as impartial as possible and allow educators to tell their story, from their perspective.

Context

Three different urban schools in a Midwest state were identified due to their proximity to universities and ongoing partnerships. Large urban districts in this midwestern state are geographically close to major universities and, thus, likely partners for placements of PSTs. The schools are considered urban based on the following metrics from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES.ed.gov):

- Geographic description as small, mid, or large city
- Student demographic is at least 50% students of color
- 50% or more of the students receive free or reduced lunch

In addition to the aforementioned statistics, the schools also have a multilingual population ranging from 5%-20%.

Participants and Setting

When deciding who to ask to participate in the study, Baumann and Bason (2011), state “it is most efficient to simply ask those who can inform the question” (p. 405). Thus, individuals in the schools who engage in field experiences of preservice teachers were invited to participate. The initial participants were selected via purposive sampling, a strategy employed to identify those who are most likely to provide useful information to the study (Campbell et al, 2020). Recommendations were also made by participants regarding additional people to interview.

Ultimately, three educators across the state were selected to participate. The participants had an average of 16 years of experience working in schools and held several positions across their careers. Including their current positions, they represent the gamut of educational vocations from school substitute to district administrator. Their varying roles offered diverse holistic perspectives to the school-university partner relationship. See table 1 for the profiles of the participants.

Table 1:

Participant Profiles

<i>Case</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Partnership experiences</i>	<i>Participant pseudonym</i>	<i>Years of experience</i>	<i>Title</i>
1	9-12 public high school	Student teachers, university led college prep help	Kelly	11	English teacher
2	P-5 elementary school	Student teachers, pre-internship field placements	Zaria	25	Social studies teacher School principal Middle school assistant principal Middle school math teacher
3	P-5 public elementary school	Student teachers, pre-internship field placements	Rachel	12	District administrator Middle School teacher Elementary teacher

Data Collection

Data sources included a) interviews with participants and b) reviewing school district documents related to school needs and partnership work. The interview gathered demographic information about the participants and built context. The questions were semi-structured to focus on the details of participants' experiences, beliefs, and opinions. Questions such as "How do you perceive the overall importance of the partnership to your students' success?" and "How have partnerships with universities been used to support literacy needs of students" were asked to help uncover how partnerships are viewed. Appendix A provides the list of all interview questions. The semi-structured

format supported the function of using interviews to better understand the topic, while also allowing opportunities for participants to expand and clarify as needed (Nardi, 2014). Although only a few questions were initially developed for the interview, participants' responses elicited follow-up questions that provided a more detailed understanding of their beliefs and experiences.

Archival research complemented the interviews and observations. I studied the school districts' annual reports, school improvement plans, and website information, as it related to their literacy and partnership goals. I also reviewed the teacher preparation program documents of partnered universities to analyze their language around partnership and clinical experiences. Using multiple data collection methods assists with triangulation of data and supports validity of outcomes (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Denzin, 1978; Jick, 1979).

Data Analysis

To address the research questions, I followed the process of deductive and emergent coding (Stuckey, 2015). Coding is the process of analyzing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way" (Creswell, 2015, p. 156). Deductive codes are predetermined, deriving from the research questions, and emergent coding evolves from the data (Stuckey, 2015). Coding can also be described as a decision-making process in an attempt to identify patterns and themes in data (Elliott, 2018). Each data collection method underwent a process of coding and included notes to clarify code meanings and how they were derived. The interviews were transcribed, and video recordings reviewed for accuracy against the transcripts. Statements were identified that were deemed significant in relation

to the research question and conceptual framework. Predetermined codes were applied, and new codes emerged.

Next, a process of collapsing and refinement occurred (Charmaz, 2006; Saldana, 2009). Codes were combined, redistributed to other categories, and new codes emerged. As text was applied with codes, subcategories were developed. Level 1 codes expanded to have multiple levels to appropriately apply to the data. The level 1 codes included 1) Literacy Needs, 2) Partnership Importance, 3) Expectations, 4) Opportunities. Within the code “Partnership Importance,” level 2, level 3, and level 4 codes were applied to include positive perception of partnership, negative perception, and subsequent expansion of each of those levels. See Appendix B for the codebook. After the coding approach was used, themes were created to best interpret the data (Aleman et al, 2017; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Blair, 2015).

The documents were reviewed through the lens of the research question. Table 2 shows how the districts documented their priority of literacy achievement, as well as their focus on university partnership, within their school improvement plan.

Table 2:*Document Review*

Participant/District	Documents	RQ1: Literacy Needs	RQ2: Perception of school-university partnership importance
Kelley	• District improvement plan • District website	Expand a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework in all schools	Establish partnerships with post-secondary institutions, government, and community-based organizations to create career pathways for diverse candidates
Zaria	• District improvement plan • District website	Increase academic proficiency in ELA by 5% as measured by state assessment	
Rachel	• District improvement plan • District website	K-2 reading proficiency goals MSTEP ELA proficiency goals PSAT 8 -EBRW goals SAT – EBRW goals WIDA goals Leadership development to drive instructional performance Improve primary instruction through training and skill development	Expand participation in community engagement structures, including university partners Build talent pipelines with university structures

All three districts noted some kind of literacy and partnership priority. One of the districts explicitly mentioned strengthening teacher professional development in literacy

instruction to better support students, as well as retain teachers. Another district discussed improved implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Support to address whole child needs, whether academic, behavioral, or health related. Two out of three District Improvement Plans stated a goal of expanding partnerships with universities to support the teacher pipeline.

Findings

In the findings section, I focus on the three primary themes that were underlying across all three participants and serve as questions to consider. The findings are organized in the following sections: a) What role does power and position play in the relationship? b) Who decides what is mutually beneficial? and c) What opportunities exist to strengthen the partnership?

What role does power and position play in the relationship?

I don't make the decision. The district tells me if preservice teachers will be in the building or not

There are so many logistics to consider and universities have a lot going on and there are a lot of different things they have to do

Participants were eager to answer questions about partner relationships. However, as questions probed about initiating additional activities or having expectations from the partnership, they became more thoughtful. It was as if they had never been asked what they wanted, needed, or expected from the relationship. PSTs are in their schools, learning how to teach from practicing educators, yet there were no documented expectations as it pertained to supporting the current needs of the school. Additionally, all

participants noted their limited power in decision making. The district determines who comes into the school and for what activities. It is also noted that there is a sense of reverence teachers and administrators have for university faculty. They believed the work at the university level was more intense and thus, they were apologetic on behalf of university faculty not following through on promises. One participant noted the logistical challenges for the university in providing support and follow-through for the school.

It is clear on teacher preparation program websites the expectation they have for their students as they enter field placements. Concurrently, the Association of Teacher Educators Clinical Experience Standards (2023) outlines the importance of clinical experience for teacher preparation, as well as the expectations for the experience. The standards center the partnership needs of developing future teachers. Do expectations exist for schools in partnership?

Who decides what is mutually beneficial

So what I see a lot of is the district offering things to the university but I don't see a lot of pay off in it

The participants believed that partnering with universities is important. They noted the benefits of having university students and faculty in the building. Students see PSTs and are more interested in college, interested in the teaching profession, and at times have an opportunity to work with them. However, when they considered their own efforts in the partnership, they all wondered about the “pay off.” The work that goes into allowing PSTs in the building is a strain on teachers and administrators. In addition to logistic challenges, there is hopeful expectation of future benefits of additional teacher applicants and hired teachers in the district. When administrators pondered what they

hoped to receive from the relationship, they reflected on this unrealized hope and wondered why the relationship has not increased teacher applicants.

Similarly to the theme around power dynamics, participants expressed a “matter of fact” view on the perceived priority of the relationship. They recognized the goal was to develop future teachers and even when other activities took place that may have supported some literacy needs, the main goal remained the same. Some of the participants expressed muted frustration in the relationship because they acknowledged the growing needs of their students and teachers, and yet, these needs were not being addressed in the partnership. All of the participants confessed to initiating some sort of partnership agreement with community organizations to meet the literacy needs of their students. Zaria worked with local churches and a community reading organization to service her students’ additional reading needs. Rachel worked with community centers to provide after school and summer literacy activities. Kelly worked with her school community which included other teachers and parents, to provide after school tutoring. Additionally, these agencies and resources supported other whole child needs such as food, clothing and healthcare. When questioned about initiating those kinds of relationships, the sentiment was that it was easier, and *that’s just what they do...they are part of the community and want to help out.*

What opportunities exist to strengthen partnerships?

Celebrate the teachers and make them feel valued...our students would see that and that can go a long way with their perception of the teaching field

Students get hours from observing...but also look into them getting some kind of hours from tutoring students in the school

As participants shared their thoughts and experiences around partnership with their local university, they also expressed ideas on how the partnership could improve. All three participants focused on improvement around two main areas: 1) student achievement, and 2) sustaining the teaching profession.

As teacher preparation programs continue to develop future teachers through collaboration with local schools, it is important to understand the context of the local school. If students in particular grades, or across the entire school are facing academic challenges, the TPP can support the effort to raise achievement. This requires more intentional partnership and collaboration but is one that teachers want. Concurrently, focusing just on the development of new teachers, in an era of teacher shortages and retention crisis, can be seen as short sighted. Universities, and TPP specifically, have an opportunity to find ways to celebrate and recognize teachers in the field. While money is scarce everywhere, there are ways that teachers can feel recognized and supported by their local university. Kelley discussed a local university that sends a faculty representative during teacher appreciation month to formally thank the teachers for their service. Another university invites research participation and collaboration from the teachers. The teachers in the school then feel part of the full spectrum of the education community and not as isolated.

Discussion

The three schools in this study have preservice teachers frequent the building for their program experience in teacher preparation. These formal agreements link the school and university in partnership. Much of the recent research on school-university partnership emphasizes the importance of reciprocity, ensuring both parties benefit

(Jeffrey & Pollock, 2013; Walsh & Backe, 2013). However, as PSTs are in schools, it is assumed that they learn about the needs of the school. Although TPPs are often benefiting from these formal partnerships, schools have needs that are not always heard or considered, such as perceptions about the value of the relationship and their ability to navigate various academic needs of their students and teachers.

The key findings revealed themes that were present throughout the responses of all three participants. The themes yielded questions around the influence of power in partnerships; mutual beneficial relationships in partnerships; and opportunities to strengthen partnerships by focusing on the school. The research questions sought to understand how educators perceived the relationship impact on their literacy and instructional needs. Through interviews their positive view on the importance of partnership for both preservice teachers and the school was uncovered. However, it was also uncovered that the participants placed little value in the relationship supporting literacy needs of the school. The subsequent research question was directly focused on how the urban educators in the study center their own needs in the partnership. What was revealed was that their needs were not considered as they engaged in partnership work. Instead, they sought more community partnerships to meet their needs. The issue of mutually beneficial partnership and the influence of power in the partnership were evident throughout the interviews. All three participants noted the TPPs receiving more benefit in the partnership, and additionally, not considering their own needs in the partnership prior to the study.

These results challenge the idea of mutually beneficial partnerships. A successful partnership must be rooted in both parties receiving agreed upon benefits (Kruger, 2009).

However, if one party is not considering their own needs, how can the outcomes be mutually beneficial? Furthermore, if the requests for partnership and the placement of TPPs happen at levels above the classroom teacher, how can the teachers be part of establishing goals and expectations of the partnership? The current structure perpetuates issues of power. Social capital theory illuminates issues of power that may be present in organizations (Claridge, 2015). Since capital influences how power is reproduced and viewed, social capital may influence how individuals behave within the school and university systems (Bourdieu, 1993).

This study has potential limitations. The data collection method could have been strengthened if all participants were in the same building or had the same job title (i.e. teacher). The participants worked in different districts and had different roles, which may affect validity of findings. Similarly, the findings could have been more significant if observations of educators were part of the data collection method. Furthermore, more diverse documents could have been reviewed in the process. Adding the aforementioned items could have supported triangulation of data. Finally, urban educators were the subjects of the study, but university faculty and preservice teachers could have participated to compare perceptions of benefit in the partnership.

This study has implications for universities seeking partnerships with schools. Especially teacher preparation programs who work with local urban schools to provide opportunities of observation and practice for preservice students. Before placing students or approaching schools for partnership initiatives, it is important for all parties to express needs and goals. As well as how measurement will be determined (Jeffrey & Pollock, 2012). This could influence how teacher preparation programs envision partnership work

within the clinical experience portion of teacher development. This could also encourage schools to consider their own needs within clinical placements, and develop agreed upon requirements, so mutually beneficial partnerships can exist

Conclusion

I believe there are two competing priorities within the field of education. 1) Increase the number of quality teachers, and 2) Increase academic achievement in P-12 schools. These two priorities have the potential to work together, and clinical experience of preservice teachers can support both. However, as universities are developing structures for clinical experiences, the partner schools' needs may not seem like a priority. To better understand the perception of benefit, this study sought to hear directly from urban teachers and administrators in the field. What was uncovered was a competing view of both positive acknowledgement on the work and possibility of partnership, as well as frustration with the lack of tangible benefit to their own school.

While it may seem the benefit of the partnership is skewed to the university, the small sample size of the study limits generalization. However, if the sentiment grows and expands across more schools and districts there could be repercussions that impact TPPs. Resentment toward the university could develop limits opportunities for preservice teacher placement. Schools may look to other organizations for teacher development support or student instructional support, such as what the participants in this study have done. The relationship between university and school is symbiotic. Universities rely on schools to develop new teachers. Schools rely on universities to add teachers to the field

that are trained, qualified, and will one day work in their school or district. Nevertheless, both institutions need to work together to ensure the relationship yields agreed upon benefit both parties, for the sustainment of the field, and benefit to the students and teachers in the school.

CHAPTER THREE

LETTER OF ACCEPTED PUBLICATION TO THE JOURNAL OF SCHOOL UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS



Mary Patillo-Dunn <patilodunn@oakland.edu>

School University Partnerships - Decision on Manuscript ID SUP-02-2025-0006.R1

1 message

School University Partnerships <onbehalf@manuscriptcentral.com>

Sat, Jul 19, 2025 at 11:12 AM

Reply-To: khall@unf.edu

To: patilodunn@oakland.edu, patillom@msu.edu

19-Jul-2025

Dear Ms. Mary Patillo-Dunn,

It is a pleasure to accept your manuscript SUP-02-2025-0006.R1, entitled "P-12 Literacy Needs and University Support: Exploring Educator Perceptions of Partnership" in its current form for publication in School University Partnerships.

Please note, no further changes can be made to your manuscript.

This email will be followed by a second message containing a copy of your author accepted manuscript (AAM) which is the version that we will typeset and publish in the journal.

Your article will now go through editorial checks by Emerald's editorial team to ensure it meets our publication standards. These checks can take up to five days; we'll be in touch if we have any queries at this stage.

Once this step has been completed you will receive an email directing you to Emerald Submit to select your publishing license (CC BY 4.0 License) and submit your article to production. Please be advised that as your article is being published in our Diamond Open Access journal, no processing fee will be applicable. Whilst our standard CC BY 4.0 license refers specifically to payment of the processing fee, **we confirm that no processing fee is due** and we will proceed with the publishing process following receipt of the license duly signed by you.

Please note, when creating an account to sign your license in Submit, you must use the same email address that is linked to your ScholarOne account. If you use a different email, you will not be able to see your accepted manuscript in the Submit platform.

If you have not received an email with editorial queries or an invitation to complete licensing on Emerald Submit within 10 working days of acceptance, please do contact the JEO (Journal Editorial Office), you can find their details on the journal homepage:

<https://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/journal/sup>

Please note that it is the corresponding author who must sign the publishing license on behalf of all authors of your article.

Once you have completed licensing on Emerald Submit, your article will enter the production process and you'll be provided with a proof. You will need to approve your proof before your article is published. If you have any queries about the proofing system you can contact the journal's Supplier Project Manager (SPM) whose contact details are on the journal homepage: <https://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/journal/sup>.

By publishing in this journal your work will benefit from Emerald EarlyCite. Once the above steps are completed your article will be published online in EarlyCite. EarlyCite is the author proofed, typeset version of record, fully citable by DOI. The EarlyCite article sits outside of a journal issue and is paginated in isolation. The EarlyCite article will later be collated into a journal issue according to the journals' publication schedule.

Thank you for your contribution. On behalf of the Editors of School University Partnerships, we look forward to your continued contributions to the Journal. It's a nice first look at a partnership and elevates the perspectives of school partners. We hope you continue this work to expand your findings and eventually provide recommendations for next steps (for partnerships) given those findings.

Sincerely,
Dr. Katrina Hall
Editor, School University Partnerships
khall@unf.edu

CHAPTER FOUR:

FINAL DRAFT OF MANUSCRIPT TWO:

MUTUAL BENEFIT IN LITERACY PARTNERSHIPS: UNDERSTANDING PRINCIPAL PRIORITIES

Introduction

Mutual benefit is a term used across the scholarship on school-university partnerships (Selland, 2021; Walsh & Backe, 2013; Jeffery & Polleck, 2010; Cox, 2000; Goodlad, 1991). The Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) encourages partnerships that are rooted in communication and collaboration, to ensure fulfillment of agreed upon goals (Mahar, 2025). The collaboration typically involves the school principal, who also has a variety of needs competing for their attention. Among them are the literacy needs of the school (Kierstead et al., 2023; Plaatjies, 2019), in addition to supporting teacher education students through partnerships with the university (Nettleton & Barnett, 2016). The partnerships have potential to be mutually beneficial and give rich field experiences to future teachers, while also offering literacy support to students (Cloonan et al., 2022). Although mutual benefit is encouraged by CAEP, the benefits often skew toward the university (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016; Walsh & Backe, 2013; Jeffery & Polleck, 2010). Yet, pursuing mutual benefit should be the responsibility of both principals and university faculty members because they both have an interest in the relationship serving their needs (Bass, 2023; Overstreet & Norton-Meier, 2020).

Research in school-university partnerships demonstrates the importance of communication and collaboration between the school and the university (Jeffery & Polleck, 2010). The principal is often the school's representative and engages in partnership communication (Plaatjies, 2019; Handford & Leithwood, 2013). However, the goals of the partnership are frequently centered on the university's needs and not the needs of the school (Dunn, 2025; Lipp & Helfrich, 2016; Walsh & Backe, 2013; Jeffery & Polleck, 2010). The data highlights the urgency of literacy improvement in schools across the United States, and especially in urban districts where reading proficiency rates are significantly lower than in suburban districts (Howard & Milner, 2021). Scholars encourage partnerships that go beyond development of preservice teachers and include supporting the school's literacy needs (Ronan et al., 2018; Zenkov et al., 2017). However, determining what the partnership looks like, and which needs are addressed requires a common understanding from all stakeholders and a strategic vision from the principal (Plaatjies, 2019; Handford & Leithwood, 2013). If principals are at the center of the partnership and can make decisions about how the partnership supports the schools' goals, what is in the way of the partnership yielding positive academic outcomes? While studies document the necessary components for effective school-university partnerships, limited studies analyze the role of the principal in the relationship or how their priorities impact how they navigate the partnership.

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that influenced how elementary principals in an urban district prioritized their own literacy needs within an existing school-university partnership. Additionally, how stakeholders in the school-

university partnership understood the term “mutually beneficial” was investigated. The study addresses the gap in the research by applying Bourdieu’s (1993) Social Capital Theory and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1954) to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What factors influence the principals’ prioritization of mutually beneficial literacy partnerships in urban elementary schools?

I used a multiple case study design method to study three elementary schools in one urban district in Michigan. I relied on data from interviews, observations, and public documents that reflected literacy as a priority and evidence of partnership collaboration as a priority. Principals, classroom teachers, university faculty, and preservice teachers participated in the study. Findings offer both principals and university faculty suggestions on how to cultivate and sustain mutually beneficial literacy partnerships

Background

The study investigates partnerships between teacher preparation programs (TPP) and urban elementary schools. The roots of school-university partnerships have long been to support teacher education students (Zeichner, 2010; Labaree, 2008). Through different iterations, the relationship has strengthened teacher preparation while also uncovering areas of improvement and need, notably in the relationship between universities and urban districts.

History of Partnerships in Teacher Education

School university partnerships have their origin in evolving forms of the apprenticeship model. In the nineteenth century, normal schools relied on an apprentice-style approach by pairing coursework with practice in “model schools,” where novice teachers observed master teachers and gradually assumed responsibility (Fraser, 2007; Labaree, 2008). This structure reflected the classic apprenticeship model of learning by doing alongside an expert. Concurrently, Dewey’s Laboratory School at the University of Chicago (1896) advanced this tradition by embedding practice within a research and theory-rich environment. Rather than simple imitation, Dewey envisioned apprenticeship as a process of inquiry and reflection, where preservice teachers critically engaged with pedagogy while working directly with children (Dewey, 1904/1965; Zeichner, 2010). The Dewey Laboratory model demonstrated how the two institutions, universities and schools, could work together to train future teachers through hands-on experience and collaboration (Winitzky & Stoddard, 1992).

Later, in the late twentieth century, the Professional Development School (PDS) model further expanded the meaning of apprenticeship in teacher education (Fraser, 2007). Building on recommendations from the Holmes Group, Michigan State University and other institutions developed PDS networks in the 1980s and 1990s that provided extended internships and structured collaboration between universities and K–12 schools. These partnerships emphasized “simultaneous renewal” of both teacher education and school practice, positioning preservice teachers as participants in professional communities rather than as isolated apprentices (Holmes Group, 1990; Darling-

Hammond, 2006). In this way, the apprenticeship model evolved once again—shifting from individual imitation to collaborative professional practice—while maintaining the central idea that effective teacher preparation requires authentic, guided engagement in school settings.

As the school-university collaboration in teacher education continued to evolve, more opportunities for immersive clinical experiences developed. Residency models offer one kind of immersive clinical experience between the school and teacher education students. In this model, clinical experiences are more supportive and extensive. The teacher candidates teach under a mentor teacher while simultaneously completing course work (Chu & Wang, 2022; Zeichner, 2010). This model responds to the call for more field experiences in teacher education to better prepare teachers for student success and provides the school district with a classroom teacher (Zeichner et al., 2015). This model also addresses barriers in teacher education including financial, due to prevalence of residency models offering financial assistance and guaranteed teaching positions at the conclusion of the program (Zeichner et al. 2024; Darling-Hammond, 2023). Moreover, this model positions the school as co-instructors in the development of teachers and responds to the question of whose knowledge matters in teacher education (Zeichner et al., 2015).

School-university partnerships in teacher education continue to support preservice teachers (PSTs) by collaborating with local schools. PSTs engage in instructional practice and work with students within their content and grade level. These experiences support PSTs understanding of teaching and learning, especially in urban schools where frequent

and sustained clinical experiences enhance preparedness (Howard & Milner, 2021; Lee et al., 2010).

Urban Schools as a Focus

The term *urban* tends to be coded language for many categories including geographic location, racial demographic, age descriptor, and even meaning contemporary or popular (Noguera & Wells, 2011). Milner (2012) teased out a more nuanced way of viewing *urban education specifically*. He placed schools in categories as a result of their resource needs and in consideration of their location and size. *Urban Intensive*, *Urban Emergent*, and *Urban Characteristic* provide educators with a framework for understanding types of schools. *Urban Intensive* denotes schools in large cities in the United States such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. These large metropolitan cities have many people and large school districts trying to meet the needs of all the students. The sheer number of students presents a strain on resources. *Urban Emergent* is similar, but the city and school size are not as large as *Urban Intensive*. Yet, resources are still strained due to the number of students and various needs, such as language support for multilingual learners, and academic support for students in need of interventions (Milner, 2012). Finally, Milner (2012) describes urban schools that may not be situated in large or mid-size cities but are still experiencing strains on the schools' resources due to the needs of the students. *Urban Characteristic* describes this final group and can be found in cities, suburbs, or rural areas.

While Milner (2012) places need, as a result of location size, as the priority, in the current study, I extend his categorization to place priority on racial demographics and

socio-economic status as well. Schools that serve predominantly black and brown students are often found in urban areas and within proximity to universities (see Figure 1). These universities call upon local urban schools to support TPP goals, which include classroom observations, site-based courses, application of instructional methods, and internship experiences in their schools (Bass, 2023; Gupta & Lee, 2020; Nelson et al., 2020; Sailors et al., 2018). The TPP relies on the school to fulfill teacher development and the school sees this as an opportunity to train and recruit new teachers.

Figure 1:

Urban Districts in Michigan and Proximity to Local Universities

District	Demographic	Local University	Distance between district and university
Flint Community Schools	14 schools and 2,840 students The district's minority enrollment is 90% 75.6% of students are economically disadvantaged.	University of Michigan – Flint Flint, MI	0.4 miles
Detroit Public Schools Community District	107 schools and 48,548 students The district's minority enrollment is 100%. 62.1% of students are economically disadvantaged.	Wayne State University Detroit, MI	1.0 miles
Grand Rapids Public Schools	51 schools and 13,787 students The district's minority enrollment is 70%. 62.5% of students are economically disadvantaged.	Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI (main campus) Grand Rapids, MI (downtown location)	16 miles to main campus 2.6 miles to downtown campus
Lansing Public School District	28 schools and 10,023 students The district's minority enrollment is 80%. 88.4% of students are economically disadvantaged	Michigan State University East Lansing, MI	5.2 miles
Muskegon Public Schools	7 schools and 3,353 students The district's minority enrollment is 80%. 57.7% of students are economically disadvantaged.	Muskegon Community College Muskegon, MI	4.2 miles
Pontiac City School District	10 schools and 3,402 students The district's minority enrollment is 90%. 57.2% of students are economically disadvantaged	Oakland University	6.3 miles
Saginaw School District	16 schools and 5,286 students The district's minority enrollment is 80%. 65.4% of students are economically disadvantaged	Saginaw Valley State University Saginaw, MI	8.6 miles
Ypsilanti Community Schools	12 schools and 3,721 students The district's minority enrollment is 80%. 50.5% of students are economically disadvantaged.	University of Michigan – Ann Arbor Ann Arbor, MI	7.4 miles

Another focus of many urban schools is their desire to include practices that honor and build upon the backgrounds of students in the school community, as well as to sustain their language and culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014).

However, cultural mismatch can exist between students and teachers when teachers lack knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds and experience. This mismatch can impede teaching and learning, which is already strained in urban schools (Larson et al., 2021; Delpit, 1998). Targeted professional development, as well as curriculum changes in teacher education are necessary to ensure teachers have the skills to teach in urban settings where student demographics differ from the teachers' backgrounds (Hilaski, 2020; Wesley, 2015; Martin & Mulvihill, 2023). Having experience in urban schools prior to teaching can mitigate unpreparedness; supports teacher retention; and can encourage more culturally aware and appreciative teachers (Zeichner, K., 2024; Showalter & Gamboa-Turner, 2017; Catapano, S. & Huisman, S., 2010; Carter Andrews, D.J., 2009). "These opportunities are transformative, as a way to become not only acquainted with the cultural histories of their future students but also invested in and appreciative of both the problems and funds of knowledge that their students possess" (Showalter & Gamboa-Turner, 2017, pg. 2), which can be realized through partnerships with urban schools.

As researchers continue to point out, experience in schools is critical to future teacher success (Zeichner, 2024; Zeichner et al., 2024; Laman, et al, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Principals of urban schools have discussed the need for teacher applicants to understand the dynamics of the school where they are considering teaching. Being aware of the needs and experiences of urban students can support how teaching is approached (Howard & Milner, 2021; Lee et al., 2010). Noguera and Wells (2011) argue that urban school districts comprise more students experiencing poverty than suburban

counterparts and this affects their learning. Noguera and Wells (2011) go on to highlight the problems that are associated with poverty, including food insecurities, housing instability, in part, due to historic issues of redlining and unfair housing practices, divestment in education, crime, unemployment, health disparities and other social issues (2011). All these external factors can impede attention, which subsequently affects how information is learned and absorbed (Larson & Nelms, 2023).

The National Assessment of Education Progress Report Card (2025) found that in 2024, four out of 25 urban districts saw a decline in reading progress, while 20 out of the 25 remained constant, without any change. This was alarming because the 2022 assessment results also showed a decline in most of the urban districts assessed, which means more urban districts remained steady in the latest assessment round, but did not improve student reading achievement (NAEP, 2023). Socol (2024) also recognizes the disparity in reading proficiency among different demographics. Furthermore, in 2023, fourth grade reading proficiency among Black or African American students was at 17%; Latino students achieved 21% proficiency; students with disability achieved 11% proficiency; and multilingual learners in the fourth grade achieved 10% proficiency on the reading assessment (Socom, 2024). Urban schools typically have larger percentages of students of color, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners (Howard & Milner, 2021). This data presents challenges and opportunities for strategic partnerships to improve literacy outcomes for urban students.

Literature Review

The current study originated from a pilot investigation and began with the belief that schools and teacher preparation programs should operate in mutual benefit. The goal in the initial study was to explore how urban school educators perceived their partnership with their local university. The findings yielded three themes around mutual benefit, power and position, and opportunities to strengthen the partnership (Author, 2025). The subsequent claims were developed from those themes and used in the current research study:

- 1) Principals as the central figure in schools and decision-makers, responsible for challenging university partners to help meet the literacy needs of students in her/his school.
- 2) As the central figure in schools, principals often prioritize the most pressing needs at the moment.
- 3) Literacy partnerships are currently not mutually beneficial and are the responsibility of BOTH the principal and university faculty.

The following literature review discusses each claim in depth to situate it within the current study.

Principals are the central figure in determining the prioritization of mutually beneficial literacy partnerships

Partnerships between schools and universities often begin with principals. They are the ones to determine if field placements in reading are possible. They assess the

strengths of the teachers in the building and make decisions on mentor teachers, classroom partners, and other logistics (Kierstead, 2020; Plaatjes, 2019; Hanford & Leithwood, 2013). Principals are tasked with finding ways to meet academic needs and address gaps in instruction and learning. Principals recognize this challenge as they form collaborations within the school and with external partners to support both teaching and learning. Initially, the principal was seen as one of absolute authority on instructional knowledge. They were perceived to have the expertise on being an effective teacher and understanding what students needed best in order to learn (Marks & Printy, 2003; Donnemoyer & Wagstaff, 1990). This perspective evolved to principals sharing instructional leadership and cultivating a community of leaders in the school with academic and instructional expertise (Blase & Blase, 1999; Marks & Printy, 2003; Murphy & Lick, 2001). Developing a community of instructional leaders includes supporting the preparedness of future teachers. Thus, when universities seek partnerships for PSTs, principals consider the future hopes for their own staffing needs and in the field in general.

As the reading needs of students in urban schools continue to be a heightened priority, principals often narrow their instructional focus to literacy and take on the title of literacy instructional leader. Literacy instruction is a foundation in teacher elementary preparation programs (Cervetti et al., 2020; Sailors et al., 2018; Lacina & Block, 2011). Nevertheless, principals have a responsibility to meet the requirements to be an effective literacy leader. They must have content knowledge in literacy and be able to model literacy instructional methods (Kierstead et al., 2023; Plaatjes, 2019; Dowell et al., 2012;

Goldwyn, 2008). Principals should also embrace a school literacy culture that includes developing a mission and vision around literacy (Plaatjies, 2019; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Bevel & Mitchell, 2012; Denton et al., 2003). Principals must provide school structures that support literacy through leveraging grant funding, providing professional learning, and ensuring staffing can meet the needs of the school (Dowell et al., 2012; Plaatjies, 2019). Effective literacy leaders use multiple data sources to identify areas of concern in curriculum delivery, assessment outcomes, and to make decisions around instructional support (Kindall et al, 2018; Marks & Printy, 2016; Anderson et al., 2010;). Finally, literacy leaders must monitor and evaluate the implementation of literacy curriculum (Plaatjies, 2019; Dowell et al., 2012). Monitoring literacy instruction helps to determine gaps, opportunities, and the effectiveness of the instruction.

Principals must also connect and build relationships with external partners to assist in bridging gaps in the needs of the school (Leithwood, 2012; Murphy et al., 2006). This includes engaging with community members, organizations, and local colleges and universities. These relationships can have a strong impact on the academic success of the school (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Partnerships with TPPs have the potential to build upon principals' literacy leadership and support student academic needs in literacy, while also providing valuable literacy instructional experiences to PSTs.

Principals prioritize the needs most pressing

While partnerships have potential to support a variety of school literacy needs, and principals are at the center of prioritizing mutually beneficial literacy partnerships, they also prioritize the needs of the school that are most pressing. This can include

focusing on teacher retention, student behavior, parental involvement, as well as academic improvement (Wesley, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Assessing the school environment and responding to meet the various needs is part of Ancona's et al. (2020) sensemaking framework which states that leaders not only need to have applicable skills and styles but should also be able to respond in times of chaos and crisis. Ganon-Shilon and Chen (2019) detail how principals constantly need to respond to rapidly changing environments and attribute new meaning to the situations they face. The responses necessary may be out of the expertise of the leaders' existing knowledge and capabilities. Thus, effective leaders must undergo a process of making sense of the "local and external demands" and "creatively interpret, mediate, negotiate, and recontextualize ambiguous experiences into a familiar set of actions that suit their particular situation" (Da'as et al., 2020, p. 729,). This sensemaking is an important skillset that is often overlooked and under-appreciated (Ancona et al., 2020). Yet, effective principals need this practice to address challenges and seize opportunities that support an environment of teaching and learning.

The role of a principal includes creating a school culture where teaching and learning can thrive. Fink and Resnick (2001) note that principals are responsible for creating an academic focused culture that is evident throughout the building. Within the school, teachers and leadership have shared values for what is important; engage in ceremonies and traditions that enhance teaching and learning; and share the hopes and dreams for what is possible (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Some theorists view school culture as comprising the values and norms of an organization (MacNeil et al., 2009), while

others define school culture as an organization's personality (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2023). As a personality, school culture can be difficult to change and can evolve over time (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2023).

While culture focuses on the shared values and norms, climate can be seen as a result of the culture created. It is the behaviors and attitudes that make up the total environment quality (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2023). MacNeil et al., (2009) describes the relationship between culture and climate as overlapping concepts. They are distinct but relate to each other. Hoy et al. (1990) views climate from a psychological perspective and culture from an anthropological perspective. Culture is what is believed while climate is what is felt. Gruenert & Whitaker (2023) offer a visual representation of the differences between the two, seen in Figure 2, which also show how similar and interdependent they are.

Figure 2:

Gruenert and Whitaker (2023): Some Differences Between Climate and Culture

Culture ...	Climate ...
Is the group's personality.	Is the group's attitude.
Gives Mondays permission to be miserable.	Differs from Monday to Friday, February to May.
Provides for a limited way of thinking.	Creates a state of mind.
Takes years to evolve.	Is easy to change.
Is based on values and beliefs.	Is based on perceptions.
Can't be felt, even by group members.	Can be felt when you enter a room.
Is part of us.	Surrounds us.
Is "the way we do things around here."	Is "the way we feel around here."
Determines whether improvement is possible.	Is the first thing that improves when positive change is made.

The climate or environment set by principals can lessen the effect of the day-to-day challenges that principals and schools face. The right climate can support the development and retention of teachers and can affect student achievement (Robinson et al, 2008; Wesley, 2016). It can also support collaboration and improve relationships among staff. Fullan (1998) conducted a qualitative study exploring strategies principals used in developing a collegial and collaborative environment. The successful principals employed six strategies: 1. Continually build school culture; 2. Use multiple techniques to engage and bring change; 3. Foster staff development through professional development or other methods; 4. Create clear lines of communication; 5. Execute a model for participative leadership; and 6. Allow teachers and staff to contribute to decision making processes. While these efforts combine to support a healthy environment, the principal is responsible for determining which needs take precedent. The combination of demands competes for the attention of the principal and influence which needs are prioritized.

Many Literacy Partnerships are not Currently Mutually Beneficial and are the responsibility of BOTH principals and university faculty

If principals are at the center of the partnership between schools and universities, and they prioritize the most pressing needs, which may include literacy needs, why aren't the partnerships currently mutually beneficial? PSTs engage in literacy methods courses that connect them with local schools to observe instruction, practice literacy methods on students, and engage in their student teaching internship. However, the reading data in urban schools in Michigan do not reflect mutual benefit. Reading data shows 38.9% of 3rd graders and 42.4% of 4th graders were proficient on the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (MSTEP) (Chamber et al., 2025). The proficiency rate in reading is much lower in urban districts across the state (Tanner and Altavena, 2025). Table 3 displays the 2025 ELA MSTEP scores for some of the urban districts across Michigan.

Table 3:

2025 Michigan MSTEP ELA Scores

Note: Taken from Detroit Free Press, [2025 M-STEP results for Michigan schools](#)

	3 rd Grade	4 th Grade	5 th Grade
Detroit	12.9%	14.7%	16.8%
Lansing	20.6%	18.9%	19.6%
Pontiac	11.3%	12.7%	12.7%
Saginaw	19.6%	21.8%	26.6%
Flint	5.4%	6.3%	11.4%
Muskegon	11.8%	15.5%	12%
Grand Rapids	19.6%	23.3%	23.6%

Urban districts are typically in close proximity to universities and become easy partners for field experiences for PSTs. It can be assumed that many PSTs are frequenting elementary schools close to the university to fulfill their program requirements. The reading school's reading scores and partnership with TPPs offer an opportunity to explore mutual benefit in this area. While reading scores are not the only area where mutual benefit can be achieved in partnership, for the purpose of my study, I have chosen to highlight them because of the opportunity for both supporting development of teachers and enhancing literacy initiatives at partner schools.

Successful partnerships between schools and universities require certain ingredients. The research highlights shared goals, mutual respect, and trust as conditions to success in the relationship (Ainscow, 2016; Walsh & Backe, 2014; Lee et al., 2010; Bresler, 2002). According to Corbin et al. (2017), collaboration and communication are critical to developing shared goals. This includes creation of strategies for "achieving more horizontal relationships" that ensure each member's voice is encouraged and valued; as well as engaging in collaborative work that is "mutually negotiated" so both parties have their goals met (Corbin et al., 2017, p. 42). In addition, the study stresses the need for both university and school leadership to share power, model openness, display respect, humility, and be committed to the process of evolution in the relationship. Opportunities to reflect and engage in meaningful discussion about partnership are also important components of a successful relationship (Nehring & O'Brien, 2012).

Partnership building can be challenging work due to bringing stakeholders across multiple institutions together to collaborate. If there were failures or let down in the partnership previously, it must be acknowledged in order for all stakeholders to move forward (Miller & Hafner, 2008). Obstacles in collaborative relationships can occur "when participants from drastically different backgrounds possess different ideas about what issues need to be addressed" (Aleman et al., 2017, p. 857). Thus, to minimize obstacles, and pursue more mutually beneficial partnerships, principals and university faculty must establish a shared vision of the needs and goals in which everyone is invested and committed.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study is grounded in Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1993) and Maslow's (1958) Hierarchy of Needs to critically examine the dynamics of mutual benefit in school–university partnerships. The school setting acts as a micro society, and the power that each institution holds affects the partnership (Claridge, 2018). Social Capital Theory, developed by Pierre Bourdieu, is concerned with the dynamics of power in society (Bourdieu et al., 1993); specifically, with how power reproduces social inequalities (Claridge, 2018). “Social capital enables a person to exert power on the group or individual who mobilizes the resources” (Claridge, 2018, p. 7). Both schools and universities are resources, and hold power, but how each institution's power is perceived is dependent on the individual (Grissom, et al., 2021). Individuals in schools may view universities as having more power and thus allow them to set the rules and norms around the partnership (Author, 2025). The power differential (Bourdieu et al., 1993) in the school-university relationship, may position schools to be accommodating of requests for partnerships without disrupting established norms or promoting the school's needs first. However, Coleman (1988), extended Bourdieu's (1993) theory of Social Capital to refer to social structures that encourage action. These social structures include trust, collaboration, network of relationships, and establishment of norms (Coleman, 1988). Where Bourdieu saw social capital as distributing unequal power in society, Coleman saw social capital as a public good, and a tool to benefit society (Claridge, 2018). Stakeholders in school-university partnerships may have varying degrees of belief around who holds the power in the relationship. But the partnership offers social good for both

institutions to carry out their vision and goals (Walsh & Backe, 2013; Jeffrey & Polleck, 2010).

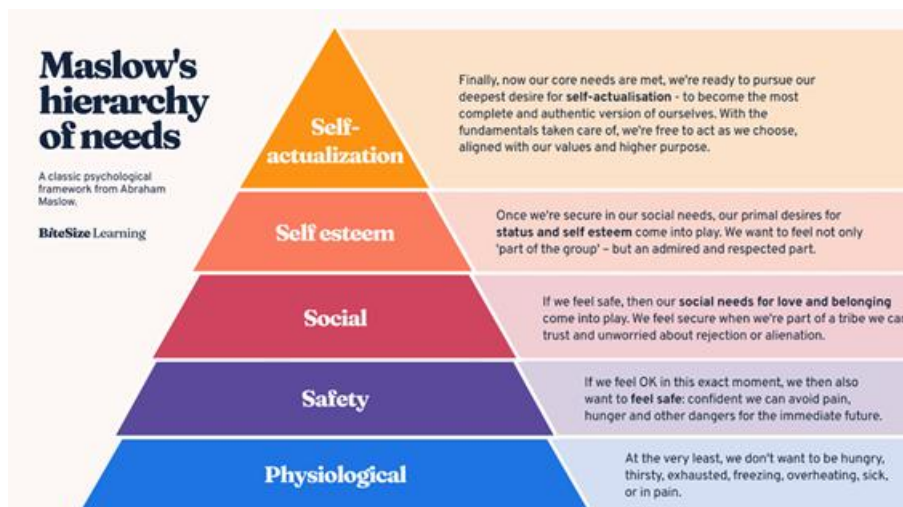
Additionally, the unique needs of a school may also influence the decisions made around the partnership. Maslow (1958) theorized that a person's motivation is tied to their unmet needs and there is a hierarchy of needs that humans had to obtain before self-actualization could occur. Image 1 shows the hierarchy which includes 1. Physiological; 2. Safety; 3. Love and Belonging; 4. Esteem; and 5. Self-Actualization (Maslow, 1958). Self-actualization is the need to reach one's full potential or the desire to assume one's full capabilities (Pardee, 1990). Although critiqued at times, the theory states that certain needs must be met before the next need on the pyramid can be considered (Adiele & Abraham, 2013; Pardee, 1990). In this same vein, there may be a hierarchy of needs that must be reached before prioritization of literacy needs can take place in the school university partnership. The hierarchy of needs, from the principal's view, may impact which needs are deemed necessary to meet before others can be considered. This study examines which needs are prioritized and how that affects partnership navigation and fulfillment of the partnership's full capabilities.

Image 1:

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Note: From “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Explained” by BiteSize Learning

[Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Explained + Pyramid Diagram — BiteSize Learning](#)



Methods

Partnership in this study is defined as a relationship between a PK-5/PK-8 school and a teacher preparation program. The study focused on three urban elementary schools and the principals who led them. Principals are best positioned to be agents of change in a school and thus have an overwhelming influence on the culture of a school (Kierstead, 2020; Plaatjes, 2019; Hanford & Leithwood, 2013). If literacy is a priority and

partnerships with universities already exist, principals may offer insight into the factors that contribute to their prioritization of literacy efforts within the partnership.

The study utilized a multiple case study design method (Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995) to explore participant experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The data collection method consisted of interviews, observations and documents to understand the factors that influence principals' prioritization of mutually beneficial literacy partnership (Seidman, 2019, Johansson, 2007).

Research Sites

The research sites included three schools in an urban district in the state of Michigan, consisting of two public elementary schools and one public K-8 charter that serves predominantly students of color. The schools in this city participate in the state's free breakfast and lunch program due to the large percentage of students who qualify for the program. While there are community challenges to acknowledge that affect the school system, it is equally important to recognize the assets in this community that can positively affect teaching and learning. The city boasts numerous cultural opportunities such as museums, theaters, and music programs that frequent the school district, giving students additional experiences that support academic and social development. These spaces are assets and add to the richness of the community despite its challenges (Yosso, 2005).

The schools were chosen due to the school's investment in increasing the literacy achievement of their students. Table 4 shows the average ELA MSTEP scores for the schools in the district.

Table 4:

Michigan Urban School District ELA MSTEP Scores Over Time

Note: Author's original creation, taken from school district annual report

	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
3rd Grade	26%	24%	13%	15%	15%
4th Grade	25%	30%	17%	17%	17%
5th Grade	30%	26%	25%	19%	27%

Post Covid saw a decline in student ELA scores in all grades in the district from 2018-2023. While there were some years of growth, such as in 4th grade from 2018 to 2019, the scores then decreased the following year and remained steady. However, 5th grade began trending upward as of the 2023 assessment year. This data shows that the district has opportunities for growth in order to meet Michigan's average MSTEP scores across 3rd-5th grades.

Two of the three schools in the study are in danger of state intervention due to low reading and math scores on the state's primary assessment. The schools also have regular PSTs in the building either engaged in student teaching or gaining field placement

experience in their literacy methods course (Bass, 2023; Gupta & Lee, 2020; Nelson et al., 2020; Degraff et al., 2015). Previous studies have cited the value of teacher preparation programs establishing partnerships between schools for the purpose of site-based courses which allow for the blending of “practitioner knowledge with academic knowledge as they work in the classroom context (Nelson, 2020, p. 19).

Participants

The participants include three principals, three classroom teachers, three TPP faculty and three PSTs. The three principals chosen to participate were selected through informal relationships and knowledge of literacy goals and regular collaboration with TPPs. “The primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people, the “others” who make up the organization or carry out the process” (Seidman, 2019). It is important to hear from the other individuals in the school-university partnership to learn their perspective. Snowball sampling, a form of purposive sampling, was also utilized to recruit participants (Guetterman & Creswell, 2018). Principals recommended classroom teachers and some faculty, and classroom teachers also recommended PSTs to participate. Figure 3 provides the full participant and school list for the study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of the participants.

Figure 3:

Participant List and Profile

Note: Author's original creation

Site	Participant <i>*Pseudonym</i>	Profile
Wilson Elementary PK-5 Elementary 330 Students 70% minority enrollment 60% free and reduced lunch	Principal Linsday	Principal in current school for four years. Principal of a previous school in the district for three years. Special education teacher prior to administration
	Autumn	Kindergarten teacher, 17 years teaching experience
	Monica	Literacy Methods Instructor and Clinical Placement Coordinator, 15 years in the role
	Jennie	3 rd year in the TPP

Vista Elementary K-8 Elementary 330 students 95% minority enrollment 90% free and reduced lunch	Principal Kellogg	Principal in current school for three years. Instructional Coach for five years previously. Taught third grade prior to becoming an administrator
	Nina	1st-grade teacher, eight years teaching experience
	Julie	Literacy Instructor and Placement Coordinator, 4 years in the role
	Francesca	Instructor, Teacher Education, 8 years in the role
Bay Jones Elementary PK-6 Elementary School 325 students 96% minority enrollment 89% free and reduced lunch	Principal Daniels	Principal in current school for three years.

	Kathy	3rd-grade teacher, 15 years of teaching experience in multiple grades
Additional Interviews	Lauren	4 th year in TPP
	Maddy	3 rd year in TPP

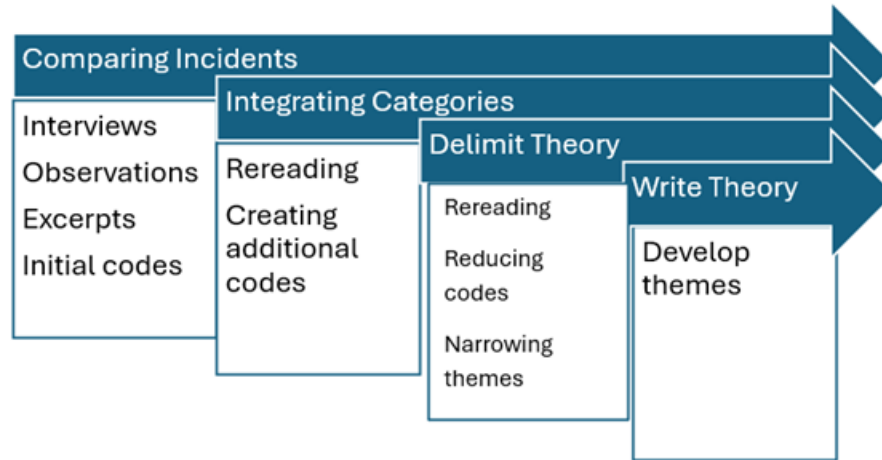
Analysis

Analyzing the data included reviewing the interviews, observations, and public documents for patterns that could be used to construct themes (Seidman, 2019; Corbin & Strauss, 2019; Guetterman & Creswell, 2018). The analysis process relied on the Constant Comparative Analysis Method (Fram, 2013). This method involves comparing the data against each other to develop codes, themes, and concepts (Fram, 2013). I chose this method to illuminate patterns as it is related to the categories of participants and to constantly compare data to develop a theory. Glaser (2008) offers a 4-stage process in using constant comparative analysis that was applied to the analysis process: “1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, 2) integrating categories and their properties, 3) delimiting the theory, and 4) writing the theory” (p.5). Figure 4 provides my Constant Comparative Analysis Schema, built from Glaser’s (2008) categorization of the analysis method, to show what took place in each stage of the process.

Figure 4:

Constant Comparative Analysis Schema

Note: Author's original creation



I also applied The Constant Comparative Analysis process to the analysis of the observations. Observation notes and reflective memos were compared from each observation against the other observations. Meaningful themes or observances were highlighted in the notes. The initial codes of *Literacy Focus* and *School University Partnership Collaboration* were also applied. Then upon rereading the highlighted components, new codes were created. The observation data was utilized to triangulate data already uncovered in the interviews.

Bowen (2009) suggests there is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents. Documents can be analyzed and interpreted to gain understanding and construct meaning about the subject matter (Bowen, 2009). Bowen (2009) details that

the analysis procedure includes finding documents, selecting the documents that may contribute to the study, appraising the relevance of it, and then synthesizing the data contained in the document. The documents were analyzed by creating a list in a Google Spreadsheet of all the documents reviewed. The initial codes of *Literacy Focus* and *School University Partnership* were once again applied as column headings. As each document was reviewed, examples and references to either code category were selected and placed in the cell. For example, one of the elementary school's calendars had a literacy focused data meeting with the staff on the schedule, this was noted and placed under the *Literacy Focus* category. One of the school district's Annual Report expressed a commitment to more university collaboration, which was noted and put under the *School-University Partnership Collaboration* category. This selection process was repeated until all documents were reviewed and categorization completed.

Findings

This study developed from a pilot study, with the goal to learn about priorities of principals in urban elementary schools as they navigated partnerships with teacher preparation programs. I wanted to learn what influenced how principals centered their own literacy needs within their existing partnerships. From the pilot, it was uncovered that mutually beneficial relationships may not be happening in the partnership. Explicit benefits to the school were rarely discussed. Also, the findings in the pilot study showed that how schools perceive the power and status of the university may impact how the partnership is structured and navigated. Finally, the pilot study findings revealed opportunities to strengthen the school-university relationship. Based on these results,

claims were developed to serve as a guide in the current study. The claims were: Principals are the central figure in the partnership; Principals prioritize what is most pressing or important; and finally, School-University literacy partnerships are not currently mutually beneficial, but should be, and are the responsibility of both principals and university faculty. To test these claims the following research question was used: “What factors influence the principals’ prioritization of mutually beneficial literacy partnerships?”

Analysis of the current study data revealed three central themes that were consistently reflected across participants as well as evident in the observations and public documents reviewed. The themes include: 1) School culture and climate affect partnerships in various ways, 2) Stakeholders’ have a conceptualization of mutual benefit, and 3) A strategic vision is required to sustain effective partnerships.

Culture and climate affect partnerships in various ways

The kids are still impacted by poverty, transportation issues, attendance issues, behavior issues, things are still occurring at home. We still have kids who struggle with housing and food insecurities that we don't necessarily have the resources to support them. But we're expecting them to come to us every day ready to learn. I firmly believe that you don't have to be a certain class or race, or anything to be a smart kid, and everyone deserves an opportunity to learn

(Lindsay, principal at Wilson Elementary)

Stakeholders were aware of challenges the students face, yet they demonstrated a commitment to learning and ensuring all students have an opportunity to learn. Principal Lindsay's quote provides evidence of their level of commitment. The commitment to learning is a value that represents their own personal belief but is also seen throughout the school. Resource links on the webpage as well as community resources in the school office are demonstrative acknowledgements of the additional needs that accompany the young learners and the resolve to support those needs in addition to teaching. Within the classrooms, teachers are not only following the standard subject matter schedule, but are also incorporating additional subjects such as STEM, Dance, Leadership, and Marketing. Further demonstrating the school's value of diverse learning opportunities,

The responsibilities I have as a building leader...sometimes there are emergency situations that I have to respond to...it can be chaotic at times"

(Daniels, principal at Bay Jones Elementary)

Principals can sometimes feel like they are responding to emergency situations daily. Principal Daniels expresses the weight of leadership when it comes to responding to the various needs of the school. As the leader, they are responsible for ensuring they create optimal conditions for students and teachers to thrive. However, this can be a challenge when there are emergencies to respond to. For example, Principal Daniels shared how two young students had a misunderstanding that escalated into yelling in the classroom. The classroom teacher was visibly upset and needed reassurance that the school, i.e. the principal, held high behavior expectations for students. In this example, the principal had to focus on rebuilding trust with the teacher, reteaching behavior

expectations to the students, and reviewing protocols with all staff on cultivating the best learning environment.

The chaos of the school environment can also be felt in the building while staff strive to support the current needs of the day. Within the school halls, staff are quickly corralling students into their designated area for dismissal as well as reminding incoming parents of the dismissal policies. In the office, there is a chart on the wall that shows bus numbers and their routes. There is also a list of after-school activities and the days and times that correspond with each activity. The secretary takes a phone call and notes that the supervisor of one of the after-school programs will not be present today. The staff in the office take their cues and start moving quickly with this new information. This end of the school day dance requires much focus and a common understanding of procedures and protocol.

I am definitely that leader where climate and culture is top priority.
Coming into this role, that was my number one goal, building a positive
climate and culture in the building. I look at it from a teacher's lens.
Classroom management is key. You can't teach anything if you don't have
classroom management. I want my team to feel valued and once that is
there, then we can focus on effective tier 1 instruction

(Kellogg, Principal at Vista Elementary)

Effective instruction is important, but school leaders concede that they must build a positive school culture and climate first, which includes providing structural support, to ensure that teachers feel capable to teach. Within Principal Kelloggs' mindset is first

evaluating the current culture and climate and then doing their part to improve upon what has already been established. Principal Kellogg knew that climate and culture were lacking when she first took over as principal. The staff did not want to be there, the students did not enjoy school, and the parents did not have a formal system for providing feedback or collaborating with the school. She recognized the lack of shared norms, values, and vision as a school team, affected the overall environment. Her main priority was to transform the culture and climate of the school by working on the needs of teachers, students, and parents. She increased instructional and management support for teachers by providing staff that can support intervention and student behavior. She developed recognition programs for teachers and found ways for the staff to bond as a team. For students, she developed leadership opportunities, incentive programs, and extracurricular activities that helped increase student pride in the school. Finally, she helped establish a consistent parent-school organization where family members had a formal way to be active and collaborate with the school.

Stakeholders have a conceptualization of mutual benefit

We want to give to the school as much as we take, right, and that is talked about a lot in the program. And as soon as we feel like we're taking more than what we're giving back, then we have to scrutinize that. It can happen in terms of the increased number of placements and the fact that we've asked for people to take more students in a classroom, and that feels like we're asking more of them

(Monica, Teacher Education faculty member for 15 years)

Monica's quote demonstrates acknowledgement of the imbalance in the nature of the school-university partnership from the perspective of a university faculty member. Universities need schools for placements, and at times, the number of placements require more schools and classrooms to be accommodating. Even with the desire to "give" as much as they "take" it can still be felt as "asking more" of the school partners than actually giving to the school, as described in one of the faculty member interviews. The quote is reminiscent of how many scholars characterize the school-university partnership to favor the university's needs over the needs of the school (Walsh & Backe, 2013; Jefferey & Polleck, 2010). The benefits slanting toward the goals of the university may not be intentional. But this quote illustrates how it can happen. It also shows the dynamic of power in the relationship and who holds more influence on achieving their desired outcomes of the partnership.

So in terms of like, you know, mutual benefits, the school is benefiting from these college students that are coming in, who are being encouraged on all sides to take it really, seriously, and might someday work at the school

(Jessica, 4th year PST)

Preservice teachers have their own familiarity with mutual benefit. Jessica's statement expresses one PSTs understanding of mutual benefit as the placement school receiving quality teacher candidates. The PST recognized their own benefit in the relationship because they were learning how to teach, which had direct personal benefit. Other PSTs interviewed had not heard the term mutually beneficial. When explained,

they confessed to not considering the schools' benefit beyond the future consideration of more teachers in the school and district. The other PSTs in the study did wonder about the classroom students receiving additional support from the students completing their field work, but they admitted to a lack of knowledge of the academic needs of the classroom, so the benefit was unknown.

Because the benefits that I see within my class, like those kids, are excited to go with those college students, and they're always like, are they coming in today? You know, and they're very eager to go with them -" I got to read to the college students today!" And so the benefits of just having those kids in my class, working with the college students and seeing the confidence that comes out of it. Especially in the literacy part of it.

(Nina, 1st grade teacher at Vista Elementary)

As a 1st-grade teacher, Nina was excited to share how she perceived the mutual benefit of PSTs learning about literacy instruction and then practicing those skills with the students. She acknowledged the urgency of literacy improvement with her students. While there were initiatives and intervention programs in place to address the students' reading concerns, the students still needed more support. Nina recognized the value of having PSTs come to her classroom weekly and work with her students. She saw the confidence boost and enthusiasm in her students when they were paired with PSTs. She also expressed the benefits PSTs received in engaging in literacy practices with real children and believed it could help them be more effective teachers. When I asked about

tracking the benefits or outcomes of the partnership, she confessed that assessment of the benefit was observational and without formal practice.

“I think the partnership is definitely reciprocal. I think that they're giving us resources. Mostly human resources. And we're giving them experiential resources. You can never have too much support. And especially if we're looking from a literacy lens, we service students who are below grade level in some form and so being able to have that additional layer of support, that practice that is being provided to the students. And also we have seen students [preservice teachers] who go through the program who want to come back to our school and be a part of our team. So, it creates that partnership. It also allows our little students to be able to work with different faces, and to be able to learn from them as well.”

(Kellogg, Principal at Vista Elementary)

Principal Kellogg attributed additional people in the school, working with students in a variety of informal ways, as a mutual benefit. While their building was used for development of teaching skills in preservice teachers, their own students received exposure to college students and additional reading support. The principal also saw this partnership as an opportunity for future teachers to experience the school environment and then want to return as a regular teacher one day.

The participants in the study had varying degrees of experience with the term mutually beneficial. The faculty believe they stress the term and importance with preservice teachers who are entering field work. However, pre-service teachers were not

familiar with the term. PSTs claimed that their teacher education courses did not explicitly teach them how to interact with schools to ensure mutual benefit or that the school gets something out of the relationship. They had not really considered this concept while they were engaging in field experiences at schools. PSTs also mentioned a lack of information given to them about the demographics, needs, or historical background of the school they were placed in. Some might take the initiative to ask questions or do research to find out, others claimed that the principal never shared that information with them, so they did not know about the school.

Strategic vision is required to sustain effective partnership

“So yes, our focus has been on literacy over the last few years. We've had different initiatives that we thought would help, like after school tutoring, summer literacy program, community-based reading program...we set NWEA and state goals and we monitor our students' growth...it would be nice, like, if the university could support this effort”

(Daniels, principal at Bay Jones Elementary)

Assessing the academic landscape and developing a strategy to support what the students and teachers need is common to the role of principal as an instructional leader. Principal Daniels quoted various indicators of their reading needs in the building, as well as different initiatives that were meant to improve reading scores. Upon further discussion of preservice teachers in the building for field work, the principal wondered about the partnership goals. They mentioned the usefulness of PSTs more intentionally

supporting literacy efforts beyond reading with students or practicing a literacy instructional skill they just learned.

These preservice teachers coming into the building help us add on to our team later. And that comes from knowing that these future teachers are going through a program and then coming into our setting and seeing how our school and team operates, motivates them to want to be a part of this team once they finish the program.

(Kellogg, principal at Vista Elementary)

Principal Kellogg's statement represents the common vision around school-university partnership relations. Many see the relationship as a pipeline for future teachers in their own building. Thus, the priority becomes focusing on the needs of the PST or university to maintain a positive relationship. These needs include accommodating requests, securing mentor teachers, classroom space, and thoughtful feedback to promote their development.

While the partnership has the potential to move beyond seeing the preservice teacher needs as paramount in the relationship, the educators in the school also viewed it in that regard. Participants mentioned a *professional duty* or *courtesy* to help develop future teachers. Autumn, a teacher in the study, stated "I had good mentors when I was learning to be a teacher, and I want to be a good mentor to someone else, so they can say, 'I learned that from Mrs. Autumn.'"

Literacy challenges, growth, and initiatives were apparent in all three schools and in the messaging of the principals and teachers. They all talked about where the reading

achievement scores once were and their goal to make improvements. When I questioned the relationship with the local university and how that could be leveraged, they were receptive and hopeful. The consensus was that it would be great if the local university teacher preparation program could partner strategically with schools in the area. All three principals had a vision for how the existing partnership could support the needs of their school more, including tutoring, writing support, offering clubs, test prep, drama performances, professional development for teachers, and more. Therefore, it is not a question of lacking vision but more how to bridge current reality with future goals. However, the concept did not move beyond an idea into actionable steps. Pre-service teachers considered this same question as to what they could do to support schools beyond their own needs as developing teachers. They also thought this was a good idea and could be helpful to schools. However, they believed this would be up to the teacher preparation program to facilitate.

Synthesis of Findings and Model Development

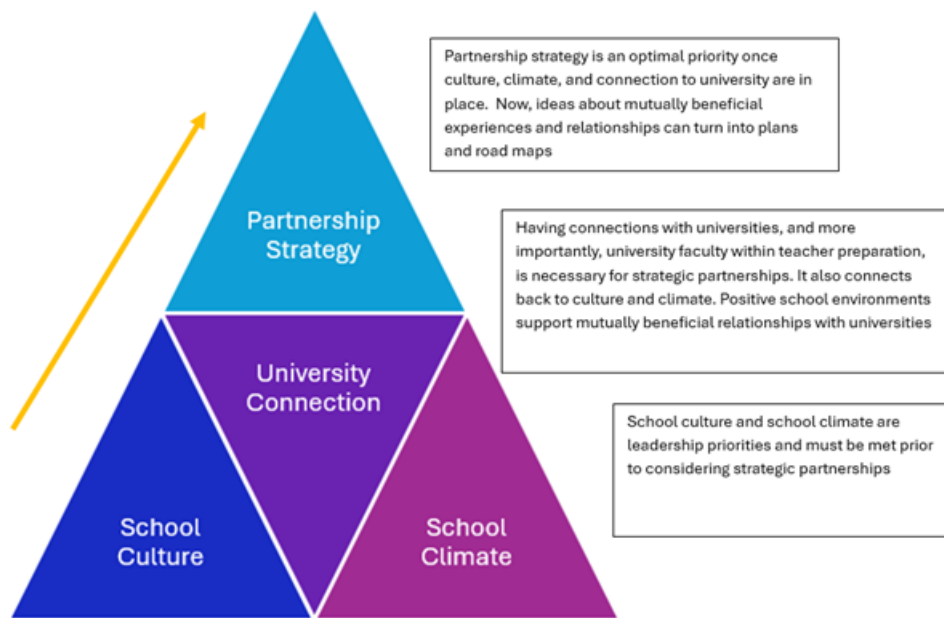
Extending the three primary themes, the study examines new cross-case insights that underpin the construction of a conceptual model depicting how school leaders should prioritize and navigate dynamics in a mutually beneficial school-university partnership. The findings reveal a persistent imbalance in the dynamics between the schools in the study and their university partners, with implications for how partnerships are structured and sustained. Both parties understand the initial goal of developing future teachers from the placements in the school; however, the schools are not receiving benefits in an

equitable way. The research also illuminates the opportunity for schools and universities to reimagine how partnerships can be mutually beneficial.

The findings highlight important factors that urban elementary school principals should likely prioritize in their role as school leader, which affects how they navigate partnerships. Figure 5 illustrates the hierarchy of components essential for prioritizing school needs within partnerships, with a focus on literacy. Participants identified environmental indicators that either support or hinder partnership navigation. These findings inform considerations for fostering future mutually beneficial relationships that enhance literacy initiatives in partner schools.

Figure 5:

Hierarchy of Principal Prioritizations in Mutually Beneficial Literacy Partnerships



The bottom of the triangle connects both *school culture* and *school climate*. These tenets serve as a foundation to the principal's priority and main concern in their leadership. Principals are routinely responding to the various needs of their school. While one principal in the study has regular "fires" to put out and respond to, another principal is combing over data that shows external factors impeding student learning. Both leaders are assessing their school needs and making plans to support. Within these environments, stakeholders are watching and feeling the effects of those needs and observing the principals' response to the challenges. One principal stated they wanted their teachers to feel valued and heard. While another principal wants all teachers to understand where the students are coming from and to hold high expectations for their potential. These scenarios present a challenge for the school-university partnership. As the leader of the school, they must prioritize the more pressing needs of the school.

Likewise, focusing on a culture of literacy is part of having a positive school culture. In each building I visited, it was clear that literacy was a priority. From the vocabulary lining the walls, to the reading achievement goals and data on various bulletin boards, to the after-school events meant to target reading skills. One school put on a Poetry Slam to get students excited about reading poetry and writing their own poems. Audience members left wanting to try their hand at poetry. Another school leader spent time during a school meeting to highlight the reading growth of students and to spotlight the work of some of the teachers who were intentionally targeting skill development to increase a students' vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Another principal used books as incentives for positive behavior and goal attainment. Students were excited to be

recognized and then have the opportunity to choose a book as a prize. This incentive program stemmed from the overall need of the school to increase reading achievement on state assessments as well as benchmark assessments. The teachers in the school corroborated that literacy is in fact a priority and described the school as having a culture that values literacy. The classrooms mirror the principals' focus by being print rich, displaying a variety of books, noting student growth, and having dedicated blocks for sustained reading and English Language Arts.

Moving up the triangle, *University Connection* is the next component and is attached to both culture and climate. I define the *University Connection* component as having personal relationships with faculty members at the university. Leithwood (2012) characterizes a strong school leader or principal as one who is able to connect with partners outside of the school to raise the academic success of the school. This is an important factor in their prioritization of school needs. The principals who had personal connections with faculty had varying degrees of engagement with the university and PSTs beyond the clinical component. For example, one principal noted their ability to call up the placement director and request specific interns for their school. Another principal had a personal relationship with one of the faculty members, and that translated to engagement in the school outside of the PSTs placement. One of the faculty members interviewed expressed how important their presence was in the school because they wanted to support the principal and believed in their vision. Another faculty member stated the schools they work closely with are "honestly those who have a relationship with them." One of the PSTs stated their mentor teacher did a good job of using the PSTs

to serve the needs of the students in the classroom during the field placements. They noted the teacher talked regularly with the PSTs' instructor and that they had a good relationship. The partnership alone is not enough of a connection to spark prioritization. From the participants in this study, personal connection was needed as well.

Rather than presenting a traditional hierarchical model, the figure depicts the interrelationships among components, underscoring that their effectiveness depends on their interaction rather than on individual or isolated achievements. *School Culture* and *School Climate* affect *University Connections*. Depending on what is valued (culture) by the school leader, and translated to the school environment (climate), connections to the university may alter. Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggested one need had to be achieved before the next need on the ladder. However, scholars have disagreed that the hierarchy had to follow a hierarchical pattern and that any need could take precedence over another (Flowers, 2014). But they agreed that the various needs must be met for a person to reach self-actualization.

In this vein, *Partnership Strategy* is the final component in the relationship hierarchy. Many principals had great ideas for how the partnership could be used to benefit the literacy goals of the school while also attending to the teacher development needs of the PSTs. They suggested pairing specific schools in the district with the university to address specific needs. Such as focusing on literacy professional development in one school because of the experience level of the teaching staff. Another school could be used for after-school tutoring which would provide PSTs with more instructional and relational building experience while offering interventions to

elementary students. But I define *Partnership Strategy* as not just having the ideas, but having action steps, road maps, and evaluative measures in place to ensure that it happens.

The leaders in this study had varying degrees of school culture and climate priorities. They had different levels of personal relationships with faculty from the university. They also had various ideas on how universities could better support school initiatives. However, the combination of those elements influenced how they strategized to center their needs in the partnership.

I acknowledge that varying contexts can influence principals' prioritization. The study sites varied from K-5 schools to PK-8 schools. While the focus was on elementary schools and principal prioritization, the additional grades could contribute to additional needs and priorities. Moreover, while the participants in the study represented multiple stakeholders within the school-university partnership, each school did not have the same representation of principal, classroom teacher, faculty member, and PST. This information is important when considering the findings and replication of the study.

Conclusion

The study presented three themes related to mutually beneficial literacy partnerships: school culture and climate, stakeholders' conceptualization of mutual benefit, and the strategic vision required to sustain effective partnerships. Cultivating and maintaining a healthy school culture and climate are a must, but principals should also prioritize developing stronger relationships with university faculty so their vision of

partnership can be achieved. Additionally, the perception of capital must be acknowledged in the partnership. As universities work with schools for the purpose of teacher education, they must recognize the common perception of the university holding more capital (Author, 2025). The acknowledgement of the power imbalance can be used within conversations around mutual benefit in the relationship.

The *Hierarchy of Priorities in Mutually Beneficial Literacy Partnerships* model was developed from the themes in the study. This model offers a framework for understanding principal priorities and necessary components within prioritization of mutual benefit. The research in the field is clear that the benefits in school-university partnerships are unevenly distributed (Jeffery & Polleck, 2010). The data also shows the urgency of academic improvement in the area of literacy in urban schools. By clarifying priorities and fostering a shared understanding of mutual benefit, principals and teacher preparation programs can move toward more strategic, equitable, and sustainable collaborations. These findings underscore the need for ongoing dialogue, intentional planning, and targeted support to ensure that partnerships truly serve the needs of both schools and universities, ultimately enhancing literacy outcomes for students.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Overview of Studies

Dissertation Pilot Study

The dissertation pilot study focused on three schools that had PSTs frequent their buildings for field experiences in teacher education. The placements of PSTs linked the school and university together in formal partnership. Much of the research on school-university partnership emphasizes the importance of reciprocity, ensuring both parties benefit (Jeffrey & Polleck, 2013; Walsh & Backe, 2013), in addition to the CAEP standards that explicitly state the expectation of mutual benefit (2025). Although TPPs are often benefiting from these formal partnerships, schools have needs that are not always heard or considered, such as perceptions about the value of the relationship and their ability to navigate various academic needs of their students and teachers.

The key findings in the pilot revealed themes that were present throughout the responses of all three participants. The themes yielded questions around the influence of power in partnerships; mutual beneficial relationships in partnerships; and opportunities to strengthen partnerships by focusing on the school. The influence of power, or perceived power, in the partnership was evident in the data. One participant stated, “I don’t make the decisions. The district tells me what to do” in response to how they utilize their current partnership relationship to benefit their students’ literacy needs. The influence of power was also evident in how participants talked about university faculty. There was a sense of reverence that teachers and the administrators had for the role of a

university faculty member. They believed the work at the university level was more intense and thus, were apologetic on behalf of university faculty when they did not follow through on promises made.

The theme of *who decides what is mutually beneficial?* was reflected in how participants described their current relationships with the university. All the participants acknowledged the value of the relationship, especially for developing future teachers. But when they were asked to think about how their needs were being served by the relationship, they were unable to express benefit. The participants described the university getting more out of the relationship, and a lack of follow-through when other, school-centered, opportunities were presented. Similarly to the theme around power dynamics, participants expressed a “matter of fact” view on the perceived priority of the relationship. They recognized the goal was to develop future teachers and even when other activities took place that may have supported some literacy needs, the main goal remained the same.

The final theme revealed *opportunities to strengthen the partnership by centering the needs of the school*. Participants gave examples on how the university could become better partners by celebrating current teachers and working with K-12 students in a consistent and sustained fashion. As TPPs continue to develop future teachers through collaboration with local schools, it is important to understand the context of the local school. If students in particular grades, or across the entire school are facing academic challenges, the TPP can support the effort to raise achievement. This requires more intentional partnership and collaboration but is one that teachers want. Concurrently,

focusing just on the development of new teachers, in an era of teacher shortages and retention crisis, can be seen as short sighted

Dissertation Extended Study

The dissertation extended study focused on three schools in one urban district and included 12 participants that held various positions in education. The focus of the study was to explore the factors that influence prioritization of mutually beneficial literacy partnerships. The findings revealed three main themes that serve as questions to consider: *How does culture and climate affect partnership?* It was learned in this study the extent to which school climate and school culture influence the priorities of the principal. This is the foundation upon which everything else is built. School culture includes the norms and values of the school, while school climate is the perception or feel of the environment (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Maslow's (1958) hierarchy of needs discussed basic level needs requiring fulfillment before subsequent needs could be met. In this vein, principals focus on school culture and climate before other needs can be met. This includes focusing on the partnership relationship. One principal mentioned "putting fires out all day" as an illustration to the chaos in the building at times and their responsibility as principal to diffuse the chaos. If there are basic needs competing for the attention of the principal, it is difficult to be fully focused on the school-university partnership, beyond what the university establishes.

The next theme revealed more information regarding mutual benefit: *How is mutually beneficial understood by stakeholders?* While mutual benefit is touted in the CAEP standards (Mahar, 2025), stakeholders in the school-university partnership do not all have the same understanding or experience with the term. Faculty members noted

using the term with PSTs prior to placements in the school. However, PSTs did not readily remember the term. They could speak about their own belief on how the school and PSTs benefit in the relationship but not mutual benefit. Furthermore, classroom teachers and principals were not aware of mutual benefit as an Education Preparation Provider requirement (Mahar, 2025). Another faculty member acknowledged the imbalance of benefit when they asked schools to take on more PSTs. This requires effort on the principal to choose mentor teachers, and effort on the classroom teachers to mentor the PSTs. Yet, even with this acknowledgement, the request is still made because of the program's need.

The final theme, uncovered from the data, was on strategic partnerships: *What is the strategic vision of the relationship?* One of the teachers in the study shared their desire to support PSTs as they are learning to be teachers, due to the mentoring they themselves had. This presented a pay-it-forward opportunity, as well as professional courtesy for this teacher. Another strategy for the partnership was in the development of future teacher applicants. Most of the principals in the study perceived the partnership would result in highly qualified teacher applicants returning to their school one day to support the academic needs of their students.

All three principals recognized their literacy concerns. Assessing the academic landscape and developing a strategy to support what the students and teachers need is common to the role of principal as an instructional leader. The principals quoted various indicators of their reading needs in the building, as well as different initiatives that were meant to improve reading scores. They promoted a culture of literacy, which included focusing on literacy achievement, intervention, and initiatives. When questioned about

the relationship with the local university and how that could be leveraged, they were receptive and hopeful. Upon further discussion of PSTs in the building for field work, the principals wondered about the partnership goals. They mentioned the usefulness of PSTs more intentionally supporting literacy efforts beyond reading with students or practicing a literacy instructional skill they just learned. All three principals had a vision for how the existing partnership could support the needs of their school more. So, it is not a question of lacking vision but how to bridge current reality with future goals. However, the concept did not move beyond an idea into actionable steps. PSTs considered this same question as to what they could do to support schools beyond their own needs as developing teachers. They also thought this was a good idea and could be helpful to schools. However, they believed this would be up to the TPP to facilitate.

Implications

The results of the pilot study and extended study challenge the idea of mutually beneficial partnerships. The studies have implications for universities seeking partnerships with schools. Especially TPPs who work with local urban schools to provide opportunities of observation and practice for PSTs. Before placing students or approaching schools for partnership initiatives, it is important for all parties to express needs and goals. As well as how measurement will be determined (Jeffrey & Pollock, 2012). This could influence how TPPs envision partnership work within the clinical experience portion of teacher development. This could also encourage schools to consider their own needs within clinical placements, and develop agreed upon requirements, so mutually beneficial partnerships can exist.

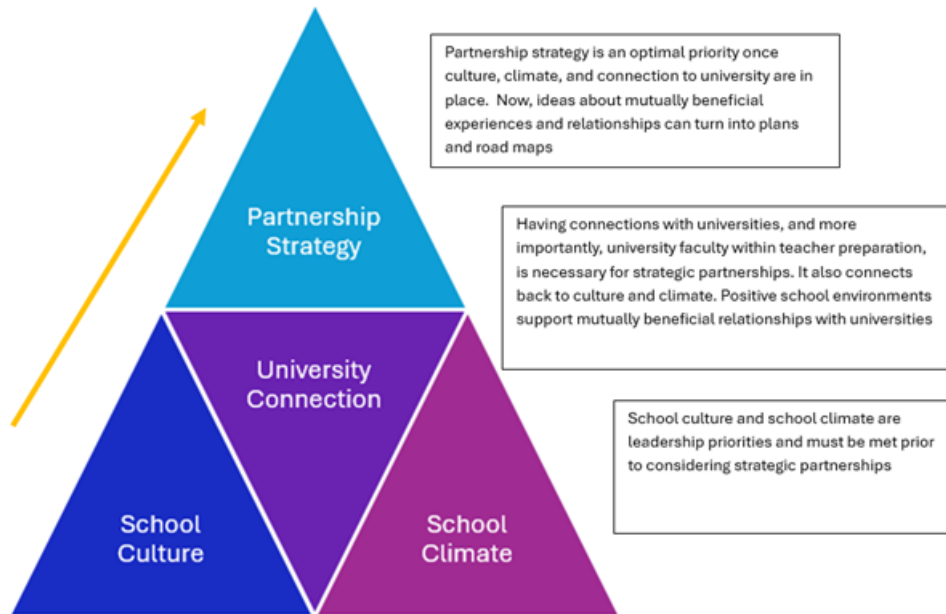
Synthesis of Findings and Model Development

Extending the three primary themes, the extended study examines new cross-case insights that underpin the construction of a conceptual model depicting how school leaders should prioritize and navigate dynamics in a mutually beneficial school-university partnership. The findings reveal a persistent imbalance in the dynamics between the schools in the study and their university partners, with implications for how partnerships are structured and sustained. Both parties understand the initial goal of developing future teachers from the placements in the school; however, the schools are not receiving benefits in an equitable way. The research also illuminates the opportunity for schools and universities to reimagine how partnerships can be mutually beneficial.

The findings highlight important factors that urban elementary school principals should likely prioritize in their role as school leader, which affects how they navigate partnerships. Figure 6 illustrates the hierarchy of components essential for prioritizing school needs within partnerships, with a focus on literacy. Participants identified environmental indicators that either support or hinder partnership navigation. These findings inform considerations for fostering future mutually beneficial relationships that enhance literacy initiatives in partner schools.

Figure 6:

Hierarchy of Principal Prioritizations in Mutually Beneficial Literacy Partnerships



The bottom of the triangle connects both *school culture* and *school climate*. These tenets serve as a foundation to the principal's priority and main concern in their leadership. Principals are routinely responding to the various needs of their school. While one principal in the study has regular "fires" to put out and respond to, another principal is combing over data that shows external factors impeding student learning. Both leaders are assessing their school needs and making plans to support. Within these environments, stakeholders are watching and feeling the effects of those needs and observing the principals' response to the challenges. One principal stated they wanted their teachers to feel valued and heard. While another principal wants all teachers to understand where the students are coming from and to hold high expectations for their potential. These

scenarios present a challenge for the school-university partnership. As the leader of the school, they must prioritize the more pressing needs of the school.

Likewise, focusing on a culture of literacy is part of having a positive school culture. In each building I visited, it was clear that literacy was a priority. From the vocabulary lining the walls, to the reading achievement goals and data on various bulletin boards, to the after-school events meant to target reading skills. One school put on a Poetry Slam to get students excited about reading poetry and writing their own poems. Audience members left wanting to try their hand at poetry. Another school leader spent time during a school meeting to highlight the reading growth of students and to spotlight the work of some of the teachers who were intentionally targeting skill development to increase a students' vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Another principal used books as incentives for positive behavior and goal attainment. Students were excited to be recognized and then have the opportunity to choose a book as a prize. This incentive program stemmed from the overall need of the school to increase reading achievement on state assessments as well as benchmark assessments. The teachers in the school corroborated that literacy is in fact a priority and described the school as having a culture that values literacy. The classrooms mirror the principals' focus by being print rich, displaying a variety of books, noting student growth, and having dedicated blocks for sustained reading and English Language Arts.

Moving up the triangle, *University Connection* is the next component and is attached to both culture and climate. I define the *University Connection* component as having personal relationships with faculty members at the university. Leithwood (2012) characterizes a strong school leader or principal as one who is able to connect with

partners outside of the school to raise the academic success of the school. This is an important factor in their prioritization of school needs. The principals who had personal connections with faculty had varying degrees of engagement with the university and PSTs beyond the clinical component. For example, one principal noted their ability to call up the placement director and request specific interns for their school. Another principal had a personal relationship with one of the faculty members, and that translated to engagement in the school outside of the PSTs placement. One of the faculty members interviewed expressed how important their presence was in the school because they wanted to support the principal and believed in their vision. Another faculty member stated the schools they work closely with are “honestly those who have a relationship with them.” One of the PSTs stated their mentor teacher did a good job of using the PSTs to serve the needs of the students in the classroom during the field placements. They noted the teacher talked regularly with the PSTs’ instructor and that they had a good relationship. The partnership alone is not enough of a connection to spark prioritization. From the participants in this study, personal connection was needed as well.

Rather than presenting a traditional hierarchical model, the figure depicts the interrelationships among components, underscoring that their effectiveness depends on their interaction rather than on individual or isolated achievements. *School Culture* and *School Climate* affect *University Connections*. Depending on what is valued (culture) by the school leader, and translated to the school environment (climate), connections to the university may alter. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs suggested one need had to be achieved before the next need on the ladder. However, scholars have disagreed that the hierarchy had to follow a hierarchical pattern and that any need could take precedence over another

(Flowers, 2014). But they agreed that the various needs must be met for a person to reach self-actualization.

In this vein, *Partnership Strategy* is the final component in the relationship hierarchy. Many principals had great ideas for how the partnership could be used to benefit the literacy goals of the school while also attending to the teacher development needs of the PSTs. They suggested pairing specific schools in the district with the university to address specific needs. Such as focusing on literacy professional development in one school because of the experience level of the teaching staff. Another school could be used for after-school tutoring which would provide PSTs with more instructional and relational building experience while offering interventions to elementary students. But I define *Partnership Strategy* as not just having the ideas, but having action steps, road maps, and evaluative measures in place to ensure that it happens.

The leaders in the extended study had varying degrees of school culture and climate priorities. They had different levels of personal relationships with faculty from the university. They also had various ideas on how universities could better support school initiatives. However, the combination of those elements influenced how they strategized to center their needs in the partnership.

Conclusion

The extended dissertation study presented three themes related to mutually beneficial literacy partnerships: school culture and climate, stakeholders' conceptualization of mutual benefit, and the strategic vision required to sustain effective partnerships. Cultivating and maintaining a healthy school culture and climate are a must,

but principals should also prioritize developing stronger relationships with university faculty so their vision of partnership can be achieved. Additionally, the perception of capital must be acknowledged in the partnership. As universities work with schools for the purpose of teacher education, they must recognize the common perception of the university holding more capital (Author, 2025). The acknowledgement of the power imbalance can be used within conversations around mutual benefit in the relationship.

The *Hierarchy of Priorities in Mutually Beneficial Literacy Partnerships* model was developed from the themes in the study. This model offers a framework for understanding principal priorities and necessary components within prioritization of mutual benefit. The research in the field is clear that the benefits in school-university partnerships are unevenly distributed (Jeffery & Polleck, 2010). The data also shows the urgency of academic improvement in the area of literacy in urban schools. By clarifying priorities and fostering a shared understanding of mutual benefit, principals and teacher preparation programs can move toward more strategic, equitable, and sustainable collaborations. These findings underscore the need for ongoing dialogue, intentional planning, and targeted support to ensure that partnerships truly serve the needs of both schools and universities, ultimately enhancing literacy outcomes for students.

APPENDIX A
CONFIRMATION OF IRB APPROVALS

Date: 7-31-2025

IRB #: IRB-FY2023-76

Title: Examining literacy instruction across multiple contexts

Creation Date: 10-5-2022

End Date:

Status: **Closed**

Principal Investigator: Mary Patillo-Dunn

Review Board: OU IRB

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt
Submission Type	Admin Closure	Review Type	Unassigned	Decision	Approved

Key Study Contacts

Member	Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	mcmillon@oakland.edu
Member	Mary Patillo-Dunn	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	patillodunn@oakland.edu
Member	Mary Patillo-Dunn	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	patillodunn@oakland.edu

IRB #: IRB-FY2025-172
Title: Examining Literacy Needs and Partner Relationships
Creation Date: 10-28-2024
End Date:
Status: **Approved**
Principal Investigator: Mary Patillo-Dunn
Review Board: OU IRB
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt
-----------------	---------	-------------	--------	----------	---------------

Key Study Contacts

Member	Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	mcmillon@oakland.edu
Member	Mary Patillo-Dunn	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	patillodunn@oakland.edu
Member	Mary Patillo-Dunn	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	patillodunn@oakland.edu

APPENDIX B

CONFIRMATION OF JOURNAL SUBMISSION TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

JOURNAL



Journal of School Leadership <onbehalfof@manuscriptcentral.com>

To: patilodunn@oakland.edu; Patillo-Dunn, Mary



Tue 10/7/2025 11:00 PM

07-Oct-2025

Dear Ms. Patillo-Dunn:

Your manuscript entitled "Interrogating Mutual Benefit in School-University Partnerships" has been successfully submitted online and is presently being given full consideration for publication in Journal of School Leadership.

Your manuscript ID is JSL-25-0103.

You have listed the following individuals as authors of this manuscript:
Patillo-Dunn, Mary

Please mention the above manuscript ID in all future correspondence or when calling the office for questions. If there are any changes in your street address or e-mail address, please log in to ScholarOne Manuscripts at [https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jsla_!!HXcXUKclxQ7238J0-wYQ3pTFvPwWUX6phySTEKPPM2ggRi-bZoiBppO1aAV--EW6L0yFc7HK1e-EjWa-D7RjwZ6--4E-IPdZCKuA\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jsla_!!HXcXUKclxQ7238J0-wYQ3pTFvPwWUX6phySTEKPPM2ggRi-bZoiBppO1aAV--EW6L0yFc7HK1e-EjWa-D7RjwZ6--4E-IPdZCKuA$) and edit your user information as appropriate.

You can also view the status of your manuscript at any time by checking your Author Center after logging in to [https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jsla_!!HXcXUKclxQ7238J0-wYQ3pTFvPwWUX6phySTEKPPM2ggRi-bZoiBppO1aAV--EW6L0yFc7HK1e-EjWa-D7RjwZ6--4E-IPdZCKuA\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jsla_!!HXcXUKclxQ7238J0-wYQ3pTFvPwWUX6phySTEKPPM2ggRi-bZoiBppO1aAV--EW6L0yFc7HK1e-EjWa-D7RjwZ6--4E-IPdZCKuA$).

As part of our commitment to ensuring an ethical, transparent and fair peer review process Sage is a supporting member of ORCID, the Open Researcher and Contributor ID ([https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://orcid.org/_!!HXcXUKclxQ7238J0-wYQ3pTFvPwWUX6phySTEKPPM2ggRi-bZoiBppO1aAV--EW6L0yFc7HK1e-EjWa-D7RjwZ6--4E-IPdZCKuA\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://orcid.org/_!!HXcXUKclxQ7238J0-wYQ3pTFvPwWUX6phySTEKPPM2ggRi-bZoiBppO1aAV--EW6L0yFc7HK1e-EjWa-D7RjwZ6--4E-IPdZCKuA$)). We encourage all authors and co-authors to use ORCID iDs during the peer review process. If you have not already logged in to your account on this journal's ScholarOne Manuscripts submission site in order to update your account information and provide your ORCID identifier, we recommend that you do so at this time by logging in and editing your account information. In the event that your manuscript is accepted, only ORCID iDs validated within your account prior to acceptance will be considered for publication alongside your name in the published paper as we cannot add ORCID iDs during the Production steps. If you do not already have an ORCID iD you may login to your ScholarOne account to create your unique identifier and automatically add it to your profile.

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to Journal of School Leadership.

Sincerely,
Akhil Ahluwalia
Journal of School Leadership
jsl.pra@sagepub.com

APPENDIX C

DISSERTATION PILOT – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

	QUESTIONS
1	What is your current role and title?
2	How long have you been in this role?
3	What are your job responsibilities?
4	What other professional experiences have you had?
5	How would you describe the demographic of the students you serve?
6	What literacy needs have you noticed from your students and/or fellow teachers
7	Does your school support clinical experiences – such as student teaching or other activities to develop future teachers? Describe
8	How have you, or others at your school, engaged with university faculty or preservice teachers to support the literacy needs of the school?
9	How would you describe the importance of school-university partnership to the school community?
10	What do you want universities, specifically Teacher Preparation Programs, to know about partnering with schools?

APPENDIX D

DISSERTATION EXTENDED STUDY – PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#	QUESTIONS
1	What do you understand about the Teacher Preparation Program's (TPPs) role in the partnership? What do you understand about the school's role in the partnership?
2	How do you define a successful partnership between your school and the TPP?
3	What are the key benefits you believe the partnership can bring to your school?
4	How do you define mutual benefit? Follow up – how is the current partnership mutually beneficial?
5	Describe any past or current partnerships with TPP
6	Describe the literacy needs of your school (students, teachers, and families)
7	How do you, as the principal, promote a culture of literacy?
8	How does the partnership with the TPP create or reinforce a culture of literacy?
9	When the TPP approaches you to place PSTs, what factors do you consider before agreeing to the partnership? What factors do you consider on which classroom/teacher to place Preservice teachers (PSTs) with?
10	What are your main priorities when partnering with TPPs?
11	How do you balance the needs of your school with the objectives and needs of the PSTs?
12	What types of resources (e.g., training, support, mentoring, classroom time) would you expect the TPP to provide the school and the PSTs in this partnership?
13	Do you intentionally think about how to make the experience meaningful for both your school and the PSTs in your class/building?
14	If yes, how? If no, why not?
15	What challenges do you face in establishing or maintaining partnerships with TPP
16	What concerns do you have regarding the quality of the PSTs placed in your school, and how do you address those concerns?
17	How do you navigate any logistical or organizational challenges, such as time constraints or scheduling, that might arise from hosting pre-service teachers?
18	How do you assess the impact of the partnership on student learning and teacher development? How do you track long term outcomes?
19	Looking back at previous partnerships, what factors have been most critical to their success, and what would you do differently in the future?

APPENDIX E

DISSERTATION EXTENDED STUDY – CLASSROOM TEACHER INTERVIEW

QUESTIONS

#	QUESTIONS
1	What do you understand about the Teacher Preparation Program's (TPPs) role in the partnership? What do you understand about the school's role in the partnership?
2	How do you define a successful partnership between your school and the TPP?
3	What are the key benefits you believe the partnership can bring to your school?
4	How do you define mutual benefit? Follow up – how is the current partnership mutually beneficial?
5	Describe the literacy needs of your school (students, teachers, and families)
6	How does your school promote a culture of literacy?
7	How do you as the classroom teacher promote a culture of literacy?
8	How does the partnership with the TPP reinforce a culture of literacy?
9	In what ways/other ways, do you think they could help?
10	How do you balance the needs of your classroom students with the objectives and needs of the Preservice teachers (PSTs)?
11	What types of resources (e.g., training, support, mentoring, classroom time) would you expect the TPP to provide the school and the PSTs in this partnership?
12	Do you intentionally think about how to make the experience meaningful for both your students and the PSTs in your class/building?
13	If so, how? If no, why not?
14	What concerns do you have regarding the quality of the PSTs placed in your classroom, and how do you address those concerns?
15	Looking back at previous partnership experiences, what factors have been most critical to their success, and what would you do differently in the future?

APPENDIX F

DISSERTATION EXTENDED STUDY – UNIVERSITY FACULTY INTERVIEW

QUESTIONS

#	QUESTIONS
1	What types of resources (e.g., training, support, mentoring, classroom time) do preservice teachers (PSTs) receive before doing their placements?
2	What do they learn about the school, classroom, needs, and demographics?
3	How does the program ensure a meaningful experience for both the pre-service teachers and the school?
4	How do you determine which schools to seek partnership with for field placements? Are there specific “look for’s” you need/would like to be in place?
5	What are the benefits you believe a partnership with a school brings to your PSTs?
6	What are the benefits the partnership brings to elementary schools?
7	How is culture of literacy reinforced or cultivated because of partnership?
8	As a faculty member in teacher education, how is the term “mutually beneficial” or “reciprocal” discussed with PSTs as it pertains to partnerships?
9	What challenges do you face in establishing or maintaining a partnership with schools?
10	How do you address concerns from teachers or staff about hosting pre-service teachers or participating in the partnership?
11	How do you assess the impact that PSTs have on student learning and teacher development? How do you track long term outcomes?
12	Prior to placement, do principals and faculty formally discuss the goals of the partnership? If yes, do they meet after the placement to determine if the goals were met? If not, why do you think this doesn’t happen?
13	What measures do you use to evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership in improving teacher quality and student outcomes at the partner school?
14	Looking back at previous partnerships, what factors have been most critical to their success, and what would you do differently in the future?

APPENDIX G

DISSERTATION EXTENDED STUDY – PRESERVICE TEACHER INTERVIEW

QUESTIONS

	QUESTIONS
1	What do you understand about why Teacher Preparation Programs (TPP's) partner with schools? Why do you think schools say yes and allow the partnership?
2	What are the benefits to each party?
3	How would you define a successful relationship between a school and the TPP?
4	What have you heard about “mutually beneficial” partnerships?
5	What are the key benefits you believe a partnership with a school brings to you as a PST? What are key benefits the partnership brings to the elementary school?
6	What literacy or other instructional skills are you expecting to develop/gain during your field experiences?
7	Thinking back to the school/schools you've had field experiences in, what literacy or other needs did they have? How do you know this?
8	What types of resources (e.g., training, support, mentoring, classroom time) did you/will you receive to prepare you for the internship or field experience
9	What kinds of classes did you have to prepare for going into the elementary school? What activities did you do / lessons learned to prepare you?
10	How do you know if your time in the classroom was beneficial to the students and to the teacher?
11	What do you think is most important to know and do to ensure both the school and TPP/PST benefit from the partnership? <i>Based on answer</i> , are these things done currently?

REFERENCES

- Adiele, E. E., & Abraham, N. (2013). Achievement of Abraham Maslow's needs hierarchy theory among teachers: Implications for human resource management in the secondary school system in rivers state. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*, 2(1), 140-144.
- Ainscow, M. (2016). Collaboration as a strategy for promoting equity in education: Possibilities and barriers. *Journal of Professional capital and community*, 1(2), 159-172.
- Alemán Jr, E., Freire, J. A., McKinney, A., & Delgado Bernal, D. (2017). School–university–community pathways to higher education: Teacher perceptions, school culture and partnership building. *The Urban Review*, 49(5), 852-873.
- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). (2018). A pivot toward clinical practice, its lexicon, and the renewal of educator preparation. Retrieved from <http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/cpc-aactecpreport.pdf> Warner & Hallman (2017)
- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). (2020). AACTE State Policy Tracking Map: State Actions to Support EPPs and Teacher

Candidates. <https://aacte.org/resources/covid-19-resources/state-actions-covid19/>.

Ancona, D., Williams, M., & Gerlach, G. (2020). The overlooked key to leading through chaos. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 62(1), 34-39.

Anderson, S., Leithwood, K., & Strauss, T. (2010). Leading data use in schools: Organizational conditions and practices at the school and district levels. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 9(3), 292–327.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15700761003731492>

Association of Teacher Educators (2023). Clinical Experience Standards (Third Edition). ate1.org/.

Barber, A. T., & Klauda, S. L. (2020). How reading motivation and engagement enable reading achievement: Policy implications. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 7(1), 27-34.

Bass, E. L. (2023). Using university–school partnerships to facilitate preservice teachers' reading and responding to student writing. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 66(6), 377-381.

Baumann, J.F., & Bason, J.J. (2011). Survey Research. In N. Duke & M. Mallette (2nd Eds). *Literacy research methodologies* (pp.404 - 426). The Guilford Press.

Bevel, R. K., & Mitchell, R. M. (2012). The effects of academic optimism on elementary reading achievement. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 50(6), 773–787.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231211264685>

Blair, E. (2015). A reflexive exploration of two qualitative data coding techniques. *Journal of Methods and Measurement in the Social Sciences*, 6(1), 14-29.

Blase, J., & Blase, J. (1999). Principals' instructional leadership and teacher development: Teachers' perspectives. *Educational administration quarterly*, 35(3), 349-378.

Booth, W., Colomb, G., Williams, J., Bizup, J., and Fitzgerald, W. (2024) *The Craft of Research*. (ed. 5th). The University of Chicago Press.

Bourdieu, P., Calhoun, C., LiPuma, E., & Postone, M. (Eds.). (1993). Bourdieu: critical perspectives. University of Chicago Press.

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40.

Bresler, L. (2002). Out of the trenches: The joys (and risks) of cross-disciplinary collaborations. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 17-39.

CAEP. (n.d.). <https://caepnet.org/standards/2022-adv>

Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., ... &

Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of research in Nursing*, 25(8), 652-661.

Carrillo, S. (2023). U.S. Reading and math scores drop to lowest level in decades. *NPR: Weekend Edition Saturday*. Retrieved from

[Test scores drop among U.S. students in reading, math : NPR.](#)

Casto, H. G. (2016). " Just One More Thing I Have to Do": School-Community Partnerships. *School Community Journal*, 26(1), 139-162.

Cervetti, G. N., Pearson, P. D., Palincsar, A. S., Afflerbach, P., Kendeou, P., Biancarosa, G., & Berman, A. I. (2020). How the reading for understanding initiative's research complicates the simple view of reading invoked in the science of reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 55, S161-S172.

Chambers, J., Pignolet, J., and Atwood, S. (2025). Michigan's reading scores continue slide for state's youngest students. *The Detroit News*. Retrieved on 9/2/2025 from [Michigan's reading scores continue slide for youngest students](#)

- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.
- Claridge, T. (2018). Introduction to social capital theory. *Social Capital Research*, 1(4), 1-44.
- Cloonan, A., Paatsch, L., & Hutchison, K. (2022). Teacher educators' perspectives on establishing school-university partnerships for preservice teacher research. *The International Journal of Learning in Higher Education*, 29(2), 71.
- Cochran, J. A. (2020). Helping Disadvantaged Urban Youth: Tutoring Lessons from University and Community Partnerships. In *The Essence of Academic Performance*. IntechOpen.
- Corbin, J. (2017). Grounded theory. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), 301-302.
- College Crisis Initiative. (2020). The college crisis initiative dashboard.
<https://collegecrisis.shinyapps.io/dashboard/>
- Corbin, J. & Strauss, A., (2015). *Basics of Qualitative Research*. (ed. 4th). SAGE.
- Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP] (2022). *2022 CAEP Standards*. Retrieved from [Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation](#)
- Cox, D. N. (2000). Developing a framework for understanding university-community

partnerships. *Cityscape*, 9-26.

Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Creswell, J., & Guetterman, T. (2019). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Pearson.

Da'as, R. A., Ganon-Shilon, S., Schechter, C., & Qadach, M. (2021). Implicit leadership theory: Principals' sense-making and cognitive complexity. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 35(3), 726-740.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2023). Response to how teacher education matters. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 74(2), 157-159.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2014). Strengthening clinical preparation: The holy grail of teacher education. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 89(4), 547–561.

doi:10.1080/ 0161956X.2014.939009

Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). Constructing 21st-century teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57(3), 300e314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487105285962>.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). How teacher education matters. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 166-173.

- Deal, T. E., & Peterson, K. D. (2016). *Shaping school culture*. John Wiley & Sons.
- DeGraff, T. L., Schmidt, C. M., & Waddell, J. H. (2015). Field-based teacher education in literacy: preparing teachers in real classroom contexts. *Teaching Education*, 26(4), 366-382.
- Denton, C. A., Foorman, B. R., & Mathes, P. G. (2003). Perspective: Schools that “beat the odds”: Implications for reading instruction. *Remedial and Special Education*, 24(5), 258–261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325030240050101>
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Donmoyer, R., & Wagstaff, J. G. (1990). Principals can be effective managers and instructional leaders. *Nassp Bulletin*, 74(525), 20-29.
- Dowell, S., Bickmore, D., & Hoewing, B. (2012). A framework for defining literacy leadership. *Journal of Reading Education*, 37(2).
- Eddles-Hirsch, K. (2015). Phenomenology and educational research. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 3(8).
- Elliott, V. (2018). Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(11), 2850-2861.

- Fink, E., & Resnick, L. B. (2001). Developing principals as instructional leaders. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82(8), 598-610.
- Francisco, S., & Henning Loeb, I. (2020). The site-based learning of vocational education and training teachers. *International Journal of Training Research*, 18(1), 1-7.
- Fraser, J. W. (2007). *Preparing America's Teachers: A History*. Teachers College Press
- Fullan, M. G. (1998). Leadership for the 21st century: Breaking the bonds of dependency. *Educational Leadership*, 55(7), 20-22.
- Ganon-Shilon, S. (2010). *Learning from Success as a Leverage for Professional Learning Community: Exploring the Process of Sustaining an Educational Reform*. Bar Ilan University.
- Gilstrap, D. L. (2007). Phenomenological reduction and emergent design: Complementary methods for leadership narrative interpretation and metanarrative development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 6(1), 95-113.
- Ginsberg, A., Gasman, M., & Samayoa, A. C. (2021). "When things get messy": New models for clinically rich and culturally responsive teacher education. *Teachers College Record*, 123(4), 1-26.

- Glaser, B. G. (2008). The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. *Grounded Theory Review*, 7(03), 3-12.
- Goldstein, D (2023). Amid reading wars, Teachers' College will close a star professor's shop. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/08/us/lucy-calkins-teachers-college.htm>
- Goldwyn, S. (2008). *Examining educational leaders' knowledge base: Investigating educational leaders' domain knowledge of reading*. The Florida State University.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1988). School-university partnerships: Rationale and concepts. In K. Sirotnik & J. Goodlad (Eds.), *School university partnerships in action (pp. 3–31)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1991). School-university partnerships: Fundamental concepts. *School of Education Review*, 3(2), 36-42.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1993). School-university partnerships and partner schools. *Educational Policy*, 7(1), 24-39.
- Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). How principals affect students and schools. *Wallace Foundation*, 2(1), 30-41.
- Gruenert, S., & Whitaker, T. (2023). *School culture rewired: Toward a more positive and*

Productive school for all. ASCD.

Guetterman, T. C., & Creswell, J. W. (2018). Educational research: *Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research. (6th ed.)* Pearson.

Gupta, A., & Lee, G. L. (2020). The effects of a site-based teacher professional development program on student learning. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 12*(5).

Handford, V., & Leithwood, K. (2013). Why teachers trust school leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration, 51*(2), 194–212.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231311304706>

Hilaski, D. (2020). Addressing the mismatch through culturally responsive literacy instruction. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 20*(2), 356-384.

Hitt, D. H., & Tucker, P. D. (2016). Systematic review of key leader practices found to influence student achievement: A unified framework. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(2), 531-569.

Howard, T. C., & Milner, H. R. (2021). *Teacher preparation for urban schools. In Handbook of Urban Education* (pp. 195-211). Routledge.

- Hoy, W. K. (1990). Organizational climate and culture: A conceptual analysis of the school workplace. *Journal of educational and psychological consultation, 1*(2), 149-168.
- Jeffery, J. V., & Polleck, J. N. (2010). Reciprocity through co-instructed site-based courses: Perceived benefit and challenge overlap in an urban school-university partnership. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 37*(3), 81-99.
- Jick, T. D. (1979). Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 24*(4), 602-611.
- Johansson, R. (2007). On case study methodology. *Open House International, 32*(3), 48-54.
- John, E. S., Goldhaber, D., Krieg, J., & Theobald, R. (2021). How the match gets made: Exploring student teacher placements across teacher education programs, districts, and schools. *Journal of Education Human Resources, 39*(3), 261-288.
- Jones, M., Hobbs, L., Kenny, J., Campbell, C., Chittleborough, G., Gilbert, A., ... & Redman, C. (2016). Successful university-school partnerships: An interpretive framework to inform partnership practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 60*, 108-120.

Kena, G., Hussar, W., McFarland, J., de Brey, C., Musu-Gillette, L., Wang, X., ... &

Dunlop, Velez, E. (2016). The condition of education 2016. *NCES 2016, 144*.

Kierstead, M., Georgiou, G. K., Mack, E., & Poth, C. (2023). Effective school literacy

culture and learning outcomes: The multifaceted leadership role of the principal.

Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 69(4).

Kindall, H. D., Crowe, T., & Elsass, A. (2018). The principal's influence on the novice

teacher's professional development in literacy instruction. *Professional*

Development in Education, 44(2), 307-310.

Kruger, T., Davies, A., Eckersley, B., Newell, F., & Cherednichenko, B. (2009).

Effective and sustainable university-school partnerships. *Beyond determined*

efforts by inspired individuals.

Lacina, J., & Block, C. C. (2011). What matters most in distinguished literacy teacher

education programs?. *Journal of Literacy Research, 43(4)*, 319-351.

Laman, T. T., Miller, E. T., & López-Robertson, J. (2012). Noticing and naming as

social practice: Examining the relevance of a contextualized field-based early

childhood literacy methods course. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher*

Education, 33(1), 3-18.

Lee, R. E. (2018). Breaking down barriers and building bridges: Transformative practices in community-and school-based urban teacher preparation. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 69(2), 118-126.

Lee, R. E., Eckrich, L. L., Lackey, C., & Showalter, B. D. (2010). Pre-service teacher pathways to urban teaching: A partnership model for nurturing community-based urban teacher preparation. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 37(3), 101-122

Legal Information Institute (2020). No child left behind act of 2001. Retrieved from https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/no_child_left_behind_act_of_2001

Leithwood, K. (2012), *The Ontario Leadership Framework with a Discussion of its Research Foundations*, Institute for Educational Leadership, Toronto, available at:

www.educationleadership-ontario.ca/application/files/2514/9452/5287/The_Ontario_Leadership_Framework_2012_-_with_a_Discussion_of_the_Research_Foundations.pdf

(accessed 25

November 2018)

Lipp, J., & Helfrich, S. R. (2016). Pre-service teachers' growth in understandings of best practice literacy instruction through paired course and field experience. *Reading*

Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts, 55(2), 4.

MacNeil, A. J., Prater, D. L., & Busch, S. (2009). The effects of school culture and climate on student achievement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 12(1), 73-84.

Mahar, D. (2025) Partnering to advance mutually beneficial partnerships. Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation.

[CAEP - Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation](#)

Marks, H. M., & Printy, S. M. (2003). Principal leadership and school performance: An integration of transformational and instructional leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(3), 370-397.

Maslow, A. H. (1958). A Dynamic Theory of Human Motivation. In C. L. Stacey & M. DeMartino (Eds.), *Understanding Human Motivation* (pp. 26–47). Howard Allen Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11305-004>

Masuda, A. M., & Ebersole, M. M. (2013). A qualitative inquiry: Teachers' attitudes and willingness to engage in professional development experiences at different career stages. *International Journal for Professional Educators*, 79(2), 6–14.

Michigan State University (n.d.). *Pre-Internship Guide*.

[Pre-Internship Guide - Teacher Preparation Program](#)

- Miller, P. M., & Hafner, M. M. (2008). Moving toward dialogical collaboration: A critical examination of a university—school—community partnership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(1), 66-110.
- Milner IV, H. R. (2012). But what is urban education?. *Urban education*, 47(3), 556-561.
- Minor, C. (2023). *Best practices in literacy instruction*. Guilford Publications.
- Murphy, C., & Lick, D. (2001). *Whole-faculty study groups*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Murphy, J., Elliot, S., Goldring, E. and Porter, A. (2006), *Learning-centered Leadership: A Conceptual Foundation*, Wallace Foundation, New York, NY.
- Murray, F. B. (1986). Goals for the reform of teacher education: An executive summary of the Holmes Group report. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 68(1), 28-32.
- Nardi, P. M. (2018). *Doing survey research: A guide to quantitative methods*. Routledge.
- National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2022). *National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAES]*. NCES: National Center for Education Statistics.
<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>
- National Center for Education Statistics. [The Condition of Education 2016](#).

National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). <https://nces.ed.gov/>

National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. (2010). *Transforming Teacher Education Through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy To Prepare Effective Teachers*. Retrieved from [ED512807.pdf](#)

Nations Report Card. (2025). Explore results for the 2024 NAEP Reading Assessment. [NAEP Reading: Reading Results](#).

Nelson, J., Papola-Ellis, A., & Giatsou, E. (2020). Developing literacy-minded educators: Authentic field-based teacher preparation. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 59(1), 17-38.

Nehring, J. H., & O'Brien, E. J. (2012). Strong agents and weak systems: University support for school level improvement. *Journal of Educational Change*, 13(4), 449-485.

Nettleton, K. F., & Barnett, D. (2016). Gatekeeper or lynchpin? The role of the principal in school-university partnerships. *School-University Partnerships*, 9(1), 20-29.

Officer, S. D., Grim, J., Medina, M. A., Bringle, R. G., & Foreman, A. (2013). Strengthening community schools through university partnerships. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 88(5), 564-577.

Overstreet, M., & Norton-Meier, L. (2020). Introduction: Making the Case for the Study of the “Messy Realities” in the Preparation of Teachers. In *Clinical Partnerships in Urban Elementary School Settings* (pp. 1-7). Brill.

Pardee, R. L. (1990). *Motivation Theories of Maslow, Herzberg, McGregor & McClelland. A Literature Review of Selected Theories Dealing with Job Satisfaction and Motivation.*

Parker, A. K., Groth, L. A., & Byers, C. C. (2019). Designing and implementing site-based courses in elementary teacher preparation. *The New Educator*, 15(2), 130-155.

Patillo-Dunn, M. L. (2025). P-12 literacy needs and university support: exploring educator perceptions of partnership. *School-University Partnerships*, 1-16.

Patton M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Petti, A. D. (2013). Seeking mutual benefit: University and districts as partners in preparation. *School-University Partnerships: The Journal of the National Association for Professional Development Schools.*

Plaatjies, B. (2019). Investigating principal capacity in literacy instructional leadership at selected primary schools. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 10(3),

136-60.

Reischl, C. H., Khasnabis, D., & Karr, K. (2017). Cultivating a school-university partnership for teacher learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 98(8), 48-53.

Robinson, V. M., Lloyd, C. A., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(5), 635-674.

Ronan, B., Bauer, J., Iunker, L., Sanford, J., & Berry, M. (2018). Building literacy partnerships across district and institutional boundaries. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 61(5), 577-580.

Ruhl, T. (2009) Professional learning schools as the site for new teacher preparation. Article presented at meeting of Advisory Committee for Professional Learning Laboratory Schools, Marylhurst University (Marylhurst, OR).

Sailor, W., McCart, A. B., & Choi, J. H. (2018). Reconceptualizing inclusive education through a multi-tiered system of support. *Inclusion*, 6(1), 3-18.

Saldana, J. (2009). An introduction to codes and coding. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 3(2).

Seidman, I. (2006). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in

education and the social sciences. *Teachers College*.

Seidman, I. (2019). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. (ed. 5th). Teachers College Press.

Selland, M. K. (2021). "Mutually Beneficial": Developing a clinically-based teacher education partnership with K-12 and university partners. *Educational Research: Theory and Practice*, 32(1), 43-47.

Shanahan, T., & Lonigan, C. J. (2010). The National Early Literacy Panel: A Summary of the Process and the Report. *Educational Researcher*, 39(4), 279-285. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X10369172>

Sparks, S. (2020, April 10). Coronavirus and school research A major disruption and potential opportunity. Education Week.
<https://www.edweek.org/technology/coronavirus-and-school-research-a-major-disruption-and-potential-opportunity/2020/04>

Stake R. E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. SAGE.

Stake, R. E. (1998). "Case Studies" in: Norman Denzin & Yvonna Lincoln. (eds.): *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*. SAGE

Stuckey, H. L. (2015). The second step in data analysis: Coding qualitative research data.

Journal of Social Health and Diabetes, 3(01), 007-010.

Sullivan, S., Plancher, A., Rabinovitch, I., & Kubasko, W. (2025). Co-visioning Clinical Practice: Developing a Shared Lens for Pedagogy With University and School Partnerships. In *Collaborating for Transformative Change in Education* (pp. 92-104). Routledge.

Tanner, K. & Altavena, L. (Aug. 2025). M-Step 2025: Find results by Michigan school or district. *Detroit Free Press*. [2025 M-STEP results for Michigan schools](#)

University of Michigan (n.d.). *Marsal Family School of Education*.

[Practicum | University of Michigan Marsal Family School of Education](#)

VanLone, J., Pansé-Barone, C., & Long, K. (2022). Teacher preparation and the COVID-19 disruption: Understanding the impact and implications for novice teachers.

International Journal of Educational Research Open, 3, 100120.

Walsh, M. & Backe, S. (2013). School-university partnerships: Reflections and opportunities. *Journal of Education*, 88(5), 594-607.

Wesley, K. Y. (2016). Teacher attrition, retention, and preservice preparation.

Winitzky, N., Stoddart, T., & O'Keefe, P. (1992). Great expectations: Emergent professional development schools. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(1), 3-18.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race ethnicity and education*, 8(1), 69-91.

Zeichner, K. (2010). Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in college-and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1-2), 89-99.

Zeichner, K., Payne, K. A., & Brayko, K. (2015). Democratizing teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 66(2), 122-135.

Zeichner, K. M., Darling-Hammond, L., Berman, A. I., Dong, D., & Sykes, G. (2024). Evaluating and improving teacher preparation programs. *Consensus Report*. National Academy of Education.

Zenkov, K., Ronan, B., Bauer, J., Iunker, L., Sanford, J., & Berry, M. (2018). Building literacy partnerships across district and institutional boundaries. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 61(5), 577-580.