PROCESSES TOWARD PARTNERSHIPS: HOW UNIVERSITIES AND K-12 SCHOOLS MAKE SENSE OF PARTNERING

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of

Educational Policy – Doctor of Philosophy

2017

ABSTRACT

PROCESSES TOWARD PARTNERSHIPS:
HOW UNIVERSITIES AND K-12 SCHOOLS MAKE SENSE OF PARTNERING

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Despite the increase in university and K-12 school partnerships over the last thirty years (Smith, 1992; Catelli, 2006), there is lack of scholarship devoted to the formation of partnerships. This qualitative study examines the relationships between a university and an urban K-12 school district, and the front-end organizational behaviors associated with the partnership. Using an auto-ethnographic approach, this study explores a key stakeholder's perspective of how the various partners make sense of their function, benefits and responsibilities in the partnership, and under what initial circumstances such partnerships are likely to thrive.

Keywords: Partnerships, university-school partnerships, sensemaking, urban partnerships, auto-ethnography, organizational behaviors

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This ain't no tall order, this is nothin' to me
Difficult takes a day, impossible takes a week
I do this in my sleep (Jay-Z, 2005)

This project has many inspirations and is dedicated to all the leaders and thinkers I come across along this journey. First and foremost is my family. To my wife, Christel, who has shared in this doctoral expedition and I in hers, thank you and I love you. To my two lovely daughters, Isabella and Simone who are the source of the fire that burns in me to make schools better places to learn in my own community, papi is coming home soon. To my parents, my mother, a librarian and my rock, and my father, a principal and my role model; thank you for always believing in me, even when I didn't. To my brother, Walker V, thanks for being my loudest cheerleader even from afar. To my other brothers, Tony and Marcus, thanks for keeping me down to earth, EPIC.

To my chair, Dr. Terah Venzant Chambers, thanks for getting me to the finish line and for all of those cursed sticky notes. Your support has been immeasurable, even the reverse psychology. To the rest of my committee, Dr. Marilyn Amey, Dr. John Yun and Dr. Elizabeth Heilman, thank you for all of your wisdom, support, and encouragement. Your scholarship is something I aspire to.

A very special thank you to the Assistant Dean for K-12 Outreach at Michigan State University, Dr. Barbara Markle. You saw something in my as an 8th grader and invested in me so that I could reach my full potential. To my colleagues in Michigan State University's Office of K-12 Outreach- Dan Schultz, Dr. Neelam Kher, Dr. Diane Jackson, Shirley Jackson, and Dr. JoAnn Andrees, Jacqueline

Gardner, Megan Papoi and so many others; thank you for being the sounding board I needed and a fantastic group of coworkers.

To the Michigan State University Educational Policy doctoral program staff, especially Dr. Michael Sedlak, Jodi Potter, Joni Burns, thank you. To my fellow Ed Policy crew, thank you for pushing me to limits I never thought possible in terms of scholarship and policymaking, especially Dr. Brian Boggs, Dr. Hugh Potter, Dr. Sean Williams, Dr. Christie Poitra, Dr. Jacqueline Jackson, Dr. Alan Hastings, Dr. Amanda Frazier, and Dr. Rachel Dickman.

To my colleagues on the Lansing School Board, thanks for helping me to see all the good that can happen when good politics meet good policy, especially Gabrielle Lawrence, Rachel Lewis, Shirley Rodgers, and Peter Spadafore.

To all of the legends in my life: Beverly's, Diamond's, Rocha's, Bellgowan's Starr's, Armstrong's, Atterbeary's, Baltimore's, Jones', Jenning's, Wilson's, Peters', Verser's, Green's, Joseph's, Beltran's, Reed's, Eskimos, Spartan Dawgs, and of course Big Reds.

To the soundtrack of this and every project: Jay-Z, DJ Quik, Drake, J-Dilla, Fela Kuti, Marvin Gaye, A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, D'Angelo, Little Brother, Soul II Soul, Sade, The Weeknd, and Damian Marley

And last, but certainly not least, THANK YOU to the central office, principals, teachers, and students of Flint Community Schools. I have learned far more from you than you have from me. Your resolve and commitment are characteristics I will brag about as long as I work in the field of education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter One: Background of a Partnership

University and K-12 school partnerships are an often-studied solution to challenges to school and district improvement efforts (Eddy & Amey, 2014; Lieberman, 1992; Smith, 1992; and Zeitlin & MacLeod, 1995). However, a limited number of studies have focused on the processes that form and sustain these partnerships. This qualitative study examines the relationships between universities and K-12 school districts and the front-end organizational behaviors associated with the partnerships in an attempt to determine how the various partners make sense of their function and responsibilities in the partnership and under what initial circumstances such partnerships are likely to thrive. This section will first define partnerships, outline the challenges in university and K-12 school partnerships, identify important organizational theories, and finally, highlight three key challenges to sustained partnerships- roles, motivations and conditions.

Voices From the Field

The principal at Lawrence Elementary School is having a long week, and its only Monday afternoon. Mrs. Donnelly started the day with two absent teachers, one who had retired abruptly over the holiday break, and another who had resigned. An hour into the school day and yet another teacher is going home on mental health leave, the result of working too many long hours under high pressure circumstances dealing with some of the district's neediest children.

Mrs. Donnelly, a 2nd year principal who is also working on her Ed.D., is increasingly frustrated by the disconnect between the district and school staff amid the disaster relief efforts in which her community was currently immersed. "I appreciate all of the attention we're getting, but how about we get some more teachers", she exclaimed. Flint has fallen victim to a community health crisis created by dangerously elevated levels of lead in the city's water supply. As a result of the water crisis, families have not been able to drink or cook with the water in their homes for more than 2 years, which has produced emotional stress for everyone in this ever shrinking community. Mrs. Donnelly's teachers (many of whom don't live in the city) now share this stress, as their students are emotionally fatigued and no one can drink the water in the school either. As head one of the state designated Priority Schools[1], Mrs. Donnelly is constantly anxious about the instructional practices of those teachers that remain and how to best provide them with the supports they so desperately need. "I don't have the time or money to waste on a program I'm not sure will work. Besides, my teachers are tired of jumping from one thing to another and frankly, we're all tired of being guinea pigs. What we need is Michigan State University to continue to provide us support."

Dr. Barbara Markle, faculty member and Assistant Dean for the Office of K-12 Outreach at Michigan State University, is hard at work organizing her notes prior to speaking to a group of school leaders. Her office coordinates a series of professional development sessions for administrators and teachers in Flint. As a former principal and state education department administrator, she has several decades of experience in improving the capacity of school leaders to drive change. There is urgency to the

[1] *Low-performing (Priority Schools)*. This term relates to a school that meets all of the following conditions:

- Must be located in the state of Michigan
- Ranked in the bottom five percent of schools on the state's Top-to-Bottom list according to student achievement on the state assessment (MDE, 2012, p.10).

moment for teachers and students, who have persevered under disaster response conditions.

The Office of K-12 Outreach at Michigan State University is charged with connecting researchers and experts to district and school-level staff. As the Director, Dr. Markle employs several former district and school administrators to serve as mentors for in-service practitioners and to facilitate workshops. The purpose of the workshops is to heighten the ability of school staff to assess their own instructional practices, facilitate coherence between district administration and school staff, and develop strategies of supports for students. “This is not about Michigan State University, this is about Flint and how to best support you in reaching your students,” Dr. Markle proclaimed.

The shared sense of urgency and recognition of need between the two educators, Mrs. Donnelly and Dr. Markle, underlines an important aspect of professional learning in education- the university and K-12 school partnership. Much public, political, and scholarly attention has been paid to the state of US universities and K-12 schools. K-12 schools and districts are under ever-increasing pressure to produce results and perform under federal and state education policy guidelines (Murphy, 2009; McDermott, 2011) structured to hold teachers and administrators accountable for the achievement of students.

Universities, also on the radar for performance, are increasingly involved in community development, including schools (Altbach, Berdahl & Gumort, 1999, Bok, 2015). To this end, the involvement of universities into the functions of K-12 schools can be formatted as a partnership between the two institutions. Goodlad (1988) proposes that collaboration between schools and universities creates the opportunity for simultaneous individual and institutional renewal by infusing the workplace with expertise and knowledge from inside and outside the setting.

State Context

Though the community in Flint has faced significant challenges, the educational landscape in the state of Michigan overall has lagged behind other states in terms of student achievement. In recent reviews of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), as seen in Table 1.1, Michigan has often ranked in the lowest third of states in terms of student proficiency and the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) demonstrates a wide test score gap along racial/ethnic and income levels (O'Keefe, Pennington & Mead, 2017). In addition, only 1/3 of 11th grade students meet college readiness benchmarks despite the state having implemented Common Core State Standards. Furthermore, several reform efforts have been initiated that include the adoption of school choice policies that have led to 10% of students statewide now attending public charter schools, and the emergence of state governance interventions where the state takes over operations of policy, fiscal, and operational duties for struggling schools and districts (O'Keefe et al., 2017).

Table 1. Michigan NAEP Rankings: 4th and 8th Grade Reading and Math

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015
4th Grade Reading	28th	30th	30th	34th	35th	38th	41st
4th Grade Math	27th	32nd	32nd	38th	41st	42nd	42nd
8th Grade Reading	27th	29th	32nd	32nd	28th	32nd	31st
8th Grade Math	34th	33rd	36th	36th	36th	37th	38th

Note: Rankings are among all 50 states
Source: NCES, NAEP Data Explorer

Table 2 below demonstrates from the fiscal side, from 1994-2002, that the state's per pupil financial support system had detrimental effects on both central cities and low-income suburbs as they both lost students at nearly three times the rate of rural districts. Furthermore, foundation grants from the state to central city and low-income suburbs increased at less than one-third the rate of those same rural districts (Arsen & Plank, 2003). "Enrollment decline overwhelmed the fiscal benefits of modest foundation increases in both central cities and low-income suburbs. In both groups of districts total real foundation revenue has fallen significantly since [1994]" (Arsen & Plank, 2003, p. 23).

Table 2. Michigan Growth of Foundation Grants and Enrollment by School District Type

	Average Annual Growth Rate 1994 to 2002		
School district type	Real per pupil foundation grant	State aid pupil count	Total foundation revenue
Central City	0.80	-1.64	-0.84
Low-income suburb	0.79	-2.16	-1.37
Middle-income suburb	0.99	0.51	1.50
High-income suburb	-0.01	2.20	2.19
Rural	2.47	-0.58	1.89

Note: All growth rates are derived from pupil-weighted means for each school district grouping.

Flint Community Schools Context

Flint is an urban community located 50 miles from Michigan State University's campus. The city has seen large-scale population shifts that have coincided with the industrial changes that have plagued much of the region over the last twenty years. Simultaneously, Flint Community Schools (FCS) has seen stark enrollment declines that have resulted in fiscal challenges. From 1997-98 to 2014-15, the district's enrollment dropped from a pupil count state ranking of 4th (25,395 students) to 42nd (6,471 students) (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2017. This coincided with a decline in state rankings for local contributions to general fund revenues per pupil from 193rd ($1,108) in 1997-98 to 262nd ($2,012) in 2014-15 (MICEPI, 2017). Even as FCS revenues increased, they lagged even further behind other districts in the state. Table 3 highlights a startling decline over the last four years where the district's general fund balance fell from $21.9 million to $112,000 (MICEPI, 2017). In addition, the state's accountability systems have perennially ranked Flint's schools at or near the bottom of the state with the percentage of students proficient in math and reading (3-8 grade) dropping from 11.9% in 2012-2014 to 5.6% in the current academic year of data (MICEPI, 2017).

Table 3. Flint Community Schools Accountability Data 2016-2017

Flint Community Schools			
Description	**Two Years Prior**	**Prior Year**	**Current Year**
Students Proficient in Math and Reading 3-8	11.9%	13.6%	5.6%
Students Proficient on MME (in all subjects)	2.5%	1.7%	2.1%
4 year Graduation Rates	51.60%	58.3%	59.35%
Dropout Rate	20.53%	23.68%	21.74%
Average Class Size K-3	20.6	17.9	15.3
Total number days instruction provided	177	167	176
General Fund Balance	($21,964,181.00)	($5,555,858.00)	($112,097.00)

Data Source: CEPI & MDE, 2017

Michigan State University Context

Michigan State University (MSU) is a large, public university located in the East Lansing, Michigan. It has a legacy of teaching, research, and service, and is one of seventy land-grant colleges instituted by the Morrill Act of 1862. MSU's mission statement is focused on creating knowledge with the aim of addressing societal needs and includes goals of preparing students to contribute to a globalized society, conduct research to expand learning and stimulate change, and engage both local and global communities in innovation (Michigan State University, 2017). Faculty members at MSU are each expected to contribute to instruction, research, and public service. Michigan State University is highly ranked among US higher education institutions in elementary and secondary education, higher education, curriculum and instruction, educational psychology, and administration/supervision (Michigan State University, 2017). As Table 4 indicates, MSU spends 15.2 % of its annual $1.7 billion budget on public service activities, demonstrating that service is an emphasis of the institution in terms of resource allocation- public service enjoys a larger budget allocation than either scholarships or academic supports.

Table 4. Michigan State University 2015-2016 Fund Expenditures

Type of Expenditure	Amount	Percentage
Instructional	$673,275,103	39.2%
Scholarships and Fellowships	$197,155,581	11.5%
Academic Support	$199,968,198	11.6%
Student Services	$53,607,937	3.1%
Research	$410,046,562	23.8%
Public Service	$260,830,733	15.2%
Auxillary Enterprise	$377,402,164	21.9%
Institutional Support	$140,930,298	8.2%
Operation and Maintenance of Plant	$92,859,894	5.4%
Non-Mandatory Transfers	$715,063,484	-41%
Mandatory Transfers	$28,541,406	1.7%
TOTAL	$1,719,554,394	100%

Source: Michigan State University, 2017

MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach

Established in 1997, the Office of K-12 Outreach mission is to bridge research to practice. The Office's work is grounded in a student-centered, systemic model that emphasizes capacity building, collaboration and deep support. Working with schools and districts in partnership, the technical support offered by the Office of K-12 Outreach is customized to meet each partner's specific needs. The foci of the support and services are leadership development; collective capacity building for system alignment; effective use of data; rapid turnaround of schools and districts; addressing achievement gaps;

and educational coaching.

University- K-12 School Partnerships

Defining Partnerships

Mohr and Spekman (1994) define partnerships as "purposive strategic relationships between independent firms who share compatible goals, strive for mutual benefit, and acknowledge a high level of mutual interdependence They join efforts to achieve goals that each firm, acting alone, could not attain easily" (p. 135). Tuckman (1965) defines the fundamental stages of group development as forming, storming, norming, and performing (Tuckman, 1965) and partnerships are collaboration between two previously established groups. Partnership in an educational sense, as outlined by Epstein (2011), is an approach to the sharing of responsibilities for children's learning and development. Baker (2011) submits three points of inquiry into school-university partnerships organizational arrangements: 1) schools/districts 2) universities/colleges and 3) the joint entity recognized as the partnership.

Research suggests that partnerships between K-12 and higher education institutions might help address social challenges (Bok, 1982). Among these problems are the obstacles facing academically challenged schools and districts in urban areas. As universities and urban schools increase the number of collaborations, it becomes more necessary to understand the depth and complexity of these partnerships. Kirchenbaum and Reagan (2001) offer perspectives from each side:

> From the university's perspective, some partnerships are motivated by the desire for university personnel and students to make a positive contribution to the community around them. In other cases, working in the schools directly helps the

university by providing meaningful field experiences for their students and research opportunities for faculty.

From the school district's viewpoint, university collaboration contribute to the district's building instructional capacity and additional opportunities for students to learn (Restine, 1996), better training opportunities for teachers and professionals who will eventually work in urban schools and with students who are culturally different from themselves (Restine, 1996; Romo, 1999), and additional volunteer mentors, tutors, and other resources (Brent, 2000; Brown, 1998) in (Kirchenbaum & Reagan, 2001).

Focusing more specifically on the partnership process, studies of essential elements of effective partnerships (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, & Cook, 2000), include moving beyond a cooperative dynamic toward collaborative relationships (Kirschner, Dickinson, & Blosser, 1996) and building trust through consistent communication between partners (Lewison & Holliday, 1997). Collaboration between universities and K-12 schools is "both valuable and manageable" and that "partnership programs have positive impacts on student achievement, and this includes low-income students of color in low-performing schools" (LaPoint & Jackson, 2004, p. 26). Understanding the dynamic relationships between universities and schools can be a challenge unless there is effort directed toward comprehending the function of the initial stages of the partnership- including what makes the partnership necessary, why are the partners choosing to partner with one another, and what is understood about the benefits and responsibilities of each partners.

Problem Statement

Notions about how to reform K-12 schools in this era of high stakes accountability have taken on governance (Chubbb and Moe, 1990; Cooper and Fusarelli, 2009; Kirst and Wirt, 2009), funding (Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine, 1996; Hanushek, 2006) and teacher compensation (Woessman, 2011). Further, studies on teacher training (Ballou and Podgursky, 2000; Darling-Hammond, et.al, 2005) and neighborhood effects (Burdick-Will, et. al, 2011) attempt to examine influences for teachers and students on student achievement. Lots of resources have been targeted toward the improvement of our nation's struggling schools (Borman & D'Agostino, 1996; Duncombe, Lukemeyer, & Yinger, 2008; Vinovskis, 1999) yet as in the case of Michigan, student achievement outcomes fall short of desired goals (O'Keefe, Pennington, Mead, 2017).

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2005) states were granted more autonomy in addressing struggling schools, yet the law establishes an expectation for accountability for underperforming schools (USED, 2015). For its part, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has developed an approach to ESSA that includes designating the struggling districts as 'Partnership Districts' where school districts are identified as "those with low academic performance, as well as other areas of need. The MDE will provide intensive supports to LEAs with at least one "F" school (as identified by the state's accountability system) and may work with LEAs with "D" schools on an early warning basis" (MDE, 2017). This partnership model is intended to comprise a "net of local and state supports and resources to help communities provide each student with the access and opportunity for a quality education"(2017). With Michigan's approach to school improvement being inclusive of a partnership model it seems appropriate to develop more thoughtful consideration of partnerships- both the success and challenges.

The literature on university-school-community partnerships is rich. From studies of university engagement around social work (Soska & Butterfield, 2004) to community action projects (Harkins, 2013) research around partnerships is bountiful. Some studies have focused on these types of collaborations aimed at improving outcomes for students (Epstein, 2001) and include professional development schools (Higgins & Merickel, 1997) and service learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Most of these studies center on the outcomes of a particular partnership, however, research that examines the formation of these partnerships in a discerning way is insufficient and this research is even less inclusive of policy making, administrative and practitioner lens. Where several studies have concluded that a disconnect between partnering institutions is often the reason for a lack of sustainability or effectiveness, understanding why and how partnerships form could be useful to each of the partnering institutions or state agency that mandates them.

In assessing university and K-12 school collaborations, Catelli (2006) submits an urgent and ethical obligation for schools and universities in addressing social issues that emphasizes partnerships motivated by the consequences from not closing achievement gaps. One challenge involves universities and K-12 schools often having goals that conflict with one another- universities are accountable for intellectual training, research, and critical examination of knowledge; K-12 schools are accountable for comprehensive education for students of a social backgrounds (Smith, 1992).

This presents complex challenges in partnerships as the university emphasis is usually on research and publishing, which dissuades faculty involvement in collaborative projects because the time commitment is far too extensive (Smith, 1992). One consistent critique of university and community partnerships as the university partner benefitting from the collaboration far more than the community (school) partner (Harkins 2013). This 'pressure to publish' is related to "the more books and articles professors produce, the higher their paycheck" (Bok, 2013, p. 329) demonstrating that faculty incentives are more tied to research than teaching or service. When research is overly dominant in the evaluation and professor tenure process, teaching takes a secondary position, and outreach/service is a distant tertiary priority (Bok, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

Given the lack of scholarship devoted to the formation of partnerships, this qualitative study examines the relationships between universities and K-12 school districts and the front-end organizational behaviors associated with the partnerships in an attempt to determine how the various partners make sense of their function and responsibilities in the partnership, and under what initial circumstances are such partnerships likely to thrive. The study analyzes how these relationships, especially the formal partnership, were established and organized. In addition to describing the informal relationships and formal partnership, the auto-ethnographic approach employed in this study allows for analysis of the perception of benefits to each organization that result from this partnership.

Research Question

I examine a research question that stems from the research purpose outlined above. This question reflects the relationships from both university and K-12 school perspectives, as well as those who play a role in these relationships.

1. How do the various partners make sense of their roles, both formally and informally, in a university and K-12 school partnership?

This study is driven by an auto-ethnography of my experience as a program coordinator for the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders and also includes document analysis in order to answer these questions. The auto-ethnography focuses on three critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954) that serve to illuminate important aspects of a partnership and the manner in which key players in each organization make sense of their function within the partnership; and their perceptions of responsibilities and benefits from participation in the partnership.

Rationale and Significance

Despite the increase in university and K-12 school partnerships over the last thirty years (Catelli, 2006; Smith, 1992) little research has examined the formation of these partnerships in a profound way. In general, these studies are focused on the outcomes once a partnership has been formed, this study instead focuses on the partnering institutions and the process each partner uses to understand their responsibilities for and benefits from the partnership. The auto-ethnographic approach used in this study provides a rich analysis from the perspective of a participant within a partnership that explores such processes.

Researchers on the higher education and K-12 sides, as well as policymakers, have posited the need for more thoughtful research on these partnerships. It is my hope that this research will be informative for policymakers and policy implementers at both the university and school district levels when making decisions on when and how to partner to improve instructional practices.

Partnerships between universities and schools include dynamic tensions of interdependency (Shafitz et al., 2011) and it becomes necessary to understand the degree of impact of these tensions within and between partners. This includes the recognition that power relations foster specialization and division of labor that leads to the creation of interdependent organizations (Shaffitz et al., 2011). These power and political factors contribute to the shape and development of a partnership and survival of the partnership is not necessarily prioritized over the survival of the individual partners. A study of the influence of roles, motivations, and conditions in the initial phases of the formation of a university and K-12 school partnership can help address a void in the research with respect to perceptions of responsibilities and benefits associated with these partnerships. Studying these influences along policy making, administrative and practitioner perspectives can inform decisions at each of the levels and collectively for the partnering institution.

From a practical lens, the Michigan Department of Education has formatted its approach to ESSA based on a partnership model for low performing schools that could include universities (MDE, 2017). The timeline for formalizing these partnerships is expected to be short. The likelihood that power and political tensions could derail these partnerships could be mitigated should both universities and K-12 schools better understand each of their responsibilities within the partnership and have reasonable expectations of benefits. Research into the process each partner uses to understand the roles, motivations, and conditions for the partnership can help facilitate this understanding of responsibilities and benefits.

Michigan State University, with its history of success with regards to rankings of Colleges of Education and founding mission of service in response to the social challenges of Michigan, is situated as a partnering resource for schools and districts under MDE's proposed partnership model. Having devoted substantial resources to public service and establishing both a university-wide Office of Outreach and

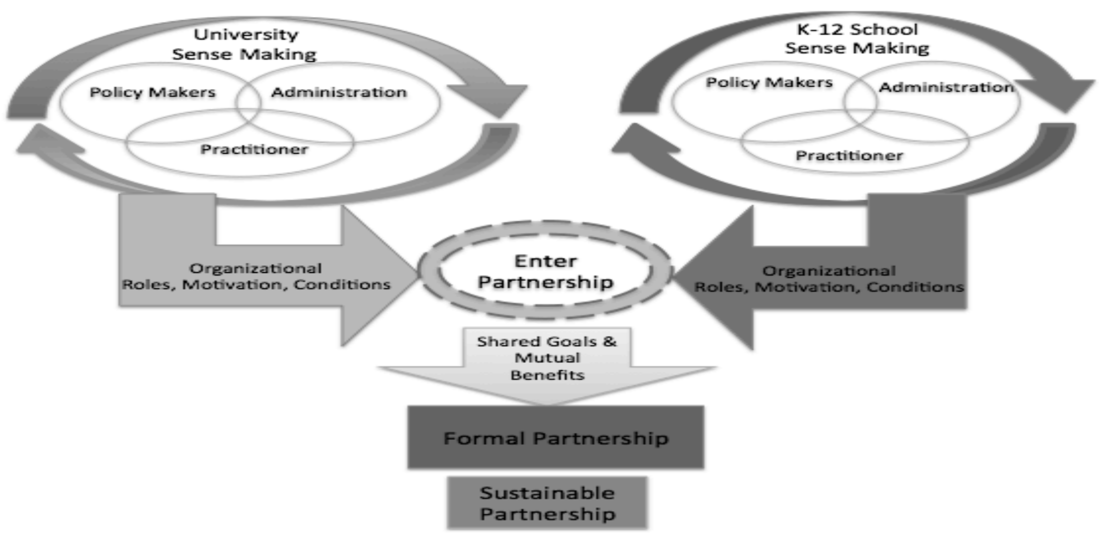
Engagement and an Office of K-12 Outreach in the College of Education, MSU seems primed to continue community development partnerships into the future. Yet, even MSU, with commitment, resources and infrastructure to support outreach, can gain better understanding of the responsibilities and benefits when deciding to partner with external organizations.

In this age of high stake accountability (McDermott, 2011), policymakers who have a role in developing school reform programs that encourage or mandate university and K-12 school partnerships often do so without a full understanding of the practical implications (Zimpher & Howey, 2004). The cultural and social differences between these institutions can prove to be challenging obstacles and result in a waste of resources even when each partner intends to support the other. Though many success stories exist, much can be learned for policymakers by analyzing the progression of a partnership that had less favorable results for either or both partners (2004).

Conceptual Framework

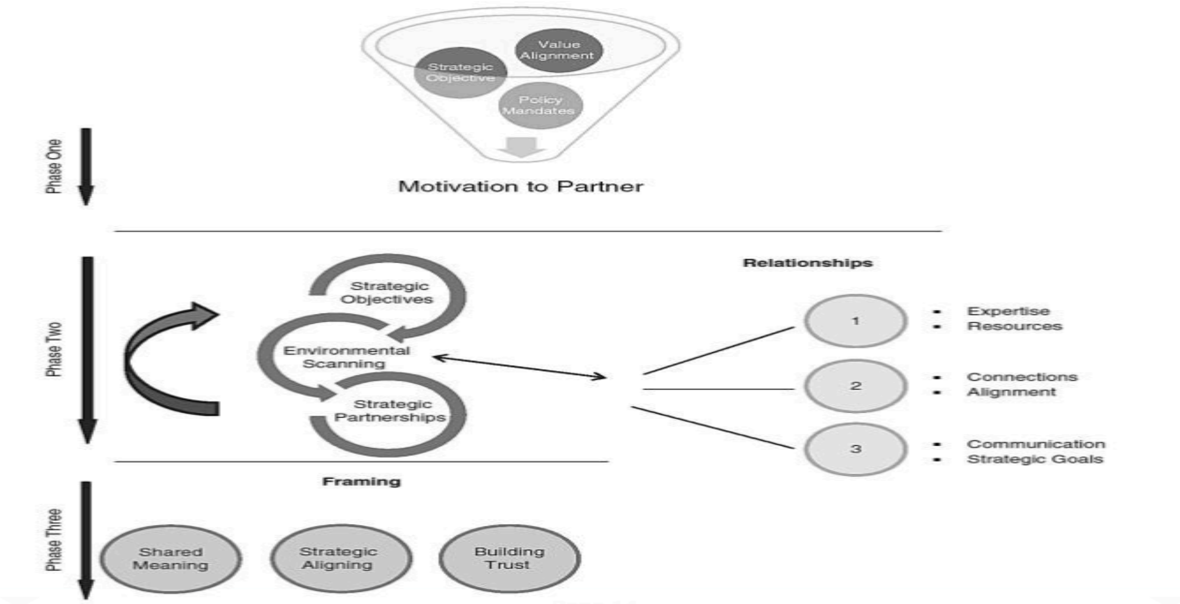
In an attempt to form a conceptual framework I connect research on partnerships in education and the functions within and between organizations. This is accomplished by joining research on forming of strategic partnerships by Eddy and Amey's (2014) with Weick's (1995) organizational sense making. It becomes necessary to combine these two notions because the study of partnerships in education is complex and involves taking into account mutuality characteristics, the level of partner involvement and the influence of leadership (Shinners, 2006). This study's conceptual framework (see Fig. 1) highlights multiple layers within and between institutions-policy makers, administrators, and practitioners. It is necessary to understand the motivation and purpose on which partnerships are formed and the manner in which the partnership supports the achievement of institutional goals and objectives (Eddy & Amey, 2014). Further, this study describes my perspective on how actors understand the roles conditions and processes for organizing toward a shared outcome and sustained partnership. Weick's (1995, 2015) sensemaking is a particularly useful framework for comprehending how groups create meaning as "(s)ense making involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action" (Weick, et al. 2015, p.409).

Figure 1. University-K-12 Partnership Sensemaking Conceptual Framework



The strategic partner model (Eddy & Amey, 2014) (Fig. 2) centers on three phases- pre-partnership, partnership development, and partnership capital. Phase One includes the importance of precursors and motivations for partner organizations in joining with others- specifically, policy mandates, value alignment, and strategic objectives. Phase Two analyzes the practices associated with formal and social processes in a partnership- contracts, external mandates, and relationship building. In Phase Three, partnership capital is the evolution of a partnership as the result of creating shared meaning, building trust and aligning strategic goals.

Figure 2. Strategic Partnership Model



Eddy and Amey (2014) focus their attention on the comparison of partnerships formed along traditional processes versus strategic partnerships. Where traditional partnerships are the result of individual interests that ultimately require the involvement of others (Amey, 2010) as a matter of happenstance, strategic partnerships are "intentionally formed based on goal alignment among partners that helps create more staying power" (Eddy & Amey, 2014, p. 1). The case studies they include in their analysis underscore how key difference between traditional and strategic partnerships lie in how individuals in strategic partnerships "pursue connections based on how the partnership helps meet institutional strategic goals" (Eddy & Amey, 2014, p.2). It's the intentionality in the formation of a partnership, where the goals of the partnership are aligned with 'mission and vision' of the partner organizations that results in deep change (2014).

Eddy and Amey (2014) highlight the influence of both roles and motivators in outlining their model for sustainable strategic partnerships. In addition, the authors address conditions for partnering in highlighting contexts that focus on policy mandates, the quest for prestige, and competition (Eddy & Amey, 2014). However, a gap exists in their approach to partnerships where conditions include institutions having outreach and engagement as a part of their guiding principles. The way in which an organizational mission of outreach and engagement is communicated within an institution and then prioritized through actions and resources could have an influence on the types of partnerships an institution enters into, the manner in which they enter into the partnership and the behavior stakeholders demonstrate during the partnership.

In order to better understand how members of an organization make sense of their function in a partnership, it is necessary to gain greater understanding of sense making in general. Weick (1995) attempts to fill gaps in organizational theory with a sensemaking framework that includes identity, retrospection, enacting, social activity, an ongoing process, extraction of clues, and seeking plausibility over accuracy. "Sensemaking involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action" (Weick, Sutcliffe, Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). Organizational efforts to move from thought into action must first articulate that which they are attempting to address, why they feel the need to address it, and then how they plan to go about it. To this end, "sensemaking is central because it is the primary site where meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity and action" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409) as organizational leaders try to negotiate the tricky process of vision creation and value alignment.

When considering the role of sensemaking in partnerships, its important to recognize the challenges of creating shared meaning within and between organizations and the function relationships play in determining who has access to information and when. Understanding the opportunities and difficulties of creating shared meaning within a school setting, as Coburn (2001, 2005) has highlighted, it can be surmised that similar challenges are evident in postsecondary organizations where goals and interests are often varied.

Shinners (2006) highlights the complexity involved in the study of partnerships in education where mutuality characteristics, the level of partner involvement and the influence of leadership are key indicators of partnership success. The combination of the aforementioned conceptual frameworks provides some flexibility in addressing the highly adaptable environments of both university and K-12 school organizations. Partnerships between the two types of institutions are products of these highly elastic environments in terms of shared meaning due to the layers of policymaking, administration and practitioners on both sides. Where Eddy and Amey (2014) submit the function of roles and motivations in a strategic partnership where collaboration is key, Weick (1995) and Coburn (2001; 2005) point to the sensemaking framework as a viable method for understanding how shared meaning is created both within and between organizations.

From my vantage point as a participant in the partnership, this study examines the formation of a partnership between a university and an urban K-12 district as described in all three phases of Eddy and Amey (2014) where motivation to partner, relationships and communication, and shared meaning are the foundation of a strategic and sustainable partnership. Understanding the reasons a partnership is formed, how relationships are nurtured, and the manner in which communication is distributed points to how well partnership goals are aligned to individual partner goals and are explored through my role as program coordinator. The mutual benefits that can accompany a partnership are often reflected in the depth of focus and diligence in communicating strategic objectives. Yet the process in which each partner makes sense of organizational functions and responsibilities through the partnership is reliant upon the process for making sense within and between each organization. By using the sensemaking framework suggested by Weick (1995) and Coburn (2001, 2005) to examine the process meaning is created among the structural layers within and across each institution the need to more closely develop systems for facilitating shared meaning may become more evident.

Definition of Terms

(Formal) University- K-12 school partnership. This term describes a more formal, localized effort between a university and an individual school or district that are working together to achieve goals toward improvements in student achievement.

Front-end organizational behaviors- the initial stages of the partnership (forming) and the process each partner uses to understand their responsibilities for and benefits from the partnership (norming).

Informal relationship. This refers more generally to all of the relations between and among individuals and entities (e.g., districts schools, colleges, organizations), including those that are more informal in nature. This could include general discussions in person/phone/email. In comparison, the term partnership infers a more formal relationship between two entities whereby there are contractual obligations between the entities.

Low-performing (Priority) schools. This term relates to a school that meets all of the following conditions:

- Must be located in the state of Michigan
- Ranked in the bottom five percent of schools on the state's Top-to-Bottom list according to student achievement on the state assessment (MDE, 2012, p.10).

Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs)- a school leadership team comprised of the principal and seven teacher leaders who are focused on school improvement.

Memorandum of Understanding- A formal document binding a partnership between two organizations that consists of expectations and responsibilities for each partner.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)- Small groups of teachers that meet regularly to review each other's instructional practice and develop strategies for improving student achievement.

School Improvement Grant (SIG)- A competitive grant application program offered by the Michigan Department of Education that offers qualifying schools with additional financial resources for school improvement efforts.

Motivation for the Project

My interest in University and K-12 school and district partnerships stems from first hand participation in a major university's relationship with several urban districts. As a graduate assistant, and later as a program coordinator, in an outreach office housed in the college of education, several of my duties involved facilitating professional development opportunities in these urban districts. During my four plus years in university outreach, I became keenly aware of both the potential for change and the challenges of navigating exchanges between two very complex organizations.

My previous professional experiences working in K-12 schools have provided me with an up close vantage on the structural, social, and economic issues plaguing many low performing urban districts. Declining enrollment has led to difficult administrative decisions about resources- people, time, and money- and relationships with external partners has been one avenue schools have chosen for addressing improvement. Furthermore, high stakes accountability measures from federal and state governments put pressure on schools to find immediate solutions to problems in student achievement or financial management. The answers to these issues and more are considered not to be the purview of the K-12 system.

Generally speaking, when partnerships are developed with a university, a research component is often a driver of the connection. Universities often view urban schools as fertile ground for innovations in curriculum, instruction, and evaluation. Often, when faculty is applying for grants to perform research in a school setting, there can be tangible and intangible benefits for the school- reports, faculty feedback, funds for participation. However, the short and long-term benefits for schools rarely equate to the level of commitment exhibited by K-12 school staff and the sustainability of said partnerships are then jeopardized.

This disconnect between needs and benefits for K-12 schools led me to seek better understanding of how these partnerships are formed and how they can be designed to address real issues with focused resources and what circumstances have the best potential for fostering sustainability in these partnerships.

In the next chapter, I review the existing literature on partnerships and organizational theory. This is accomplished by exploring sensemaking in partnership contexts, exploring Professional Development Schools, outlining challenges to sustainable partnerships and evaluation models. Further, the review of the literature includes a focus on organizational theory (Roles, Motivation, and Conditions) and the layers of actors within educational organizations that contribute to creating shared meaning for a partnership. This is followed by a discussion on methods and the auto-ethnographic approach used in this qualitative study. Chapter Four provides contextual grounding of the partnership under study, the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders, a professional development program offered by Michigan State University to support principals and teachers in Flint Community Schools. Chapters Five, Six, and Seven delve into three critical incidents on the front-end of the partnership. Each chapter explores the relationships and processes that contributed to the creation of shared understanding, mutual benefits, and the sustainability of the partnership. The conclusions and implications offered in Chapter Eight highlight recommendations for research, policy, and practice for future university and K-12 school partnerships.

Chapter Two: Partnerships- Practiced & Organized

Review of the Literature

This chapter presents a review of the literature about the organization of partnerships between universities and K-12 schools. This review is structured according to the University-K-12 Partnership Sensemaking Conceptual Framework (see Figure 1.5) as described in a previous section. The first section is devoted to university and K-12 school partnerships in practice as a means of highlighting where recent research has focused on organizational indicators within and between partners and demonstrating where a need for additional scholarship may lie. This includes synthesizing sensemaking in partnership contexts, exploring Professional Development Schools, outlining challenges to sustainable partnerships and evaluation models. The remaining portion of this chapter includes a focus on organizational theory (Roles, Motivation, and Conditions) and the layers of actors within educational organizations that contribute to creating shared meaning for a partnership.

Partnerships in Practice

There are two key research findings that define the relationships between universities and K-12 schools it is necessary to explore two understandings. First, partnerships between universities and K-12 schools are often reflected in the literature through an examination of the outcomes these partnerships produce rather than the relationship building aspects that produce the environment in which these outcomes are made possible (Brinkerhoff, 2002). A second key finding is that the manner in which these partnerships are shaped can be attributed to organizational theories that outline the forming and norming stages between two institutions toward a shared goal

(Tuckman, 1965). The current study aims to address the partnering institutions in the initial stages of the partnership and the process each partner uses to understand their responsibilities for and benefits from the partnership.

Partnerships are a social practice characterized by trust, mutuality, and reciprocity, and an effective partnership has 1) focus on learning for all stakeholders; 2) leads all stakeholders to take on altered relationship practices; 3) constructs new enabling structures which span the boundaries of school and university (Kruger, Davies, Eckersley, Newell, & Cherednichenko, 2009).

As universities and K-12 school partnerships continue to increase in number, the urgency for research to accelerate better understanding of the process of collaboration between the two institutions continues to expand. While some studies focus on curriculum reforms (Zeitlin & MacLeod, 1995) others have been devoted to improving the design and quality of pre-service and in-service teaching (Sandholtz, 2002) or college access for urban youth (Beasely-Wojick, 2015). In addition, one large-scale initiative, the "professional development school" was a model in which districts and universities collaborated to provide development opportunities to in-service teachers and staff (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Edens & Toner, 2001; Flint Community Schools, 1995).

Yet as Harkins (2013) posits assessing "competing interests and a differential power imbalance" (p. xvii) is essential when exploring effective community collaborations. Where the university is often regarded as the "expert" and the school partner as the "client" it becomes necessary to avoid recreating a "cycle of oppression" so that the school is empowered to succeed (Harkins, 2013, p. xviii). This requires fostering a trusting and supportive setting that engages each of the partners equally.

Exploring how the social practice of partnership leverages the notions of relationship building and structure involves investigating the interactive processes stakeholders use to understand the partnership.

Making Sense of Partnerships

Goodlad (1990) describes the need for a symbiotic relationship between universities and schools, where universities do more in the relationship than just provide teachers advanced degrees, or a school's function is greater than just providing universities with research subjects. When an individual teacher or faculty member is the unit of selection in both teaching and research, sustainable and effective changes to schooling are often undetected (Goodlad, 1990). Symbiosis in this case involves moving beyond benefits to individual faculty members or teachers toward a state of mutual satisfaction for both partners.

Brinkerhoff (2002) defines mutuality as the spirit of partnership principles that are distinguished as horizontal rather than hierarchical coordination and accountability with equality in decision-making. The author proposes an Evaluation and Program Planning framework for assessing partnership relationships ahead of evaluating the outcomes of the partnership (Brinkeroff, 2002). The framework establishes the need to minimize the degree to which one partner is dominant over another partner that includes a set of rights and responsibilities that maximize benefits for each partner (Brinkeroff, 2002).

Recognizing the inherent power dynamics in inter-organizational relationships Brinkeroff's framework situates mutuality as a key for performance. *Equality* in decision-making, resource exchange, reciprocal (as opposed to hierarchical) accountability, transparency, and degree of partner representation and participation in partnership activities results in even benefits for each partner (Brinkeroff, 2002). The elements are attributable to sustainable partnerships both informal and formal. In formal partnerships, "contracts typically seek to exploit organization identity—purchasing the unique advantages of a particular organization, but incorporate little mutuality, with the terms of the contract determined in advance by the purchasing" (Brinkeroff, 2002, p. 217). The outcomes of formal partnerships are most likely to be the most precarious concepts in relation to mutuality. Partners anticipate tangible return on any investments of time, money, or people and the extent to which these outcomes have an even benefit- characterized as perception of fairness, satisfaction with benefit distribution, and satisfaction with the criteria for benefit distribution (Brinkeroff, 2002). The tangible returns that partners realize on mutually beneficial terms can be characterized as partnership capital (Amey, 2010).

Partnership capital (Amey, 2010) is created through developing shared norms and beliefs and an alignment of collaborative processes through networking (Eddy & Amey, 2014). Though possible for a traditional partnership to grow into a strategic partnership, this is attained only by closely coupling the partnership goals to partner organizations strategies and long-term objectives. Another important characteristic in the development of partnership capital lies in the collaborative practices demonstrated to facilitate larger buy-in through shared sense of power and responsibility (Eddy & Amey, 2014). Growth within partner organizations, as a result of the partnership, is attributable to the way in which leaders seeking system change frame organizational change for their stakeholders- communicating goals and creating meaning for staff is often a leader's responsibility. That is, how are leaders helping their stakeholders to make sense of organizational change- to this an examination of sensemaking is helpful.

Building on the research of Spillane (2000) that analyzed the role of cognition in policy implementation, Coburn (2001; 2005) incorporates a sensemaking lens when assessing processes in which educators understand policy directives. Coburn (2001) examined the manner in which teachers comprehend meaning through discussions with their peers. Coburn posits that sensemaking is directly related to previous experiences and understandings that occurred as a result of those experiences. Coburn holds that formal networks and informal alliances assist in the shaping of meaning of external initiatives (2001). Acknowledging that teachers receive multiple messages from a variety of sources regarding the practice of teaching and learning, teachers are then charged with implementing strategies and policies by grounding themselves in a level of understanding.

Coburn (2001, 2005) argues that much of this meaning is fashioned through social interactions with peers- both formally and informally. Formal interactions are based on professional learning communities in which protocols are followed in activities that create meaning around a specific topic. Informal interactions include teachers self-selecting like-minded teachers to bounce ideas, concepts, and questions off one-another. Through these interactions, Coburn argues that shared understanding is devised which then informs practice in the classroom (2001).

Collaborating with teachers provides an opportunity, through shared experience, for principals as instructional leaders to demonstrate the vision for a policy or method for a practice that he/she feels most impactful (Coburn, 2005). Through collaborative processes, the principal is likely to provide consistent feedback regarding the focus of a policy in order for those staff working in collaboration to gain a clearer understanding of its purpose. This process is more advantageous than modeling perhaps, because through collaboration, the teachers also working on the project will be afforded the opportunity to attempt the practice or challenge the policy in a setting that provides instant feedback in a relatively safe environment (Coburn, 2005).

When including the sensemaking lens into the larger system, Coburn (2005) focused on reading policy implementation by school principals and the guise under which they make and share meaning with teachers. School leaders serve the role as gatekeeper in terms of determining access to key information for teachers, where a principal usually receives district and state directives and is then responsible for disseminating the message to colleagues in the school. Acting as a gatekeeper, the principal often controls the flow of information into the building and is able to influence the likelihood that a particular policy could be implemented. Conversely, an ineffective instructional leader will provide too little or too much information that will either constrict or inundate his /her staff with information.

In the context of Coburn's "sense-making," the district helps unify the understanding of the important issues surrounding the policy, as well as the policy itself. In assisting with the communication of information, the district can help the principal educate staff and reduce skepticism in order to increase faith in the new policy by formulating a consistent and clear message with regard to intent and methodology (2005). Coburn's argument can also be associated with portions of Bryk and Schneider (2002) *Trust in Schools* in which the authors portray the importance of collegial relationships- teacher-to-teacher, principal-to-teacher, district-to-school personnel-in establishing an environment conducive to professional learning.

Review of Partnerships in Action

The literature on partnerships between university and K-12 schools is rich and extensive. The following section presents some key findings in the partnership research specific to school improvement efforts, including a closer look at Professional Development Schools. The key findings hold that collaboration and co-development of goals, and administrator advocacy are among the essential elements of effective partnerships; provided that mutuality of benefits have been clearly established.

Zeitlin and MacLeod (1995) examine a university and K-12 school partnership born out of the need to reform one of the lowest performing schools in the Los Angeles Unified District. Supported by funds from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the program involved school staff, university faculty, parents and community representatives. Recognizing the school's efforts to improve students' learning was not achieving the desired effects, the principal engaged university faculty to provide support for a comprehensive school reform. One aspect of the reform was for university faculty and teachers and administrators to modify curriculum and instructional practices focused on enriched literacy. Three years into the partnership, gains of a few percentile points indicate a measure of success of improvements to instructional practices (Zeitlin & MacLeod, 1995).

The authors concluded that one a critical aspect to the partnership was a nurtured sense of parity and mutual participation of both institutions where equal value were place on both the technical expertise of the university and the practical understandings of the local educators (Zeitlin & MacLeod, 1995). This partnership focuses the collaborative efforts of university faculty and school staff steeped in *mutuality* in response to state accountability measures aimed at improving underperforming schools.

Smith (1992) examined thirty-eight teacher education-centered university-K-12 school collaborations from 1977-1989 and found thirty-one partnerships still in operation. Of the seven partnerships that were no longer in existence, changes in partnership focus, funding challenges, changes in leadership, and lack of administrative support were at fault in the demise of the collaboration. Of the thirty-one partnerships that remained viable, emphasis on mutuality and results combined with concerted efforts to build trust were championed as essentials to sustainability (Smith, 1992).

Oregon State University and University of Wisconsin-Extension are two examples of postsecondary institutions focusing more efforts on outreach and community applications of knowledge (Weiser & Houglum, 1998; Wise, Retzleff & Reilly, 2002). University presidents commissioned committees to establish an approach to tenure and promotion practices that was to be designed to" re-engage more productively with their local and regional communities" (Wise et al, 2002, p. 2) and develop knowledge "grounded in the best current research and teaching and aimed at contributing to practical solutions to real problems" (Wise et al., 2002, p. 2). University administrations set a directive for increased engagement and adapted tenure and promotion guidelines to reward scholarship aimed at improving community conditions. The tenure and promotion practices of these institutions now include an institutional policy that encourages outreach. This establishes both a core institutional *value* of service to the community and an *economic reward* for scholarship that is connected to the community.

Sanzo, Myran, and Clayton (2011) examine a district and university partnership called the Futures Program that focused on leadership development. In this partnership, district principals identified themselves as the instructional leader in the building, but deficient of the necessary professional development to drive change through the development of teacher leaders in their schools. These changes were deemed essential as a response to state based accountability measures. School leaders found themselves as community organizers in connecting the various stakeholders in their schools' community- the university inclusive.

The Futures Program was designed to develop the leadership capacity of teachers while addressing criticisms of educational leadership preparation programs that were identified by the administrators themselves- specifically a need to highlight the connections between the work of the Futures Program and other work teachers were already doing (Sanzo et al, 2011). Administrators had been adamant about disconnects between theory and practice in their own leadership preparation and worked collaboratively with university faculty to design a program that supports the instructional needs of teachers by relating professional development to school-based practices (Sanzo et al, 2011) A key step in this collaborative design was the co-development of shared goals (Sanzo et al, 2011).

Sanzo et al (2011) found that the co-development of shared goals was connected to the assertions of school and district administrators that professional development be embedded in the current practices of school staff. In addition, the willingness of university faculty charged with delivering the professional development in "recognizing the need to narrow the gap between research and practice have focused their scholarship on research that addresses best practice in school leadership, classroom assessment practices, data-based decision making, school-university partnerships and other practice centered areas" (Sanzo et al., 2011, p. 305).

The advocacy of district leaders aided development of the partnership by providing context and ensuring an authentic experience for teacher leaders. This advocacy helped university staff- faculty and middle level administrators to create share meaning of various partnerships as a cohesive set aimed at building upon the unique needs of the district (Sanzo, et al., 2011). The interactions among district administrators allowed for an increased leveraging of their gatekeeper role, as university level staff wanting access to school staff to achieve their entrepreneurial research goals needed to design a program that fit the needs of the school including establishing a stronger link between theory and practice. Here there is a distinct need to balance the *intrinsic reward as a motivator* with the *extrinsic need for value alignment* with the needs of the school in their attempts to address accountability mandates.

In another study, the school principal, while responsible for the assisting in the formation of the partnership, was more proactive in developing the leadership of his teachers- encouraging their engagement with university faculty and creating an environment for a sustained partnership after his departure (Stevens, 1999). One university faculty member remarked "Given the high rate of turnover of principals and teachers at [the school], it is quite remarkable any sense of program continuity was maintained, let alone that there were signs of program impact" (Stevens, 1999, p. 224) recognizing principal and teacher turnover as an inhibitor for sustainability. Furthermore, the size of universities and public schools generated financial challenges to each institution and connecting partners making it necessary to pool resources- people and money to accomplish partnership goals including pre-service preparation and in-service professional development of teachers (Stevens, 1999).

Partnerships inclusive of collaboration and co-development of program objectives and design have been found to be the most effective, especially in scenarios with high involvement of both K-12 and university administration. Each of these factors is demonstrated in a closer look at Professional Development Schools.

Professional Development Schools

A heavily studied example of partnership between universities and K-12 schools are the Professional Development School model (Johnston, 1997; Ravid & Handler, 2001; Stroble & Luka, 1999). Professional Development Schools (PDS) are innovative school reform efforts formed through partnerships between professional education programs and P–12 schools and have a four-fold mission: 1) the preparation of new teachers, 2) faculty development, 3) inquiry directed at the improvement of practice, and 4) enhanced student achievement (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2014).

Goodlad (1993) describes PDS as a continuum of active participation by a K-12 school in the pre-service teacher program of a university or college. The participation is categorized either by providing scattered and isolated student-teacher placements within classrooms of in-service teachers on one end of the continuum or a "symbiotic partnership" by which university and K-12 school personnel share in programmatic decisions on the other end (Goodlad, 1993, p.25).

On example along the isolated portion of said continuum describes the experience of many in-service teachers with student-teachers is as follows:

> "(A) supervisor of some level asks if you are interested in working with a student teacher. Many say yes. Here is an opportunity to give to the profession. Two weeks later you are introduced to an undergraduate, given a university handbook, and a schedule of the quarter. The university supervisor, who is very busy with his or her own studies and many other interns, sets up a time to come back and review progress. Midpoint progress is documented and a final assessment of

student teaching is made through conversation and some type of written account (Johnston, 2000, p. 269)."

In this example, in-service teachers become frustrated with university faculty's lack of regular and meaningful involvement of the development of student-teachers and fail to realize many benefits from the relationship with the university. The in-service teachers have little input in the development of relationships nor do they have many access points throughout the school year to influence the relationship.

Further, according to Bullough and Kauchak's (1997) case study of PDS collaboration, leadership plays a significant role in the success of a PDS. In several instances university approaches were found to be too directive, creating isolation and stress among teachers. Teachers in both high schools and the middle school in the study needed to feel valued and a part of the decision-making process and found communication channels between their school and the university challenging to navigate (Bullough & Kauchak, 1997).

When considering the placement of student teachers in a school, the university faculty may assume student teachers would be placed in the best classrooms, to be mentored by the best teachers (Stevens, 1999). However, from the K-12 school leadership perspective, the principal in Stevens' study was adamant about not upsetting the school community by creating "caste system in the school" (Stevens, 1999, p. 293). With the principal concerned about the level of achievement in the lowest performing classrooms, it became necessary to facilitate a strategy that valued the school community's needs over university expectations and reconcile the frustration of university faculty in not having their expertise about student teacher placements placed into higher performing classrooms being a priority for the partnership (Stevens, 1999).

Along the more symbiotic partnership portion of the continuum described by Goodlad (1993), Stroble and Luka (1999) focus their study on the impact of PDS on administrators in both university and school settings and found that benefits of the program were qualified by the relationships that were built between partners. They conclude that benefits for the universities extend to faculties, teacher education programs, and students. In these instances decision making and operational strategies were determined jointly by university and K-12 participants. Both university and K-12 administrators found the overall partnership to be a "reflection … of their ambitions for themselves as leaders and their visions for their institutions" and the opportunity to share in decision making to be "complementary to the values and leadership style" of their respective positions (Stroble & Luka, 1999, p. 133).

Additionally, Field (2008) highlights the leadership practices of seven principals in PDS partnerships. The author found each of the seven schools to be high achieving due to professional development efforts provided through the university despite many social challenges facing the school community (Field, 2008). The success of the PDS model in this instance is a result of a multi-layered system designed for principals and partnering institutions to create a shared vision "of teaching and learning grounded in research and practitioner knowledge" (Field, 2008, p. 124). The intentional manner in which university and K-12 school perspectives were included in the formation of the partnership led to shared understanding and richer professional development.

Sandholtz (2002) holds university and school partnerships as a prime opportunity for increasing professional development options for teachers. PDS often provide a range of activities for teachers, but the extent to which teachers are involved in designing what those options look like has a strong influence on the degree to which teachers will engage in those options. When evaluating the quality of these options, teachers' participation increases when they are encouraged and supported through formal recognition by the district of their efforts (Sandholtz, 2002).

Thus far, the literature has pointed to what makes university and K-12 school partnerships effective, yet in other instances the outcomes are less productive for each of the partners. The following section considers factors that contribute to less successful partnering between institutions.

Challenges to Sustainable Partnerships

Several studies of university and K-12 school partnerships highlight the challenges to sustainable collaborations. These include a 'false dualism' between "superior" academic theory and the "inferior" applied practice of K-12 partners' (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2000, p. 24); resource constraints of non-profits organizations in dealing partnering with universities (Bushouse, 2005); and a lack of authenticity in intentions and actions among service learning partners (Morton, 1995). Benson et al. (2000) assert that the superior and inferior dichotomy attributed in part to lack of emphasis on a community agenda in the academic mission of higher education institutions-where research is valued over practice. Each of these studies highlight the importance of creating shared understanding within and among partners in order to mitigate issues of miscommunication and dominance with regard to purpose and benefits of the partnership. It is also clear that motivation for partnering and conditions that increase or decrease institutional capacity to support the partnership factor into the overall success of the collaborative over a period of time.

Partnerships between higher education institutions and community-based institutions, like K-12 schools, have increased in number because these community organizations perceive benefits that include access to intellectual, human and financial resources; improved access to key funders and decision makers; and increased legitimacy through partnering with a university (Ferman & Hill, 2005; Fulbright-Anderson, Auspos, & Anderson, 2001; Nye & Schramm, 1999). Ferman and Hill (2005) extend that these benefits include access to data and evaluation services, training for staff and tutoring for youth. Further, community-based organizations benefit from supplemental funds acquired through joint grant projects and extension of networks through connections with university researchers. As an example, one community organization representative, "cited as a benefit the legitimacy that accrued to their organizations and programs through their association with an institution of higher education" (Ferman & Hill, 2005, p. 247). In this instance, the community-based organization leveraged their relationship with the university to achieve a higher status among community organizations.

On the other hand, several challenges to sustainable partnerships are grounded in the incentives that motivate partners to enter into university and K-12 collaborations (Bok, 2015; Ferman & Hill, 2005; Nye & Schramm, 1999). Nye and Schramm (1999) found that some community-based organizations were critical of university collaborations because several had been used by universities to leverage support for grants, but then not sharing the funds with the organization or the community at-large once the grant was obtained. Ferman and Hill's (2005) study included the director of one community-based organization assertion, "that some academic researchers enter the community just to experiment or to observe residents-or worse, to offer student help, only to use the entree to study the community on the sly" (Ferman & Hill, 2005, p. 247). The perception of researcher as expert and practitioners as subjects leads to a certain amount of distrust among community leaders where interpretation of their reality is often skewed by academics (Ferman & Hill, 2005).

The air of distrust is amplified by some disconnects between incentives for each of the partners (Bok, 2015; Ferman & Hill, 2005). Schools being among these community-based institutions enter into research projects in order to gain resources, access to the university, expand networks and improve the perception of the organization (Ferman & Hill, 2005). Bok (2015) examines these partnerships from the perspective of faculty at universities and finds professional and institutional priorities (publishing, service-learning placement of students, grant funding) often outweigh good intentions for community improvement. This is particularly salient when considering the financial and tenure incentives that are associated with publishing, student supervision, and grants; rather than the lack of incentives for community outreach projects (Bok, 2015). Faculty is often less motivated to participate in community outreach because the institution does not incentivize it. Instead, the "now-prevalent practice of basing promotion and tenure on the *quantity* of books and articles published" (Bok, 2015, p. 337) dominates the academic landscape and professors are forced to churn out more publications, rather than pursue scholarship that may have a more direct impact on their local communities.

Kirschenbaum and Reagan (2001) completed a series of interviews with university staff to analyze university and K-12 school partnerships in urban settings-focusing their attention on the University of Rochester and the Rochester public schools. The review of 57 separate collaborations between the university and the schools was designed to, among other things, develop understanding about the sustainability and quality of the collaborations- many of which were observed to have achieved programmatic goals of improving student learning. The collaborative programs fit under one of five categories: school-linked services, curricular enrichment, tutoring/mentoring, community support, and school-to-work, and all identified to provide a level of support for underperforming schools. In terms of longevity, programs focused on curricular enrichment were among the oldest programs with 9 of the 21 programs lasting longer than ten years connecting to curriculum.

Partnerships focusing on tutoring/mentoring, curriculum enrichment, and community support were rated the highest in terms of the interaction between program type, level of collaboration and mean goal accomplishment suggesting a connection between goal setting, relationships, and relevance to institutional missions (Kirschenbaum & Reagan, 2001). Kirschenbaum and Reagan (2001) found that programmatic partnerships that were the most sustainable were closely tied to the mission of the university and relied upon the initiative of individual faculty to drive collaborative efforts. Unfortunately, many of the interviewees indicated a sense of "frustration with the lack of time and financial resources available to devote to collaborative programs with the city schools, a lack perceived to be partially caused by an already demanding workload" (Kirschenbaum & Reagan, 2001, p. 500). Programs with inconsistent and uneven collaboration, highlighted by a lack of shared ownership or mutuality were found to have limited sustained success (Kirschenbaum & Reagan).

Similarly, Firestone and Fisler (2002) examine a partnership between a large research university and a local urban school that centered on an eight-year collaboration that was inspired as professional development school project but became too narrowly focused on school improvement (Firestone & Fisler, 2002). Through interviews and observations of teachers from multiple grade levels and special education the authors were able to assess the function of smaller professional learning communities between the two institutions. Of particular interest are the political aspects of school-university partnerships that resulted in “divergent interests and conflicts” (Firestone & Fisler, 2002, p. 450) among these various groups. The isolating circumstances found in larger urban districts can foster an environment where lack of communication and distrust go hand-in hand and exacerbates school personnel detachment from the decision making process (Crosby, 1999). While these conflicts were categorized as challenging, improvement occurred in services available for students, changes in teacher practice and school governance (Firestone & Fisler, 2002).

To this point, successes and challenges in university and K-12 school partnerships point to the degree to which mutuality of benefits are clearly established for a program and each partner contributes to the co-development of goals and design. Yet, how these elements are measured means looking beyond the outcomes. The following section highlights a need for examining these partnerships through a closer look at the relationship between partners by exploring both a case study and a proposed framework for evaluating partnerships.

Evaluating University - K-12 School Partnerships

Where the previous section underlines some of the challenges to partnerships, it is important to develop an understanding of how to evaluate collaborations between universities and schools. Rendon, Gans, and Calleroz, (1998) present a case study of an assessment project that highlights the challenges to evaluating university and K-12 school partnerships. The case study focused on efforts to evaluate the Ford Foundation’s Urban Partnership Program (UPP)-designed to assist sixteen U.S. cities in addressing barriers for at-risk students in K-12 schools. These partnerships, in addition to universities and urban public, included community-based organizations, elected officials, and business and industrial organizations. Assessment of the progress of the UPP was centered on outcomes for each of the cities' network of partnering organizations and challenges included staff workload, lack of funding, staff turnover, and connection of assessment to programming. The authors hold that much early effort was concentrated on relationship building, negotiating, and patience as leadership was at work developing shared experiences that led to long-term successes of the UPP initiatives (Rendon et al, 1998).

Brinkeroff (2002) posits a framework for evaluating partnerships and highlights the need for assessing partnership relationships ahead of evaluating the outcomes of the partnership. As in Rendon et al (1998), considerable efforts and resources were designated for the purpose of building relationships and an earlier review in the form of a case study of the processes in which those relationships were being developed might have provided a clearer sense of opportunities and challenges to participants for later stages of the partnership. The traditional sense of assessing partnerships in which prerequisites and success factors lead to partner performance and then to programmatic outcomes leaves out many essential elements of partnerships (Brinkeroff, 2002). Going beyond the traditional framework, the author proposes including partnership practices with a focus on both success factors (trust, confidence, clear goals, and senior management support) and the degree of the partnership (mutuality in decision making, resource exchange, and reciprocity) (Brinkeroff, 2002).

One can gain a greater sense of the efforts around collaboration and mutuality by centering attention on partnership practices and the depth of the partnership. Considering the complexities of partnering institutions, placing attention merely on the outcomes of the partnership misses several relevant aspects that produce the outcomes, specifically the relationship between the partners. Several key organizational theories inform the development of a partnership and how to evaluate the likelihood of a sustainable partnership. The complexities of organizations are discussed further in the following section.

Partnerships as Organizations

If, as Brinkeroff (2002) posits, evaluating the outcomes of a partnership should be preceded by the evaluation of the relationships associated with a partnership, then it becomes necessary to frame the ideal of partnerships into organization theoretical models. When success of relationships in a partnership is determined through factors such as trust, confidence, and clear goals; and degrees of a partnership are attributed to mutuality in decision-making and reciprocity, it could be helpful to examine the relationships through a review of organizational literature.

The fundamental stages of group development include forming, storming, norming, and performing (Tuckman, 1965) and the majority of these studies consider the outcomes of a particular partnership (performing). Where the current study aims to address the partnering institutions is in the initial stages of the partnership (forming) and the process each partner uses to understand their responsibilities for and benefits from the partnership (norming).

Organizational theories abound for the examination of the interdependence between and within groups in pursuit of common goals (Baker, 2011; Bidwell, 1965; Hoy & Miskel, 2005;Locke & Latham, 1990; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). These sets of notions of schools as organizations can be applied to both university and K-12 settings.

Meyer and Rowan (1977) posit that organizational structures are disguised as myth and ceremony to produce rationality and survival. In the authors' review of formal organizations, structures were found to be rational, impersonally prescribed and highly institutionalized. The emergence of professions in organizations includes a realization that occupations are not only subject to direct supervision, but also social rules of certifications and schooling with delegation of activities being socially expected and legally obligatory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Bidwell (1965) portrays organizations, specifically schools, as combinations of bureaucracy and structural looseness. In one of the earliest studies of the bureaucratization of schools, the author describes the top-down nature of school districts and includes school boards, superintendents, school leaders and teachers in his study. Focusing his work on the structuring of offices as the organizing unit that facilitates the surrender of direct management activity from board authority to classroom supervision. Further, the author highlights the recruitment of superintendents and principals from the teacher ranks as an example of the structural nature of roles and tasks being connected (Bidwell, 1965).

Hoy and Miskel (2005) provide a pragmatic approach to a theoretical review of research on the administration of educational organizations. Viewing schools as social-systems, the authors present critical elements of school life-structure, motivation, culture, and politics- as interactive and contextual for the success of teaching and learning. Administrative processes are observed and categorized as deciding, empowering, communicating and leading within analysis of case studies in leadership. Hoy and Miskel conclude that two basic organizational domains exist in schools: a) bureaucratic- made up of the managerial and institutional functions and b) professional- encompassing the technical processes of teaching and learning (Hoy &

Miskel, 2005).

Finally, Shafritz, Ott, and Jang (2011) outline organizational theories for power and politics and determined that “organizations are viewed as complex systems of individuals and coalitions, each having its own interests, beliefs, values, preferences, perspectives, and perceptions” (Shafritz et al, p. 271). The authors found competition for scarce organizational resources within coalitions and that goals were the result of “ongoing maneuvering and bargaining among individuals and coalitions” (Shafritz et al, p.271).

The sustainability of effective university and K-12 school partnerships is reflected in the literature through recognition of the **roles** (Biddle, 2013; Kahn & Fellows, 2013;Mead, 1934) **motivations** (Lawler, 1973; Locke & Latham, 2006; Lord & Hanges, 1987; Osterloh & Frey, 2000), and **conditions** that lead to effective and sustainable partnership outcomes (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015; Eddy & Amey 2014; Epstein, 2011). Each of these ideas will be discussed in greater depth in the following section.

Roles

In their exploration of organizational psychology, Kahn and Fellows (2013) examine the fields of executive coaching and management to investigate how meaningful work is cultivated and sustained throughout a variety of work settings. The authors focus on the scope in which workers experience meaningfulness at work and found the nature of employee engagement is shaped by the degree specific work environments offer essential conditions for engagement to exist (2013a). Kahn and Fellows (2013b) define *role* as “…constructed in the sense that normative expectations specify a range of obligatory, acceptable, and prohibited conduct on the part of individuals inhabiting the role, otherwise known as *actors*" (Khan & Fellows, 2013, p. 672). In this sense, roles are a situational construction within a larger social system.

Further, in extending *role theory* (Mead, 1934, Biddle, 2013) positional roles are formally recognized by the organization and functional roles grow out of interactions within the group whereby positional roles "enable continuity in the organization; as personnel change, new actors conform to existing roles and produce performances acceptable to role set members" (Kahn & Fellows, 2013, p. 675). Positional roles deviate from functional roles in that there is a sense of permanence associated with their formality.

Previously, Katz and Khan (1979) examine organizational processes in several industries and highlight the interdependent behavior people demonstrate through both supportive and complementary action that create a structure that can be applied to large scale organizations. The authors found roles are also established by associating positions in an organizational system with pattern of behavior- consisting of recurring actions of individuals, regulated by norms and expectations, which are then interrelated with the cyclical activities of others in the organization (Katz & Khan, 1978).

As Eddy and Amy (2014) highlight in their analysis of partnerships, individuals maintain roles within their organizations in which they hold a set of professional functions and responsibilities and there is a need to negotiate these sets of responsibilities when participating in a partnership. Connected to *role theory, role conflict* occurs when expectations associated with multiple roles are in opposition to one another (Kahn & Fellows, 2013), and "actors may be forced into undesirable choices between the demands of the two salient, but distinct, role sets. At the same time, if roles are seen as complementary, such that the financial benefits of employment allow an actor to fulfill a provider role in the family, the possibility for role enrichment exists" (Khan & Fellows, 2013, p. 675). Actors often understand their roles and institutional mandates through sense-making behavior derived from the social interactions with others (Coburn, 2001).

Within an organization, roles are constructed to include normative expectations and underline professional functions and responsibilities. This construction can be formally recognized and a sense of negotiation occurs when an individual is associated with more than one role- such as the case within a partnership. The partnership represents a 'new' organization and similarly roles are re-established for participants in the partnership. Developing an understanding of the function of each institution within a partnership, as well as, the individual roles within those institutions is important and follows next.

Identifying Institutional Roles

Universities are generally regarded as the institution in which knowledge is created, culture is enhanced and innovations are produced (Altbach, Berdahl, & Gumport, 1999; Horowitz, 1987). The purposes of K-12 schools in the larger society include where socialization and skills for the workplace are administered to youth (Labaree, 1997; Mann, 1957). K-12 schools and districts continue to be under pressure to produce and perform with federal and state education policies (McDermott, 2011; Murphy, 2009) and much of that pressure is targeted towards holding teachers and administrators accountable for the achievement of students. From a K-12 schools perspective, leadership's ability to leverage external expertise is one strategy toward building internal capacity for improvement and a key to large-scale and sustainable reform (Kaufman, Grimm, & Miller 2012). "With sufficient guidance from internal and external sources, teachers can refine their instructional practice to support real gains in student achievement" (Kaufmann et al., 2012, p. 107) and often universities are the external source.

The process of building internal capacity for school improvement includes engaging outside perspectives and strategies and then developing them within the school over time (Kauffman, et al., 2012). While programming between elementary and secondary education to postsecondary education exist- teacher preparation, curriculum development (Bartholomew & Sandholtz, 2009; Catelli, 2006; Goodlad, 1993) lack of connection is a result of historical policies separating the two entities (Kirst & Venezia, 2001) including governance and funding (Altbach et al, 1999; Kirst & Wirt, 2019).

Multiple institutional roles specific to each partner exist at the university- Board of Trustees, President, Dean, and Faculty- (Birnbaum, 1988) and K-12 school level- School Board, Superintendent, Principal - (Kirst & Wirt, 2009) that contribute to development and functioning of a partnership. "School-college partnerships hold significant promise for renewal and improvement in education but must be vigorously supported and advance by top leadership at public school and college levels" (Essex, 2001, p. 736). Several roles within a partnership contribute to its success and sustainability (Eddy & Amey, 2014; Lieberman, 1992) including champions- those advocating for the partnership; the face of the partnership- those involved in working with stakeholders; and boundary-spanners (Stevens, 1999)-those who tightly-tied to both institutions engaged in a partnership and able to navigate between them.

***K-12* Roles.** At the school level, whether the administrator is of a manger or leader model (Kirst & Wirt, 2009), principals have a degree of control over information and access to school operations including arrangement of agenda items, program recommendations, recruitment, and consensus building (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). Piercer and Anderson (1995) describe teacher leaders as teachers in leadership roles, including team leaders, lead teachers, department chairpersons, and master teachers- where teacher leaders leverage their skill sets toward the improvement of teaching and learning in their schools by collaborating with their peers on ways to improve instructional practice. However, in the districts and schools where the accountability pressure is high, professional development is strongly related to product development and those products are intended to put into application sooner rather than later (Davies, Edwards, Gannon, & Laws, 2007).

Finn and Keegan (2004) posit the traditional role of local school boards as existing to primarily oversee the distribution of local property taxes on school expenses and "watch over the superintendent, assistant superintendents, and other district officials as they managed the school system" (p. 16). Generally the role of boards of education is to serve as the community's accountability instrument for financial and quality controls (2004). Kirt and Wirst (2009) submit that school boards are the mechanism for communities to exert democratic control over schools and "most citizens have a greater opportunity and chance of policy influence in their local district than with policymakers or administrators at the federal or state level. Local school policymakers … are much closer both geographically and psychologically" (Kirt & Wirst, 2009, p. 145). The decision making process of school boards are likely to be reflective of the desires and concerns of the local community and the potential partners within the community could likely try to leverage any connection with school board members toward a partnership.

Similar to principals, superintendents play gatekeeping roles (Malen, 1994) with the entire district. However, in addition to the financial management and community leadership roles, superintendents play a significant role in the professional development of staff as the educational leader by setting goals and strategic objectives for the district (Kirst & Wirt, 2011). With district-wide financial decision-making authority, superintendents can engage external consultants in professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators (Grogan & Roberson, 2002). Social capital is often a factor in the decision of a superintendent to partner with external partners and superintendents often are identified as the face of a partnership or a champion of the partnership (Eddy & Amey, 2014).

Kirt and Wirst (2009) explore the organizational politics within a school and find that due to the autonomy afforded teachers in terms of instruction principals often have to resort to managing through exchanges and bargains. Further, "the interaction between principals and teachers over decision making becomes particularly important in efforts to create reform…" and the authority in making these decisions is held more often at the school site and no longer at the district or state levels (Kirt & Wirst, 2009).

Whether the administrator is of a manger or leader model (Kirst & Wirt, 2009), principals have a degree of control over information and access to school operations including arrangement of agenda items, program recommendations, recruitment, and consensus building (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). Principals are gatekeepers (Malen, 1994) and can either advocate for programs that include partnering with external organizations or minimize the level of access a partner has to the school or its staff and students. In advocating for a partnership, a principal may take the lead in grant applications or leverage their own social capital- the expected collective or economic benefits derived from the preferential treatment and cooperation between individuals and groups. When developing relationships with community partners, and depending on the level of contact with the school or district, the principal may serve as the face of the partnership at the school level (Eddy & Amey, 2014).

University Roles. At the university level, administration is a product of the system constraints and circumstances, and leadership should be cultivated within the institution (Birnbaum, 1988; Thelin, 2011). Traditional university roles in the operations of K-12 schools include teacher preparation and professional development of educators (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gaitlin, & Helig, 2005; Guskey & Huberman, 1995). More modern roles of the university include an extension of the university to address community, economic, and workplace challenges by increasing application and access to knowledge (Walshok, 1995).

Contemporary university outreach can be categorized as in-reach, university service, professional service, community/civic service, and consulting (Fear & Sandmann, 1995). Bok (2015) submits that universities offer local businesses, government agencies and schools systems service activities centered on technical advice and expertise, "to the point where "most universities include 'service' as an explicit part of their mission along with teaching and research" (Bok, 2015, p. 30). University outreach is an aspect of an institution's academic core, serving as the overlap between teaching, research, and service and the degree to which outreach is integrated into the university mission and culture can change direction of the institution (Fear & Sandmann, 1995)

Boards of Trustees in higher education are charged with creating and overseeing policies that govern the institution of higher learning and sit at "the top of the university hierarchy" (Bok, 2015, p. 46). Many of the individuals in these positions are experienced in finance, management, and law and provide expert advice to university administrators (Bok, 2015). In general individuals in these roles are appointed through a political process or selected by members of the board themselves (Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1991; Legon, Lombardi, & Rhoades, 2013). In order to serve in an effective manner, trustees "should be able to demonstrate a history of commitment to education and a positive record in educational improvement. Contributions to education and educational improvement can be achieved in multiple ways, such as through charitable donations, volunteering, teaching, research or scholarship" (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, University of Southern California, 2006, p. 1). Further the collective board should remain focused on the mission of the higher education institution as they have been charged with being ambassadors for the university and attending to the public's trust (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, 2006).

A university president is instrumental in setting the strategic objectives of the institution including the degree to which the university will engage in outreach opportunities (Eddy & Amey, 2014; Fear & Sandmann, 1995). A university president could direct subordinates to engage with community stakeholders to facilitate the sharing of expertise and innovation in efforts to improve community conditions. University presidents often rely on leadership teams to drive development, as Birnbaum (1988) relays, presidents should "recognize that their downward influence is limited and that much of the guidance and support in an effective college or university is provided by the qualities of the participants, the nature of the task and the characteristics of the organization" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 206). University presidents are instrumental in developing the vision for the institution as a whole, and more specifically the degree to which the institution is focused on service. The quality of university service opportunities are often the result of individuals and resources designated by administration to achieve community-centered goals (Fear & Sandmann, 1995).

At the faculty level, individual entrepreneurship is often found to be a base of university culture (Miller, 1993), norms, and traditions (Robinson & Darling-Hammond, 1994). Faculty roles at their home institution are often centered on research and teaching (Diamond & Adam, 1995), but the notion of service is a growing focus of their work (Driscoll & Lynton, 1999). While knowledge attainment and delivery is consistently under the auspices of academic freedom (Thelin, 2011), the development of teacher preparation and training programming is increasingly done in collaboration with community partners including schools (Clark, 1988; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Faculty are going beyond the stance that schools are merely a field for study to thinking proactively using their research to collaborate with community partners including schools (Muñoz, Winter, & Ricciardi, 2006). At this intersection of research and service lies a strong potential for improving outcomes for students through the sharing of resources between the university and K-12 partners- specifically those aimed at cultivating teacher practices (Muñoz et al., 2006).

Faculty, and in some cases middle-level university administrators, are often the face of a partnership and serve as the champion of the work at the university level (Eddy & Amey, 2014). Individual faculty or middle-level administrators may also serve as boundary-spanners (Lieberman, 1992; Stevens, 1999) in a partnership depending on the degree of social capital (Coleman, 1988) established by the individual within the K-12 school setting. Boundary spanners in these instances are seen as the face of the partnership in both settings and identified as maintaining decision-making and macro level thinking about strategic objectives and outcomes. The negotiation between roles is often influenced by motivation, which is explored next.

Motivation

As roles distinguish conduct and functions of actors, motivation influences the negotiations between function and conduct, particularly when individuals maintain multiple roles. Motivation often determines the extent to which an actor undertakes a task or the willingness to do so in the first place. Lawler (1973) in a review of management practices emphasizes basic principles of effective organizations by outlining the need to understand how to motivate and encourage effective individual performance including reward systems, organizational design, and organizational change. Motivation is critical because of its impact as a determinant of performance and its intangible nature, and while training or altering the environment can improve many shortcomings, motivation problems are not as easily addressed (Lawler, 1973).

Osterloh and Frey (2000) explore the motivations of employees submit that while motivation can be both intrinsic and extrinsic, intrinsic motivation is crucial when tacit knowledge in and between teams must be transferred, and the form of the organizations often influence the nature of the motivation of organizations (Osterloh & Frey, 2000). Similarly, Lord and Hanges (1987) examine human motivation through a control theory model found that goals are a chief principle in organizational motivation as they connect to decision mechanisms within an organization (Lord & Hanges, 1987). Locke and Latham's studies of choice and influence find that goal-setting theory includes a link between the level of organizational self-efficacy and goal sources- self-set, set jointly with others, or assigned (Locke & Latham, 2006) and goals must be specific, challenging, attainable and individuals must be committed to them (Locke & Latham, 1990).

Identifying Motivational Factors. Eddy and Amey (2014) underline economic factors, policy mandates, and value alignment as key motivation characteristics in developing strategic partnerships. Leadership includes the capacity to facilitate the creation of an "institutional embodiment of purpose" (Selznick, 1957, 149 in Birnbaum, 1988). In connecting motivations to various leadership roles, leaders should align potential partners with institutional strategic plans and resources (economic), fit of requirements and ability to leverage mandates as instrument for transformation (policy), and organizational values and objectives (Eddy & Amey, 2014).

While the literature is split on how economics can address the challenges of K-12 schooling (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine 1996; Hanushek, 2006) the fact remains that many public schools and districts are suffering from financial hardships- enrollment declines, poverty, competition from charters among them (Arsen & Ni, 2011; Ni & Arsen, 2011). Meanwhile, higher education institutions face their own financial challenges- limited federal and state support, competition from technology-based institutions (Altbach et al., 1999).

Limited resources are a common factor for all educational institutions regardless of level or target population, and contribute to a need to share resources across institutions (Goodlad, 1993; Kirschenbaum & Reagan, 2001). Funding can also be a challenge for partnerships, not just for startup, but also as a concern for sustainability. While certain university/school partnerships are internally funded through university resources or through joint university/school funding, external grant resources fund the majority of projects (Grossman, 1994; Porter, 1987).

Multiple studies point to a troubled portrayal of US education (Ladson-Billings, 2006; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Murphy, 2009) and K-12 school and universities both have a vested interest and responsibility to address the challenges individually and collaboratively. Labaree (1997) argued social mobility, social efficiency, and democratic equality are the purpose of education in relation to a public good. Moe (2000) establishes a similar argument, in that K-12 schools pass on knowledge that prepares children not only for their own future but also to be active citizens in the greater society. DeMarrais and LeCompte (1999) posit a theory of functionalism – where schools serve a functional role in society (Economic, political, and social) and education systems, both K-12 and postsecondary, are one of the structures that carry out the function of transmission of attitudes, values, skills and norms.

Contributing to the greater society and addressing the functional challenges of a struggling system are shared goals for both institutions (Altbach et al, 1999; Goodlad, 1984; Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006). When K-12 schools and universities "have similar missions, core values, and goals, a coalition is easier to create as partners have a shared ethos and partnering requires little change from their standard forms of operation and understanding of mission" (Eddy & Amey, 2014). These partnerships hold great hope for stimulating changes and improvements in curriculum, instructional practices in K-12 schools, high school design, and connection between education and the greater community (Goodlad, 1988).

Fundamental causes of poor academic performance are not schools themselves but institutions governing them, and the bureaucracy imposed by democratic principles impairs basic requirements of effective organizations (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Traditionally, state policy domains have included curriculum and instruction, accountability and assessment, teacher preparation, governance, and finance (Corcoran

& Goertz, 2005). Schools are a product of institutional control, but greater accountability mechanisms are correlated with improved student performance (Carnoy & Loeb 2002).

The minimization of local control and growth of state and federal involvement stemming from 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act was response to several educational challenges- inequities in finance, special needs students, higher standards (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2009). Further, in the 1990s National Assessment of Educational Progress data highlighted disparities in states' performance, which resulted in greater state involvement (e.g. curriculum standards, student assessments, and school report cards), and the federally mandated No Child Left Behind reform (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2009).

Overall, state/federal power has grown in the last 30 years, including finance- primarily resulting from the inequalities in per-pupil expenditure when at the local level, but resulting also in state and federal influence in how money is spent; how curriculum and testing are developed and implemented- including: increased content standards, some centralization of textbook selection, high school exit exams (Fusarelli, 2009). Simultaneously, teacher evaluations and effectiveness have dominated the policy landscape (McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz & Hamilton, 2003; Rice, 2003) as a lever that states and the federal government are using to initiate change to the education system. In districts and schools where the accountability pressure is high, professional development is strongly related to product development and these products are intended to put into application sooner rather than later (Davies, Edwards, Gannon & Laws, 2007).

Considerable literature indicates diminished results for US public education in terms of outcomes (Hirsch, 1996; Ladson-Billings; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) falling short on the aims of the society at large. Universities are hubs for social, political and economic innovation (Altbach et al, 1999). The history of the development of many US postsecondary institutions demonstrates a response to societal needs- Morrill Land-Grant, freestanding professional schools, women's and historically black colleges, post-war access and policy mandates create opportunities for growth and development of postsecondary institutions (Thelin, 2004).

Universities are most commonly linked to K-12 schools through teacher preparation programs that serve as centers of pedagogy and these collaborations are often guided by teacher certification mandates and standards established by state governments (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Darling-Hammond, et al. 2005). When improving student outcomes is a focus of policy, effective school and university partnerships can be a useful mechanism for creating change through the strengthening of teacher practice as the result of researcher and practitioner collaborations (Haycock, Hart, & Irvin, 1991).

That which motivates a partnership between a university and a K-12 school, and how the institutions and the individuals within those institutions respond to that motivation is often the product of conditions that surround the partnership. What follows is an exploration of some of these conditions.

Conditions

Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2015) study connections between researchers and practitioners and find that in *complex systems,* such as schools, universities and the partnerships between them, performance is the product of interactions among the people engaged in the work. This is described as the tools and materials they have at their disposal, and the processes through which these people and resources come together to do work (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015). Yet, it is the environmental factors that these organizations are responding to that influence the capacity to work together and is often the impetus for collaboration. Organizations collaborate toward improvement by using data and information to identify problems of learning to improve; problem identification guides design-development where organizations test change ideas, analyze results, and modify the ideas based on analysis, then retry the modified change ideas toward system improvement (Bryk et al., 2015). As an extension Gomez, Russell, Bryk, LeMahieu, and Mejia (2016) find when similar researcher and practitioner partnerships, seen as networks, are focused on improvement it becomes necessary to facilitate effective coordination among the various processes and actors that are part of the improvement work. The purpose of the collective is to support K-12 schools and educators perform at a higher level, and the networked activities are intended to be solution-based through leveraging skill, expertise, and knowledge of others within the group (Gomez et al., 2016).

Organizations, particularly those formed for the purpose of school improvement, are highly influenced by the economic, political and social environments they inhabit and these environments also offer resources with which an organization navigates challenges and manages change toward sustainability (Bastedo, 2004). "Treating schools as if they are independent of their environment would lead to wide misperceptions of the driving factors behind organizational change. Contemporary studies of accountability movements, teacher professionalization, and instructional leadership all benefit from a strongly open systems approach to understanding environmental demands and the resulting adaptation in school policy and its implementation, or lack thereof" (Bastedo, 2004). For example government regulations targeting the institutionalization of high stakes accountability systems have real consequences on the technical practice of schools (Rowan, 2006). Understanding how universities and K-12 schools focused on school improvement navigate some of the environmental demands can inform the potential for a sustainable partnership.

Identifying Partnership Conditions. From the K-12 schools lens, organizing a team with multiple perspectives generates diversity of thoughts and innovation in outcomes when inspired by challenges (Kaufman, Grimm, & Miller, 2012, p. 79). The key is to be "regularly collecting and analyzing data [to] help leaders build connections between teacher efforts and student performance"(2012, p. 4) in order to ensure that improvement efforts transfer district-wide, instead of in a handful of schools. Embracing the 'across the district' concept is essential-from superintendent to department heads, from central office to principals, from principals to teachers- every actor must be geared toward adopting new roles (Kauffman et al., 2012). However, the limited resources available in many urban schools (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Kozol, 1991) limit the ability for teachers and administrators to allocate sufficient time, money or people to the collection or analysis of data (Bickel & Hattrup, 1995).

From the university lens, a hierarchical structure and rational administrative procedures that emphasize efficiency in decision-making is found at most postsecondary institutions (Birnbaum, 1988). Administratively, "the work of individuals is coordinated and controlled by having them follow the directives of a superior" (Birnbaum, 1988, p.123) and the provision of rules and articulated objectives. Alternately, a highly collegial system can be found to produce a sense of community among colleagues-where activities and attitudes combine to create productive interactions among faculty and staff (Birnbaum, 1988). However, tradition and structural rigidity often prevent the development of a collegial system (Birnbaum, 1988).

While districts' limited resources and university hierarchical structures present challenges at each of those levels, partnerships between the two can create conditions necessary for benefits for each partner (Eddy & Amey, 2014) Further, "The practical core of the effective partnership is the professional relationships, which the partnership initiates. The partnership provides the space for stakeholders to initiate new learning relationships by valuing the contributions made by each partner" (Kruger et al., 2009, p. 10). As previously stated, the specificity, challenge, attainability, of goals and the corresponding commitment to them factors into the success of an organization (Locke & Latham, 1990). Effective partnerships take a high level of commitment among group members in a dynamic and interactive manner (Jenkins, 2001).

Connecting the Literature

While including both the university perspective and K-12 schools perceptions of program accomplishments, this study's relevance includes recognition of the importance of collaboration in goal setting and relationship development between and within institutions, including addressing specified needs of the K-12 school (Goodlad, 1990; Zeitlin & MacLeod, 1995). In addition, sustainability will be linked to the program being associated more closely with the core mission of the university or department charged with the outreach effort signaling the influence of value alignment as a motivating characteristic (Weiser & Houglum, 1998; Wise, Retzleff & Reilly, 2002). On the contrary, programs with diminished longevity and sense of accomplishment neglected to develop the *trust, sharing, and sense of mutual benefit* necessary for sustained success (Kirschenbaum & Reagan, 2001). While some programs self-identified as having *champions* on the university side, those with the greatest longevity found matching drive and initiative in their K-12 counterparts; and the few programs that lacked ownership from the K-12 school side were defunct after one or two years (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Kirschenbaum & Reagan, 2001).

Each of these scenarios suggests a need to facilitate nurturing and collaborative relationships between and within postsecondary institutions and K-12 schools. The absence of consistent advocacy limited the communication between partners and impaired the development of clear goals and a vision representative of both parties. A willingness and continuous commitment to sharing of knowledge, perspectives and resources among partners are conditions that can lead to an increase in likelihood of sustaining the partnership over a period of time.

The genesis of many of these partnerships may be the result of the social capital in educational circles of individuals who leverage relationships with their community to achieve intrinsic and extrinsic goals connected to their institutions mission or the recognition of institutional leaders that external engagement is a priority. Leadership of these partnerships includes individuals playing the role of advocate and champion or boundary spanner. Many partnerships, be it in the shape of Professional Development Schools or configured as training, curriculum development support or comprehensive school reform collectives are created out of the need to respond to accountability measures from federal or state governments (Davies, Edwards, Gannon & Laws, 2007). The degree to which the partnership is reliant on continuity of leadership is in relation to the level of trust and mutuality developed in the partnership (Fear & Sandmann, 1995). Where the collaboration is stronger in trust and commitment to shared goals, the likelihood of success increases.

Sustained success of university and K-12 school partnerships rests on the roles, motivations, and conditions under which the partnership is formed and endures (Biddle, 2013; Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015; Eddy & Amey 2014; Kahn & Fellows, 2013; Lawler, 1973; Lord & Hanges, 1987; Locke & Latham, 2006; Epstein, 2011; Mead, 1934; Osterloh & Frey, 2000). By being aware of certain organizational indicators within and between partners, those charged with creating collaborative environments for the partnership can facilitate the sharing of needs and establish clear and concise goals with the aim of mutualized benefits. As motivations for partnerships fluctuate-often changes to policy mandates or challenges to value alignment, the roles within and between partners become more vital and collaborative conditions more salient (Eddy & Amey, 2014). Commitment and development of trust within a partnership is a foundational priority for sustained success. Developing an understanding of the process each of the partners use to create and share meaning between and within their institutions could assist in addressing issues of sustainability.

This study examines these processes within both university and K-12 school organizations. The next section will describe how this study went about developing understanding the functions of motivation and conditions as they relate to the purpose for entering into a university and K-12 school partnership and the perception of mutual benefits that are intended as the result of this partnership. The process in which goal setting and rewards are both constructed toward mutuality and achieved will be analyzed through a lens of connection to organizational strategic objectives.

Chapter Three: Methods

This section outlines the methods of this qualitative study. It begins by defining auto-ethnography and the theoretical underpinnings of this approach. This section discusses how the study was set up, beginning with document analysis and reflection on critical instances in the formation of a partnership. The chapter concludes with an examination of my data analysis methods and the positionality and trustworthiness of my research approach.

A Qualitative Approach

The activity of research is to "question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (Van Manen, 1990, p.5). Indeed, to wonder is to be willing to step back and allow the world and others in it to connect to us; being receptive enough to allow things of the world to present themselves in their own terms (Van Manen, 2002). In qualitative research, the purpose of studying a subject is to understand a person's lived experience with a particular event or phenomenon. Glesne (2011) submits that an interpretivist approach to phenomenological research includes an assumption that reality is socially constructed and complex. Research is for the purpose of understanding and interpreting, and includes using the researcher as an empathetic, personally involved instrument (Glesne, 2011). This approach leans towards a natural and inductive reasoning while searching for patterns with which to describe said phenomenon (Glesne, 2011).

Qualitative researchers must enter into these settings and interpret these subjects in relation to the phenomenon of interest. This type of research includes case study, interviews, observations, historical and interactional texts, and personal experience

(Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Further, Glesne (2011) offers that analysis of qualitative research looks for patterns but doesn't attempt to "reduce the multiple interactions to numbers, nor to a norm. [The] final write-up will be quite descriptive in nature" (Glesne, 2011, p. 8).

As this study is designed to describe how partners create and share meaning between and within the partnership and along this broad range of perspectives, adopting a social constructivist approach to knowledge creation is a good fit. Kim (2001) describes social constructivism as being based on assumptions about reality, knowledge and learning. The author summarizes reality as being constructed through human activity; knowledge as created meaning through their interactions with each other and the environment; and learning as occurring when people are engaged in social activities (Kim, 2001). Additionally, Rogoff (1990) outlines the concept of intersubjectivity as the created meaning between individuals where interactions are centered on common interests that shape their communication. The experiences of individuals are "affected by the intersubjectivity of the community to which the people belong" when meaning is shaped through communication within the group (Kim, 2001, p. 4).

Methodology: Auto-ethnography

In order to understand the processes in which university and K-12 school partnerships are formed and sustained I employed an auto-ethnographic approach that examines one specific partnership, the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders between Michigan State University (MSU) and Flint Community Schools (FCS). This is the preferred approach because it provides a unique vantage point for discussing the forming and norming of this partnership.

Auto-ethnographic studies are "artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience" (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p.1). Glesne (2011) describes auto-ethnography as way to inquire about culture and society through a focus on one's own personal experiences. This accomplished through confronting the tension between insider and outsider perspectives (Adams et al., 2015) where introspection and reflection contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. As a research method, auto-ethnography 1) leverages a researcher's personal experiences in describing and critiquing cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences 2) acknowledges and values the relationships between a research and others 3) employs deep and careful self-reflection understand the intersections between self and society 4) balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity (Adams, et al., 2015, p. 1-2).

An *ethnography* would "use a set of methods to collect data, and the written record is the product of using the techniques" and is a represented as a "sociocultural interpretation of the data"; the goal here is "to reveal the context and social reality that guide people's behavior within a particular setting" (Heck, 2006, p. 381). *Auto-ethnography* incorporates the researcher into this inquiry of sociocultural contexts (Glesne, 2011). Here the perspective and expertise of an investigator in the midst of a phenomenon is valued as a knowledge producing form of writing. Using narrative to discover a sociological perspective on a cultural and scholarly discourse, readers are asked to explore the re-telling of events from the vantage of the writer (Glense, 2011).

Auto-ethnography offers research focused on "human intentions, motivations, emotions, and actions, rather than generating demographic information and general descriptions of interactions" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 21). In this particular study, I desired to understand the complex social phenomena of partnerships between a university and a school district, which compelled me to look at issues of roles, motivations, and conditions. The auto-ethnography approach allowed me to detail specific interactions between actors at the policymaking, administrative, and practitioner levels from my own perspective as a participant. This insider perspective provided a unique, up-close examination of the key interactions at the beginning of this partnership and the reflection and writing process enlightened the "view from the ground level" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 22) where personal connections, personal knowledge, and hands-on participation allowed for richer insight (Adams et al., 2015).

As this project has a focus on sensemaking from the lens described by Weick (1995) and Coburn (2001; 2005) it was necessary to highlight the common set of priorities of auto-ethnographic research: 1) Foreground personal experience in research and writing 2) Illustrate sense-making processes 3) Use and show reflexivity 4) Illustrate insider knowledge of a cultural phenomenon/experience 5) Describe and critique cultural norms, experiences, and practices 6) Seek responses from audiences (Adams et al. 2015, p. 26). These principles provide a basis for designing and implementing an auto-ethnographic study and allowed for a complex and insider account of how and why this particular experience is important and challenging (Adams et al., 2015). Further, this approach targeted a range of perspectives that are not generally studied in combination – those at the top of the policy making process, those in charge of administration of policy, and those who are in practice of implementing policy.

Through this study, I developed an idea of how actors within partnering organizations construct understanding of their responsibilities and benefits from the partnership while comprehending the degree to which the range of perspectives may influence creation of this shared meaning. It must be acknowledged that gains in knowledge will likely be different across different partnership contexts, educational or otherwise.

Purposeful Sampling

Patton (2002) identifies sixteen purposeful sampling strategies for case studies. Ritchie and Lewis (2013) reviewed these sampling strategies and found, “members of a sample are chose with a ‘purpose’ to represent a location or type in relation to a key criterion” (2013, p. 79). The key criterion in this instance is that a university –K-12 partnership be one that addresses school and district reform efforts. Suri’s (2011) review of Patton’s work includes the assertion that purposeful sampling requires access to key informants. In this study, the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders, as a partnership between a university (Michigan State University) and a K-12 school district (Flint Community Schools) is selected for this study because it involves school and district reform efforts with respect to leadership development for administrators and teachers.

Exploring Patton’s (2002) work further, of the sixteen case-sampling strategies described, critical case sampling is met when the case being investigated demonstrates a phenomenon or are essential in the transfer of a process (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). Where these cases are ‘critical’ to the development of knowledge for similar or future cases, “’Patton, sees this approach as particularly valuable in evaluative research because it helps to draw attention to particular features of a process and can thus heighten the impact of the research” (2013, p. 80). Suri (2011) maintains that a large portion of the value of the synthesis of a critical case is to the stakeholders that make informed decisions about the viability of an educational program” (p. 68). Examining the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders fits the criterion for a critical case sampling because it stands to reason that the synthesis of development of this partnership could inform future partnerships between other universities and schools.

Context

The Michigan Department of Education's (MDE) partnership model is intended to comprise a "net of local and state supports and resources to help communities provide each student with the access and opportunity for a quality education"(Michigan Department of Education, 2017). Key elements of the partnership model include:

- Using an A-F state accountability system, any district with one or more "F" schools would be eligible. Districts with one or more "D" schools potentially could select to participate, pending State Superintendent review and capacity.
- With multiple partners at the table—including local board members, the ISD, education organizations, tribal education councils, business, community members, parents, higher education organizations, and foundations— identify a plan of supports and interventions that will improve student outcomes.
- Academic outcomes are a primary focus.
- Other whole child outcomes that can impede improved academics—like health, nutrition, behavior, and social/emotional also are addressed. (Michigan Department of Education, 2017, p. 9)

When considering Flint's district level achievement data several schools have been identified as low achieving over the course of the previous four years (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2017). District wide, graduation rates are below 60% and student proficiency on the state assessment is between 2-4%. Furthermore, the district continues to struggle financially as the fund balance has decreased significantly over the past 3 years (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2017). Separately, each of these challenges make FCS a prime candidate for the partnership model under MDE's approach, yet the extreme conditions exhibited when these challenges are taking in combination make it even more imperative for the district to shrewdly consider with whom it partners and how.

Previously under NCLB, the federal government mandated allocation of a percentage of Title I funds for the lowest performing schools toward "consultation regarding rapid turnaround" among other requirements (The Edtrust-Midwest, 2012). As Flint Community Schools considers its options under the Every Student Succeeds Act, it will be helpful to develop understanding of the process the district employed in determining how to acquire services and supports using specific Title I funds including evaluating partnerships. FCS' analysis could include a focus on the district's function within the partnership and highlight a need for clarity around benefits to the district.

Michigan's new school accountability model makes studying the influences on a partnership along policy making, administrative and practitioner perspectives more relevant. Analysis can inform decisions at each of the levels and collectively for the partnering institution. Both universities and K-12 schools could have a better understanding of their responsibilities within the partnership and have reasonable expectations of benefits. Research into the process each partner uses to understand the roles, motivations, and conditions for the partnership can help facilitate this understanding of responsibilities and benefits.

Research Design

To conduct this study, I began by dividing the research design into two phases. The first phase of the study analyzed documents relating to the Fellowship of

Instructional Leaders, considering my research question. The findings from these documents function as a guide to reflecting on my experiences working for MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach and coordinating the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders. The reflections on this experience center around three critical incidents and are analyzed in hopes of drawing connections to the University-K-12 Partnership Sensemaking Conceptual Framework.

Phase I- Meta-Reflective Document Analysis

Glesne (2011) offers that documents can "raise questions about your hunches and thereby shape new directions for observations and interviews" (p. 85). Interviews alone do not reveal all of the elements and nuances of partnerships so it reasons that document analysis also be included. Document analysis can provide a framework for the interview process. Document analysis, as Heck (2006) argued can "provide an important indication of an organization in action. The organization's culture leaves its imprint on most of the printed material that is produced" (Heck, 2006, p. 80). The author warns of the "organizational slant" many of these documents may include and suggests analysis be mindful of the fact that the evidence included within is from the organization's own perspective (p. 80).

In addition, Bowen (2009) as found in Boggs (2014) submits five key functions that document analysis serves, and are described in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Specific Function of Document Analysis

Function	Rationale
1. Provide context within which research participants operate	Document analysis provides background information as well as historical insight. "Such information and insight can help researchers understand the historical roots of specific issues and can indicate the conditions that impinge upon the phenomena currently under investigation" (Bowen, 2009, p. 29-30).
2. Information contained in documents can suggest questions that need to be asked	Document analysis can help focus specific items of attention and generate interview questions. This can allow the research to complement other research activities.
3. Supplementary research data	As Bowen argued, "Information and insight derived from documents can be valuable additions to a knowledge base" (2009, p. 30)
4. Means of tracking change and development	When there are several drafts of a document, in this case the proposed PEFA legislation, the researcher can compare versions for changes.
5. A way to verify findings or corroborate evidence from other sources	As Bowen posited, "Sociologists, in particular, typically use document analysis to verify their findings ... if contradictory ... investigate further. When there is convergence of information ... readers of the research report usually have greater confidence in the trustworthiness of the findings" (Bowen, 2009, p. 30).
	*Based on Bowen (2009)

Phase 1- Meta-reflective document analysis was accomplished by collecting public documents concerning the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders. One identified source is a Memorandum of Understanding, similar to a contract, between Michigan State University and Flint Community Schools (see Appendix 1). This document is publicly available through the Freedom of Information Act (1967), though I was provided a copy by Barbara Markle, Ph.D., Assistant Dean for K-12 Outreach. In addition, MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach has a website that includes programmatic information regarding the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders and other promotional materials related to the program. A list of the documents that were examined is found in Table 6.

Table 6. Documents Examined

Document #	**Title**	**Format**	**Source**
1	Memorandum of Understanding	Digital	MSU Office of K-12 Outreach
2	Office of K-12 Outreach: Programs and Services	Hard Copy	MSU Office of K-12 Outreach
3	New Educator Spring/Summer 2016 Edition Building Capacity For Change With Flint Schools	Digital	MSU College of Education
4	Coming Together For Change	Hard Copy	MSU Office of K-12 Outreach

The Memorandum of Understanding between MSU and FCS includes a list of deliverables and a description of a set of resources that are associated with the partnership. The deliverable list is structured on a 3-year cycle of support and each year has its own set of outcomes and is described in Table 7.

Table 7. List of Memorandum of Understanding Deliverables

	Deliverable
Year 1	• Learn to be a leader of organizational and instructional change (e.g. norms, effective practices, coherence, collaboration, building trust). • Assess current initiatives that impact student learning. • Implement a culture of improvement, including an accountable professional community. • Increase capacity to work with students in poverty. • Cultivate a collective vision of what is possible, including a shared understanding of instructional program coherence and the role students have in their own learning. • Build the capacity to use data to inform all decisions influencing instructional improvement. • Identify and support effective instruction. • Align organizational structures to improve student achievement.
Year 2	• Expand staff capacity to implement effective instructional and leadership practice. • Increase skills in using data and establishing data use as an institutional norm. • Increase skills for monitoring systems that promote complex change in schools. • Identify an appropriate problem of practice and theory of action in order to provide focus for school improvement efforts that will leverage the greatest achievement gains. • Expand the accountable professional community to include feeder schools and central office.
Year 3	• Continue to develop capacity to assess, adjust, and improve instructional and organizational strategies that have the greatest impact on student achievement. • Ensure instructional program coherence across and between grade levels/subjects. • Focus on assessment for learning. • Differentiate learning based on student learning needs and data.

Reflections on the documents occurred on at multiple times throughout the project. Initially, the documents were analyzed to provide grounding in the goals, objectives, and processes outlined in the various partnership documents. This provided a clearer understanding of the intentionality in partnering between the organizations and historical context of previous connections.

Phase II- Focus on Critical Incidents

Critical Incidents

My auto-ethnographic reflections and analysis center on three key incidents in the partnership between Flint Community Schools (FCS) and Michigan State University (MSU). I have highlighted important processes for making sense of the partnership from both the university and K-12 school perspectives through thoughtful consideration of these particular moments in the partnership. The examination of the critical incidents that follows explores the forming and norming stages of the partnership and analyzes actors' perceptions of the roles, motivations, and conditions that led to a sustainable partnership from the my unique vantage point.

Flanagan (1954) defined the technique of using critical incidents as a point of analysis as:

[A] set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles ... By an incident is meant any specifiable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical the incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 327).

This study developed inferences that can inform future partnerships based on my reflections and observations on interactions with colleagues at MSU and counterparts with FCS specific to the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders.

Incident 1: *Formation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)*

The creation of a legally binding document that outlines Michigan State University's support for Flint Community Schools's Priority Schools was conceptually developed by MSU with input from FCS central office administration. The document represents the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders partnership's scope of work, period of performance, compensation, evaluation and termination, resources, and deliverables. The MOU is connected to the University-K-12 Partnership Sensemaking Conceptual Framework as a representation of the culmination of the creation of shared meaning that leads to entering into a formal partnership and was voted upon by the FCS Board of Education. The formulation of the MOU included many meetings, emails, and phone calls within and between the two organizations. Memorandums of Understanding are typically used to establish formal connections between two large organizations and I believe that the interactions that led to the creation of the document found in this study exemplified the structure for formation of this partnership.

Incident 2: *Introduction of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders to FCS Principals*

Following the approval of the MOU by FCS administration and board of education, MSU presented an overview of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders for the four principals of the schools initially involved in the partnership. This norming activity was preceded by multiple meetings within MSU's organization, emails between the MSU and FCS, and culminated in a single meeting between with the two organizations. In this instance, developing shared meaning between the two organizations also included providing an opportunity for principals to give input. This input was emblematic of the emphasis on mutual benefits and allowed practitioners a voice in how the partnership would be most effective in addressing the needs of each school. The interactions between Flint Community Schools and Michigan State University before and during the principal's meeting are symbolic toward establishing norms for the partnership.

Incident 3: Adding a New School Mid-way Through Year 2.

One example of a partnership norming challenge within the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders partnerships included adding a new school to the program after it already began. Several factors including district student enrollment and state accountability policies necessitated an additional school being added to the partnership mid-stream. This resulted in a need to evaluate the partnership in order to understand how best to incorporate additional participants in a relevant and efficient manner. Several meetings, emails, and phone calls within MSU and inclusive of FCS was necessary to create an approach to assimilating the new school into the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders. As was necessary in Incident 2, developing shared understanding also involved input from the principal as to how this partnership would best meet the needs of the school.

Data Collection

I collected emails, documents, handouts, field notes and recreated phone calls and personal conversations. Each of these supporting elements informed my analysis of each critical incident. Next, the analysis of the documents informed the reflection on the critical incidents. It was necessary to connect the events highlighted in Phase II to the goals, objectives, and processes outlined in the documents.

Table 8. Auto-ethnographic Data

Incident	Data	# of Sources
1	Documents, Phone Calls, and Emails	Seven emails, Four documents, 3 phone calls, multiple meeting notes
2	Documents	Five documents, multiple meeting notes
3	Documents and Emails	3 emails, 3 phone calls, multiple meeting notes

Analysis of Data

Where several key experts encourage the analysis of data to include a measure of coding (Conrad & Serlin, 2006; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2010) in a traditional sense of qualitative research, this study departs from this approach. Though the National Research Council (NRC, 2002) at one time published a report that established criteria for consideration of scientific standards in educational research, these criteria have since been challenged (St. Pierre, 2002) on the basis of inclusion of diversity of perspectives. Augustine (2014) applied Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) concept of *assemblage* to connect the theoretical underpinnings of her dissertation to the actual interview data. Assemblage is a framework for analyzing social complexity by emphasizing fluidity, exchangeability, and multiple functionalities (1980).

For Augstine, the Deleuze and Guattari concept supported her data analysis as she, "began writing across the linguistic and material settings of the interviews, not in search of a transcendent level of meaning that would explain everything but across possible surprising connections among theories and the experiences of my participants" (Augustine, 2014, p. 749). This allowed her analysis to accurately portray her subjects and not simply correspond to connections to her theoretical framework. The participants surprising responses tended to land outside of her initial framing and rather than be confined to stringent principles of coding, her use of narrative summary allowed, "new connections among ideas occurred—thoughts I did not know I had came to life on the page (Augustine, 2014, p.750). Augustine combined notes from interview, interview transcripts, literature review and participant ideas into an interpretation section. This process of writing and reading focused and informed how participant experiences were theorized in a manner than allowed for open interpretation.

The Deleuzian narrative approach simply stated:

"Data analysis was putting different and unrelated data into relation with theory in unplanned and unexpected ways. Analysis was not simply coding data but the intermingling of data and theory after focused reading and copious amounts of writing" (Augustine, 2014, p.750).

I incorporated Augustine's approach to data analysis so as to leave room for new and previously unconsidered perspectives about partnerships to surface. It was imperative to take copious notes during the writing process. This provided for additional data points that reflect the conversations and the settings in which they occur. In addition, the analysis of the critical incident reflections also included constantly referring back to the conceptual framework and literature review from Chapters 1 and 2. This 'looking back' focused mostly on notions of roles and motivations in highlighting how those concepts were evident in the literature and then comparing those instances to similar instances in the critical incidents.

Further, Bochner and Ellis (2016) distinguish two types of analysis of auto-ethnography: narrative analysis and narrative-under-analysis. Narrative analysis is summarized as the "research product is a story … that the researcher composes to represent events, characters, and issues that have been studied. Here we are concerned with what the story does, how it works… We take the standpoint of the storyteller who wants a listener to 'get into' the story" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 185). In narratives-under analysis, stories are treated more as data and analyzed "to arrive at themes, types, or storylines that hold across stories" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 185). This study leans toward narrative-under-analysis where scientists represent a perspective of reality in order to develop theory and reach generalizations (Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

Summarizing the data from document analysis and reflections while being open to new concepts beyond what is currently situated in the framework is a responsible stance in the quest for knowledge. It is hoped that this new knowledge can support the potential benefits to not just the field of research, but also to various stakeholders of future university and K-12 school partnerships.

Intertextuality

Pseudonyms have been used to maintain the confidentiality of participants. All of the pseudonyms are taken from the HBO television series *The Wire*, which highlights social and political challenges in Baltimore, MD. The series included a social critique of the education system in the city and the names represented here are mostly from characters set in the schools. A description of participants and their roles in the partnership can be found in Chapter 4.

This intentional use of pseudonyms to convey additional meaning is an element of intertexuality. Allen (2011) describes the theory of intertexuality suggest that meaning in a text is only understood in relation to other texts and that no text stands alone but is interlinked with the tradition that came before it and the context in which it is produced. Further, in this dissertation the reflections found in the Phase II critical incidents and earlier in the Voices from the Field are inclusive of interactions with individuals who have been keenly involved in the development of the partnership but also work to improve the conditions in urban schools. As such, parallels are intended to be drawn to the characters in *The Wire* and the social critique found within.

As an exception, Dr. Barbra Markle is identified as she is the Assistant Dean for K-12 Outreach at Michigan State University and Primary Investigator for all of the grants through which much of the work of the Office is funded. She has granted permission to be included in this study although all of the comments attributed to her are from my recollection.

Positionality

While the scope of this case study is latent with challenges, I allow for the support that Michigan State University, College of Education- Office of K-12 Outreach, will provide in administering and collecting much of the data. My Research Assistantship with Michigan State University's College of Education-Office of K-12 Outreach provides unparalleled access to much of this data. With the research vantage point I used, the association with MSU K-12 Outreach has potential for bias. In addition, the concept of positionality in this research will also be confronted by my own personal experiences and values that both enlighten and influence my perspective. While it is inevitable that each of these matters shaped the interpretation of the many findings, it was my own responsibility to maintain fidelity to the research and minimize the degree to which these factors were able to influence the reporting of the data.

In an effort to effectively manage the conflicts of positionality, it is of prime importance to acknowledge their existence and recognize the places in the practice of research in which their influences will come into fruition. First, the benefits that result from the advantage of employing data resources obtained by MSU's K-12 Outreach are steeped in the biases and limited by the methodology preferred by the College of Education. While it can be reasoned that each of the Office of K-12 Outreach data sources utilized in the study will have a certain level of validity and accuracy, one must be careful to control for the predisposition of Office of K-12 Outreach staff and the outcomes they desire. Furthermore, my position as a graduate assistant is predicated on my appointment in this same office and I have to be mindful of the interplay between my own research interests and those of the Office of K-12 Outreach. Clarification of researcher bias is more involved and is described below.

The research design and conduct must take into account my own personal affinities and bias with regard to the research topic. Both of these attributes have been honed by my own personal educational and professional experiences. My role as facilitator with Fellowship of Instructional Leaders could both aid and hinder the research study- the relationships I've built and my perceptions of the Flint Community Schools also included the development of multiple working relationships with key staff members in many of the Priority Schools. Being mindful of these relationships and the potential for influence on analysis of findings is a rational concern. In these terms, Gary Fine (1993), in his essay on challenges in ethnography, explains how the Friendly ethnographer must be cognizant of conflicting goals and motivation, and the Kindly ethnographer often "becomes sympathetic to the aims of the group" (Fine, 1993 p. 271). Indeed, one of the preeminent virtues of this research was my ability to collect and report analysis while balancing respect for my subjects and an obligation for honesty to the field.

In addition, I, not unlike any past, present, or future researcher, owe a great deal of consideration and effort to the concept of objectivity. Again, my personal experiences played a role in the degree to which my findings hold fidelity to which Fine (1993) describes as “ presentational choices” whereby I made a concerted endeavor to report in a manner that is aware of the multiplicity of perspectives that my data could be viewed through and limit the level to which the data becomes “’contaminated’ by the perspective that the researcher brings to the question and by the emotions generated by the field” (Fine, 1993, p. 287). While being objective in a study in which there is apparent and real proximity to the subjects was without a doubt a challenge, being attentive and responsive to these challenges is paramount to a successful study-specifically, it was essential to not become overly familiar with the subjects

Being present in the research activity is a means to gathering a richness of data that through analysis can make a significant contribution to the field. Additionally, my reflections and the methods I used to summarize these data and analyze documents were all fashioned by my experiences working in urban school settings and research-based institutions. The resulting text of analysis had to be equally vigilant in controlling for my personal experiences.

Trustworthiness

As in many qualitative studies, ensuring trustworthiness is a challenge for this study. To this end, Glesne (2011) summarized Creswell (1998) description of several procedures for qualitative researchers to follow to contribute trustworthiness to their studies. This study employed peer debriefing, and clarification of researcher bias to increase the validity of the findings. Member checking included sharing of transcripts and analysis with partnership participants in order to ensure their accurate representation. Further, I employed audit trails as described by Carcary (2009) as the documentation of the course toward a completed analysis to provide an account of all research decisions and activities throughout this entire study. Further Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlight six categories of information that need to be collected to inform the audit process: 1) Raw data 2) Data reduction and analysis notes 3) Data reconstruction and synthesis products 4) Process notes 5) Materials related to intentions and dispositions 6) Preliminary development information. Through examining these six categories, I was able to better assess whether this study's findings are grounded in the data.

Chapter Four: The Fellowship Of Instructional Leaders

On the Ground in Flint

The first thing visible upon entering Flint, Michigan's city limit, off Interstate 69, is a massive General Motors plant. It stands as a constant reminder of the overbearing presence auto manufacturing has had in this community for since the birth of General Motors in 1908. The first exit after the auto plant leads to two schools. Turning left off the exit leads to Lawrence Elementary, surrounded by homes that remain as some of the last vestiges of Flint's middle class within the city limits. Many of the aging homes are still in majestic form having been the residences of the auto company's first era of executives. The school at the top of the hill is in disrepair from the exterior and the glassed in green house has been the victim of several years of neglect.

Inside, the students are as high energy as can be found in any urban school around the country, somehow able to ignore the plastic bags that surround each drinking fountain around the school, a constant reminder that the public water system is poisoned with lead. The water crisis that began in 2014 continues to impact students and families, and the mental toll on educators is just as enormous as the stockpile of donated water bottles that I found on site. Teachers, administrators, and support staff all wear faces fatigued by months of emotional stress caused by the water crisis and the exhausting pressure from external media that has been covering the public health situation in Flint. Furthermore, the schools district's most recent round of restructuring has yet again shuffled around students and teachers alike from one school to another and an air of unfamiliarity is tangible.

A right turn off of highway exit will follows around a bend and towards Metro

High School. Once a jewel of the city, enrollment in Metro High used to require a high score on an entrance exam. Now, due to the district's declining enrollment- down from 20,556 in 2002-2003 to 4,806 students in 2016-2017-Metro High is no longer requires a test for entrance (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2017). In fact, Metro High now enrolls every 7th, 8th, and 9th grade student in the district plus the 10th – 12th grade students within its school boundary zone, which is a part of the process of consolidating the district from two high schools into a single high school. Many of Metro High's teachers are still used to the more advanced students in the district and have difficulty adjusting to the learning styles of the more diverse and challenging student base. Test scores at Metro High had dropped the statewide percentile proficiency ranking from the 54th percentile in 2011-12 to 8th in 2015-16. In the same time frame, the school's percentage of economically disadvantaged students increased from 73% to 84% (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2017).

Walking into Metro High can be challenging, once I find an unlocked door among the seemingly ending array of inaccessible entrances, I am immediately questioned by a public safety officer and instructed to pass through a metal detector. The hallways are beset with far too many students who have found an unhappy medium between truant, tardy and neglected. The main office is a hub of active inactivity, where adults are far more concerned about sharing their social lives with coworkers than engaging the several students seated along a wall, or even welcoming the variety of guests who have entered the space. A tour of the school takes me past abandoned classrooms, still more plastic covered drinking fountains, and into a data room with no student data on the walls.

Making a Case for Partnership

When I first visited Flint's schools in the spring of 2014, I found them to be in desperate need of not just change, but a renewal. A colleague and I arrived at Rodgers Elementary to support three schools applying for a state funded School Improvement Grant, and immediately recognized that, though the staff seemed very dedicated to their students, the lack of coherence in instruction within schools and across the district restricted much progress. The incongruity in instructional programming and practice was evident even among members of the school leadership teams that had been designated to develop the school improvement plans that informed the School Improvement Grant applications. Getting a better handle on the instructional program and more accurately aligning resources for implementing those programs in a coherent manner was to be the top priority for any intervention.

That my colleague and I from Michigan State University's Office of K-12 Outreach were even in Flint was the result of the professional development program the two of us were now tasked with leading after two years of working in the program as graduate assistants. The program, the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders, had previously worked with one of Flint's high schools. One of the former participants had been promoted to central office and sought MSU's support for the four schools that had been designated as Priority Schools by the state's accountability system.

Flint's previous participation in the Fellowship developed out of prior relationships between the MSU's College of Education and Flint Community Schools. Some examples of the relationship that predates the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders include: Student-Teacher internship placements in Flint classrooms, extensive technical assistance from MSU in the creation of professional development schools in Flint, and support for district and school administration within the State of Michigan's Statewide System of Support- MiExcel- that MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach spearheaded in intervening in the state's most academically challenged schools.

MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach. Established in the College of Education, the mission of MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach is to bring effective research-based practices to K-12 educators so they can use those practices to improve teaching and learning for all students. In keeping with MSU's land-grant mission, MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach works on multiple fronts to build the capacity of the state's education system to improve student academic outcomes, with special attention to closing the achievement gap between highest- and lowest-performing students. This mission is pursued with the help of a diverse, highly trained and committed staff and the internationally recognized professional expertise and resources available through MSU's College of Education.

The document "Office of K-12 Outreach: Programs and Services" features the following programs:

On-site School and District Support- MSU specialists provide real-time coaching and mentoring throughout your schools and central office as you pursue a systemic approach to raising over-all achievement and eliminating achievement gaps.

Coaching 101- A collaborative effort to build a statewide cadre of educational coaches who have a strong knowledge base, common language, and the competence and skills necessary to promote school improvement.

Data Services and Support- Provides professional development, individual and group coaching, and the custom development of tools and materials that allow school and district personnel to make the best use of national, state, and local data sources and web-based educational resources to improve instruction. MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach also offers expert support in developing, designing, and implementing turnaround plans, including program evaluation and action research.

The Fellowship of Instructional Leaders- Instructional leaders serve on school teams that participate in professional development events with leaders from other improving schools and learn from MSU's expert staff. The Fellowship supports these teams as they increase student learning and achievement by improving the quality of daily classroom instruction.

Emerging Leaders- Provides potential school principals an opportunity to explore in detail the knowledge, skillsets and mindsets required to be a successful leader in today's complex educational environments.

Educational Policy Fellowship Program- a year-long leadership development program for mid-career professionals involved in education and human services. Through program activities, Fellows learn about education policy design and implementation at the local, state and national levels, grow as effective leaders, and strengthen their professional networks.

Summer Institute for Superintendents- Provides superintendents with the high-quality professional development related to today's educational challenges. Superintendents work together to experience diverse perspectives on issues and develop leadership and problem-solving strategies.

President's Education Forums- An outreach strategy to used inform policymakers and education leaders about current education issues and open discussion around research and best practice in specific policy areas.

The document, "Coming Together For Change" details the support offered in the

Fellowship of Instructional Leaders program. In developing this program the Office designed a framework (Figure 3) to provide customized support for schools that were alike in their Priority status and yet distinct and different in the context and characteristics that put them in that status. School leadership teams, comprised of teachers and the principal, identified their own problems of practice and were guided through a process that built the capacity of building principals to improve the instructional core (Elmore, 2008).

Figure 3. Leadership for Coherence: A Systems Perspective

In designing program content for the Fellowship, we collaborated with the foundational experts of these concepts and adapted their research for practical application in Michigan. The Fellowship of Instructional Leaders has worked with nearly 100 principals, over 1,000 teachers and their instructional coaches helping MSU's K-12 Outreach understand the importance of leadership teams in schools, as well as the interplay between schools and their contexts within districts. This is highlighted by the need for stronger professional learning communities and instructional program coherence throughout a district and a school. The Fellowship program has previously worked with several schools from Detroit through a grant from the Skillman Foundation. This intensive program brings together cohorts of instructional learning teams to identify and work on their specific school needs, learn from turnaround experts, and from one another.

MSU's Fellowship of Instructional Leaders began a partnership with Flint Community Schools in 2014. Several meetings and communications with Flint's central office staff led to the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), a signed document that outlines the expectations and responsibilities of each partner and required approval at the administrative and policy making levels for each institution. The MOU specifies nine professional development workshops per year for the four Priority Schools. The first year the schools included Lawrence Elementary, Lewis Elementary, Rodgers Elementary and Metro High.

In order to introduce the program to the schools, a meeting was held with the four Priority Schools principals in order for a colleague and I to convey an overview and expectations. In addition we used this meeting to gain a better sense of the strengths and needs of each school so that we could provide customized support. Three of the four schools attended the meeting and the program was met with varying degrees of acceptance by the principals in attendance with several lessons learned about the school context each of the leaders was immersed in.

In the second year of the partnership, Rodgers was closed for financial reasons and City High was introduced to the Fellowship, necessitating additional support to catch the school's Instructional Leadership Team up with the first year schools. The process of engaging City High included a meeting with the principal and a tour of the school to gain a better sense of the school's culture and professional and academic needs.

The third year of the partnership saw an expansion of the program to include the remaining eight schools in the district, as well as, a closer alignment between the Fellowship and an additional partnership between MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach involving leadership coaching. The funding for the additional partnership was provided by a philanthropic foundation based in the community. For the 2016-17 school year, two of the original four schools advanced off the state's Priority Schools list: Lawrence Elementary and Lewis Elementary.

Places

Centro High School. Set in a part of town with extremely limited resources, Centro had decades of academic struggles despite almost parallel success in athletics. Centro was identified by the state as Priority School in the first wave of designation in the post-No Child Left Behind rise in school accountability. Originally mandated by the state to participate in the statewide system of support that included an early version of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders, the school's leadership team found enough value in participating that they funded the final year of support after the state withdrew funding. The school was closed the following year by the Board of Education due to the district's financial challenges.

City High School. Also located in a part of town typified by pervasive neglect, City High is massive structure that houses the compulsory high school, an alternative education program, and the district's ROTC program. In one classroom, students are performing yoga and the teacher has the lights dimmed. The empty but expansive hallways were built for a previous generation and years of declining population have led to declining enrollment in the district and particularly City High, which had fewer than 600 students in 2015-16, 83% of which are economically disadvantaged (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2017). The district has decided to phase out City High, which has entire wings of the building with no active classrooms. The school will only offer 11th and 12th grades for the 2017-18 school year.

Metro High School. Set atop a hill visible from the interstate, Metro High is formerly an entrance test school. The school's walls are dotted with the pillars of the International Baccalaureate curriculum. However, you have to endure an interlude at the school's security desk before gaining access to the maze of corridors that have been partitioned by grade. The main office is loud and bustling with activity, though not much of it is targeted for school improvement- the data room has been void of data for three years.

Lewis Elementary School. Set between a neighborhood of single-family homes and several apartment complexes, Lewis Elementary is home to a diverse student population with 62% of the 288 students being non-white (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2017). One wall in the main hallway has been decorated with a collection of hopes for the upcoming year submitted by students, teachers, staff, and parents. The data room is adorned with student attendance, behavior, and test scores; all organized and color-coded by grade-level. Students walk the hallways in a very orderly manner and even high-five staff as they pass them, even when passing the numerous plastic-wrapped drinking fountains.

Lawrence Elementary School. Lawrence Elementary is a school building that has seen better days, structurally. The stockpile of bottled water sets just off of the gymnasium that doubles as the cafeteria, and smells as such. Across the hall, the principal is leading a monthly student recognition program that highlights good behavior with children receiving gold, silver, and bronze rewards in front of less-interested classmates. Teacher turnover continues to be an issue and two staff members have recently gone out on mental health leave. The data room is functional and is representative of the hard work the leadership team has engaged in over the last year.

Rodgers Elementary School. With a small wooded area as a backdrop, Rodgers Elementary once stood as a pillar of the Community Schools movement, where students, families, and community members would participate in programming during the day and evenings. Its welcoming façade and windows throughout the building let in a lot of natural light, but the surrounding neighborhood has fallen on darker times. The effect of the lack of resources that lead to crime on enrollment forced the Board of Education to close the school in 2008, but it reopened in 2011 as community pressure forced the Board to reconsider. The school closed for good in 2015.

Michigan State University- Flint Campus, College of Human Medicine. The Michigan State University-Flint Campus houses an extension of the *College of Human Medicine* and was opened on the site of the former home of the *Flint Journal* newspaper. The facility hosts the Program in Public Health's medical courses, a computer lab, and several conference rooms. The industrial modern theme throughout the space pays tribute to the historic space but offers several technological amenities and is steeped in MSU's school colors, green and white. The facility is home to the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders' Saturday sessions with Flint leadership teams and offers both meeting rooms and break out space for small group activities and lunch.

Major Characters

Bryan Beverly is a Doctoral Candidate in Educational Policy PhD student at Michigan State University, an alum and co-coordinator of Michigan's Educational Policy Fellowship Program, and an elected member of the Lansing Board of Education. In addition, he's also a Program Coordinator with the College of Education's Office of K-12 Outreach – where his work is centered on school turnaround efforts and instructional leadership. Prior to returning to MSU for his PhD, Mr. Beverly worked as an education consultant for the KRA Corporation and the Lansing School District. His other professional experiences include work with the President's Council of State Universities, Michigan; the State of Michigan, Office of the Governor; GEAR-UP, MSU; and the Michigan Association of Counties. Mr. Beverly holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology/Anthropology from Olivet College and a master's degree in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education Administration from Michigan State University.

Barbara Markle is the Assistant Dean for K-12 Outreach at MSU. A multi-decade veteran of K-12, state government and higher education, Dr. Markle is a big picture thinker with a stately sense of order and fashion.[2]

Diane Greggs is an Outreach Specialist for MSU. A former schoolteacher and principal, Mrs. Greggs has a demeanor fit for managing the commotion found only in an elementary school. Her hair is always neatly tied up in a bun and her light aromatic perfume will stay with you, pleasantly, far after she's departed. With a smile that can light up any room, Mrs. Greggs' keen interest is spending time with her granddaughters.

Grace Sampson is the Priority Schools Facilitator for FCS. Her sense of instructional practice and passion for improvement is matched only by her recipe for Sloppy Joes. A long-time school-level staffer, the brunette Mrs. Sampson is as at home in her garden as she is in the classroom.

[2] Bryan Beverly and Dr. Barbara Markle's real names are used. All other names are pseudonyms.

Howard Colvin is the principal at City High School in FCS. Mr. Colvin has numerous experiences in urban education and a broad view of school turnaround. His baldhead and dark contemporary glasses accentuate his athletic build and tall stature.

Dr. Albert Stokes is the former Deputy Superintendent for FCS. His responsibilities included both operations and instruction for the district and were aligned with his experience working for a charter school and MSU. Dr. Stokes is a bearded, jolly fellow who is not afraid to show his swagger or crack a joke.

Omar Barksdale is the current Superintendent for FCS. A native of Detroit and a former district administrator for Detroit Public Schools, Mr. Barksdale is even-keeled and highly cerebral. Though slight in stature, his intellect and grasp of all things related to schools can captivate a large room of his peers.

Minor Characters

Michigan State University- Office of K-12 Outreach

Donald Pryzbylewski, Program Manager, is a former state bureaucrat with experience in grant writing and allocations. He is calculating and calm, and his appearance is more sportsman than academic. He responsible for the operations within the Office.

John Dorman, Finance Director, has worked in several departments in the university and state government. He's quiet and unassuming befitting his button-down collared style.

Nicholas Withers, Chief Grant Writer, is also an adjunct English professor and an elected official in his rural hometown. His regal sensibilities are akin to his penchant for academic language and amenities. He's constantly plotting the next move for the Office.

Carol Brice, Lead Coach, develops and delivers MSU's coaching model across the state. Her short hair and bohemian chic style accents her higher order thinking.

Alma Madison, Principal Coach, is a retired high school principal in Detroit. Her tall build lends itself well to her rakish sense of style.

David Parenti, former Coordinator-Fellowship of Instructional Leaders, previously was a principal in a rural town. Highly knowledgeable about school reform, his unpretentious style mirrors his down-to-earth demeanor.

Flint Community Schools

Lester Freamon, former Interim Superintendent, held the interim tag for almost three years. More of a spokesperson than an instructional leader, his minimal role in improving the district stands in opposition to physical size.

Principals

Sandra Dawson, former Lewis Elementary Principal, has been a principal and curriculum leader in a neighboring district before. She's just as meticulous and thorough in laying out her meeting materials as she is in her appearance, and in leading a school.

Marcia Donnelly, Lawrence Elementary Principal, has previously been a principal in another district. The red streaks in her hair compliment the modern cut and her contemporary outfits. She's a sassy individual with just as much theoretical knowledge as practical experience.

Chrystal Jenkins, Rodgers Elementary Principal, is a retiring veteran of FCS. Her short hair is similar to her curt communication style. She's a straight shooter and highly frustrated with central office.

Michaela Lee, Metro High Principal, is a veteran urban schools administrator. Her expertise and passion for children often overshadows the strengths of her team. Her glasses magically hang at the end of her nose despite the rapid fire of her words.

Howard Colvin, City High Principal (Description above).

Carla Duquette, former Centro High Principal, is reserved and thoughtful. Her increasing frustration with central office has contributed to the growing number of grays flowing out of her hair clip. She will retire as Centro High School is closed.

Instructional Leadership Teams

Kimberly Russell, City High Instructional Coach, is energetic and ready to learn as her aspirations include being an administrator. She indulges in cosmetic products, but her personality is very transparent and welcoming.

James McNulty, City High Teacher, teaches science and serves on the Instructional Leadership Team. His scruff personality matches his prickly beard, but he is passionate about his students and providing them with opportunities to learn.

Janet Perlman, Instructional Coach, is soft spoken and modest. Her handle on data and instructional practice are impeccable, much like the cardigans and pearls she wears on a regular basis.

Felicia Pearson, Metro High Assistant principal, has previously been a teacher at Metro High. She is selfless almost to a fault, but loyal to her head principal Mrs. Lee. Her gray shoulder-length hair and conservative dress give the impression that she’s a veteran of working in schools.

What Follows

The following sections include my reflections and observations on interactions with colleagues at Michigan State University and counterparts with Flint Community Schools specific to the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders. These reflections and analysis are centered on three critical incidents in the formation of the partnership and have been developed after a review of documents, communications, and field notes related to the Fellowship. Chapter Five, which focuses on the formation of the formal partnership from practitioner, administrative and policymaking perspectives, examines the motivations to partner and key roles that were essential to the front-end of the partnership. Chapter Six, which centers on the first meeting between MSU and FCS' principals highlights normative processes that led to the creation of shared meaning, and incorporates the practitioner perspective on the partnership. Chapter Seven, includes administrative and practitioner perspectives in order to discuss the inclusion of a new school into the partnership and the necessary normative processes for effective inclusion in the program and foreshadowing future school expansion.

Chapter Five: Critical Incident 1

The creation of a legally binding document that outlines Michigan State University's (MSU) support for Flint Community Schools' (FCS) Priority Schools through the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders was conceptually developed by MSU with input from FCS central office administration. The document represents the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders partnership's scope of work, period of performance, compensation, evaluation and termination, resources, and deliverables. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is connected to the University-K-12 Partnership Sensemaking Conceptual Framework (Figure 1) as a representation of the culmination of the creation of shared meaning that leads to entering into a formal partnership and was voted upon by the FCS' Board of Education. The formulation of the MOU included many meetings, emails, and phone calls within and between the two organizations. The reflection that follows, and the analysis that is embedded, charts the chronological timeline of events as I recall them.

Reflection

Building on a Previous Relationship

On multiple occasions as a graduate assistant, I facilitated table discussions for the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) from Centro High School in Flint, Michigan during sessions from the Michigan Principal's Fellowship, a precursor to the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders. I heard from both the principal, Mrs. Carla Duquette, and teacher leaders about the instructional, cultural, and social challenges in both the school and the district- where the academic challenges often took a back seat to higher priorities in neighborhood and financial issues. Mrs. Duquette shared with me, "One of the worst stories in my 30 years of being an educator was when the third of three brothers was murdered. Every one of them was still in high school when they died and I will never forget seeing the mom after the last one. She wasn't just sad or angry. She was defeated." I cringed and thought how terrible it must be for violence, both in and out of school, to be such a consistent obstacle and a condition that teacher and learner alike were tasked with overcoming.

Flint's team often highlighted how poverty had contributed to the constant state of mental distress and despair in each of the young peoples' lives, which often manifested itself in a violent way because they don't believe in themselves, or in society being able to provide or prepare them for another path. "Our students don't even know what they don't know. They are so accustomed to the weekly, almost daily, violence, that they have a hard time imagining another reality," one teacher once told me.

In addition, Mrs. Duquette told me, "I'm concerned for my school and my district. Our city has been losing people for years and the school's enrollment is one third of what is used to be when I started teaching." Flint's population had been declining for years (from a peak of 200,000 in the 1960s to 99,763 in 2013), Centro High was facing parallel losses in enrollment- down from 1,257 students in 2009-10 to 842 students in 2012-13 (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2017). This caused some to question whether it would or even should stay open. In addition, Mrs. Duquette argued, "My students deserve more books. More computers. Better Internet access, and more teachers. Without these resources how do they expect me to create a culture where learning is a priority?"

My only instinct was to remind her of the opportunity in front of her that day in the Fellowship- that we had some tools for her and her team to work with as they spent some time focusing on instruction. Mrs. Duquette thanked me for my time and efforts to refocus her and the ILT. The conversations between Mrs. Duquette and me were reminiscent of collegial conversations I had with co-workers in the schools in which I had previously worked. Similar to Coburn's (2005) description of informal interactions, there was an open and honest element to the conversation as a result of the two of us establishing relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Further, I could both hear the urgency in her voice and feel the contextual challenges that were motivating her to seek additional professional support. The social conditions surrounding her school would soon be accompanied by political and economic challenges which parallel the Kirschenbaum and Regan (2001) study where frustration with the lack of time and financial resources available to devote to sustaining collaborative programs led to frustration on the part of faculty and feelings of dissatisfaction on the part of K-12 personnel.

Despite all of the challenges that the Centro High team faced, the care and commitment of every member of the ILT was evident. Never once did any of them refer to students at Centro High as anything but 'our students' or 'my students'. I could tell that each person on that team had a strong sense of ownership over both the challenges and opportunities in working with their students.

It seemed to me that the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) had a handle on how to best improve the instructional practices in their school, but lacked essential resources and support for their efforts. One teacher mentioned,

> "Its so exciting when my students latch on to a concept. Like one day, I was teaching a geometry lesson on angles and all of sudden, a pair of students starts rapping a song about degrees and measurement. It was very catchy, actually. I think it must've

been like one of the songs on the radio, because before long, every kid in my class is singing along. I just wish I could leverage that type of learning more often and that we had money to let the students push their creativity"

This teacher and other members of the ILT often mentioned how much they enjoyed participating in the program and how they worked hard to implement the strategies and practices that were presented during the Fellowship sessions. The instructional coach stated, "The work we are doing here in the Fellowship connects so well to the work that our school is already doing to improve test scores and create a culture of learning for all of our students." This perceived alignment seemed to be a welcomed change from professional development opportunities previously offered to members of the ILT. Partnerships, such as the Fellowship, focused on curriculum enrichment and building professional community are rated the highest in terms of the interaction between program type and level of collaboration suggesting a connection between goal setting, relationships, and relevance to institutional missions (Kirschenbaum & Regan, 2001).

As another teacher mentioned, "I am often frustrated by PD [professional development] because it rarely means anything to the reality back in the building. We usually just end up with more work." I understood that the Flint ILT was appreciative of the chance to learn and work through some of their challenges. This was verbal recognition of the value participation in the Fellowship was bringing to participants. It was becoming clear that though the work wasn't easy, -nor the conversations that the work stimulated- the benefits to this school were tangible.

Unfortunately, at the end of my first year working with the MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach, I learned that the school would be losing state and district funding for participation in the Fellowship. As Nye and Schramm (1999) found, partnerships between higher education institutions and community-based institutions, like K-12 schools, have increased because schools often perceive benefits that include access to human and financial resources. The Fellowship was unlike many research-based partnerships in that it didn't include access to funds from the university to the schools. However, because the ILT found so much value in participating in the Fellowship, they decided to pay for the principal and professional learning chair to participate out of the school's discretionary money.

I was surprised to hear that the ILT had made such a commitment, but later Mrs. Duquette shared, "The time and space to work together as a team and reflect on the implementation and progress of our school's initiatives motivated our team to continue with MSU's support at the Fellowship sessions. Personally, I found learning from the other ILTs in the Fellowship to be crucial to our own school improvement work. Where else am able to bounce ideas off of fellow educators in a safe place? The feedback we get here is priceless."

I recognized how being in a community of learners was an important aspect of their development as a leadership team. Whenever opportunities to hear from other schools ILTs or receive feedback would occur in the Fellowship, the Flint ILT was highly motivated and adamant about incorporating 'best practices' into what they were planning. "We're going to try that!" the instructional coach exclaimed after hearing about how one school was using an observation tool for visiting colleagues' classrooms in order to view specific instructional strategies. The ability to learn not just from MSU personnel, but also from other schools is a benefit that the Centro High ILT valued and is a hallmark of the Fellowship. This merging of interests between the partners around collegial feedback stands in line with Firestone and Fisler's (2002) findings where conflicts among partners arise when interests are so dissimilar.

The following year, I learned that due to declining enrollment in FCS -enrollment dropped from 13, 798 in 2008-09 to 8,599 in 2012-2013- Centro High was closing (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2017). Under those circumstances, it would be somewhat understandable if the principal and instructional coach had mentally checked out of the Fellowship, especially when the considering the majority of the work was focused on preparing for the upcoming year. Instead, both educators were in attendance every session and engaged in the content, recognizing that the products from each session would be useful in whatever educational setting they would be placed next. "We've come too far with this group to just stop," said the instructional coach.

A Spark from the SEA

Around the same time, the state's education authority, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), posted a call for proposals for a School Improvement Grant (SIG). The SIG was designed to provide qualifying schools with financial and human resources to overcome some of their academic challenges through approved interventions. Schools qualified for the SIG if they were designated as a Priority School on the state's accountability system, which is an example of policy mandates creating conditions for schools to acquire additional support (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Corcoran & Goertz, 2005). One particularly salient aspect of the SIG was an emphasis on professional development and, as Davies et al. (2007) highlight, in districts and schools where the accountability pressure is high, professional development is strongly related to product development and these products are intended to be put into immediate application. As MSU was already an approved intervention vendor for professional development by the MDE, the Office of K-12 Outreach went about a marketing campaign in order to be written into several districts' grant proposals.

On the university's policy making side, the Board of Trustees and administration was keen on creating both a larger university presence in urban centers and demonstrating capacity to have an impact on urban schools. As Boards of Trustees in higher education are charged with creating and overseeing policies that govern the institution of higher learning (Bok, 2015); administration is charged with setting the strategic objectives of the institution including the degree to which the university will engage in outreach opportunities (Fear & Sandmann, 1995; Eddy & Amey, 2014). The Office of K-12 Outreach within the College of Education was established in 1997 by the university in order to address the divide between research and practice and was responsible for engaging urban schools on behalf of the university.

The Office of K-12 Outreach response to the grant opportunity offered by the Michigan Department of Education was in line with several upper level conversations being held at the university. Dr. Barbara Markle met with me on multiple occasions to express the level of interest on issues pertaining to urban education from the university president's office and the Board of Trustees. Dr. Markle, at one point, shared a question she got directly from the president, "Are we doing enough in Flint and Detroit?" To which Dr. Markle said she outlined our previous Fellowship efforts and additional coaching support. MSU's president was clear in that we could and should be doing more to help schools in those cities, and Dr. Markle was quite direct in her request to continue thinking of ways to be more effective in Flint and Detroit, "I want you to think about how we can have a sustained impact in these schools."

About this same time and in response to the MDE request for School Improvement Grant proposals, David Parenti, the new Coordinator of the Fellowship and a former graduate assistant, and myself traveled all over the state for three weeks visiting districts that had schools that were eligible for the SIG. During this time, we spent a lot of time thinking about how to best support these schools in turning around. "Hopefully we can put together a new cohort of the Fellowship and customize our support based on the needs of the individual schools," David said. I remember thinking he was on to something. Our collective reflections on the state of the Fellowship was an example of informal sensemaking (Coburn, 2005), and in order for the Office of K-12 Outreach to plan strategically to meet the needs of schools we had to first develop some shared understanding of what the program was and what it could be.

Previously, the Fellowship was probably more prescriptive than it should have been. Designing professional development for multiple schools and contexts was difficult, and the previous iteration of the Fellowship provided generic support. As we crossed the state, we recognized that schools had very diverse needs. Benton Harbor required support around climate and culture; both Holland and Leslie were looking for support around differentiated instruction; Flint was seeking support around implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support; and Detroit was interested in reading strategies. It became clear that tailor-made support for each district was an approach we should embrace, but we later found that even within a district, we should provide customized support school by school.

Brinkeroff (2002) and Eddy and Amey (2014) highlight the importance of a champion- one who advocates for a partnership from within an institution (internally) and from within a partnership (externally). As chance would have it, the instructional coach at Centro, Grace Sampson, was hired in at Flint Community Schools' central office as FCS' new Priority Schools Facilitator, and was placed in charge of the most academically challenged schools. Grace Sampson was also responsible for writing the SIG application for FCS. Mrs. Sampson invited David and I to visit FCS on two occasions in supporting their grant writing efforts and was very happy to see MSU's Fellowship of Instructional Leaders written into the schools' improvement plans.

A Champion in Practice

Johnston (2000) highlights the importance of practitioner influence on the conception of a program that will directly impact their practice. In Johnston's study, in-service teachers were very frustrated with university faculty's lack of regular and meaningful involvement of the development of student-teachers and in the end, the in-service teachers failed to realize many benefits from the relationship with the university. Faculty schedules and incentives structure, which value publishing more than service, lead to disconnect and even distrust with K-12 school personnel (Smith, 1992; Bok, 2015). Each time we met with FCS to write the grant was an opportunity to learn more about the challenges the schools were facing.

Three Priority Schools: Lewis Elementary, Lawrence Elementary, and Rodgers Elementary, participated in the grant writing sessions on two warm spring days in the data room at Rodgers. Each school sent a team of three to each session: the principal, instructional coach, and one other teacher leader. Right away it was clear that the needs of the schools would vary, as some schools were very collaborative in their writing approach while others waited for the principal to direct the conversation.

Lewis' principal, Mrs. Sandra Dawson, strong and self-assured, was confident in her team and the work they had done before our meetings, "All we need to do is reformat our school improvement plans into the grant application template. I think what we have will fit neatly into each of the categories.” She neatly laid the grant application templates we’d provided in front of her along side the set of pencils she’d already arranged. “Our school-wide focus is still going to be on reading and interventions in math, reading, attendance and behavior. We won’t need to recreate the wheel. Our staff has already done so much of the heavy lifting.”

Rodgers’ principal, Mrs. Chrystal Jenkins seemed very distracted from the first introduction, sweat beaded up on her brow and was more evident because of the dramatically short haircut she wore. “I’m not sure what the point of all this is. I’ve been told our school is closing next year. Why are we applying for this grant when we might not even be open when we receive it?” She seemed anxious as she rubbed her thick gold necklace. “I’m just not into wasting time. My students can’t afford for any of us to be wasting our, or their, time. I’m not convinced this is an effective use of our time. Furthermore, where is central office in all of this?”

When refocused to draw attention to the needs of the school today, Mrs. Jenkins seemed eager to help the students. “I recognize we do need support. We all do,” she said referencing the other schools. “I think what would help us most is a focus on the data. I can admit working with data is not my strong point,” almost laughing. “But I know that it means a lot in terms of understanding the needs of each student.” It was clear to me that Mrs. Jenkins was transparent in her own self-assessment with a gap in understanding how to use data. It was also very clear that she wanted to see support for data use written into the Rodgers grant application.

Lawrence’s grant writing team seemed stuck without their principal who was running late. There was confusion on which set of school improvement planning documents they should reference, there seemed to be more than one working version. One teacher raised one set of plans in her hand and said “We worked on these last week”, while another responded that those weren’t the right ones. The exchanges continued for more than an hour while the team tried to fit their school improvement plans into the SIG grant application. Finally, Ms. Donnelly arrived carrying several bags and a large three-ring binder. “Alright, where are we?” Her team was too perplexed to answer.

David and I walked over to their table to catch her up and show her the grant application template. “Ok, I got it,” she said after a few seconds moving the red streaked portion of her hair out of her eyes. David and I shared a quick glance and a raised eyebrow. She turned back to her team and says, “See, what we have to do is enter our reading agenda into the plan. You remember, the one we discussed last week?” Her team still looked confused. “Just email me the template and I’ll just enter this myself tonight,” she said as she glanced at her phone for what seemed like the thirteenth time since she’d arrived late. I reminded her that this was designed to be a collaborative process and we were there to support whatever needs they had and perhaps outlining their goals, as a team, would be a good place to start. “I’ve already done that part,” she shot back. A lack of team input into the planning was becoming very evident and beyond whatever instructional needs Lawrence had, building a professional community was a priority for any future support MSU would provide.

Unfortunately, the MDE did not choose any of the Flint schools to receive the SIG allocation. However, Flint’s staff decided to allocate some of its Title I funds for participation in the Fellowship, and Mrs. Sampson reached out to me at MSU via email in order to provide support for drafting a proposal for district leadership. Her idea under this proposal was for the four most challenging schools to receive a customized Fellowship experience separate from any other district participation, and I recall being initially perplexed as to how that would look and feel in relation to my own experiences in the Fellowship. Focusing on one district was a new wrinkle for the Fellowship and I was unsure how to tackle the team-to-team learning component when the context seemed to be so similar.

This new customized model was the focus of multiple meetings in the Office of K-12 Outreach and took collaborative thinking from the Assistant Dean for K-12 Outreach, the grant writing team, the Fellowship coordinators (of which I had become as David Parenti had left for new professional opportunities), the finance team and the data team. Several meetings were devoted to developing a broader internal understanding of the impact and potential of the Fellowship including modifying the model of intervention at both the school and district levels. "We keep coming back to our previous model," I said in minor frustration. "We can't do what we've always done. In all due respect, what we did before was great stuff. But this is now and this requires something new."

Understanding an MOU

I understood almost immediately that MSU K-12 Outreach could outline many outcomes that the program could produce, but without further input from any of the schools or district designing next steps would be extremely difficult. Goodlad (1993) highlights the importance of a "symbiotic partnership" by which university and K-12 school personnel share in programmatic decisions. This can include establishing an open and transparent process for garnering input in the design of the structure of a program. To that end, a meeting was scheduled with the Assistant Superintendent, the

Priority Schools Facilitator, and the Director of Professional Development that took place in November of 2014 in order to gain input from the district's administration.

At that meeting, Grace Sampson introduced our team- the Assistant Dean for K-12 Outreach, the Program Manager, the finance director, our chief grant writer, and myself. She then explained to her FCS colleagues why she felt the Fellowship would make a difference in the four Priority Schools, once again advocating for a partnership as a champion (Brinkeroff, 2002; Eddy & Amey, 2014). "In all my years as an educator, as a teacher and as an instructional coach, I've never been a part of a professional development as powerful as the Fellowship. Our team grew by leaps and bounds as a result of the time with MSU, specifically in implementing, monitoring and adjusting initiatives and data driven decision-making." She then continued connecting her perspective of the Fellowship to the needs of the schools,

> I think each of these schools will benefit from this. Lewis, Lawrence and Rodgers each need focused time to work on instruction." She looked around the table to see if her superiors were following along. "They are all in different places, but I think they can learn from each other, and will benefit from being out of the buildings with a consistent focus on improvement (Grace Sampson).

The Deputy Superintendent, Dr. Albert Stokes, was a former employee of MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach and had left our organization for this position only a few months prior to this meeting. This collegial arrangement offered additional familiarity and trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). "I'm very familiar with the Fellowship, obviously. But, I think we all can agree that this will need to be something different." Dr. Stokes was on the same page as I was, though I wasn't sure everyone on my team was yet. As he sat, Dr. Stokes stroked the vest of his three-piece suit. "I've seen the Fellowship in Detroit and elsewhere in the state, but what we need here in Flint is a more rapid timeline of improvement. We have to start making a difference in student achievement, not just yesterday, but more like starting last week." Dr. Stokes' sense of urgency was palpable, his usually jovial face was sterner than I'd remembered seeing, and I could tell that we couldn't just rest on our previous relationships. An ambitious plan would be necessary to alleviate Dr. Stokes' timeline concerns.

"I appreciate your kind words, Mrs. Sampson, and I want Dr. Stokes to understand we are here to develop a plan that meets the needs of your students and schools as quickly as possible," I suggested as an opportunity to move the conversation forward. "What do you see as the priority needs for the schools?"

Dr. Stokes replied, "We need lot of work on classroom instruction. But what's more is we need a better sense of what exactly is going on in classrooms. Our schools are all over the place with strategies and programs."

"Would it make sense for us to do an audit and analysis of your instructional programs?" I proposed.

"Yes, that sounds like a good place to start," Dr. Stokes responded. "But we also should be working toward ensuring that all of our schools are on the same page."

"So, I hear you say we need to build coherence around instruction. That's literally a part of our framework for the Fellowship," Dr. Markle interjected looking for a way to bring MSU's support to the forefront. "We believe in making sure that instruction is aligned across the entire school, but what I'm hearing is you want to make efforts to extend this across the district." She ran her fingers across her pearls and waited for Dr. Stokes to respond.

“That's’ correct. We have so much mobility in our district, both students and staff. It would be nice if everyone were all doing the same things in terms of classroom instruction,” replied Dr. Stokes, adjusting his glasses.

I was beginning to see some synergy, as described by Goodlad (1993) as a symbiotic relationship, between what the central office wanted and MSU’s capacity and experience in addressing those needs. We had several exercises and activities that would indeed draw parallels across classrooms and having more than one school from a district in a room would allow for this shared understanding around instructional practice to build across schools.

“What about data?” Mrs. Sampson mentioned, looking up from her notes. “Our schools are in dire need of support for working with data. I’ve been in some schools, and they don’t have any common space for viewing or sharing data. Some of the principals are down right afraid of data and many teachers are too.”

MSU’s Program Manager, Donald Pryzbylewski, who’d spent most of meeting studying the other participants, spoke up and offered, “We have a data team who are highly trained in all of the accountability tools that the state uses. They are able to provide training to your staff and develop strategies for progress monitoring toward instructional goals.” It was becoming clear that MSU’s team was attempting to identify the current services the Office of K-12 Outreach could provide and connect them to the needs of the district.

The document, “Office of K-12 Outreach: Programs and Services” features the data services and support and outlines the professional development, individual and group coaching, and custom development of tools and materials that allows schools and district personnel to make the best use of national, state, and local data sources and web-based educational resources to improve instruction. The Office of K-12 Outreach also offers expert support in developing, designing, and implementing turnaround plans, including program evaluation and action research. Ferman and Hill (2005) highlight that benefits for a school in a partnership with a university could include access to data and evaluation services and training for staff.

The conversation then turned to next steps again emphasizing the importance of establishing shared understanding, at which point the chief grant writer discussed his process for taking our thoughts and turning them into a proposal. Shared understanding in this instance takes on the formal interactions based on professional activities that create meaning around a specific topic Coburn (2001; 2005). Nicholas Withers, MSU's chief grant writer, outlined how he would take the district's needs and attempt to draw links between research, best practices, and services the Office of K-12 Outreach could provide. It struck me as interesting how research and best practices were to be used to justify the partnership in the proposal, where previously we led with research in the development of projects. It seemed as though these circumstances were best suited to involving the district's needs on the front end instead of trying to retrofit a researched practice onto the challenge. This was apparently only discernible because of the nature of the previous relationships at play between the various actors.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the finance director, John Dorman, began discussing payment and fiscal policies. It was determined that the money was already in place as a part of Flint Community Schools' Title I set aside funds, but the process for creating a mechanism for payment would need to avoid a full-out contract between the two organizations as a delay in service would result.

> I've seen a Memorandum of Understanding being used in lieu of full contract in some of my previous work at the university. It's possible that this work could qualify for a MOU, but would need to include a description and scope of work, among other key elements, and an acknowledgment that the MOU represents the entire agreement (John Dorman).

This expedited process seemed to appease Dr. Stokes sense of urgency as he asked, "Is it possible to see a draft of this by the end of the week? I'm eager to get this moving."

Back on campus, our team debriefed the meeting again attempting to further develop internal understanding (Coburn, 2005). Each participant was charged with drafting components that spoke to their particular area of expertise. I spent time tweaking our model for professional community to incorporate learning across the district. I recall thinking how challenging it was going to be to address district coherence when only four of thirteen schools would be present. It seemed almost counterproductive to be thinking about improving an entire district when only one-quarter of the staff would be represented. Further, I wondered how we would create a sense of ownership in this leadership development model without direct central office connections. As Mrs. Jenkins (Rodgers Elementary) had alluded to in one of the writing sessions, how would we create a link between the improvement work schools were doing to the work the district wanted them to do.

Chief grant writer, Nicholas Withers, drafted several iterations of his proposal in the days after the meeting, incorporating input from the data office, the finance office, and myself. A review of the initial versions of the MOU discovered key areas of: scope of work, period of performance, compensation, termination and evaluation, intellectual property, and an acknowledgment that the MOU represents the entire agreement. In addition, an implementation cycle overview was incorporated into the MOU that included a list of deliverables[3] based on a three-year structure.

Year One's focused on creating a culture of organizational change among school leaders, assessing current student learning initiatives, building trust, creating a shared vision and instructional coherence, and increasing staff capacity to work with students of poverty and effectively use data.

Year Two's deliverables centered on expanding staff capacity in the Year One areas, as well as, improving skills for monitoring systems, identifying appropriate problems of practice and theories of action, and expanding the accountable professional community.

Year Three deliverables also built on the previous two years by continuing the development of capacity to assess, adjust, and improve organizational strategies for improving teaching and learning. In addition, Year Three deliverables included an emphasis on instructional coherence, a focus on assessments, and using data to create strategies for differentiating learning to meet the needs of students.

After the third version of the MOU, I mentioned maybe we should circle back to Mrs. Sampson to see what her thoughts were thus far. We sent her an electronic version and scheduled a call. Mrs. Sampson was very complimentary of our conceptual design and program description, "I think you've captured the needs of both the district and the individual schools. I'm very excited to see this begin. I firmly believe that the schools will benefit greatly from the Fellowship experience." However, we needed to be more

[3] The final version of the Memorandum of Understanding, including the implementation cycle overview can be reviewed in the appendix.

specific about the structure of the program, “How many sessions are you proposing, who’s responsible for arranging meals and who would be responsible for printing off materials?”

Nicholas and I met with John Dorman, finance director, who had been hard at work trying to determine a total compensation figure that was inclusive of facility, material and labor costs. We determined that we would provide nine-session days- six Saturday sessions and a three-day summer institute, for 8 participants per school. We would provide lunch for participants. Further, we determined that all required books, binders and support materials would be provided by MSU, as well as, access to online resources and MSU expertise. Prior to our submitting the proposal to the Deputy Superintendent, we asked Mrs. Sampson to review it one last time for any last minute input, “I think we’re ready to roll!” she replied.

Dr. Stokes reviewed the proposal and approved of it as presented. He stipulated that the next step was for approval by the Board of Education and advised that it would be helpful if a representative of MSU would be in attendance as the MOU was presented. Finn and Keegan (2004) submit the primary role of boards of education is to serve as the community’s accountability instrument for financial and quality controls. On the night of the board meeting several vendors had presentations for the board. Each one of them took a turn sharing the perceived benefits of their programs and responding to inquiries from board members. While all of the vendors that presented that night were approved, several of them were questioned quite extensively and a lack of familiarity between the vendor and the board was evident. Alternatively, when the MSU-FCS MOU emerged on the agenda, one board member interjected, “MSU. Oh, we know you guys. I move to approve the MOU.” The level of familiarity though not clearly founded- maybe the university's reputation or the district's previous relationships with MSU- indicated a semblance of trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) even at the board level.

The motion was quickly supported and voted on and approved unanimously. None of our representation needed to speak nor were any of the details of the MOU discussed among board members. I recall thinking how either the board had done their due diligence in reading the MOU before the meeting, and we had done an outstanding job of writing up the scope of the project or MSU's reputation as a world class university and expertise in education had preceded this effort with the board.

Partnership Summary

Critical Incident 1 is emblematic of the front-end organizational forming behaviors outlined in the University-K-12 Partnership Sensemaking Conceptual Framework (Figure 1, p. 17). The development of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) required involvement from each of the levels of the university and K-12 school district- policy making, administration, and practitioners and the development of shared understanding. It seemed to me, that many of the interactions between the different levels contributed to sensemaking of the partnership as a whole; and an environment where input from the various stakeholders was valued was a necessity.

In my opinion, if not for the Grace Sampson playing the role of champion and advocating for the partnership within her organization, Flint Community Schools and between organizations inclusive of Michigan State University, this partnership likely would have ended when Centro High School closed its doors. While previous relationships, on both professional and personal levels, existed between MSU and both former Deputy Superintendent Dr. Stokes and Superintendent Barksdale, their degree of intimacy with the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders was minimal. I believed a stronger understanding of the benefits and responsibilities of both the university and district was necessary to move towards a more formal partnership. Mrs. Sampson's familiarity as a former Fellowship participant was the only formal connection between the district and the intervention program. This familiarity was a driver of her advocacy and a key initiator of the partnership.

Another key aspect of the formation of the partnership was the considerable amount of accountability pressure established by the Michigan Department of Education on Flint Community Schools to turnaround low-performing schools. Having multiple schools identified as Priority Schools brought about additional resources for increasing student achievement and these resources eventually were used to support the partnership. However, the sense of urgency that was created by the Priority School designation increased the rate in which the partnership was formed, which I felt strongly in conversations with both Dr. Stokes and Mr. Barksdale. The pressure and the accompanying sense of urgency had the potential to create communication challenges between the university and the district.

Chapter Six: Critical Incident 2

Following the approval of the Memorandum of Understanding by Flint Community Schools (FCS) administration and board of education, Michigan State University (MSU) presented an overview of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders for the four principals of the schools initially involved in the partnership. This meeting between practitioners of the two partnering organizations was a part of the norming process at the beginning of the partnership. The introduction of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders is symbolic of the concepts represented in the Phase Three of the Strategic Partnership Model (Figure 2., Eddy & Amey, 2014) in that it includes creating shared meaning, building trust and aligning strategic goals. Steps involved in introducing the Fellowship to principals included multiple meetings within MSU's organization, emails between the MSU and FCS, and culminated in the meeting between the two organizations. In this instance, developing shared meaning also included providing an opportunity for principals to give input as to how the partnership would be most effective in addressing the needs of each school.

Reflection

Shaping a Practitioner Perspective

"If this turns out to be one of the most unproductive team experiences you've ever had, what will have happened (or not)?" I read aloud to the team of educators at my table. As the protocol stipulated, the participants then wrote their responses on sticky notes. After two minutes, I asked them, ""If this turns out to be one of the most productive team experiences you've ever had, what will have happened (or not)?" giving them the same 2 minutes for self reflection. Members of the Instructional Leadership

Team then shared their comments with an elbow partner at the table before opening up the sharing to the whole group. I posted their sticky note responses on a large sheet of paper that had been taped to the wall. After all responses had been posted, I asked the team, if any of the fears and hopes surprised them and were there any trends or patterns apparent in their fears and hopes? The Fellowship of Instructional Leaders always utilized protocols for facilitating discussion and deep thoughts, and this protocol was used in order to acknowledge concerns and opportunities in participating in the Fellowship.

I spent the two years preceding the partnership between MSU and FCS, as a graduate assistant- primarily as a support for the coordinators of the Fellowship for Instructional Leaders. In this role, I had opportunities to facilitate small group discussions and workshop projects for several school teams from around the state. In those moments, I recall thinking about my time as a teacher and school administrator and how difficult it was to balance academic and social responsibilities when working with young people. Hearing principals and teachers discussing the week that was- filled with student altercations, parent disputes, teacher conflicts, union grievances and more- brought back memories of my own attempts to wade through the social debris and focus on student learning.

Reflecting on my own time as a school-level practitioner, I was jealous of the time and space to reflect on and strategize about instruction that the Fellowship was now providing this group of educators, luxuries I was never afforded when I was working in schools. Coburn (2001; 2005) highlights the interactions among teachers that lead to clarifying expectations and goals. I was able to gain an understanding of the value of the

Fellowship through the interactions between myself, as a graduate student, and participants in the Fellowship.

My initial opportunities to make sense of the partnerships between the MSU Fellowship and K-12 schools were developed through formal interactions (Coburn, 2001) that included the protocols and activities used to foster growth for the Instructional Leadership Teams. Underneath the sensemaking that occurred as a result of formal interactions, was the perspective I viewed these interactions through as a former school administrator. This perspective would prove ever valuable when supporting principals' sensemaking of the Fellowship.

Preparing to Meet the Principals

After many months of waiting for Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to be signed (by both FCS and MSU) and lots of unknowns in terms of timing, locations, and participants in the Fellowship, we were finally given the go-ahead to meet with the principals of the four Priority Schools. My co-coordinator, Diane Greggs, and I spent much time developing our approach to this meeting. Diane is a former principal in Detroit Public Schools and has vast knowledge about instruction and leadership.

Collectively, we felt we knew very little about Flint, the Flint Community Schools, or the players in the district. The majority of staff that had participated in the previous iteration of the Fellowship with Centro High was no longer with the district, save for Grace Sampson. We understood we were lacking school-level champions (Brinkeroff, 2002; Eddy & Amey, 2014) or anyone at the schools who had even heard of the Fellowship for that matter.

Outside of Grace Sampson and the few interactions with the Deputy Superintendent and a handful of central office staff, we had minimal interactions with

FCS staff. The district's central office's goal for the partnership was developed through conversations with the Deputy Superintendent, Dr. Albert Stokes, as the Interim Superintendent, Lester Freamon, wasn't involved in the partnership at all. Dr. Stokes, through his previous employment with MSU had a rudimentary understanding of the Fellowship work in Detroit, but had little exposure to the planning or debriefing of sessions with schools.

Eddy and Amey (2014) highlight intentionality in the formation of a partnership and the importance of the goals of a partnership being aligned with the mission and vision of the partner organizations. It seemed, even as prior relationships existed between individuals in both partnering organizations, shared understanding of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders was lacking in the central office level on the K-12 side, administrative staffers responsible for instruction lacked familiarity with the Fellowship. Likewise, the university side wasn't initially clear about the district's intentions or important contextual elements of the partnering organization. Each party understood that improving the schools was the overall goal, but how to achieve that and what specific elements could be accomplished through the Fellowship remained unclear.

Diane and I started our internal planning time by focusing on our intention for the initial principal meeting, which we decided was two-fold: relationship building and understanding and buying into a notion of instructional coherence. Based on our understanding of school-level leadership, we recognized the importance of establishing relationships with FCS' principals if the partnership was to truly take hold and drive change in the Priority Schools. In addition, the meetings back at MSU regarding Fellowship program development, incorporated input from Dr. Stokes and others at central office, and settled on instructional coherence as a focus for the first year of work.

This focus on coherence was reflected in the MOU deliverables. Shinners' (2006) study of partnerships in education established the deep complexities that involve taking into account mutuality characteristics, creating a collaboration among partners and the influence of leadership. In this instance FCS's administration had input into the overall focus of the program based on a vision that the Deputy Superintendent had for the district's future.

Adding to the pressure for the partnership was the desire by Dr. Stokes for the four Priority Schools to serve as program pilots of sorts- where strategies would be modeled in these schools in hopes of scaling up to the non-Priority Schools. Where instructional coherence across the district was a goal of FCS' central office, the program needed to first address coherence across classrooms within a school, which became a way to generate buy-in for principals.

Yet, both Diane and I knew how important introducing the Fellowship to the principals was, and that merely presenting a collection of deliverables on a document would not be enough to generate the type of buy-in we both felt was necessary to create sustainable change. Just as Bryk & Schneider (2002) underline trust among colleagues as the basis for creating productive relationships, Diane and I needed to create an environment that was conducive for principals to trust not only the program, but also the two of us as lead facilitators.

In building relationships with the four Priority School principals, we had an additional challenge: three of the four were either new to their school or new to the district. Chrystal Jenkins, principal at Rodgers Elementary was a veteran of FCS and was formerly principal of another elementary school that had closed the previous year. Sandra Dawson, principal at Lewis was a veteran administrator in a neighboring district and was joining FCS for the first time. Marcia Donnelly had been a principal for one previous year in another district and also was new to FCS. Only Michaela Lee, principal at Metro High had been in the same setting the year before the Fellowship was to begin working with FCS.

"It will be very important for this to not feel like we're piling onto the plate of these principals," said Diane. "We need to be aware of the need to allay the fears of the principals and be very clear about what we intend for them to do as school leaders," her smile nearly masking her serious tone. I recalled reflecting once again on my time as an administrator and thinking about what a new initiative starting after the school year began would do to the organizational structure of a school, and how the thought process of an administrator was influenced by the context of working in a new school.

To that end, we devised a presentation that was attentive to both what the Fellowship was (an opportunity to reflect on and improve instructional practice) and what it wasn't (a traditional professional development where the participants needs wouldn't be at the forefront). In forming this presentation strategy, I spent extensive time considering comments from the Centro High team in the previous Fellowship, where they placed high value on team time and receiving feedback from other schools. In addition, both Diane and I reviewed the document "Coming Together For Change" (MSU, Office of K-12 Outreach, 2013) that provided a summary of the foundational concepts of the Fellowship. From this review we decided to highlight opportunities for team planning and team-to-team sharing when developing our presentation. This internal planning time is indicative of Weick's (1995) sensemaking within an organization, where Diane and I engaged in multiple face-to-face meetings and exchanged several emails trying to bounce our individual understandings off one another.

In addition, in planning for the initial principals' meeting, we spent time talking through our ideas with Grace Sampson, as she was the only one who had been a participant and was now our chief advocate at central office. Mrs. Sampson viewed our presentation slides prior to the principals' meeting and offered her input, "Make sure you are very clear about the desire for increased coherence between classrooms," to which we tweaked a couple of slides to provide even more emphasis on coherence. Mrs. Sampson went about scheduling a meeting with the four principals. By looping-in Grace Sampson, we were intentionally engaging in organizational sensemaking between groups (Weick, 1995). This represented an opportunity for the partnering organizations to exercise mutuality in input for partnership development.

The Principals' Meeting

The afternoon of the principals' meeting we met at Metro High in the Community Room. It was the end of the school day, and the hustle and bustle of the day was coming to a close, while afterschool activities were just ramping up.

Mrs. Sampson met us as we arrived and said, "I'm just so excited for this to finally be starting. I know the red tape has slowed things down, but I think you'll find the principals are eager to work with MSU."

"How much do they already know about this work," asked Diane, as we rearranged tables in the room for the meeting?

"They know they are starting with you and they know that this involves improvements to instruction. Beyond that, I'm sure they are hoping to have some blanks filled in here today," cautioned Mrs. Sampson shifting a chair.

I set up the presentation equipment and the first to arrive was Ms. Sandra Dawson from Lewis elementary. She smiled at us and assured us, that although her allegiance in college athletics was to the University of Michigan, she was pleased to be working with us. Ms. Dawson took her seat and pulled out a notebook and a set of pencils, aligning them neatly.

Next, Ms. Felicia Pearson entered carrying several manila folders and introduced herself, “Welcome, I am the Assistant Principal here at Metro. Mrs. Lee won’t be able to join us right away as we have several things going on here today.”

“It is very nice to meet you, thank you for joining us,” I replied, thinking that we were off to a tough start if the host principal wasn’t going to be joining us.

Not long after we’d met Ms. Pearson and engaged in some small talk with her and Ms. Dawson, Mrs. Chrystal Jenkins arrived; her earrings dangling like golden orbs. “Thank you for joining us today. We recognize how busy your schedules are and that it’s not easy to be away from your schools,” Diane said.

“I’m pleased to meet you,” responded Mrs. Jenkins, placing her long coat on the back of a chair.

As we began our presentation, I gave a general overview of the MSU Fellowship and the model for school turnaround. Before I could share the deliverables from the MOU, Ms. Dawson interjected. “Just how much time is my team expected to spend on this project?”

“The sessions are all on Saturdays and we are scheduled for six sessions plus the summer institute,” I answered. “Our hope is that the majority of work will be completed in those sessions. We are not anticipating too much time being devoted to any MSU activities during the school week.”

“Well that’s good to hear because we are all very busy. I hope this won’t just be about studying us.” Ms. Dawson replied.

“Our goal is that you will begin to view the Fellowship as an avenue to accomplish some of the work you aren’t finding time for right now. The Office of K-12 Outreach is responsible for connecting best practices as determined by research to practitioners. We aren’t going to be doing research; rather we hope to share how we feel research can help you in your school.” Diane added, being sure not to impose too much emotion into her response.

“Hmmm… wait, did he say Saturdays?” exclaimed Mrs. Jenkins sounding very surprised as she sat upright.

“Yes, this program will involve some Saturdays,” interjected Grace Sampson trying to alleviate personnel concerns. “I have money in my Priority budget to pay stipends to those who participate.

“Hmmm, I sure hope it’s enough,” said Mrs. Jenkins, shaking her head with some doubt.

I then spent some more time highlighting the Fellowship’s opportunities for team planning and team-to-team sharing. Diane followed with an emphasis on instructional coherence outlining an instructional inventory and analysis process and how the Fellowship created time for reflection on what was working in classrooms and how to support teachers’ instruction. I began to take stock of the three principals as she was talking and the three were engaging in thoughtful conversation with her.

From my perspective, Ms. Dawson had a can-do spirit. Her questions and responses were all very much, “Let’s do this.” While she had some apprehension at the beginning, it was mostly due to a lack of understanding about the Fellowship and what was being asked of her and her school. Because she was new to the school and the district, it was clear that she had yet to establish many solid relationships. Still, she seemed eager to make her school successful and began to see the Fellowship as a potential asset. She did, however, raise many questions about the direction of the district and felt confused by the minimal guidance being provided by central office. “I’m very interested in the instructional inventory you described. In the few months I’ve been at Lewis, I’ve discovered so many instructional initiatives. I found an entire set of unopened textbooks that no one seems to have any idea about,” said Ms. Dawson, looking perplexed.

Mrs. Jenkins seemed to hold a bit of resentment about participating in the Fellowship. She mentioned on several occasions how her new school, Rodgers was slated to close at the end of the year after her previous school had just closed the year before. “Why am I being asked to be in this group when we aren’t even going to be open next year?” she questioned.

Mrs. Jenkins demeanor had changed from the grant writing sessions before. She seemed to be much more focused on compliance but wanted to be very clear she wasn’t going to be around very long and neither was her school. I could tell she was frustrated and that participating in the Fellowship wasn't her desired first move as a principal at a new school, even if she was planning to retire. “I’ll do what I can, but don’t expect that much from Rodgers,” said Mrs. Jenkins curtly.

Ms. Pearson, the assistant principal at Metro High School seemed a little wary about saying too much as she was not the principal. Dressed in a tan blazer and grey blouse she was very reserved in her reactions to the content presented and was taking copious notes, as she undoubtedly would have to report out to Mrs. Lee after the meeting. She rarely lifted her head and even when she did speak during the initial principals' meeting, her comments were more peripheral input than explicit statements about the direction in which the school was going. She seemed content to allow the other principals to do most of the talking.

Later in the meeting, Mrs. Sampson pressed Ms. Pearson for more contextual input about Metro High. Ms. Pearson then offered her regrets,

> Metro isn't the school it used to be. We used to be the premier school in the district. Our Special Magnet program was highly regarded and students used to have to test into our school. Then the district decided to change things up because enrollment was down and we were losing money. The children we are teaching now are not the same as the ones we had before. Now we have all the 7^{th} and 8^{th} graders from around the community and our staff is struggling to adapt to this new reality- both to the maturity of the students and their ability levels. Students who don't fit the description of the students who were planned for our school are challenging our identity (Felicia Pearson).

Almost forty-five minutes into the meeting I realized we were still missing a principal. Marcia Donnelly wasn't there and when I asked Mrs. Sampson about it, she said, "She confirmed she was going to be here. Maybe something came up at the school that prevented her from being here." I reflected back to the grant writing sessions and how Mrs. Donnelly was late to those sessions as well. When she did arrive to the earlier meeting she seemed to dominate the team discussion and very little collaboration was apparent. I wondered how invested she was in the Fellowship as a school leader and whether or not she understood the value participating could bring to her leadership team. I knew that we had no opportunity to convince her of the value if she wasn't in attendance.

Returning back to those that were in the room, Diane was concluding her discussion on coherence, both across classrooms in schools and across the district. The overall sense among the three principals was one of compliance- 'where do you want us to stand, what do you want us to say'. Mrs. Jenkins even offered, "Tell us what you want us to do, and we'll do our best, " with very little depth in her tone. To which Ms. Dawson responded, "Well, I, for one, am looking forward to working with my team and having MSU's support."

Diane and I recognized more work needed to be done to establish trust with the principals. Each of us had been through extensive coach training, and in order to extend the relational connections with the principals we began asking questions about each of the schools- what were their strengths, what were their students like, what were their leadership teams like. The principals seemed to respond well to our questions and began opening up about school challenges. I also asked, "Tell me about how strategic planning currently occurs in your schools." There were several chuckles around the table and Mrs. Jenkins shook her head and mentioned, "If we ever get time in a staff meeting, the teachers' reps always watch the clock to make sure we aren't doing more professional development than is allowed in the contract."

"My team has been very hands-on," responded Ms. Dawson, pulling a small piece of lint from her sweater, "but we always have to make a concerted effort to ensure time is being saved for planning."

Ms. Pearson added, “We’re still trying to work out our PLC (Professional Learning Community) schedule because we just moved to block scheduling for our students and things are still in motion.”

“So, what I hear is there is a need for regular and structured strategic planning time. What the Fellowship offers is guided time for discussing your needs based on data, creating goals and developing strategies for improvement. What we aren’t offering is just ‘one more thing’ you have to do,” I assured them.

Later on, the principals shared their notions about teachers as school leaders. As they spent time describing some of the realities of their school context, each of them was able to identify at least one teacher leader in their school, despite two of them being new to the school community. This was an important step because we needed them to buy-in to the collaborative team approach to school improvement. We would be in for some heavy lifting if the principals couldn’t identify colleagues that they could count on to be a leader in their school. The ability for each principal to identify additional leaders in their schools is in line with trust in schools as described by Bryk and Schneider (2002). In recognizing the principals’ trust in teacher leaders were able to further leverage buy-in for collaboration in a team approach to school improvement.

Since the conversation had turned to teacher leaders and leadership teams, we thought it prudent to discuss our expectations for staff they would bring to the Instructional Leadership Teams for the Fellowship sessions. This experience was intended not to be a principal’s Fellowship but inclusive of teachers’ perspectives. We outlined responsibilities for ILTs and then what characteristics ILT participants should have:

- Consistent participation

- Taking the initiative
- Ability to drive change
- Willingness to ask and answer tough questions of themselves and others

Mrs. Jenkins then asked for clarification of how many teacher leaders she was expected to nominate. “Typically, each ILT should include eight members including the principal. The roles in which those other seven members function in your schools will depend on your needs,” I replied.

We asked the principals to spend a few moments identifying five to seven staff members whom they believed they could count on to help deliver upon these expectations. The fact that we weren’t prescribing who would be on the team, but rather leaving that up to the principal seemed to bring a sense of ownership, and by the end of meeting we no longer saw these leaders as deer in the headlights with regard to the Fellowship, but rather intrigued about the opportunities. They weren’t quite optimistic, but they had each moved beyond a compliance mindset. Perhaps most impressive was that, by the first session, less than a month later, each school had full teams in place and ready to go, including Mrs. Donnelly’s team from Lawrence Elementary.

Individuals make sense of organizational expectations through interactions with others (Weick, 1995; Spillane, 2000; Coburn, 2001, 2005, 2008). The principals’ meeting was an important opportunity for principals, as practitioners, to interact with their colleagues and the MSU staff as we discussed the Fellowship. While Diane and I shared the model and program overview, each principal was attempting to align the objectives of the Fellowship with their own school contexts. It was clear that each of them was attempting to understand what was being asked of them and how this new program would 'fit' into the overwhelming work they were already being asked to do.

The principals' efforts to connect the goals of the FCS-MSU partnership to their own school improvement plans and circumstances were aided by hearing the similarities and contrasts in perspectives of their colleagues. This sharing of perspectives is indicative of efforts to make sense within an organization. Likewise, our MSU team was attempting to gain understanding of the FCS context and how the Fellowship model would play out in the four Priority Schools. As we shared the program plan and listened to the needs and concerns of the principals we were able to develop some shared understanding regarding responsibilities and expectations between the two organizations.

Mrs. Donnelly, it seemed, would need to be addressed individually- both in that she was absent from the principals' meeting, but also that her leadership style seemed to lack the sense of collaboration necessary to be productive in the Fellowship. Unfortunately, we weren't able to meet with her again until the first Fellowship session. However, I noticed her bright patterned pantsuit as she entered and pulled her aside early in the morning session before we got started.

"I just want to check in with you. We missed you at the introductory principals' meeting. I want to fill you in on the overview," I said passing her the packet of information we provided the other principals.

"I'm so sorry for missing that meeting. We had a situation at the school come up, and I was waiting for parents to arrive," apologized Mrs. Donnelly seemingly searching for something in her bag.

“Oh, I understand. I’ve certainly had days like that when I was working in schools. A day as an administrator is never predictable,” I replied.

“More like one hour isn’t predictable,” she joked.

“One thing we did discuss is how important it is for each member of the teams to feel like they have input in the discussions. We encourage you to use this as an opportunity to empower your staff and delegate some of the responsibilities among them,” I said, trying to take a positive spin on my concerns over her taking on too much alone. “There will be times today and throughout the Fellowship where you will be sharing with other schools. We need every voice represented in the conversations.”

“I agree. I’ve been trying to get my team to be more assertive,” she offered with a straight face.

“We hope to present some strategies that will help you all to become more collaborative,” I responded hopefully.

“Well, I certainly hope this will be different from other professional development we’ve had with other universities,” Mrs. Donnelly said looking not yet impressed.

“Tell me more,” I inquired.

“We’ve had several sessions with other universities. They were dry and I felt more like I was being talked at than anything. We hardly got to talk about what we were doing and the professors often made general statements that weren’t connected to our reality. They seemed more focused on their research than on how it pertained to us,” she said, sounding very discouraged.

“Ok, I hear your frustration about prior professional development not being connected to your work. Our intention is to not be ‘one more thing’ for you to do. We hope that you will see us as a support for you to do what's already necessary," I tried to assure her.

Mrs. Donnelly shared in Mrs. Jenkins's concerns about the Fellowship adding to an overloaded workload. In Mrs. Donnelly's case, it was clear that she had an additional concern about the vantage point of the university in relation to her school staff. She voiced displeasure over a lack of connection between the faculty and the reality of the school's context. Shinners (2006) stressed the importance of input from both partners in the development of partnerships. In the examples from her previous experiences to which Mrs. Donnelly alluded, the university partner paid little attention to the school's needs. It seemed as though the school partner wasn't allowed to provide much input on the professional development, which resulted in school staff failing to recognize the relevance in the material that was presented.

In addition, as in Mrs. Jenkins's earlier concern over being the object of a research project, Mrs. Donnelly highlighted the emphasis on research in the perspective of a faculty member attempting to deliver professional development to K-12 school personnel. Ferman and Hill (2005) denote the perception of researcher as expert and practitioners as subjects creating distrust among school partners and the interpretation of their reality is often skewed by academics. The perception of a divide in benefits between organizations often magnifies the level of distrust between the two entities (Ferman & Hill, 2005; Bok, 2015). Faculty can become more attentive to their research agenda than the needs of their school partners based on the incentive structure at the university level, where research publications are valued more than outreach and service (Bok, 2015). The Fellowship of Instructional Leaders has no research component and as such is able to avoid disconnects in benefits between organizations because the perspective of MSU Office of K-12 Outreach staff is, first and foremost, connected to outreach and demonstrates institutional priorities for the university.

Partnership Summary

Critical Incident 2 is illustrative of the importance of relationships between partners and the function creating shared understanding between and within organizations plays in developing an effective partnership. It was necessary to provide an overview of the expectations and provide an opportunity for the school leaders to offer input into the implementation of the Fellowship program as part of the norming process at the beginning of the partnership. It was essential for me to reflect on my own perspective as a former school administrator in order to appropriately engage principals and generate buy-in for their participation in the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders. In addition, drawing on my previous experiences in the Fellowship allowed me to establish connections between the program and practice when attempting to foster an environment where shared understanding was possible between Michigan State University and the Flint Community Schools' principals and support the sensemaking of each of our roles within the partnership.

One element of shared understanding that was clearly absent at the beginning of this norming process was the contextual realities at play in each of the four Priority Schools. My colleague, Diane Greggs, and I resolved that of top precedence was getting a better sense of the instructional and school culture variables at Lewis, Lawrence, Rodgers, and Metro. In addition, we provided the principals an opportunity to process the responsibilities of Instructional Leadership Teams in the Fellowship together. I believe this allowed them to create understanding based on interactions among colleagues. Similarly, the principals were able to discern the benefits participation could provide each of their schools based on individual needs, all while addressing across-school coherence (albeit with additional clarification from Diane and I).

That this partnership between a university and a K-12 school didn't involve a research component was of prime significance in establishing trust in the partnership. Mrs. Dawson put the issue on the table and identified research as a reason she was being cautious with the proposition of MSU's support. I believe a vital moment in the discussion occurred when we assured the principals that the Office of K-12 Outreach was established to bridge the connection between educational research and practice, and not as an extension of the research arm of the university. This meant that the Fellowship was developed without an evaluative component. I felt it was necessary to be definitive in communicating that program development would solely focus on technical assistance and support for schools that desperately needed it.

One final key point in Critical Incident 2 was the meticulous manner in which my colleague and I went about developing a process for describing the Fellowship. We understood the delicate nature of school leadership and relationships with universities, which we wanted to address in a way that would generate buy-in. We spent extensive time absorbing Fellowship materials, studying foundational concepts, and discussing the potential strengths and areas of growth for the program as part of our internal norming process. These interactions contributed to my own increased understanding of the partnership expectations, and for creating shared understanding within the university side of the partnership.

Chapter Seven: Critical Incident 3.

Critical Incident 3 includes administrative and practitioner perspectives in order to discuss the inclusion of a new school into the partnership and the necessary normative processes for effective inclusion in the program and foreshadowing future school expansion. Several factors including district student enrollment and state accountability policies necessitated an additional school being added to the partnership mid-stream. This resulted in a need for Michigan State University (MSU) and Flint Community Schools (FCS) to evaluate the partnership in order to understand how best to incorporate additional participants in a relevant and efficient manner. Several meetings, emails, and phone calls within MSU and inclusive of FCS were necessary to create an approach to assimilating the new school into the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders. As was necessary in Incident 2, developing shared understanding, building trust and aligning goals also involved input from the principal as to how this partnership would best meet the needs of the school.

Reflection

Welcoming a New School to the Fellowship

"Gooooooooood Moooooooorrrnnninnnnggg," I speak into the microphone and increasingly raise my voice. It's Saturday morning and I, as lead facilitator, know that I have to bring some energy into a room full of principals and teachers who have spent all week molding the minds of young people. "Welcome to the first session of the 2015-2016 Fellowship of Instructional Leaders," I introduce to the crowd of participants. Its early October, but the weather is still warm enough to be a distraction for those who would rather be tailgating for a football game, and I recognize professional development isn't high on the list of alternatives.

> This session is going to be special because not only is this the first session of the school year, but it also is the first session for City High's Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) who are joining us this year. I want to welcome you, I thank you for being here today, and on behalf of my colleagues at MSU know that we are here to listen and provide support for each of you as you work to improve teaching and learning in your school (Bryan Beverly).

Creating an open and inviting environment was an important step in the process toward establishing trust between the new participating ILT from City High. Over the past year, the MSU team and I had expended a good deal of energy and effort to build trust between the Fellowship and Lewis, Lawrence, Rodgers, and Metro. This trust (Bryck & Schneider, 2002) was necessary to overcome any apprehensions on the participants' part and minimize any gaps in understanding between the university and K-12 school partners. Each partner contributed in the trust building by following through on responsibilities of attendance and program components- the development, delivery, or completion of content.

City High had been in a constant state of flux over the last five years. Four years ago, the school found itself on the state's accountability system Priority Schools list due to declining test scores with fewer than 5% of students meeting benchmarks on the ACT exam (Michigan's Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2017). Then through hard work, determination, and strong leadership, the school climbed off the list for a year, only to be placed back on the Priority Schools list after some unfortunate leadership changes.

"I've spoken with Mr. Colvin to learn what he expects to gain out of this experience and have toured your school. I look forward to working with your team this year and am excited for the other Instructional Leadership Teams to learn from you and for you to learn from them." Howard Colvin had provided some important input regarding his school's needs and I was attempting to show the new ILT that their school context was already taken into account when developing programming for the Fellowship.

Next I had the entire group review the group norms for the session- a set of guidelines that the returning teams agreed upon that govern participation, side conversations, confidentiality, and cell phones. The following slide in the presentation outlined the objectives for the day's session- a set of goals that were the subject of many conversations over the past few months. The session's focus on data and professional learning plans needed tempering by a thorough overview of what the Fellowship was and a description of the MSU model for school turnaround.

Field (2008) emphasized the importance of establishing a sense of shared understanding in Professional Development Schools and that the inclusion of university and K-12 school perspectives should be intentional. It was imperative to start the Fellowship off with a shared understanding of expectations; and model how to create the same sense of shared understanding between the schools and for the ILTs when they returned back to their schools.

The three continuing priority schools- (Lewis Elementary, Lawrence Middle School, and Metro High School) had seen the program overview and model description multiple times over the last year, but this was City High's first time. I figured it was an opportune time to leverage the learning of the three continuing schools and decided it would be appropriate for them to describe the Fellowship in their own words. Sandholtz (2002) stressed the degree in which teachers are included in designing professional development has a strong influence on the level to which teachers will engage in those professional development options. I wanted City High to hear how their colleagues within the district valued the Fellowship and the support MSU was providing them.

Lawrence's principal described why she felt it was important to focus on the instructional core (Elmore, 2004). "By focusing our attention and efforts on strategies aimed at addressing the teacher, the student, and the content, we have started to maximize our resources for classroom instruction and minimized other outside influences," said Marcia Donnelly. Looking over the top of her red-rimmed glasses, she continued, "It was important to also recognize that we don't necessarily have control over the outside influences, but we had to focus on the things we do have influence over."

Lewis' instructional coach, Janet Perlman, then spoke to which activities had addressed instructional coherence; "MSU walked us through an initiative analysis, which was very eye-opening when considering how many programs we have going on at the same time." Petite and demure, Mrs. Perlman was a strong leader and poised to some day lead a school of her own. "We recognized we were doing too much and we had to work on prioritizing our work for those strategies that work best for our students," she concluded.

Perhaps most enlightening was the response from Metro High's principal, Michaela Lee, in connection to building a professional community, in that she recognized that "Our team has come a long way because I had to work on letting go. I'm used to telling people how I want things." Mrs. Lee's curly blonde hair was an ardent contrast to her brown skin. She was very passionate and had previously been too dominant in collaborative discussions with her team. “But after coming to these Saturday sessions it was necessary for me to allow my team to be a part of the decision making process. I cannot do this alone. I don’t want to do this alone.”

Hearing from their peers seemed to be the best way to introduce some of the more important aspects of the Fellowship experience, that this was a community of learners and that our work was to support them in doing the work they were already doing; not to be an additional task or layer on even more work. This approach in facilitating this particular Fellowship session stemmed from discussions, both internal to MSU and inclusive of FCS that appreciated the concerns that a new school would bring to joining an experience mid-stream while their colleagues had received a head start in the program.

When I met with Mr. Colvin prior to the first session, he expressed being very concerned about how he felt his school was often left out or not given adequate support from their colleagues or central office. Sandholtz (2002) found that teachers’ participation in professional development increased when they were encouraged and supported through formal recognition by the district of their efforts. I felt it was necessary to get a better sense of disconnects between City High and FCS central office.

Meeting with City High’s Principal

> I don’t understand it. We’re never first. We’re never selected to pilot anything. We’re always last to hear about things. When the district wanted to test some changes to the daily schedule, do you think they started at City High? No. They never do. So even now, as we join the Fellowship, we’re a year behind the other schools. Why is that? I mean, I know why in this instance, because we weren’t a

> Priority School before. But this is just another example of City not being in the same race at the same time (Howard Colvin).

Mr. Colvin was visibly irritated, the wrinkles on his forehead leading to a shiny head void of hair.

I was sensing his frustration growing and I remembered my training on de-escalation. “So, what I’m hearing you say is that you feel City High is not regarded in the same way as some of the other schools and that you are frustrated with the lack of opportunities your school is being afforded. What are some ways you’d like to see City High supported?”

> If we could just have a more open channel of communication with central office, that would be a big step in the right direction. I mean its gotten better under the new superintendent. I like him. I think he’s tried so far, but he’s only been here since August and its only October. The issues are more deeply rooted than the superintendent (Howard Colvin).

Mr. Colvin replied and was beginning to calm down. His dark gray suit was highlighted by the blue cuff links that matched the color of a plaque displayed on the wall representing his fraternity.

“Ok, what if I assured you that the Fellowship also had a direct line of communication to central office as Mrs. Sampson attends every Saturday session?” I was attempting to redirect him to consider the advantages of participating in the Fellowship. “Mrs. Sampson has taken specific input from Fellowship participants and steered the information to the responsible central office party and then reported back to both the individual personally and the Fellowship collectively.”

I looked across the table and Grace Sampson sensed her cue to discuss. “Its true. I’ve participated in the Fellowship as an instructional coach and could only have dreamed that someone from our central office was in the room at the same time we were receiving MSU’s support,” she stated and paused to make sure she had Mr. Colvin’s full attention. “All of the principals here in Flint have mentioned what a benefit it has been to have me in the room.”

The concerns of Mr. Colvin about his school being out-of-the-loop in terms of district programming speak to concerns over communication between central office and schools. As both Weick (1995) and Coburn highlight, the activity of social interaction within an organization involve an ongoing process. Coburn observes the behavior in schools and Weick in multi-site organizations, which leads me to believe that the interactions between schools and central office should involve a similar ongoing process in order to ensure that sense is being made from policy and administrative directives. Understanding the needs of the schools and the context in which they are attempting to create shared meaning among school staff members also requires consistent engagement on the part of the central office.

Leveraging the presence of Mrs. Sampson in the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders sessions was intentional in that we desired to have a direct central office connection for the participants. That it was Mrs. Sampson who was the connection, once again, was emblematic of her role as a champion (Brinkeroff, 2002; Eddy & Amey, 2014) of the partnership. As a former participant, and now in her role as central office liaison at the Fellowship’s Saturday sessions, Mrs. Sampson could fully articulate the benefits of the Fellowship and the responsibilities of school staff to ILT participants. Mr.

Colvin seemed encouraged but would need to see this plan in action for himself it seemed.

The remainder of the initial meeting with Mr. Colvin was spent going over the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders, the program model, our history, and sessions we had planned to that point. I felt it was important to leave open space on our proposed program plan in order to offer customized support for the needs of City High and allowing practitioners to have involvement in the program design (Sandholtz, 2002).

"We have chosen school culture as our focus for this school year. Whatever we do with the Fellowship will need to be connected to school culture. Our school improvement plan that we turned into the state included several provisions for school culture," offered Mr. Colvin.

> So far in the Fellowship, we have spent time creating a culture of change among the Priority Schools leadership teams. As a part of that, we worked on developing mindsets towards a belief that ALL students can learn. Dr. Carol Brice and her Coaching 101 team from the Office of K-12 Outreach facilitated several portions of our workshops and have offered many strategies for leadership teams to take back to their schools and improve the culture. The ILTs have been quite fond of this work and look forward to continuing it (Bryan Beverly).

I felt it was necessary to continue to stress the benefits of the Fellowship to the principal as a part of the trust building process.

"That's encouraging. We're not in any position to waste time and the state is putting lots of pressure on us to improve. Its good to hear we'll be able to learn from you in an area that our whole team has decided is a focus," said Mr. Colvin, nodding his head in approval. A pause followed and then, as if he'd just remembered where he'd misplaced his keys, "What about data? In full disclosure, it's not an area we are particularly strong in right now. I've had to move some people around, just this week even, both because of staffing shortages, but also because some people were in positions that weren't exactly suited to their skillset."

The policy mandates derived from the state's accountability system was continuing to be a source of pressure on City High's staff. The growing state role in improving student achievement (Cooper & Fusarelli, 2009) created a sense of urgency on the part of practitioners, but was also created tension for school leaders and teachers alike. Mr. Colvin seemed like he was trying not to be too negative, but was also trying to provide an accurate picture of the realities in his school. "I've worked as administrator in several schools in Detroit and in other cities. I'm not so sure those settings have had the same challenges I've found here. The staff…" He seemed to start choosing his words carefully and rubbed his head searching for the right phrasing. "My staff works hard. There's no question about that. I just wonder sometimes if they always put students first. Not everyone, okay. But there are more than a handful that seem to be more concerned about themselves."

"So, I'm hearing that placing students as a priority is an area you'd like to see growth for your staff," I stated for clarification. "I believe the Fellowship will be able to spend time supporting your school's work toward that goal. I also know that we have supported the other schools in their development in using data effectively. Perhaps we could visit your data room so that I can get a better sense of the needs?"

Mr. Colvin responded, almost jumping from his seat, "Absolutely. Like I said, I have moved some people around and the instructional coach responsible for the data room is one example."

Leadership Style Under Review

As we walked to the data room, Mr. Colvin shared some of the highlights of his school- the ROTC program; several teacher's classrooms that he believed were doing an excellent job; and the community education room of which he said the staff were a great partner. By revealing more of his school's context, Mr. Colvin was attempting to develop some shared understanding (Coburn, 2001) of the variables at play at City High.

As we entered the data room, Kimberly Russell, the instructional coach, welcomed us. Much shorter than I, who was much shorter than Mr. Colvin, Mrs. Russell had a spunky spirit almost in compensation for her height. She mentioned the hard work she had already started, "When I started in here on Monday, my first thought was to move everything out and start with a blank slate. I was here until almost 8 PM that first day and the next day I started putting up some student achievement charts and tables. I also had to make it a little prettier - that's just who I am - so that people will want to be in here."

As I walked around the room, the walls seemed very familiar. "This looks a lot like the data room at Lewis Elementary. We've always been very impressed by their data room," I stated.

"I came from Lewis," said Mrs. Russell, her eyes widening beyond the thick layers of eye shadow. "I loved being there and the team. I learned a lot. But I knew I needed more experiences so I made the transition to high school. It has been challenging, that's for sure." Just then, her bright pink lipstick accentuated a smile, "But I think I've found a good fit here. Mr. Colvin has empowered me to make this space my own." I was becoming very encouraged by this example of coherence across the Priority Schools.

“The leadership team at Lewis initiated the data wall development and incorporated the rest of the staff into their planning. It was very inclusive and I believe that the process led to everyone feeling comfortable using the data room. I want to use that same process here at City High and include everyone’s voice into how this will work,” Mrs. Russell added hopefully.

The MSU team had shared a template for data walls with the four Priority schools and, though Mrs. Russell wasn’t a member of Lewis’ ILT, she still had deep knowledge of how the data walls were set up. This was indicative of the Fellowship’s goal to spread the strategies and lessons learned by the ILTs during the Saturday sessions to the remainder of the school staff. Mrs. Russell’s understanding of the data wall protocols allowed her to transfer her knowledge to City High and replicate the data walls. The data rooms at Lewis and City High are emblematic of the interactions between practitioners that can lead to sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Coburn, 2001) within a school and, in this case, across schools.

Mr. Colvin walked us back to his office and we summarized our visit with him and what we believed were his key objectives in working with the Fellowship- developing school culture and improving use of data. I found Mr. Colvin to be very reasonable and student-centered. He was honest about the relationships among his staff and what he felt were the biggest needs for his school. All of this was a bit surprising considering previous conversations I’d had the week prior with MSU staff about his leadership style.

Alma Madison was a principal coach on staff with the Office of K-12 Outreach. She was assigned to work with Mr. Colvin at City High through a separate grant project funded by the Mott Foundation. Her expertise included serving as a long-term principal in Detroit at one of the few high achieving schools based on the state’s accountability system. She'd met with Mr. Colvin on several occasions and found him to be fairly isolated in his leadership, preferring to make most of the decision with little input from his staff.

Alma cautioned me about what she perceived was his unwillingness to grow as a leader. "I've found him to be rather closed and having more of a performance orientation than a learner's mindset," she said speaking more negatively about someone than I had previously heard her talk. "He wants to talk more about what he's done, and what other's haven't done, than where the strength's of his team lie or what areas he needs to work on himself, especially when it comes to following through," Alma had shared. Her tall frame wasn't the least bit intimidated by Mr. Colvin's physical presence. "Its almost like he thinks he can do all of this alone. I know his team doesn't feel very involved."

When I met with Mr. Colvin, Alma's words were at the front of my mind. I recall telling myself to keep an open mind, but I couldn't help but to have a skeptical perspective on the initial parts of the conversation with City High's principal. Yet, in retrospect, I have to admit I was fairly impressed with his understanding of his school's needs and even his transparency in some of his limitations in addressing issues with his staff. He'd admitted to not placing people in areas that played to their strengths, and having to revisit some of his earlier decisions and make changes. Further, even Mrs. Russell stated that he'd allowed the ability to make the data room her own and she said her plan was to include the input of others. This was at minimum, a few steps toward collaborative leadership.

My conversations with Alma represented an attempt at internal sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Coburn, 2001) between our staff at MSU. Alma had developed an impression of Mr. Colvin and shared it with me. However, in this instance, the interaction with Alma needed to be substantiated with an interaction between Mr. Colvin and myself, prior to my developing any program content. While I respected Alma's vantage and conceded that she'd had multiple interactions with the principal, there seemed to be more to the story. I attributed this to Alma's coaching. Perhaps it was beginning to take hold with Mr. Colvin, even if she hadn't recognized it yet.

Scaling Up the Fellowship

Adding City High to the Fellowship was important on several levels, not the least of which was that it served as a trial effort before scaling the Fellowship up district-wide. At the beginning of the partnership, FCS' central administration saw the Priority Schools and, by proxy, the Fellowship as a place to experiment some instructional practices, with the goal of working the kinks out in implementation before going district-wide with those practices. By the second year of the Fellowship partnership, as it became apparent that we would be adding City High to the participants, both Dr. Albert Stokes, the Deputy Superintendent, and Lester Freamon, the Interim Superintendent had been replaced by Superintendent Omar Barksdale.

Mr. Omar Barksdale was formerly a deputy superintendent in charge of Priority Schools in Detroit and brought with him a wealth of knowledge about school turnaround. I found Mr. Barksdale to be very even-keeled and highly cerebral. Though slight in stature, I've seen Mr. Barksdale's intellect and grasp of all things related to schools captivate a large room of his peers in education. Part of his strategy in Detroit included a partnership with MSU Office of K-12 Outreach to provide leadership coaching for Priority school principals. Several of the Detroit Priority Schools were removed from the state's accountability list as the result of the hard work involved in that partnership and Mr. Barksdale was planning to leverage the relationship with the Office of K-12 Outreach to improve the struggling schools in Flint.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) portray the importance of collegial relationships as imperative in establishing an environment conducive to professional learning. In the example of MSU and FCS, several instance of previous relationships preceded the Fellowship partnership. Mr. Barksdale's connection to MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach served to strengthen the potential for the Fellowship to have a lasting impact on Flint's schools.

I met with Mr. Barksdale in his office in September of 2015. After exchanging pleasantries and catching up on each other's professional and personal developments, the conversation shifted to the Fellowship.

"I'm hoping to include all of our schools in the work that the four Priority Schools have been engaged in," he said from behind the massive mahogany desk that dominates his office and make his slender build seem even smaller. "I can't have four schools doing one thing and the other eight doing something different. Everyone needs to be on the same page," proclaimed Mr. Barksdale stating his emphasis on district coherence. He was smiling, but his sincerity was not lost on me.

"It's a little too late to shift gears on nine schools and expect all of them to put together leadership teams that can sacrifice Saturdays. Maybe we should start with City High because they are a Priority School again, and we can use their Title I funds. That will allow us some time to figure things out for the other eight schools for next year," I suggested. "City High can start with us in October."

"I'm ok with starting with City High, but I'd like you to continue thinking about the best way to bring the other schools up to speed," asked the Superintendent.

“I’m thinking we’ll learn a lot about how to best support the other eight schools by how we add City to the mix,” I replied. The expectations for the Fellowship were high and the Superintendent believed that each school should be participating in order to foster growth for the entire district. By delaying the remaining eight schools from entering the Fellowship until the following year, we allowed for time and thoughtful consideration of how best to engage them and bring them into the fold. This would be inclusive of both MSU and FCS input.

Back in the Fellowship, the ILTs were returning from lunch and the teams were buzzing about what great work they did in the morning. The first lesson about how the transition in scaling up to more schools would work occurred during that afternoon session. The early afternoon activity centered on a process for reviewing data, a nod to City High’s request for support in using data. At the end of the activity, ILTs were provided time to plan how to best share what they had learned with the rest of their staffs. The three continuing schools had little problem allocating time in their week to share the work (especially when the work involved looking at their own student achievement data). City High’s ILT on the other hand was perplexed.

“I don’t know how we are going to make this happen. There just isn’t any additional time in the schedule for this,” said one teacher.

“I didn’t know we were going to have homework,” stated another teacher, clearly frustrated.

“How about you set aside some time during your staff meeting to share this?” suggested on of my MSU colleagues.

“Oh, no. That definitely won’t work. Our contract stipulates, we only have to devote twenty minutes of a staff meeting to professional development. This activity will obviously take longer than twenty minutes, “said the frustrated teacher dressed in jeans and a hooded sweatshirt with City High’s logo across the chest. “This will have to wait until one of our professional development days. Unfortunately, that won’t happen before we have to meet with you again,” he continued.

I stepped closer to City High’s table. “Mr. McNulty, correct?”

“Yep. You got me,” said James McNulty.

“What about this activity we are asking you to share with your staff do you consider professional development?” I asked.

“Well, this whole thing is professional development. We’re here on a Saturday participating in your workshop. What about this isn’t professional development?” he snapped back.

“No, I agree. Today is totally about leadership development. You are here learning about new ways to address school culture and explore data. No question about that. My question is, what about the activity we are asking you to share with your colleagues do you consider professional development?” I was trying to get him to think beyond the day and start connecting the work of the Fellowship to work he was already expected to do.

“Well, let me see…” he paused.

“My understanding is that your staff is supposed to look at data, collectively,” I said.

“That’s right,” he agreed.

“Would you say that all of the staff at City High look at data the same way?” I asked.

“Well, no. I don’t think we’ve ever had any training on that as a whole,” he answered and his fingers ringed the rim of a coffee cup that had been empty for some time now.

“What we are proposing is sharing this protocol for looking at data as a part of your already accepted expectations. We aren’t asking you to do anything you aren’t already supposed to be doing. In fact, we are attempting to take the process planning work off your plate,” I attempted to clarify. “I see what you’re saying. If you recall, we anticipate this work will occur in your PLCs (Professional Learning Communities). What we are asking is that the ILT model the data protocol at a staff meeting so that everyone on your staff can see it at the same time and ask questions. The goal is uniformity of the process in the PLCs.” I could tell he was beginning to draw some connections.

“So, our work as an ILT is to participate in the professional development here and then take it back to the school and share with others? I guess I can get behind that. Like you said we aren’t doing a new project, it’s more like just an improved way to do what we’re already being asked to do,” Mr. McNaulty said, almost beginning to soften, though his beard was still as coarse as when he entered the room.

“Our expectations are simple. Find time to model the data dialogue protocol for your whole staff. It doesn’t have to be as intricate as we are rolling out to you all today. We just want your ILT to demonstrate what it looks like and then generate a discussion,” I said attempting to build on his growing disposition.

Exchanges like the one I had with Mr. McNaulty were not atypical, although, the inclusion of the union element was a new subject for me to deal with. I found that, in the several years I’d been involved with the Fellowship, the conversations I had with individual ILTs, not only provided opportunities for clarification of expectations, but also the chance to build relationships with participants. I was able to hear what aspects of the front-of-room presentation participants latched on to, and also learn what focus areas teams and individuals considered strengths and weaknesses. These conversations in which each of the practitioners were offered the chance to provide input influenced the program planning for subsequent Fellowship sessions.

As an example, following the conversation with the City High ILT about how they were going to share the data dialogue protocol, Mr. McNaulty approached me during our break. “Hey, Bryan. I hope I didn’t come across as too gruff earlier.” He extended his hand to shake mine.

“No, not at all. I appreciate your willingness to share your concerns. We can’t adjust our support if we don’t know all the variables, and this is City High’s first Fellowship session. I expected a feeling out period,” I assured him.

“Well, I appreciate that too. It’s not that we don’t want to be here. Rather, I’ll speak for myself - I want to be here. The information we’ve heard thus far is really good. I’m just not sold that we’ll be able to do much with it. The morale at our school isn’t that great right now and there just always seems to be so many changes in our district,” said Mr. McNaulty looking discouraged as he placed his hands in the pocket of his sweatshirt.

“I’m hearing your frustration. However, I want you to think about your other team members today. Each of the seven are here, ready to make a difference for your students. I believe you want to be a part of that difference. I encourage you to continue to share your needs with us so that we can be of more effective support,” I offered, hoping to get him back to the growth disposition he displayed earlier. “Trust our process. I’ve spoken with Mr. Colvin, and will continue to do so, in hopes that he’s consistently seeking each of your input into the improvement work at City High. He's mentioned both school culture and the effective use of data as key priorities for your school. I believe you'll find those areas incorporated into our planning for not just today but throughout this experience."

Mr. McNaulty was looking for a glimmer of hope, as were the rest of City High's ILT. When the three continuing schools started with us, they too were looking for something positive. Over the first year working with them, we'd established relationships, built trust, and customized our support to the needs of the individual teams. It was going to take more than a morning to create the same level of trust with City High, but my plan was to continue to leverage the learning of Lewis, Lawrence, and Metro High's ILTs in hopes that it would begin to ease some of the City High anxiety around participating in the Fellowship. Allowing City High to observe the other ILTs as they engaged in not just the content and activities, but also with the MSU staff, would hopefully expedite their understanding of the purpose of the Fellowship, what was being expected of them and how it could benefit City High's ILT.

Partnership Summary

Critical Incident 3 warranted consideration of the norming processes for including a new school into the partnership. After a successful first year of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders, a series of factors necessitated changes to the partnership between Michigan State University and Flint Community Schools. Low enrollment and the district's financial challenges forced the closure of Rodgers Elementary and low-test scores designated City High back on the state's Priority School list. I felt it was very important to make sure the Instructional Leadership Team from

City High felt welcomed as they joined the continuing three Priority Schools in the middle of the intervention.

Upon expanding a university/K-12 school partnership to include additional schools, it is often necessary to be aware of potential timing and bureaucratic challenges. Typically, it is most beneficial to start the Fellowship near the beginning of a new school year so as to not seem like a drastic shift in expectations of time and workload for participants. Additionally, grant funding cycles, board approval schedules, collective bargaining agreements and a district's calendar can influence the ability for a partnership to launch and also create challenges when adding a school after a partnership has begun. Each of these potential pitfalls in forming a partnership can prove as a greater obstacle when attempting to onboard a new school, which may make an oncoming school feel even more isolated.

One step I took toward making the ILT feel welcomed was incorporating their needs into the development of programming. This was achieved through a meeting with the principal, Mr. Howard Colvin, and a tour of the school, which demonstrated needs for support around school culture and effective use of data. Seeking Mr. Colvin's practitioner input was critical to ensuring mutuality in decision-making. Attaining Mr. Colvin's trust in me was the first stage in generating buy-in from his staff. Creating a sense of mutuality that was inclusive of the principal's perspective was the second stage.

The manner in which City High was integrated into the Fellowship had significance beyond their ILT or even the walls of the school. Through a meeting with Flint's Superintendent, Omar Barksdale, I realized he envisioned a district synchronous across all of the schools in instructional practices. The support the three Priority Schools were receiving meant they were developing strategies and skill sets beyond those being implemented in the district's other eight schools. I understood that from Mr. Barksdale's administrative perspective, he wanted to bring the other eight schools in line with the Priority Schools and together we decided that City High would serve as a pilot for how to bring the remaining schools on board. It made sense to me, that expanding the Fellowship from the original four schools, by adding City High, before growing to include every school in the district was a linear path towards creating a sustainable formal partnership.

The conversations I had with both administrators and practitioners in Flint Community Schools represented aspects of the norming process. Each partner offered input into the design and planning for implementation of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders. I presented the programmatic elements and research-based strategies for school improvement; Mr. Barksdale provided a district-wide vision of coherence; and Mr. Colvin shared the context and needs of City High School as we each worked to develop shared understanding in order to support sensemaking of our roles within the partnership.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Implications

> For [university and K-12 school] partnerships to be effective, exploration and understanding of organizational dynamics serve as the key for shaping, implementing and most importantly sustaining the desired community change (Harkins, 2013, p.xix).

I have worked in multiple schools and have visited far many more over the years. One consistent variable always stands out about my recollections of schools, the passion for teaching and caring about students as demonstrated by school staff. This study allowed me to reflect on the benefits of on my most prized professional experience to date: facilitating professional development sessions with the teachers and principals as part of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders offered by Michigan State University's Office of K-12 Outreach. The level of knowledge, passion, and commitment to improvement on display by Flint Community Schools' educators during each session always left me even more inspired to support their work.

It's not easy to sacrifice one or two Saturdays every month for the purpose of making improvements to teaching and learning. Everyone's calendar is filled with alternate obligations, both personal and professional. Yet, somehow, the participants in the Fellowship always seemed to make partaking in those workshops a priority. I can't count the number of times when Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) have worked through a scheduled break or asked if they can bring food back into the session room so that they could continue the important work. I recognize that the Fellowship allowed them space and time to toil through some of the deep strategic and cultural conversations that the demanding school week would never allow for. That the ILTs found so much value in the activities we planned and presented to them was always so encouraging.

Yet, for all the passion and commitment demonstrated by the participants during sessions, the groundwork that led to the partnership that these ILTs found so valuable was just as important to creating a foundation for the Fellowship and sustaining the partnership for multiple years.

Summary of the Study

Given the lack of scholarship devoted to the formation of partnerships, this qualitative study examined the relationships between universities and K-12 school districts and the front-end organizational behaviors associated with the partnerships in an attempt to determine how the various partners make sense of their function and responsibilities in the partnership, and under what initial circumstances are such partnerships likely to thrive. This study looked at how these relationships, especially the formal partnership, were established and organized. This study presented a personalized account of my experience as a program coordinator for the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders and included document analysis in order to answer these questions. My research question reflects the relationships from both university and K-12 school perspectives, as well as those who play a role in these relationships.

1. How do the various partners make sense of their roles, both formally and informally, in a university and K-12 school partnership?

The study was theoretically framed by Strategic Partnership Theory and sensemaking. Strategic Partnership Theory (Eddy & Amey, 2014) was employed in this study, as it relates to policy makers, administrators, and practitioners, and inclusive of the roles, motivations, and conditions that lead to sustainable partnerships. In addition, sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) is applied in order to understand the conditions and process in which actors understand their role in organizing for a shared outcome and sustained partnership.

Further, a qualitative research methodology was used for this study and supported the theoretical framework. This study was conducted using an auto–ethnography approach, described a form of narrative writing that invites and engages the reader into the cultural experiences of the writer (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Using this approach, the reader is invited to relive the writer's experiences, written in first person, rather than interpret or analyze what the writer has written. This auto-ethnographic approach focused on three critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954) that served to illuminate important aspects of a partnership and the manner in which key players in each organization make sense of their function within the partnership.

The literature review focused on the organization of partnerships between universities and K-12 schools. The structure of the literature review was distributed into two sections. In the first section, I examined partnerships in practice as a means of highlighting where recent research has focused on organizational indicators within and between partners and demonstrating where a need for additional scholarship may lie. In the second section, I focused on organizational theory (Roles, Motivation, and Conditions) and the layers of actors within educational organizations that contribute to creating shared meaning for a partnership.

For this study, I situated myself inside the culture of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders, reflecting on my own experiences as a participant in the partnership. I deliberated, observed and analyzed the supporting data to inform my analysis of my reflections as facilitator, and describe how the partnership was formed. The supporting data consisted of documents produced in connection with the partnership, emails, phone calls, personal conversations and field notes. Several of the documents used to support this study were used with permission from Michigan State University's Office of K-12 Outreach.

Findings

The research question that guided this study was: How do the various partners make sense of their roles, both formally and informally, in a university and K-12 school partnership? My findings indicate that interactions with colleagues both within and between organizations are the prime manner in which participants in a partnership make sense of the roles in a university and K-12 school partnership. Using Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory allowed me to reflect on my interactions with participants in the partnership in order to understand how policy makers, administrators and practitioners made sense of the responsibilities and benefits of a partnership.

On the university side, I found that practitioners interact with research-based best practices and other scholars in devising applicable approaches to school improvement. In developing the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders, and again when revising the program to be customized to the needs of a single district, MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach staff engaged in thoughtful meetings that were inclusive of fundamental concepts on school improvement. In addition, I found that practitioners were motivated to participate in the partnership by administrative guidance on getting more involved in urban schools. This administrative guidance was informed by policy directives from the

Board of Trustees and was supported by university resources to carry out the university-wide mission of service to the state of Michigan.

On the K-12 school side, I found that practitioners were directed to participate in the partnership by district administrators in order to more adequately address the challenges to teaching and learning in the schools. I discovered a void in the channels of communication between district administration and school-level practitioners, especially in areas of resources, curriculum and overall vision for the district. I also found that school-level practitioners, having not been given an option for participation, were wary of partnerships with universities because previous partnerships had a heavy emphasis on research.

However, I discovered that practitioners and administrators alike could be become open to developing some shared understanding about the benefits of a partnership. When provided ample opportunities to have a voice in the development of programming, partners on the K-12 school side were more receptive of expectations placed on them as the result of a partnership. Of particular interest to practitioners were proposed ideas of support that targeted the specific needs of the school; in several cases these needs included effective use of data and improvements to instructional practice and allocation of resources.

Remarkably, I found that policy makers on the K-12 school side were more easily swayed by the reputation of the university. The interaction with the Board of Education in conjunction with this specific partnership was brief nearly to a fault. Its possible that trustees had done their due diligence ahead of the meeting where the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was introduced. It’s also possible that the previous work the university had done in the district preceded any further discussion on a new endeavor.

The Board seemed pleased enough with prior results that they didn't require any additional engagement with MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach in order to ensure passage of the MOU.

Discussion

The auto-ethnographic approach provided me an opportunity to reflect on my interactions with participants in the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders. These reflections centered on key instances in the formation of the partnership and included interactions with policy makers, administrators, and practitioners and provided me with a framework for understanding my own sensemaking in relation to the partnership.

The University-K-12 Partnership Sensemaking Conceptual Framework highlights organizational elements that precede a partnership. The Fellowship of Instructional Leaders is suggestive of the framework in that the front-end 0rganizational behaviors were inclusive of roles, motivations, and conditions. Eddy and Amey (2014) proclaim the necessity for understanding the motivation and purpose on which partnerships are formed and the manner in which the partnership supports the achievement of institutional goals and objectives. The notion of roles is present in this partnership as practitioners, administrators, and policymakers each function in contribution to the formation of the formal partnership. Previous relationships between several actors in this partnership made it a partnership between Michigan State University and Flint Community Schools more likely.

Further, the University-K-12 Partnership Sensemaking Conceptual Framework is useful in understanding the processes used to create shared meaning among university and K-12 school partners in each of the critical incidents. Critical Incident 1 represents the university's internal sensemaking processes that lead to the ability for MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach to demonstrate a clear picture of the Office's programs and support offerings to Flint Community Schools' staff. Additionally, the inter-organizational interactions that led up to the signing of the MOU are representative of the sensemaking that occurs between the partners. In Critical Incident 2, the university spent time developing some internal shared understanding of the context in FCS and later met with principals to incorporate their input into the development of the program. This process led to greater understanding of the mutual benefits each of the partner would receive from the partnership and shared understanding of expectations. In Critical Incident 3, the University-K-12 Partnership Sensemaking Conceptual Framework emphasizes sustainability of the partnership, which was tested by the addition of a new school after the partnership had begun. In this instance, additional shared understanding of not just the program and its benefits, but also the context of the new school was created through interactions between the university and the school's staff.

Additionally, Grace Sampson demonstrated the role of a champion, one who advocates for the partnership. Motivations to partner were determined by both the increased pressure by the State of Michigan's accountability system and emphasis on getting involved in urban schools by university policymakers and administrators. The long-term academic challenges as experienced by FCS are emblematic of conditions that can lead to the formation of a partnership with a university. That MSU is a highly respected institution in both education and school turnaround is another condition that led to the formation of this partnership.

These conditions can change, as can the actors that perform such pivotal parts in the success or demise of a partnership. The economic and social challenges at play in Flint create obstacles for academic achievement making it necessary for schools to be particularly selective in how they allocate resources, especially for professional learning. In this instance of FCS and MSU, the champion had achieved a level of professional success in prior partnerships between the two organizations, which was leveraged to convince decision makers that a partnership was not only advantageous, but also viable and sustainable. Grace Sampson trusted the work of MSU and had established a strong enough connection with, first the Deputy Superintendent, and then the new Superintendent, for them to trust her recommendations for partnering with the university.

Coburn (2005) discussed the influence of principals on teacher sensemaking by encouraging the interactions between teachers when creating understanding of new policies. Yet the author found what was most important was, "the nature, quality, and content of the interaction … that shapes the degree to which teachers engage with policy in ways that transforms their practice or that reinforces preexisting approaches (Coburn, 2005, p. 501). One key to the interactions described in this study was the establishment of relationships that fostered trust and collaboration. Within organizations, hierarchical boundaries were less restrictive when school improvement was the objective and the interactions were more focused on strategies and needs. I found that interactions with between even top-level administrators and policy makers were fairly open because the motivation to improve the teaching and learning conditions in struggling schools was urgent.

Likewise, interactions between organizations centered on school and district needs and was inclusive of mutuality in input from both partners. In several instances I felt it was important that previous relationships had been established, allowing for a semblance of trust to drive many discussions. In instances where previous relationships hadn't been developed, it was incumbent on my colleagues and I, on the university side, to foster the environment in which practitioners and district administrators felt like their contexts were being considered and that their input was valued.

Based on both, a review of the literature, and in interactions with school principals, I understood a potential pitfall in the partnership could be the role of research in the partnership. Several authors (Bok, 2015; Ferman & Hill, 2005; Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Kirschenbaum & Regan) underline the unsteady relationships between university staff and K-12 schools based on issues related to motivation and incentives to partners, specifically when research is the main driver. Bok (2015) examined several partnerships from the perspective of faculty at universities and found professional and institutional priorities (publishing, service-learning placement of students, grant funding) often outweighed good intentions for community improvement.

One principal in Critical Incident 2, in particular, was highly cautious of entering into a partnership with a university, and I found it of utmost importance that we communicated the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders had no research component. It was clear to me that the practitioners valued the service-based mission to our work and emphasis on technical support.

Clear lines of communication within the school district seemed to be lacking between the schools and central office. Considering this point led to including a central office liaison to the Fellowship's Saturday session. That the person representing the district's central office had intimate knowledge of the program was not lost on me. In my opinion, Mrs. Grace Sampson was an essential actor in the partnership in many ways; and supporting the sensemaking of participants as liaison during the sessions was just one aspect. She was a true champion (Eddy & Amey, 2014) of the partnership, advocating for the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders to both administrators and practitioners. Her commitment also aided the university side in understanding the potential benefits the program could offer to a single district rather than the multiple district approach MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach had used previously.

The development of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), as demonstrated in Critical Incident 1, required front-end involvement from each of the levels of the university and K-12 school district, and the development of shared understanding in forming the formal partnership. The many interactions between different levels contributed to sensemaking of the partnership between and within organizations; and an environment where input from the various stakeholders was valued was a necessity.

Providing the principals with an overview as described in Critical Incident 2 illustrates the importance of relationships between partners and the function creating shared understanding between and within organizations plays in developing an effective partnership. As part of the norming process the principals' meeting was necessary to provide an outline of the expectations of the partnership and provide an opportunity for the school leaders to give voice to their individual contexts and school needs.

Bringing a new school into the partnership as described in Critical Incident 3 warranted consideration of the norming processes that were established for the initial four schools. However, it was also necessary to incorporate the unique context and needs of City High into the program design. Fostering a feeling of trust and inclusion was necessary to solicit the input of school leaders. Similarly, as the superintendent had a vision for district-wide coherence, it was necessary to continue to build on an already strong relationship and seek his input about how he saw the Fellowship factoring into that vision.

Recognizing the importance of pre-existing relationships between Flint Community School and Michigan State University is necessary before assessing the processes used in forming and scaling up the Fellowship partnership. Several layers of previous contact between the two organizations (as mentioned in Chapter 4) allowed for a sense of early trust, even as many of the actors were different from each of the organizations. However, as noted in the literature, several of the hesitations toward partnering on the K-12 school side remained- the role of research and a need for clarity in benefits and expectations among them. I believe that the critical incidents in this study provide an impartial perspective on the forming and norming of a university-K-12 school partnership, previous relationships notwithstanding.

Further, each of the three critical incidents demonstrates elements of strategic partnership theory- shared meaning, strategic planning, and building trust- towards shaping the sensemaking for each of the partners. Where the forming and norming stages of this partnership were exhibited in the formation of the MOU, the principals' meeting, and adding a new school to the partnership, its fair to say that these are not the only instances where the relationship was developed. However, the critical incidents highlighted in this study are indicative of key roles, motivations, and conditions that lead to a sustainable partnership and are inclusive of policymaking, administrative, and practitioner perspectives.

Implications

For Research

Several studies of partnerships (Sanzo, Myran, & Clayton, 2011; Stevens, 1999; Zeitlin & MacLeod, 1995) are too singularly focused on the outcomes of a partnership.

This study attempted to highlight what can be learned from studying the formation of partnership and the importance of the perception of benefits and responsibilities among partners. My hope is that the findings and analysis of this study inform future studies of partnerships by emphasizing the importance of motivation to partner, relationships and communication, and the creation of shared meaning.

Furthermore, many previous studies (Stroble & Luka, 1999; Johnston, 1997; Ravid & Handler, 2001) focused on outcomes often center the target of the study on those implementing a program as part of the partnership. That approach misses much of the richness in studying across practitioner, administrative, and policy-making levels. Studying the interactions within an organization along those levels can produce knowledge on the implementation of a policy directive or administrative guidance. Studying the interactions between organizations can inform researchers interested in partnership dynamics and what initial productive behaviors are likely to lead to successful partnerships or which counter-productive behaviors are likely to sink a partnership before it had much of a chance to launch.

This study attempts to draw increased attention to the function of sensemaking in a partnership, both within and between organizations. As Weick (1995) and Coburn (2001, 2005) highlight, sensemaking is the process creating shared meaning through interactions that depend heavily on the strength of a relationship. The within organizational sensemaking was just as key in many instances as sensemaking between organizations. The university side used several formal and informal meetings to create shared understanding of both program development and the context in Flint Community Schools. Each of these meetings was critical in forming a coherent plan for entering into the partnership and fostering a environment where K-12 school practitioners felt comfortable to move the partnership forward. In addition, very clear directives from the Board of Trustees and the President's Office made understanding that service and engagement in urban schools were both a priority. On the K-12 school side, the partnership champion, Grace Sampson, was able to build enough trust among her superiors to demonstrate the strengths of the Fellowship program to two different administrative regimes. This indicates the importance sensemaking plays in a partnership, even amidst significant changes to decision makers.

Sense made between organizations was also a key to the formation and sustainability of this partnership. In more than one instance, the university partners needed to describe the programmatic elements to administrators and practitioners. In these interactions, establishing trust, gathering input, and focusing on mutuality of benefits were all vital processes in developing shared understanding between the partners. Central office administrators were keen to maintain their vision for instructional leadership in the district and viewed improved professional learning opportunities for teachers and principals as key elements of their visions. When the central office actors changed, additional conversations were needed to assure the new superintendent that the partnership could fit his new vision for the district, but his input into how to develop the program was necessary.

Further, interactions between practitioners from the university and K-12 school sides were meaningful in the development of shared understanding of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders program. K-12 school principals were anxious about any potential research that would accompany this partnership. It became incumbent on the university practitioners to ease this anxiety and assure that the partnership was aimed toward providing support to teaching and learning. In addition, the more the university partners offered an opportunity for K-12 practitioners to provide input, the more comfortable they felt with the partnership.

Future research on university and K-12 school partnerships would do well to focus on the early stages of a partnership, specifically how central office and practitioners are incorporated into the development of the partnership. Creating opportunities for each partner to offer input is essential, and university partners should be mindful in keeping benefits to the K-12 partner on the forefront. In partnerships that involve the most needy districts, research cannot be the major focus. K-12 partners in this study made it adamantly clear that they have many needs, and being the focus of a study is not chief among them. University partners desiring to study low performing urban schools, in this age of high stake accountability, must build supports or service into potential research proposals.

Finally, this study is an auto-ethnography and a rich examination of a partnership from the perspective of a key stakeholder. I recommend further study of the same partnership that includes additional perspectives of other partnership participants. Data collection could include interviews, surveys, or observations. In addition, the auto-ethnographic approach in this study is decidedly from the university side. Another potentially rich study could use ethnography to describe the perspective of a participant from the district or one of the participating Instructional Leadership Teams.

For Practice

This study hopes to inform practical applications of university and K-12 school partnerships. Since the Michigan Department of Education has configured its approach to Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) around a partnership model for low performing schools that could include universities (MDE, 2017), understanding the variables between the two potential partners could prove beneficial. Developing understanding of the power and political tensions that have the potential to derail these partnerships could prove useful for university, district, and state bureaucrats alike. This could be especially beneficial if special attention is paid to how partners understand each of their responsibilities within the partnership and have reasonable expectations of benefits.

In addition, practitioners that are participating in a university and K-12 school partnership need to understand the dynamics of the partnership. University partners need to be aware of the anxiety of their district partners that is the product of a crammed workload, issues dealing with being the subjects of research and lack of communication with the K-12 school organization (Bok, 2015; Ferman & Hill, 2005; Firestone & Fisler, 2002). Likewise, K-12 school practitioners need to understand what some of the benefits of participating in partnership with a university are, but that understanding is most effective when it is developed through interactions with their peers (Coburn, 2001, 2005). In any instance, trust, mutuality, and the creation of shared meaning is paramount for a successful partnership.

Though the outcomes of this partnership were not the object of this study the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders has played an important role in the growth and development of the participating schools. Other low-performing schools could benefit from the strategies employed by the program if granted the same opportunity to engage in thoughtful and meaningful input sessions that helped to shape the design and implementation plans. Stevens (1999) found, partnerships have been found to be the most effective when they are inclusive of collaboration and co-development of program objectives and design between both K-12 school and university administrations. Being able to connect with school leaders and district administrators on the front-end of a partnership is a practice I hope the Office of K-12 Outreach continues to use, and one that I would encourage other organizations attempting to engage in school turnaround activities would apply.

In addition, university/K-12 school partnerships are steeped in challenges of timing and bureaucratic obstacles. This study highlighted the need to be flexible in adjusting to grant funding cycles, board approval schedules, collective bargaining agreements and a district's calendar. Each of these challenges can influence the launch of partnership or the expansion of a partnership to include an additional school after a partnership has begun. These challenges magnify the importance of relationship building between the two partnering organizations.

The relationships that preceded this partnership, from previous partnerships with the Board of Education to the former deputy superintendent to the current superintendent to the former participant turned central office administrator, were, without question, essential to the formation of this partnership. However, the manner in which those relationships were continually cultivated, in conjunction with the formation of new relationships, was pivotal to the long-term success of the partnership. My colleagues in the Office of K-12 Outreach and I were able to foster a sense of mutuality (Brinkeroff, 2002) by building on existing relationships and thoughtfully engaging practitioners who weren't yet familiar with the program, specifically because we recognized the value of the input of our partners. By not being too prescriptive in the design of the program we allowed for our partners to have voice in what benefits they would receive and what exactly was to be expected of them.

For Policy

Policymakers who develop school reform measures that encourage or mandate university and K-12 school partnerships rarely understand the implications of these partnerships. The Michigan Department of Education has designed its latest school accountability initiative with an aim to improve struggling schools, and included partnerships between K-12 schools and universities as a substantial portion of the turnaround solutions (MDE, 2017). The cultural and social differences between these institutions can create obstacles for the partnership and end up exhausting resources already diminished resources (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Kirchenbaum & Reagan; Nye & Sherman, 1999) . Though many partnership success stories exist, much can be learned by policymakers in studying the formation of a partnership so as to create favorable conditions, aside from policy mandates, that are likely to lead to effective and sustainable partnerships.

One key finding in this study also evident in the literature is the dynamic at play between universities and K-12 schools with regard to the role of research in a partnership (Bok, 2015; Ferman & Hill, 2005). Universities would do well to include outreach and service as a part of their mission, rather than having a sole focus on knowledge attainment. Michigan State University with a significant emphasis on outreach, both in mission and resource allocation, is in a prime position to provide support to the most challenged schools and districts. Universities that lack a strong institutional outreach component run the risk of alienating schools as potential future research subjects.

Further, policymakers should allocate more resources to universities for the purpose of supporting teaching and learning in K-12 schools. Institutions that have a history of commitment and success in education research should also develop accompanying vehicles for translating that research into strategies for improvement in schools and classrooms. However, any additional resources for university outreach should be complemented by changes to incentives for faculty service. Bok (2015) emphasized the conflicts university faculty encounter when their pay is more tied to research and publication than outreach to schools and districts that need help. Universities should rethink their incentive structures and place greater value on turning research into practice, especially with an aim of strengthening partnerships that support K-12 schools.

Conclusion

Understanding what motivates the formation of a partnership, how relationships are nurtured, and the manner in which communication is distributed points to how well partnership goals are aligned to individual partner goals. The mutual benefits that can accompany a partnership are often reflected in the depth of focus and diligence in communicating strategic objectives. Yet the process in which each partner makes sense of organizational functions and responsibilities through the partnership is reliant upon the process for making sense within and between each organization. This study examined a partnership formation between a university and an urban K-12 district as described in all three phases of Eddy and Amey (2014) where motivation to partner, relationships and communication, and the creation of shared meaning are the foundation of a strategic and sustainable partnership.

In revisiting the University—K-12 Partnership Sensemaking Conceptual Framework and comparing it to the critical incidents in this auto-ethnographic study, I find that policy makers, administrators, and practitioners are all present to some degree on both the university and K-12 school sides. In addition, the development of shared understanding was just as critical in the with-in organizational interactions as it was in the between-organizational interactions. However, the policy makers for each institution were less engaged than either administrators or practitioners.

On the university side, policymakers set the tone for the university's mission and emphasis on service; and while there was a clear directive to get involved in urban schools, how that was to be done was left up to administrators. On the K-12 school side, policymakers were mostly only involved in approving the formal partnership agreement, though it could be assumed that there directive from the policymaking side to allocate resources for professional learning. Again, trust plays a key role in forming a partnership, as the Board of Education respected the work of Michigan State University, and authority over developing shared understanding and creating mutuality of benefits was delegated to administrators. However, for practitioners, the development of shared understanding and fostering a sense of mutuality in benefits to both organizations was paramount in moving the partnership forward.

Partnerships are a social practice characterized by trust, mutuality, and reciprocity (Kruger, Davies, Eckersley, Newell, & Cherednichenko, 2009). This study showcased the importance of trust and mutuality between partners and within the individual organizations. Establishing *trust*, whether through previous relationships, or in intentionally developing new relationships, must be inclusive of offering appropriate opportunities for each partner to provide *mutual* input based on their own needs, while mandating *reciprocity* in potential benefits.

Goodlad (1990) describes the need for a symbiotic relationship between universities and schools. K-12 schools produce students that can go on to study in higher education institutions before entering the workforce. Higher education institutions provide the teachers that educate students in schools. This natural interdependence is magnified in institutions of higher learning where service is a part of the mission. As was the case in this study, a service mission can lead university policy makers to designate university resources for further involvement into the success of schools.

Just how administrators and practitioners are to develop understanding of the implications of these policy directives can be associated with the sensemaking framework suggested by Weick (1995) and Coburn (2001, 2005). By focusing on the interactions of key actors in a partnership it is possible to examine the process in which meaning is created among the structural layers within and across each institution. This study highlighted the need to more fully develop processes for facilitating sensemaking between partnering organizations in order to cultivate more sustainable university and K-12 school partnerships, where shared understanding and mutuality of benefits are the most essential elements.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Memorandum of Understanding
Between
Flint Community Schools
and
Michigan State University's Office of K-12 Outreach
for the
Fellowship of Instructional Leaders

This memorandum of understanding (MOU) is made between Flint Community Schools, a nonprofit educational institution located at 923 Kearsley Street Flint, MI 48503 hereafter referred to as "FCS," and the Office of K-12 Outreach at Michigan State University, a nonprofit educational institution located at 620 Farm Lane, Room 253 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, Michigan, 48824-1046, hereafter referred to as "Office of K-12 Outreach."

This MOU outlines the FCS's participation in MSU's Fellowship of Instructional Leaders program during the 2017-18 school year. The Fellowship of Instructional Leaders program will provide year-long, ongoing professional development to build instructional leadership capacity. With all schools participating, the Fellowship has become a district-wide initiative designed to provide a coherent and consistent professional development approach across the entire district to build shared instructional practices.

Outcomes of the 2016-17 Fellowship for the FCS

As a result of the FCS's current participation in the Fellowship, the following are examples of changes in adult behavior reported by FCS participants. Teachers and principals stated that they:

- Developed stronger communication ability regarding the work of school improvement – participants increased their active listening skills, two ways of talking (dialogue and discussion), and paraphrasing regarding strategies and plans to enhance student learning outcomes.
- Learned and applied to practices the characteristics of highly effective instructional leadership teams – participants learned strategies to work together on instructional improvements, develop high functioning team qualities, and develop commitments to work toward a common purpose.
- Engaged in cultural competency – participants increased their skill sets on cultural competence and the role it plays in instruction, classroom culture, and school-wide practices to respond to diverse student needs.

-Developed data-driven decision making skills – participants learned how to use data to inform changes in practice, including tools to monitor the implementation of strategies that address student attendance and behavior, use qualitative and quantitative data to develop.

-Action plans, and the Collaborative Learning Cycle process to use data to facilitate dialogue around student data.

-Learned practices to achieve school improvement goals – participants learned to clarify an instructional strategy and guidelines for consistent implementation toward a school-wide goal, including a theory of action leading to problem solving, and an action plan to improve school culture and improve student achievement.

-Collaborated to promote coherence of practices and organizational systems to leverage expertise and build shared understanding across the district.

As indicated by evaluations, 100% of participants expressed greater competence with these skills after attending Fellowship sessions.

Scope of Work for the 2017-18 School Year:
The Office of K-12 Outreach at MSU will provide support and materials for the Fellowship for Instructional Leaders Program for the following schools:

- Neithercut Elementary
- Eisenhower Elementary
- Southwestern Classical Academy
- Northwestern High School
- Freeman Elementary
- Durant-Turri-Mott Elementary
- Doyle-Ryder Elementary
- Pierce Elementary
- Potter Elementary
- Brownell STEM Academy
- Holmes STEM Academy
- Accelerated Learning Academy

Using research-based practices, the Fellowship assists leadership teams in diagnosing their own building-level issues and identifying clear and measurable goals. Using a series of protocols and activities, the Fellowship guides leadership teams as they examine their school's data and programs to ensure that they are focused on key instructional initiatives, including systematized student support that improves student achievement.

This includes training leadership teams in the use of data to identify, plan, monitor and assess changes in the components of the instructional core.

Program Components for the 2017-18 School Year
The Fellowship is designed based on a multi-year model that creates sustained change in educational practices. Key concepts identified by the district and aligned with FCS priorities for the 2017-18 Fellowship content include:

- Student Engagement
  - Time on task
  - Student voice
- Learning Targets
  - Application of learning target to practice
  - Success criteria
  - Geared toward mastery of content
- Monitoring for Learning
  - Learning to observe what the child is doing
  - Adjust instruction to match need based on observations
- Collaboration on Areas of Focus
  - Continuing strengthening a collaborative community
- Cultural Competency/Climate
  - How adults are responding to the needs of students
  - High expectations for ALL students
- Formative Assessment
  - Creating a culture of consistent use

    - Quick, less formal assessments
- Closing Learning Deficits
    - Tools and strategies for addressing students with significant gaps

Proposed Calendar
The FCS and MSU have preliminarily agreed to the tentative calendar below for full day Fellowship sessions:

- October 28, 2017
- November 18, 2017
- January 20, 2018
- February 24, 2018
- March 24, 2018
- May 19, 2018

Fellowship Resources
MSU will provide the following for each participating Fellowship of Instructional Leaders school annually:

- A total of 6 session days for 8 participants from each school.
- All required books, binders, and support materials.
- Access to online resources and MSU expertise developed in support of the Fellowship for Instructional Leaders program.
- Technology required for presentations, including audio equipment.

The FCS will provide the following:

- An adequate facility to hold the Fellowship sessions.
- Meals for Fellowship events, including breakfast and lunch.

Period of Performance
This agreement shall be effective as of October 1, 2017 and, unless otherwise amended, shall be in full force and effect until September 30, 2018. Additional professional services from MSU can be arranged through an amendment to this agreement. This MOU may be renewed annually by mutual agreement in writing.

Compensation
The total annual amount for the twelve FCS schools shall not exceed Forty Six Thousand One Hundred Thirty Two Dollars ($46,132) per school for a total of Five Hundred Seven Thousand Four Hundred Fifty Two Dollars ($507,452) for participation in the MSU Fellowship of Instructional Leaders.

Six payments (one following each MSU Fellowship session) of Eighty Four Thousand Five Hundred Seventy Five Dollars ($84,575) shall be due upon invoice receipt.

Termination and Evaluation
Either party may terminate this agreement by providing 60 days written notice to the other party. Upon receipt of such notification, the Office of K-12 Outreach will make no further commitments and will take all reasonable actions to cancel outstanding obligations. The Office of K-12 Outreach will use participant data, direct feedback, and performance data to evaluate services provided under this agreement.

Intellectual Property
Any intellectual property that the Office of K-12 Outreach provides will remain the intellectual property of MSU.

Entire Agreement
This MOU contains the entire agreement between the parties, superseding any prior or concurrent agreements as to the services being provided, and no oral or written terms or conditions which are not contained in this MOU shall be binding. This MOUmay not be changed except by mutual agreement of the parties reduced to writing and signed.

For Flint Community Schools

____
Signature of Authorized Representative

____
Title

____
Date

Coming Together For Change

The Michigan Fellowship of Instructional Leaders gives educators the tools they need to foster systemic improvement in their schools.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | College of Education
Office of K-12 Outreach

education.msu.edu/k12

Since 2007, more than 100 schools have participated in the Fellowship. Instructional leaders have spent countless professional development days reviewing, planning, and customizing powerful strategies for instructional improvement. But most important to us, the Fellowship team members have returned to their schools and applied their learning for the benefit of kids. Many Fellowship schools have successfully improved their instructional practices in ways that are helping them become Michigan's turnaround success stories.

From Theory to Practice

Through the Fellowship, practitioners join with the university to share and combine the knowledge each of us brings from the worlds of research and classroom experience.

Together, we are building upon a strong base of research that defines effective instructional leadership. Fellowship participants learn how to alter their instructional practices and lead new, more effective improvements in their schools. In turn, MSU's distinguished faculty, lecturers, and experts learn from practitioners what works best to increase student learning in the classroom.

External review and participant feedback show that the Fellowship has had considerable impact in schools of varying sizes, types, and locations. The greatest impact appears in the areas of adult learning and professional growth—two key areas that support increased student engagement and achievement.

Designed
To Deliver

The Fellowship was created to rapidly and effectively support school success. Our delivery model is proven to enrich the work of school leaders as they systematically improve the quality of instruction in their buildings.

Here's how it works: instructional leaders serve on school teams that participate in professional development events with leaders from other improving schools. The Fellowship supports these teams as they increase student learning and achievement by improving the quality of daily classroom instruction. School leaders learn how to strengthen:

- The coherence of their local instructional programs
- The function of the school's professional community
- Their ability to manage and leverage local resources in ever more strategic and thoughtful ways

The Fellowship is rich with opportunities for peer interaction. Team members can discuss and present their ideas to each other as they identify common challenges and figure out how to overcome them. Moreover, school teams, known as instructional leadership teams (ILTs), attend day-long institutes spread throughout the school year and have access to the following additional supports:

- A robust library of text resources to take home and share with teachers and staff
- Innovation conferences, where nationally and internationally known experts share their knowledge on relevant topics such as instructional quality and leadership, formative assessment, and more
- Powerful practice workshops, which are smaller, more informal gatherings taught by faculty of Michigan State University's highly-ranked College of Education that focus on providing highly effective, immediately applicable strategies for specific grade levels and content areas
- Online resources, including Fellowship materials, news links, work samples, and resources
- Web-based forums where individuals can ask questions of other teams, initiate and contribute to discussions, or comment on threads started by others

Finally, MSU offers Fellowship participants access to trained leadership coaches who attend events with school teams and work with them between institutes to support implementation of practices. This optional service can help schools obtain the on-site support necessary to build the capacity of teachers to improve instruction.

The Fellowship guides ILTs through an iterative process that balances supports with the specific expectation that teams will use tools and resources to complete learning exercises between institutes. Our findings indicate that schools applying the strategies they learn through the Fellowship are building stronger systems that more effectively support student academic gains.

Aimed At the Core

Research and practice have repeatedly confirmed the essential elements of effective school improvement programs. Leadership, coherence, data-based accountability, and other key factors are needed to implement and sustain the effects of a program that facilitates increased student achievement.

The Fellowship is based on our own Leadership for Coherence Framework, which draws on research related to school improvement and organizational development from a systemic perspective. The framework is designed to help school leaders focus on the quality of classroom practice—i.e., the instructional core—through exercising leadership that:

- Increases the coherence of the school's instructional programs
- Builds and develops professional community
- Strategically utilizes existing resources and responds to requirements

Leadership for Coherence: A Systems Perspective

The Instructional Core

The heart of the Leadership for Coherence framework is the instructional core—the interactions of teachers and students in the presence of content. Systematically improving the quality of instruction is the only way to increase student learning over time (Elmore, 2008). However, it is insufficient to focus efforts on improving only one element of the core, a common approach in educational reform (e.g., implementing a new curriculum). Rather, changing one element (such as curriculum materials) requires changes in the other two (teacher practice and the work students are asked to do) if student achievement is to improve.

As the purpose of ILTs is to improve the quality of instruction, the Fellowship engages school leaders in examining and developing a common understanding of what constitutes high-quality instruction in relation to each element of the core. ILTs work to support teachers by using instructional strategies and research-based approaches specifically selected and customized for their schools.

Characteristics of High-Achieving Schools

In 2008, teams of top leaders and researchers came together to discuss excellence and equity in public schools as part of Harvard University's Achievement Gap Initiative. Together, they identified the following five steps to becoming exemplary. They are:

1. Leaders accept their responsibility to lead the change process.
2. Leaders focus on a few key ideas and priorities that stakeholders can understand and embrace.
3. Strategies, plans, and incentives for broadly inclusive adult learning are designed.
4. Quality standards for judging teacher and student work are developed and refined.

Leaders skillfully and relentlessly implement plans, monitor results and provide appropriate supports and incentives (Ferguson et al., 2010). Fellowship participants gain tools and strategies for supporting local growth in each of these areas.

Grounded
In Research

> *"The Fellowship is the best sustainable development you will ever have.... Your team will develop coherence."*
>
> **- Instructional Leadership Coach Flint Community Schools**

Instructional Program Coherence

Having too many disparate and unconnected initiatives is a common characteristic of low-performing schools. Instructional program coherence is needed to make schools healthy places for both adult and student learning (Newman, Smith, et al., 2003). The Fellowship provides tools for school leaders to assess instructional program coherence and engages them in asking tough questions about their school improvement initiatives and the relationships between them, as well as how they relate to the instructional core.

Professional Communities

Teachers have to work together to successfully increase instructional program coherence. This kind of collaboration requires the support of a professional community characterized by trust, shared values, and a commitment to acting as a team to improve instruction (Platt, Tripp, et al., 2008).

The Fellowship facilitates the development of professional communities by engaging participants in establishing norms, identifying instructional priorities, and conducting classroom observations. A professional community, we have learned, is the fuel behind systematic instructional improvement.

Resources and Requirements

Schools exist in complex, often turbulent district, state, and federal environments (Hatch, 2009). Managing and leveraging resources and requirements is a critical skill for leading instructional improvement.

Through the Fellowship, participants analyze existing initiatives, identify and stay focused on a limited number of priorities, and, when necessary, buffer staff from requirements that may distract them from their core work: improving the quality of day-to-day classroom instruction.

Opportunities for Guided Practice

Effectively applied strategies are those that take local considerations and context into account. The Fellowship was built in a way that encourages ILTs to participate in guided practice opportunities. From thoughtful tailoring of the best instructional approaches to "team time" for discussion, consensus building, and useful feedback, we make sure ideas are shared in immediately applicable ways.

The Fellowship helps school leaders make connections between Saturday sessions to assist them in effectively applying what they've learned. Guided practices also provide common experience that supports team-to-team sharing and learning, which are key features of the Fellowship.

Engaged
In Best Practices

5

In order to further clarify Fellowship outcomes and expectations, our staff—in collaboration with national experts, state education agency representatives, leadership coaches, principals, and ILT members—developed a set of school-based practices (SBPs). The SBPs, outlined below, are not meant to be comprehensive descriptors of everything that principals, ILTs, teachers, and students should be doing in order to improve the quality of instruction in their buildings. Rather, they describe the desired, observable behaviors of these groups in relation to the work of the Fellowship.

At schools that make the best use of the Fellowship:

Principals:

- Champion instructional priorities and cultivate relationships that encourage broad staff and student participation in the school's continuous instructional improvement process
- Invest in professional supports
- Dedicate staff meeting time and focus other resources toward instructional priorities
- Promote a shared understanding of high-quality instruction

Instructional Leadership Teams:

- Gather and study data to determine instructional priorities
- Plan for and design comprehensive professional supports for teachers related to the use of key instructional strategies
- Model the implementation and effective use of key instructional strategies
- Continually build professional support for key instructional strategies
- Monitor the implementation of key instructional strategies
- Assess the effectiveness of key instructional strategies
- Collect and analyze a variety of data to calibrate professional supports
- Conduct school-based instructional rounds in order to improve professional supports, develop a shared understanding of high-quality instruction, and promote professional transparency

Teachers:

- Commit to using key instructional strategies and actively engaging in professional supports
- Discuss how to improve their practice in relation to instructional priorities
- Collaborate on planning lessons and assessments in light of instructional priorities
- Conduct and debrief peer observations focusing on key instructional strategies
- Analyze multiple measures of data to monitor student progress and identify implications for instructional priorities and strategies
- Provide feedback about instructional priorities and strategies to the instructional leadership team

Students:

- Routinely engage in the school's continuous instructional improvement process by providing the ILT and teachers with feedback about the teaching and learning process

Focused
On Results

The Fellowship's success rests heavily on participants' abilities to apply instructional leadership practices for the benefit of learners. We have created a highly interactive and coherent learning experience for participants that will increase their capacity to lead adult learning in the service of systemic instructional improvement.

Fellowship team members benefit from thoughtful guidance as they develop customized strategies to meet their school's needs. At the conclusion of their Fellowship participation, each school's ILT will have:

- Developed strategies for providing high-quality instructional support related to its priorities
- Established clear expectations for teaching practices and student outcomes
- Relentlessly assessed the implementation and impact of its work
- Established coherent instructional priorities using the Leadership for Coherence framework
- Developed solid school-wide implementation plans

Been trained in:

- Developing relational trust, setting norms, and using protocols
- Collecting, analyzing, and drawing conclusions from data to improve instruction
- Using instructional rounds to build coherence and to monitor and sustain the implementation of instructional priorities
- Establishing and communicating clear and effective instructional improvement priorities

Through this process, Fellowship school staff members will develop relationships that support continued peer dialogue, collaborative learning, and growth.

During sessions, Fellowship team members will deepen their understanding of effective strategies for delivering literacy and mathematics instruction. They will also continue to explore student personalization and connective teaching strategies.

6

"We will return to school with new learning that will further move us towards our goal of being exemplary schools... and the Fellowship has helped us reinforce our plan with advice to avoid possible obstacles to implementation."

-Fellowship Team Participant

Informed
By Our Outcomes

7

The Fellowship has grown and evolved since 2007, but one thing remains consistent: our focus on excellence.

The American Institutes for Research reviewed Fellowship outcomes and found that participating schools were reaping solid results. More than 75% of Fellowship schools and 85% of participants report local benefits as a direct result of what they learned from the Fellowship, including increased staff capacity, process improvements, and access to cutting-edge research and strategies.

A second study corroborated these findings, showing that the Fellowship was building adult capacity and influencing local school systems and processes in healthy ways (Drummond, 2012). These program benefits were evident in schools of varying characteristics and demographics, suggesting that our program design and content could be useful and applicable to all.

Finally, Brockton High School teachers, recognized for their school improvement work by Harvard University, the *New York Times*, and U.S. *News and World Report*, noted the importance of the Fellowship for its ability to foster coherence throughout the school improvement process and produce purposeful instructional leaders.

What Fellowship Participants Are Saying

- "The Fellowship has driven us to create a culture of positive change, which went beyond the building into the community." – *ILT Member, Malcolm Alternative High School (Sault Ste. Marie)*
- "The Fellowship helped us move the work to the teacher leader, and the ILT lead professional development, which lead to further teacher empowerment." – *Bobbie Jo Kenyon, 2012 Michigan Teacher of the Year, Ottawa Hills High School (Grand Rapids)*
- "In the process of one year, with the help of the Fellowship, we have managed to make AYP and hope to continue using the Fellowship strategies to sustain our work moving forward." – *ILT Member, East Jordan Elementary (East Jordan)*
- "We used the Fellowship strategies to develop relationships and trust with our students, which created an environment for learning." – *ILT Member, Covenant House Academy (Detroit)*

To learn more or to join the Fellowship, please contact us at (517) 353-8950 or by e-mailing k12out@msu.edu.

education.msu.edu/k12

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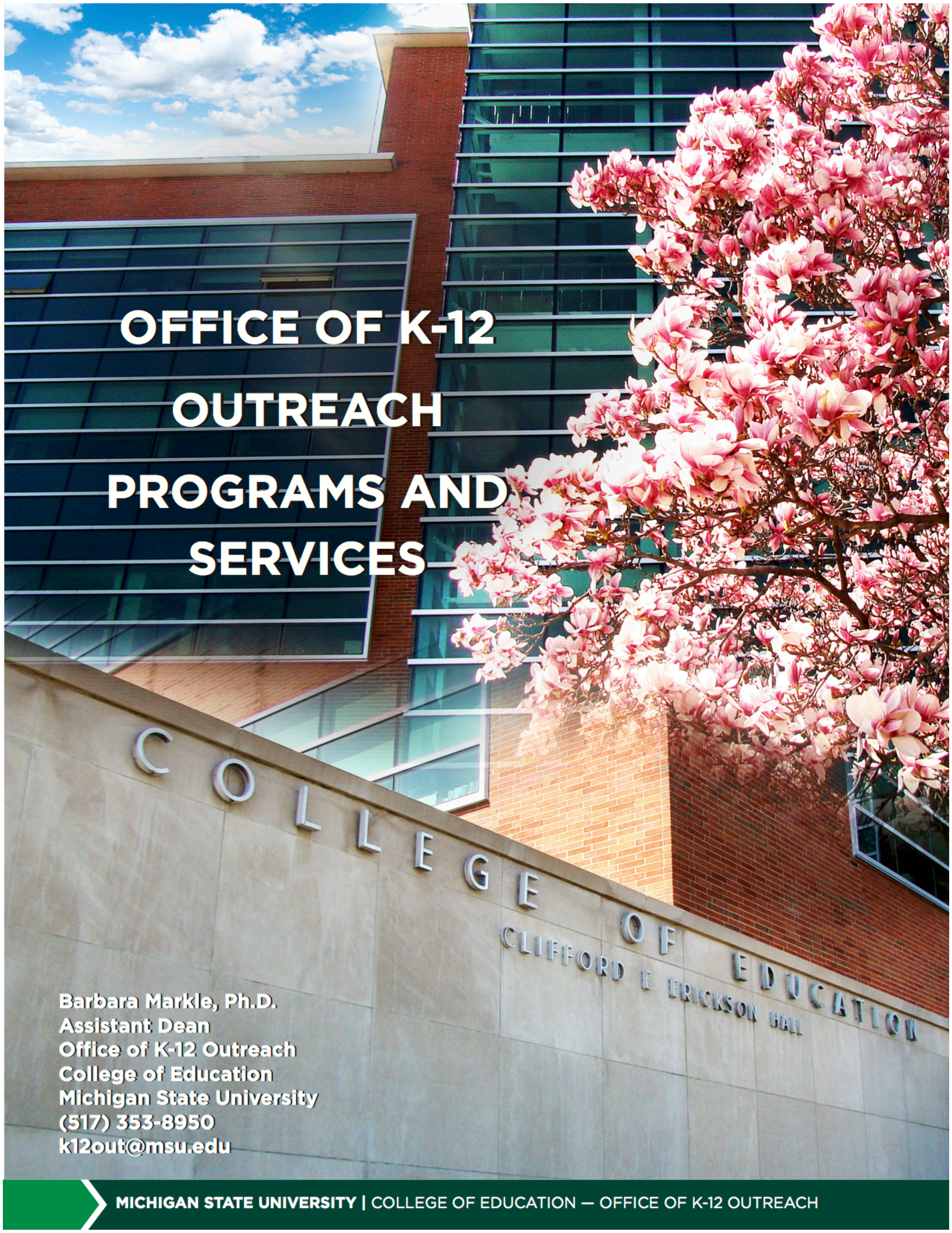
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OUR MISSION

Since 1997, Michigan State University's Office of K-12 Outreach has had a commitment to outreach and service as part of MSU's land-grant mission. The Office of K-12 Outreach works to connect research with practice in schools and districts across Michigan, the U.S., and the world. K-12 Outreach provides information, expertise, and insight to policymakers at the local, state, and national levels. We work with K-12 educators, administrators, philanthropic organizations, and policymakers to increase personal, institutional, and system wide capacity focused on improving education for all students.

WHAT WE DO: DEVELOP LEADERSHIP AND COLLECTIVE CAPACITY FOR CHANGE

Work with Low Performing, High-Poverty Schools and Districts

- Assist urban, suburban, and rural district and school leaders in developing a systems approach to school transformation in response to student needs.
- Provide customized training and leadership experiences to increase the collective capacity of staff and administrators to effect deep change.

Develop School and District "Turnaround" Leaders

- Assist districts in developing ongoing systems to identify, nurture, and place high-performing leaders in high-need schools.
- Deliver coaching and mentoring to principals, teacher-leaders, and central office staff as they work to make deep change in support of higher student achievement.

Data and Evaluation Services

- Assist schools and districts to collect, analyze, and evaluate data to enrich and inform practice using customized measurement tools and templates.

Help Schools and Districts Close Achievement Gaps

- Provide training and resources for improving cultural proficiency and developing high expectations for all students.
- Assist district leaders in assessing systemic issues that contribute to achievement gaps and in developing systems and strategies to narrow those gaps.

Provide Information and Expertise on Educational Issues to Policymakers and Other Leaders

- Provide ongoing opportunities for legislators and other policymakers to learn about current educational issues.
- Promote forums, research, and best practices to statewide organizations.

Internationalizing Education

- Broaden the international perspectives of policy makers, school and district leaders through international conferences and study tour opportunities.

WHO WILL IMPROVE MICHIGAN EDUCATION?
SPARTANS WILL.

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT INITIATIVES FROM THE OFFICE OF K-12 OUTREACH

Fellowship of Instructional Leaders

Through a year-long program, the Fellowship uses an evidence-based model to build the capacity of leadership teams to improve the quality of classroom instruction and increase staff collaboration and effectiveness. Teams comprised of the principal and teacher-leaders meet throughout the school year and attend a summer institute to work on the issues specific to their school and district context that directly relate to student achievement.

President's Education Forums

Sponsored by MSU president Lou Anna Simon, MSU faculty present current research to inform legislators, their staff, and other policymakers and leaders about current education issues and promote discussion in specific policy areas. Recent topics have included research related to third-grade reading and retention presented by Dr. Tanya Wright and issues around educating African American males with Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews. Dr. William Schmidt, a frequent presenter, recently discussed his latest study on school inequality.

International Study Tours

The Office of K-12 Outreach facilitates study tours to United Kingdom for university, community, and school leaders to learn from high-poverty, high-performing schools.

Leadership Coaching

MSU Leadership Coaching draws on national leadership standards, current research, and evidence based practices to support superintendents, central office administrators, and principals to effectively lead in a variety of educational settings. MSU provides a support model to expand the collective capacity of educators who influence school policy and instructional practice. Using a baseline needs assessment, MSU first establishes and prioritizes needs and goals. A trained mentor then works with the leader to identify, implement, and progress monitor specific strategies. MSU Leadership Coaching is based on the concept of continual improvement and is customized to achieve breakthrough performance outcomes.

MSU Educational Coaching Training

Originally funded by a grant from the Michigan Department of Education (Coaching 101), the MSU Educational Coaching Training program has been re-designed to build a professional knowledge base for all Michigan instructional leadership and content area coaches. Its goal is to increase coherence among the various coaching roles so all coaches can effectively and productively work together. By extending each coach's understanding of the fundamental knowledge, skills, and dispositions of effective coaching, MSU Educational Coaching Training program supports improved instruction and increased student achievement. Over the past six years, more than 1,300 educational coaches have been trained.

Emerging Leaders

In collaboration with the statewide elementary and secondary principals associations, this unique program provides potential school principals an opportunity to explore the knowledge, skills, and mindsets required to be a successful leader in today's complex educational environments. The program has trained over 750 participants, many of whom have gone on to become successful principals and central office administrators.

Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP)

EPFP engages early to mid-career participants in a deeper understanding of state and national policy and policymaking, effective leadership, and professional networks. Over 1,050 Fellows have participated in the Michigan program since 1975.

Customized Capacity Building

Originally developed as a component of the Michigan Statewide System of Support, MSU K-12 Outreach works with districts to develop the capacity of school and district leaders. The MSU support is geared toward making system-based changes to improve student achievement focusing specifically on:

- Improving district systems that lead to increased student achievement.
- Facilitating critical conversations about race, equity, and socio-economic conditions to close achievement gaps.
- Conducting data dialogues, developing action plans, and implementing assessment processes.
- Initiating building-level conversations that focus on systems analysis and the use of data for decision-making.

Through the work of MSU K-12 Outreach, one-third of Michigan's 321 priority and focus schools had their status removed in 2014. This included 19 of 36 priority schools in Detroit.

COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM FOR RAPID DISTRICT INTERVENTION FOR FLINT COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Project Overview

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (CSMF) has funded MSU K-12 Outreach for two years to provide intensive capacity building with the Flint Community Schools (FCS) for the purpose of improving student learning. During the 2015-16 school year, FCS's ongoing struggles with persistently low achievement were intensified by the Flint Water Crisis. Working with the FCS, MSU K-12 Outreach played a critical role in helping the district lay the foundation for a more effective school system, including:

- Established coherent systems and processes at the central office,
- Aligned school improvement goals with district improvement goals,
- Launched early childhood and preschool initiatives for the FCS,
- Built leadership capacity in principals, and
- Provided support for basic district functions including data management and reporting in order to receive state and federal funds.

The second year of the grant (2016-17), MSU K-12 Outreach continued with a focus on effective teaching and learning at the district and individual school-level. Current efforts are designed to integrate district and school goals and the systematic use of data to drive instructional and organizational improvement. Funded initiatives include:

- Developing a student support system, including grade-level transitions,
- Expanding early childhood and preschool initiatives for future FCS students,
- Implementing strategic curriculum development, support, and alignment,
- Supporting comprehensive organizational and operational alignment,
- Continuing to develop school and community outreach, and
- Providing ongoing longitudinal data analysis, including student achievement cohort analysis.

Through its collaborative efforts with the FCS, MSU K-12 Outreach is putting in place practices that are resulting in positive improvements.

Year-Three – Student Focused

In the third year of CSMF funding, MSU K-12 Outreach will be working to facilitate a deeper and more effective implementation of key initiatives to ensure sustained impact. MSU K-12 Outreach is building on the teaching and learning strategies adopted during Year-Two and implementing a student-focused, and data-driven intervention approach in Year-Three.

Conceptual Model of MSU's FCS Turnaround

Evidence of Impact

As a result of this intervention, MSU has engaged all levels of education in the FCS and thus created a model of whole district reform that can have lasting effects on improving student achievement in the FCS. Recent analysis of student achievement, attendance, discipline, and enrollment trend data provides evidence of positive growth in FCS performance.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS

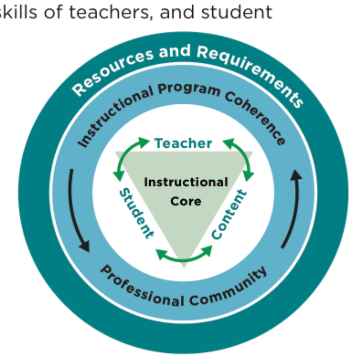
Project Overview

The Fellowship is designed using an evidence-based model to broaden and transform leadership within schools while directly addressing each school's challenges. School leadership teams, comprised of the principal and teacher-leaders, meet throughout the school year based on their schedules and for a summer institute to work with MSU K-12 Outreach to learn practical strategies and approaches for:

1. **Leading turnaround and addressing low achievement in their schools with the goal of improving student achievement;**
2. **Fostering excellence and leadership within their own teaching staffs;**
3. **Improving daily classroom instruction and collaboration.**

Since 2007, more than 1,600 teachers and principals from across Michigan have participated in the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders program. The Fellowship experience increases the capacity of principals and instructional leaders to improve all aspects of the instructional core – content being taught, the knowledge and skills of teachers, and student engagement.

The instructional core is part of MSU's framework of instructional program coherence shown by research to be a primary characteristic of schools with significant and sustained student achievement.



Leadership for Coherence Framework

> "The Fellowship of Instructional Leaders draws upon the extensive resources of the MSU College of Education, including faculty with state, national, and international expertise."

Using research-based practices, the Fellowship assists leadership teams to diagnose their own building-level issues and identify clear and measurable goals. Using a series of protocols and activities, the Fellowship guides leadership teams as they examine their school's data and programs to ensure that they are focused on key instructional initiatives that improve student achievement. This requires the use of data to identify, plan, monitor, and assess changes in the components of the instructional core.

The Fellowship of Instructional Leaders draws upon the extensive resources of the MSU College of Education, including faculty with state, national, and international expertise. These faculty specialize in urban education, leadership development, teacher quality and effective instruction, literacy and mathematics instruction, special education and inclusion, educational technology, curriculum alignment, assessment and data analysis, comprehensive school reform, and student and family support. Two independent research evaluations demonstrate that the Fellowship increases the capacity of school leadership teams to transform their own schools.

LESSONS FROM LONDON: PUTTING STUDENTS AT THE CENTER OF REFORM

Overview and Purpose

Reforms that successfully build capacity for student learning put the student at the center of the reform. However, many reforms focus on institutional governance models. While important, these reforms do not respond to the learning needs of low-performing, high-poverty students. Successful reforms recognize that students are active participants in their own learning and consumers of knowledge. MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach is working with low-performing, high-poverty schools and incorporating interdependent components of the United Kingdom's (U.K.) highly successful reform strategies in Michigan schools. Using the framework above, we offer expertise and customized support in building capacity for student learning. Elements of this approach include:

Student Responsibility for Their Learning and Data

- In the U.K., the student is viewed as the consumer of education, and individual student learning needs are the focus of both adults and students in the system.
- The U.K. incorporates student data into daily practice. Students know their own data and learn to monitor, evaluate, and reflect on improving their own learning.
- MSU assists educators in transforming student learning conditions through developing a deeper understanding of data analysis and assessments to determine individual student learning needs.

Support through Mentoring and Coaching

- U.K. schools understand that students and their families need a web of support through mentoring, advice, and guidance to successfully navigate the educational system.
- Recognizing that educator capacity is a crucial indicator of quality, MSU is developing active supports for educators so that they may effectively mentor and coach their students to be on track for graduation and careers.

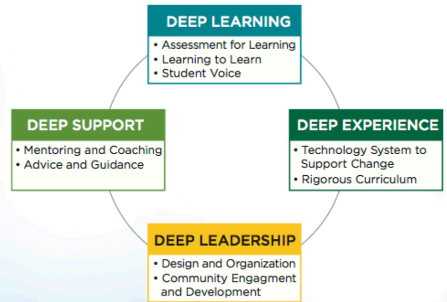


Figure 3 - U.K. Model Framework

Student Engagement and Experience through a Rigorous Curriculum

- In the Detroit area, 35.2% of students are chronically absent in part due to disengagement from school. In addition, Michigan's graduation rate is 77%, which is low when compared to other states. Making learning engaging requires structuring the curriculum so that students have ownership of their learning.
- In the U.K., core academic standards are delivered through projects, new technologies, and activities that are rigorous, yet student-led and self-directed.
- MSU works to integrate student voice and aspiration initiatives into supported learning experiences.

Leadership

- Research indicates that successful U.K. leaders are relentless, have a clear vision for student success, are driven by a strong moral purpose, make student-centered (not adult-centered) decisions, and serve as system leaders.
- MSU develops and supports leaders who build district and school-wide capacity for student learning, engage the community, and leverage resources from private and social sectors.

LEADERSHIP COACHING

The Office of K-12 Outreach provides individualized principal and administrative leadership coaching informed by current research and evidence-based practices to enhance performance and increase student achievement. Our Leadership Coaching is based on the concept of continual learning so that individuals have the opportunity to capitalize on their areas of strength while also receiving support in identified areas for growth. A cadre of seasoned former district and school leaders serve as coaches to support leadership development for individuals working in a variety of educational contexts.

The MSU K-12 Outreach coaching model synthesizes core competencies from national standards and educational leadership frameworks. The model:

- Represents a clear process for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of strategies to attain focused goals.
- Emphasizes the necessity of data-driven decision making for student achievement.
- Provides a process that can be applied for future and continuous staff development.
- Promotes a focus on curriculum and assessment as the blueprint for consistent and sustainable improvement.
- Reinforces the importance of a healthy school climate that prioritizes student achievement and values staff development.
- Underscores the need for promoting shared responsibility and the highest expectations in the whole person development (academic, social, emotional and physical) of all stakeholders.
- Imparts tenets of successful educational leaders, such as the need to articulate a vision, provide necessary resources, and value the diverse community a district encompasses.

MSU EDUCATIONAL COACHING TRAINING

The purpose of MSU's Educational Coaching Training program is to establish a cadre of educational coaches who have strong knowledge, a common language, and skills to promote school improvement across the state of Michigan. The structure of the program was originally designed to increase the coherence of support provided to Title I Priority and Focus schools under a grant from the Michigan Department of Education called Coaching 101.

The newly designed program continues to train and empower educational coaches to interact with teachers and administrators. The program assists them in identifying and addressing problems of practice resulting in more effective classroom instruction and, ultimately, higher student achievement.

The program is a multi-day training program that provides participants the fundamental knowledge and skills needed by an educational coach. At the end of the training, participants demonstrate their coaching skills. Once coaches have competed the training, they become part of a coaching community and can receive ongoing support through regular professional development sessions.

At these sessions, coaches have an opportunity to practice their coaching skills with their colleagues, ask questions, and discuss their coaching experiences with peers and MSU K-12 Outreach. To date, MSU's Office of K-12 Outreach has trained over 1,300 coaches in seven years and has an extensive history of preparing and supporting school and district-level educational coaches to improve achievement.

MSU Coaching Team Member demonstrates a coaching conversation with a trainee.

Participants from a training in East Lansing record themselves having a coaching conversation.

THE MSU OFFICE OF K-12 OUTREACH: EXPERTISE AND COMMITMENT

The Office of K-12 Outreach, under the leadership of Assistant Dean Barbara Markle, has unmatched experience in developing and implementing customized support for schools and districts in Michigan seeking to turnaround their schools and rapidly improve student achievement.

Our unique field-oriented service organization within the university brings a 20-year history of collaboration with schools and districts across the state. The MSU K-12 team has deep experiences as:

- urban superintendents,
- central office administrators,
- principals,
- curriculum leaders,
- content area experts,
- statisticians,
- have extensive backgrounds in executive management,
- data analysis and evaluation,
- curriculum and assessment development,
- content area teaching strategies,
- early childhood programming,
- student-centered learning.

"...unmatched **experience** in developing and implementing **customized support** for schools and districts in Michigan."

With this team of highly trained outreach specialists, MSU K-12 Outreach brings a proven record of improvement in Michigan education to effectively build capacity for sustained change and is committed to helping Michigan schools become exemplary.

For more information, on the Office of K-12 Outreach programs and services, contact
Dr. Barbara Markle, Assistant Dean, Michigan State University
(517)353-8950 • k-12out@msu.edu

http://education.msu.edu/k12/

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Initial IRB Application Determination *Exempt*

June 30, 2017

To: Terah Venzant Chambers
620 Farm Lane, Room 433

Re: **IRB# x17-879e** Category: Exempt 2
Approval Date: June 30, 2017

Title: Processes Toward Partnerships: How Universities and K-12 Schools Make Sense of Partnering

The Institutional Review Board has completed their review of your project. I am pleased to advise you that **your project has been deemed as exempt** in accordance with federal regulations.

The IRB has found that your research project meets the criteria for exempt status and the criteria for the protection of human subjects in exempt research. **Under our exempt policy the Principal Investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects** in this project as outlined in the assurance letter and exempt educational material. The IRB office has received your signed assurance for exempt research. A copy of this signed agreement is appended for your information and records.

Renewals: Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. If the project is completed, please submit an ***Application for Permanent Closure***.

Revisions: Exempt protocols do not require revisions. However, if changes are made to a protocol that may no longer meet the exempt criteria, a new initial application will be required. If the project is modified to add additional sites for the research, please note that you may not begin your research at those sites until you receive the appropriate approvals/permissions from the sites.

Problems: If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems, adverse events, or any problem that may increase the risk to the human subjects and change the category of review, notify the IRB office promptly. Any complaints from participants regarding the risk and benefits of the project must be reported to the IRB.

Follow-up: If your exempt project is not completed and closed after three years, the IRB office will contact you regarding the status of the project and to verify that no changes have occurred that may affect exempt status.

Please use the IRB number listed above on any forms submitted which relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the IRB office.

If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 517-355-2180 or via email at IRB@msu.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

c: Bryan Beverly

Office of Regulatory Affairs
Human Research Protection Programs

Biomedical & Health Institutional Review Board (BIRB)

Community Research Institutional Review Board (CRIRB)

Social Science Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board (SIRB)

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Processes Toward Partnerships: How Universities and K-12 Schools Make Sense of Partnering

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research project conducted by Ph.D. student Bryan Beverly under the supervision of Terah Chambers, Ph.D. from Michigan State University. This study is to investigate the how K-12 and university partners understand their roles in typical outreach partnerships. You have been selected as a potential participant in this study because you are the program coordinator of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders.

Procedure: As part of this research, you will be asked to reflect on your experiences in the program to get a more in-depth viewpoint on partnerships between schools and university regarding their mutual perceptions and behaviors.

Benefits: This participation may serve to further our scientific knowledge about the collaboration between K-12 schools and universities and how that may affect student achievement.

Compensation: You will have the personal satisfaction of knowing you contributed to a study that may affect the relationship of schools and universities as they partner to improve student outcomes.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or discontinue at any time without penalty.

Contact and Questions: If you have any questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to answer any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researchers by email: Bryan Beverly (beverlyb@msu.edu), phone: 517-505-5411; or Terah Chambers, Ph.D. (terah@msu.edu), phone: (517-884-4526) or by regular mail: Michigan State University, 620 Farm Lane Room 404, East Lansing, MI 48824.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180 or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

1

Statement of Consent/Assent:
By signing this form, you agree to participate in this study 'Processes Toward Partnerships: How Universities and K-12 Schools Make Sense of Partnering I (as a participant) voluntarily agree to participate in this study:

Signature:________________ **Date:** 6-30-17

Thank you for your time and cooperation

Purpose of the Study:

Several universities have developed policies that prioritize outreach efforts to local and state communities. Universities and K-12 schools create partnerships with one another in order to develop programming aimed at improving student outcomes. Universities allocate considerable resources in support of K-12 schools and students- both in terms of financial and human capital. Our project investigates the processes and policies created in cooperation toward these partnerships and the manner in which participants in these partnerships develop understanding of each of their roles. This qualitative study seeks to examine the relationships between universities and K-12 school districts and the front-end organizational behaviors associated with the partnerships in an attempt to determine how the various partners make sense of their function and responsibilities in the partnership and under what initial circumstances are such partnerships likely to thrive. The study will look at how these relationships, especially the formal partnership, were established and organized. In addition to describing the informal relationships and formal partnership, I also will analyze the perception of benefits to each organization that result from this partnership.

Sample Set of Experiences for Reflection

Experience 1: *Formation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)*

The creation of a legally binding document that outlines Michigan State University's support for Flint Community Schools' priority schools was conceptually developed by MSU with input from FCS central office administration. The document represents the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders partnership's scope of work, period of performance, compensation, evaluation and termination, resources, and deliverables. The MOU is connected to the University-K-12 Partnership Sensemaking Conceptual Framework as a representation of the culmination of the creation of shared meaning that leads to entering into a formal partnership and was voted upon by the FCS Board of Education. The formulation of the MOU included many meetings, emails, and phone calls within and between the two organizations.

Experience 2: *Introduction of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders to FCS Principals*

Following the approval of the MOU by FCS administration and board of education, MSU presented an overview of the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders for the four principals of the schools initially involved in the partnership. The overview included multiple meetings within MSU's organization, emails between the MSU and FCS, and a single meeting with the two organizations. In this instance, developing shared meaning also included providing an opportunity for principals to give input as to how the partnership would be most effective in addressing the needs of each school.

Experience 3: Adding a New School Mid-way Through Year 2.

Several factors including district student enrollment and state accountability policies necessitated an additional school being added to the partnership mid-stream. This resulted in a need to evaluate the partnership in order to understand how best to incorporate additional participants in a relevant and efficient manner. Several meetings, emails, and phone calls within MSU and inclusive of FCS was necessary to create an approach to assimilating the new school into the Fellowship of Instructional Leaders. As was necessary in Experience 2, developing shared understanding also involved input from the principal as to how this partnership would best meet the needs of the school.

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