

# Understanding Collaboration: A Formative Process Evaluation of a State-Funded School-University Partnership

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**ABSTRACT:** School-university partnerships are widely promoted yet little is known about what contributes to their effectiveness. This paper presents a participatory formative evaluation of a state-funded school-university partnership. The study employed an empirically derived systems model – the Bergen Model of Collaborative Functioning (BMCF) – as the analytical frame. Twenty-one semi-structured interviews with a range of participants were conducted, transcribed, and then analyzed according to the BMCF. Participants described the foundation of partnership work between schools and universities as requiring the cultivation of humility in order to overcome hierarchical barriers for students, parents, and staff within schools. The central findings include a practice model for changing organizational structures to institutionalize protected collaborative space, a theoretical model providing a framework for better understanding the process of partnership, and a policy model which indicates the importance of significant funding to surmount organizational barriers and provide incentives for the intensive, long-term work required.

*NAPDS Nine Essentials Address: #1/A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community; #2/A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community; #3/Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need; #4/ A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; #5/ Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants; #7/A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration; #8/ork by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; #9/Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.*

School-university partnerships are widely promoted by accrediting bodies, professional organizations and state legislatures (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2001; Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013). Yet, such collaborations are complex to enact (Goldring & Sims, 2005; Klieger & Wagner, 2014). Insufficient research exists that examines relational dynamics within school-university partnerships or that draws upon participants' multiple perspectives. The literature is disparate, failing to connect research in a way that builds theory or provides recommendations for effective collaboration among partners (Teitel, 2004; Clift & Brady, 2005). In order to create the right collaborative conditions for positive school and university culture change, the needs of the school, the learning of both future and current teachers, and effective processes within university-school partnerships must all be taken into consideration. (Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley & Goodlad, 2004).

This paper reports on an effort to proactively evaluate the activities of a state-funded school-university partnership in its

second year of operation. Applying the Bergen Model of Collaborative Functioning (BMCF), we systematically documented the inputs, activities and outputs of the initiative as both a formative evaluation and as a case study of the process of university-school collaboration to contribute to the literature on partnership functioning.

## Literature Review

Partnerships between universities and schools are considered to be central to effective teacher preparation and to positive P-12 student learning. The Holmes Group (1986, 1990) first used the term, *professional development school* (PDS) to identify a set of principles for learning environments designed to promote a caring climate of teaching and learning to benefit all children, to encourage inquiry and learning by teachers, teacher-educators and administrators, and to bridge common tensions between schools and universities through partnership relationships.

The National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) identified ‘nine essentials’ of effective PDSs (2008). These characteristics included a school-university partnership mission to advance equity, prepare future educators, engage in reflective and innovative practices, share in professional development, disseminate inquiry projects, identify structures, roles and responsibilities for collaboration, and decide how to utilize shared resources.

The challenges of implementing the complex PDS model have been widely documented. Problems include a lack of role clarity, the absence of shared goals, and inadequate policies overseeing school staff involvement in pre-service teacher preparation (Southgate et al., 2013, Zeichner, 2010). Established hierarchies of schools and universities remain unchanged unless shared goals and norms are established (Dallmer, 2004). Successful PDS implementation requires organizational change at university and school levels, redesign of both teacher and teacher-educator work, and changes in relationships and roles among partners (Abdal-Haqq, 1991; Guadarrama, Ramsey & Nath, 2008; Nath, Guadarrama & Ramsey, 2011).

### **PDSs to Prepare Teachers for Working with Diverse Learners, Families and Communities**

PDS work in classrooms today often involves preparing pre-service teachers to work successfully with students who are diverse in terms of language, culture, race, family structure, religion, and income levels (Jensen, 2009; Taylor, 2009).

PDS partnerships tend to encourage engagement with families as one way to reduce the achievement gap. Henderson and Mapp’s analysis of 51 studies on family involvement in schools (2002) notes “a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including improved academic achievement. This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds” (p. 24).

### **PDSs as a Boundary Area for Negotiated Practices**

PDSs provide a setting for the creation of new knowledge and practices on the edges or boundaries between schools and universities (Darling-Hammond, 2006; McDonald et al, 2013; Arhar et al., 2013; Zeichner, 2010) and help to develop common professional practices congruent with a specific school and its community. Yet, because all participants operate within the school, ways must be found to integrate university faculty to increase acceptance by teachers (Martin, Snow & Franklin Torrez, 2011).

Today, school-university partnerships remain challenging to enact. A true ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 2000) requires a foundation based on trusting relationships among school staff, families, communities, and those from the university. Yet, without a deep understanding of the complex organizational and relational factors involved in PDS partnerships, teacher education programs and schools are often defeated by

challenges. Addressing this gap in knowledge, this study aims to increase our understanding of key factors that contribute to positive and negative partnership processes in the early stages of implementing a large-scale school university partnership.

## **The Case**

In 2012, the state legislature provided \$500,000 annually for three projects that would bring schools, colleges of education, families and communities together with two major goals: 1) to improve academic and social outcomes for all students—especially English learners and those from families with low incomes, and 2) to develop models for enhanced teacher preparation and professional development. After one planning year, each project began implementation of five-year plans (contingent on re-funding). This article reports on a formative process evaluation of one of these projects conducted during the second implementation year.

With the initiation of this school-university partnership (SUP), Riverview School (pseudonym) became a professional development school in association with the Elementary Education Department of a College of Education. During the evaluation interval, 7 teacher candidates were placed in the school for their 3-quarter internships, including a quarter of full-time student teaching. There were 33 certified teachers in the school, supported by 20 paraeducators.

In 2012-2013 Riverview had a majority Latino student population (66.5%), of which 34% received bilingual services and 13% were identified as children in migrant families. However, as a result of family visits, school staff learned that many of the Latino families were actually of indigenous Mexican origin and spoke Spanish as a second language, their first language being Mixtec or Triqui. Poverty affected a large majority of school families: 81% received free or reduced-price lunch. In contrast to the student demographics of the school, which are majority Latino, the teachers were European-American, middle class and mostly female, although three of the teachers spoke Spanish with some fluency. Two support staff members were bilingual Latinas.

A Comprehensive Needs Assessment conducted during the planning year revealed a disappointing trend in the school’s standardized test scores (The Center for Educational Effectiveness, Inc., 2012). From 2009 - 2012, reading scores remained static or showed slight gains while math scores declined. The report also showed that struggling students were not catching up to their peers; in some cases they were falling further behind. The largest achievement gaps were among Hispanic/Latino students, when compared with White students and among boys, in comparison to girls.

In order to achieve the two ambitious goals set by the legislature, the partnership invested in a number of efforts concurrently, addressing the challenges from several angles at once. Two major areas of effort that are referred to repeatedly by participants in this report are family engagement and teacher professional development. The chronology below (see Table 1) will provide the reader with a very brief summary of these

Table 1. Significant Family Engagement and Professional Development Activities

A. Fall 2012	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Comprehensive School Review and other data analyses conducted.</li> <li>2. Teacher-Family visits (at home or school) piloted in response to teachers' expressed need to know more about Latino students and their families</li> <li>3. Pre-Visit survey conducted to determine teachers' questions and anxieties; need for cultural awareness identified.</li> <li>4. In-house professional development conducted by school staff focused on cultural awareness and personal experiences shared by a former Mixteco (indigenous Mexican) student</li> </ol>
B. Winter 2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Family visits led by a bilingual staff member; parents were asked what their hopes and dreams were for their children and how the school could support them.</li> <li>2. Family literacy identified by both families and teachers as an area for support.</li> </ol>
C. Spring 2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Additional support for ELL students in the general education classrooms identified as need by teachers. University faculty member offered to provide Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) training.</li> </ol>
D. Fall 2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. GLAD training conducted in the school (14 teachers, 2 university personnel &amp; 1 university trainer participated in the weeklong event).</li> <li>2. Menu of family literacy possibilities provided to families; response data used to design first series of family literacy nights.</li> </ol>
E. Winter 2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Family literacy nights launched; Spanish heritage language program (<i>Club de Lectura</i>) provided for elementary students and a Family Read program (modeled on MotherRead/FatherRead) for parents with young children.</li> <li>2. GLAD strategies implemented by teachers in the classrooms; follow-up support workshops provided by GLAD instructors.</li> </ol>
F. Spring 2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adult ESL class added to the family literacy nights in response to requests by parents.</li> <li>2. Family visits conducted with a new group of families.</li> <li>3. Poverty simulation conducted by university Human Services faculty member in response to School staff-identified need to engage low-income families impacted by trauma &amp; generational poverty.</li> <li>4. Parent Action Team formation facilitated by university Human Services faculty member; members of Latino community, PTO leadership and school staff included on team.</li> <li>5. Training in the DuFour model of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) investigated in response to School staff goal of enhancing work of collaborative grade-level teams.</li> </ol>
G. Summer 2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. School and university faculty attended PLC trainings together.</li> <li>2. Additional school staff attended GLAD training during 2014-15.</li> </ol>

activities. In the text to follow, the items in this list are indicated in brackets, to enable the reader to return to Table 1 for clarification and to situate each initiative in relation to other actions.

In cases where an action was clearly prompted by a particular partner, that fact is specified in the table above. In most cases, however, ideas and initiatives emerged organically—resulting from recognition of need, conversation, and the availability of either school or university personnel with expertise and/or interest in a particular area. When an initiative was suggested by personnel from either school or university, it received consideration from the other partner and both attempted to find ways for collaborative participation. The default location was always the school since most participants worked at that location and because the students and families at the center of our efforts reside there.

### Partnership Model

The purpose of this research project was to examine the SUP using a theoretical frame to guide the inquiry. While no models

of collaboration have been widely adopted for systematically examining collaboration in educational settings, a theoretical model does exist in the field of health promotion (McQueen, 2012; Corbin, Jones & Barry, 2016). The Bergen Model of Collaborative Functioning (BMCF) has been employed to examine a range of partnerships across several areas of practice and diverse international settings (Corbin, Fernandez, & Mullen, 2015; Corbin, Mittelmark, & Lie, 2012, 2013; Corbin & Mittelmark, 2008; Corwin, Corbin, & Mittelmark, 2012). See Figure 1.

The BMCF is a systems model that examines elements and dynamics of functioning as input, throughput and output (Corbin & Mittelmark, 2008). The inputs of partnership are mission/purpose, partner resources and financial resources. Throughput involves two types of tasks: production activities and maintenance activities. Four elements impact throughput functioning: leadership, communication, roles/structure and input interaction. These elements create cycles of interaction. Positive actions facilitate positive processes and negative ones reinforce negative processes. Each element of functioning is capable of either contributing positively to collaborative

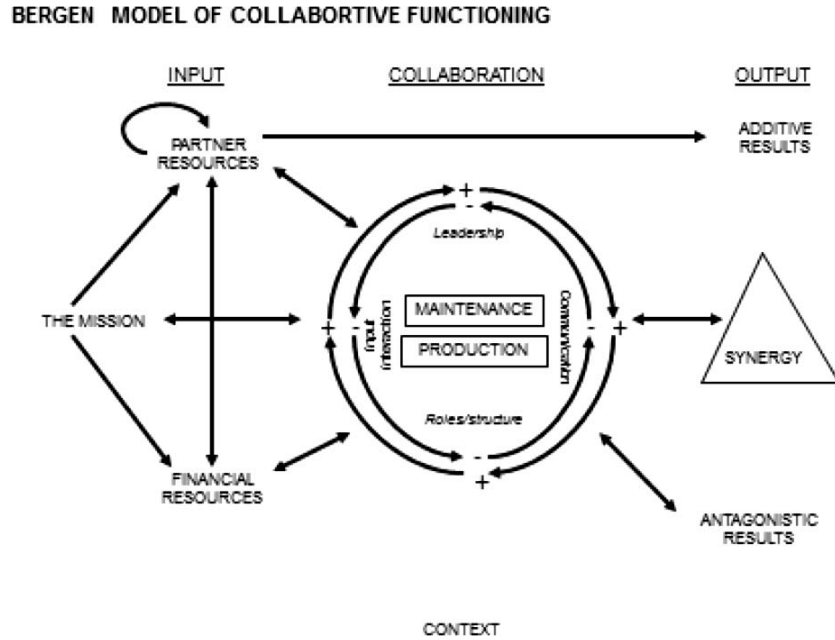


Figure 1. The Bergen Model of Collaborative Functioning

functioning or detracting from it. The three outputs are additive results (not impacted), synergy (positive) and antagonism (negative) (Corbin & Mittelmark, 2008).

A major contribution of the BMCF is that it normalizes the antagonism (negative functioning) that all partnerships experience. By tracking the presence of antagonism and its pathway, participants have a tool to improve their interactions (Corbin et al., 2013).

## Methods

This study combines participatory evaluation with an action research approach by involving stakeholders at each stage of research and feeding results directly back into the partnership practice (Green & Thorogood, 2009). The research team was comprised of an external expert on partnership functioning (first author), the co-principal investigators on the grant, the co-coordinators, and three other university faculty involved in the partnership.

The first author worked with the team to formulate the research questions, design the research strategy, and purposively select interview participants. Twenty-one interviews, ranging from 15-75 minutes, were conducted in October and November of 2014. Twenty interviews were conducted in English, one interview was conducted in Spanish with a translator. Participants were purposively selected by the stakeholder-research team to represent a broad range of roles and levels of involvement and to include individuals who had diverse perspectives on the effectiveness of the collaborative work. (See Table 2 for a list of participant roles and settings).

The interviewer employed a semi-structured interview guide developed with input from the stakeholder team based on the

BMCF. Actual interview questions varied according to the role of the interviewee in the collaboration (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). The interviewer frequently checked in with interview participants to ensure understanding of their responses (Creswell, 2008). All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The external evaluator analyzed the interview transcripts, employing directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), which involved the coding of data into predetermined categories derived from the elements of the BMCF. Once separated into these categories, a more conventional content analysis approach was employed to allow new understandings to flow from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002). The final report, presented here, is co-authored by the stakeholder-research team.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) suggest criteria for evaluating trustworthiness across seven stages of research. A strength of this study is the co-construction of knowledge through engagement of action research techniques (Meyers, 2014). Engagement of stakeholders in the process of research is inherently more reflective of real experience of the phenomena than could be achieved otherwise (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990).

## Results

The results of this study are presented according to the elements of the BMCF.

## Finances

A distinctive feature of this project is the substantial funding from the state legislature (\$500,000 annually). This considerable

Table 2. List of Research Participants

<i>Role</i>	<i>Setting</i>	<i>Number Interviewed</i>
School Principal	Elementary School	1
Department Chair	College of Education	1
Program Co-coordinator	Elementary School	1
Program Co-coordinator	College of Education	1
Teachers	Elementary School	5
Reading Specialists	Elementary School	2
Parents of students	Elementary School	2
Faculty	College of Education	5
Student teachers	College of Education	2
Family Engagement Specialist	School District	1
School Counselor	Elementary School	1
Instructional Assistant	Elementary School	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>23<sup>a</sup></b>

<sup>a</sup>Two interviewees fell into multiple categories; therefore, the individual numbers indicated above add up to 23 to reflect all roles represented, while the actual number of participants totaled 21.

funding has had positive effects on the functioning of the partnership. One participant remarked on the creativity the generous funding has stimulated:

The funding has really encouraged us to open up our thinking. . . the thought that money is not an issue – it just frees up your idea tank. You can get more creative. (18, School)

The funding has also supported the development of relationships because it has enabled multilayered, long-term collaboration:

This has become a more truly two-way collaboration. And part of it is the length of the effort. And you know the money has helped in that we can do multiple things together, many things. (25, University)

The funding has facilitated participation in important ways by paying for teachers’ time to participate in professional development, family engagement, and before-and after-school enrichment opportunities.

Participants also noted some less positive processes associated with the funding; every two years the legislature needs to renew the funding. Not knowing if the grant will be renewed, or to what extent, impedes planning:

There is something else that has weakened this grant, and our willingness to be innovative—the uncertainty of funding. (25, University)

**Partner Resources**

The SUP included family engagement initiatives that reached out to families, especially those from the Latino/Mixteco community. Efforts began with home visits during the first year (Table 1; A.2). A Parent Action Group was formed in year 2 to

engage more parents in decision-making at the school (Table 1; F.4). One participant describes the fruits of those efforts:

The last evening parent meeting we had was probably the largest attended meeting that was ever held at this school. And definitely the most diverse. (17, School)

Time is a limited resource for the SUP but it limits partners in differing ways. For some partners, outside commitments make any participation difficult:

I think there are some staff here that I would love to have involved just because of their strengths and expertise, and they’ve been invited and given the opportunity, but they just don’t want the extra work.... there’s only so much time in a day. (18, School)

For others, time constraints interfere with their ability to get other important tasks done:

We’re so short (on) faculty, that there’s no way somebody can buy out (of teaching a university course). I can’t buy myself out of a course because I can’t find somebody to teach the course. But what suffers is my writing, right? I don’t write [scholarly publications]. (31, University)

**Input Interaction: Finances and Partners**

The substantial funding provided by the grant supported extended time for university faculty to be physically present at the elementary school and enabled the building of relationships, trust, and respect.

We have teachers that are typically very nervous to have anyone walk into their room while they are teaching and now they have a lot of people in and out of their room from [university]. I think that says a lot. They’re willing to have them on PLCs [Professional Learning



Communities], they're using them as a resource instead of closing the door, learning with them and from them. (21, School)

Participants described this trust as built over time and stimulated by demonstrations of openness, risk-taking, vulnerability, two-way listening processes, and learning in public, together.

### Risk-taking

In many interviews, participants describe interactions that demonstrate personal risk-taking. One school staff member describes the following interaction with university faculty:

I was so intimidated to say anything because I thought, [university faculty members] are so [experienced], they know. But they gave me so much respect and listened to what my reasons were, why I just didn't believe in this [suggested activity]. They were so respectful. And I remember walking away from there thinking. . .ok, I am part of this and I'm not just "one of these teachers" at the school. (23, School)

This exhibition of risk-taking and vulnerability was also noted by participants in relation to the school leadership

I feel like in relation to other principals who I've worked with, which is quite a few, he's at the top of the list in terms of being authentic and being vulnerable and open for honesty. (29, University)

Another crucial aspect of trust-building that partners described was the act of learning in public, especially as exhibited by people further up in the traditional education hierarchy.

College faculty took the (PD) training right along with the teachers and the two presenters were [a university faculty member] and [a public school teacher]. They taught it together; we took it together; the university presenter taught Riverview students as a demonstration. Interns took it at this time as well. Everybody all learning it together and trying it together. (25, University)

Partner engagement within the collaboration was described as "two-way" by participants—not just top-down, but also flowing in the other direction. An example is family engagement work:

Everything that we do has been informed by parents and family visits. What nights of the week work? Would you like dinner or not? If we were to offer things about reading and family literacy would you be interested in that? Well, then they came to that and said this is all fine, but we'd rather learn English. We changed our programming last year to provide English classes. (21—School)

While all of the above processes were noted by participants as contributing to more horizontal relationships among partners,

it was recognized that schools and universities are highly hierarchical environments and power differentials must be kept in mind, especially when working with parents who have been traditionally marginalized:

Although I think people are really getting the sense that [the principal] of the school is really in it and sincere, I still think there's a reality that the principal is sitting there, teachers are sitting there and [parents] don't want to offend. (29, University)

### Input Interaction: Partners and Mission

One partner describes how engagement with another partner shaped her involvement with the evolving mission and her individual thinking:

[My interaction] with [university partner] was just one of the most profound moments of my life. We were at [an education conference] and. . . [one partner] talked about [their] life story and [their] career and [their] perspective on the family visits – it made me really process – making sure I was sensitive to all of our families. I think my sensitivity had been towards our Latino families and our indigenous families and not thinking about our families of poverty. . . this conversation, made me extremely reflective on all of our families and how to focus on all of them. (23, School)

Another interaction described by participants was how the various strands of the initiative strengthened one another.

What we have is a network of relationships, like spiderwebs, that certain pathways are becoming stronger. A positive thing that I'm seeing with families is, we started out with a family subcommittee, and those are the only people that talked about families. And gradually 'families' is becoming everybody's business. (26, University)

### Input Interaction: Partners and Finances

As described above, this project had significant resources available to accomplish its goals. This substantial funding allowed for the compensation of teachers' time:

It's really nice, you know, it's great to be involved, but it's also nice to be compensated too. It's gotten a lot more people on board than I think it might have. Everybody cares but it's a lot of hours. (16, School)

While almost everyone agreed that this compensation was a good thing, it did raise some concerns about sustainability once the grant funding ends (or is discontinued):

We wouldn't have teachers volunteering so much time in the evenings to teach if they had not gotten paid. Which, I think is kind of a double-edged sword sometimes. . . because I worry then afterwards if we've

been paid for this time, I just hope they'll continue to want to do it. (23, School)

## Leadership

When the project began in 2012, an Advisory Team was formed consisting of university faculty, the school principal, grant coordinators, teachers, an intern, and the school counselor. The two Co-PI's and two Coordinators also provided ongoing leadership, especially in relation to the budget and coordination of the many project initiatives. This coordination was made easier by the fact that the university Co-PI was granted a sabbatical during fall and winter 2013-14, and spent those two quarters at the school.

Many participants noted the crucial role the school principal played in the positive processes of the initiative. Partners noted his slow, measured approach to implementation, his thoughtful decision-making approach and the culture of mentorship, recognition, and professional advancement he cultivated.

[Principal] is a cautious individual and he does not want to get too far out of the realm of what the other [district] schools are doing. And that is in the interest of sustainability. That's really wise. (25, University)

## Communication

In terms of communication, participants talked about the "shared language" partners attained during professional development trainings:

I think the trainings have been hugely successful. The GLAD [Guided Language Acquisition Design: Table 1; D,1] training has changed the way we all teach. And we all have this verbiage now about "GLADding" things up. And I think that the scores last year reflect that, on the WELPA (Language Proficiency Assessment), I think, it's been hugely powerful. (22, School)

## Maintenance

Given the sheer size of the initiative and the funding involved, there were time-consuming reporting and budgeting activities expected. On the other hand, the budget also provided money to pay coordinators for this work.

## Context

As described above, the interaction of partners was shaped and impacted by hierarchical strictures within schools and universities. Balancing partners' contributions and facilitating horizontal (rather than hierarchal) collaboration was a constant issue for attention and reflection.

The school's history impacted the partnership. For instance, compensation for teachers was important in this context because of the local teachers' union's stance on teacher pay.

I have to say that I've been very active in the union. I don't believe in giving of our time without compensation and I think that it takes everybody in the building in order to make this work. And I think in order to do that, in a way that honors us, there needs to be money. (11, School)

It's interesting because there are certain districts here [where] their unions are very strong in that perception [that teachers should be paid] and some teachers wouldn't do anything if they weren't paid for it. And for me that's just such a foreign concept because I was never paid to do stuff after school as a teacher. (31, University)

The professional context for university faculty places unique pressures on them to produce publications, and as one university partner noted earlier, participation in this initiative inhibited her/his ability to demonstrate scholarship. It is important to note that the university faculty involved in the project all had tenure and most of them had achieved a rank of full professor. This gave the faculty members more freedom to participate, not being so concerned about continual publication and other university measures of performance than they might have been earlier in their careers.

One participant also noted the overarching context of education in the United States and how it affects every aspect of this project:

I think we're in a tense environment with or without this grant, with or without this partnership, in our field right now. There's a baseline tension of accountability. You've got [college] students who are in high stakes situations, they don't get certified if they don't pass tests, if they don't have this [portfolio] document showing they've taught somebody something and it's evaluated by someone outside of the university. So you've got people who are already stressed, right? You've got teachers who are having these merit evaluations. You've got schools whose test scores are on the web, right? Everybody. And now we've got us being evaluated- if Johnny doesn't read it's because [university faculty] didn't teach Johnny's teacher how to teach him to read. So the whole thing is in a stress situation. (26, University)

## Synergy

The major areas of synergy noted by participants included the family engagement work, development of an asset orientation, and the multiplicative effect of numerous initiatives.

*Family engagement.* The impact of this initiative was described by a parent who participated in evening classes (Table 1; E.1):

As a person I feel that I have grown. My kids, if I don't read to them before going to bed, then they won't go to

sleep. So I was taught things, how to get along better with my family so, it has helped me as a family also. (24, Parent)

*Asset orientation.* One participant articulates the changes she/he has seen in the recognition of strengths of students and families:

I think more tangible, or more immediate, is the notion that more staff at Riverview and also [the university] student teachers have a greater sense of an asset orientation and the reality that poor kids aren't the problem and I think there's been some steps forward in the arena of cultural responsiveness and awareness of the complexities involved in these children's lives. (29, University)

*Multiplicative effect of numerous initiatives.* Participants described true synergy arising from overlapping initiatives that led to unexpectedly quick changes:

[With the grant], a lot more things are possible, the percentage of people who have done the GLAD training and the PLC training is just transformative in the instruction and I think that's going to make a huge difference in that achievement gap that we're trying to close. . . . If a small group of teachers does a professional development thing it might have some effect, but when a whole school does something, then they support each other. There's a synergy that just happens with that. (27, University)

## Antagony

Much of the antagony participants described has been mentioned above. There was the general sense that perhaps some families were not being brought in as much as they could be. The absolute boundary of people's time—even if people wished to do more and even with compensation, there are limits to what teachers and faculty can manage. There are also challenges presented by doing collaboration in a hierarchical context.

The only other antagony mentioned by participants was about the disparity in compensation for parents versus other partners. One interviewee explains:

[Poor, marginalized families are giving] a disproportionate gift that's not acknowledged. They're proportionally giving more, because they're working 60 hours a week, there's other competing commitments for their time, like they can't easily afford gas money to get to the school. And folks like us get paid, we add this stuff to our vita, we apply for promotions, we can feel proud and fancy because we get publications. I think there's this sense [in schools generally] that "it's their children, who wouldn't do anything in their power for their children?" And I just think that's off base. . . . It's quite possible these parents, if they knew that everybody

sitting around that table was getting paid for their time, they would just be absolutely offended. (29, University)

## Discussion

School-university partnerships are widely called for by national organizations (Clark, 1995; Teitel, 2004). However, these partnerships present challenges (Abdal-Haqq, 1991; Guadarrama, Ramsey & Nath, 2008; Nath, Guadarrama & Ramsey, 2011) and processes that contribute to good working relationships in these collaborations are not well understood. The purpose of this study was to use an empirically derived model of collaborative functioning to map the processes of a large-scale, state-funded SUP initiative. The findings have implications for the process and structure of collaborative practice.

The study highlights important processes for achieving equitable collaboration in hierarchical setting(s) such as schools and universities. One key issue was the lack of compensation for parents involved in the initiative<sup>1</sup>. The findings also suggest clear strategies for achieving more horizontal relationships: engaging in collaborative work that was mutually negotiated, sharing of power at every level, and the willingness of leadership at both the university and the school to model openness, respect, humility and a commitment to organic evolution. Another important process was the principal's measured and methodical implementation approach, which supported gradual positive changes within a safe environment to innovate.

The findings demonstrate the importance of generous funding in creating the staffing structures (e.g., provisions for university faculty to be in the school, coordinating staff to provide logistical support, etc.) needed to support enduring initiatives. These structures in the "boundary area" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, McDonald et al., 2013) between school and university supported deep and meaningful collaboration attuned to school, family, and community contexts and the long-term relationships that contribute to the development of shared understandings among the actors.

With the resources to compensate a large number of participants, the project was able to launch concurrent projects and allow them to evolve—capitalizing on areas of emerging potential and the expertise and passion of particular team members. The sheer number of programs that were initiated created synergies that reinforced and strengthened one another. The overarching impact of both the financial support and the mass participation of academic, school, and community members was the creation of a protected third space (Guitérrez, 1995) where participants could investigate various perspectives, "think together," and develop a true community of practice. Within this community of practice there was a shift from educators as technicians implementing a myriad of top-down

<sup>1</sup> This study was conducted as a formative evaluation. In the initial reporting of the findings of this report to the collaboration's partners, the leadership team decided to figure out a way to compensate parents for their work on the partnership's committees.



educational interventions—to educators as professionals engaged in inquiry that increased their knowledge of their students and families and developed their capacity to set goals, and to plan and assess effective learning experiences for students. The organizational climate shifted from one of school-based relationships reinforcing the status quo to one of a gradual openness to generating new ideas with members of the university and with the students' families. The school's principal was identified as a key figure in promoting collaboration and change while he simultaneously protected teachers' time to ensure activities related to the district's mission and strategic initiatives (Tilford & Yendol-Hoppey, 2011).

The results of the current study suggest that inclusive professional development training that involves an entire school's staff as well as teacher educators and student teachers can have a profound impact on communication, goal-setting and professional practices.

It is also important to reflect on the limitations of any research project. While the application of the BMCF has provided a lens for systematic examination of the collaboration and has led to useful insights (as indicated by the stakeholder team and in relation to existing literature), it is also possible that the use of the model prevented the examination of important areas not depicted in the model. The stakeholder team sought to include diverse participants with both positive and negative views of the partnership, but it is possible, given the external examiner's role at the university that school or parent participants did not feel fully able to express their negative views.

It is also important to note that the processes involved in school-university-community partnerships are complex, limiting how findings might be generalized from this study to others. One especially unique aspect that might complicate the relevance for other practitioners is the significant funding present in this collaborative arrangement. The funds contributed to the possibility of the following happening but may not be a requirement if there are other ways to rearrange participants' time in order to allow protected space to think together with a mutually negotiated process that broke through the hierarchy and other organizational barriers, sharing of power, and situated, place-based learning. This study may also support other partnerships by sharing a theoretical framework—the Bergen Model of Collaborative Functioning—that helps identify what specific factors in any given partnership are promoting outcomes greater than would have been accomplished without it (what synergistic conditions are created?).

## Conclusions

This paper has presented a qualitative, formative-process evaluation of the implementation of a large-scale, multi-million dollar legislative initiative to improve student achievement, family engagement, teacher preparation, and professional development by means of a university-school collaborative

partnership. The findings have practical, theoretical and political relevance.

Practically, this partnership can inform how existing organizational structures might be changed to establish protected collaborative space on the boundaries of schools and universities. The National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) identified 'nine essentials' of effective PDSs (listed previously). Our findings confirm many of these essentials. We would also add a tenth essential: *the practice of cultivating humility to overcome hierarchal barriers for students, parents, and staff within schools.*

Theoretically, this paper offers a model that contributes to the field of education by providing a framework for better understanding the process of partnership. The BMCF provides a tool to formulate question asking and analysis that can help plan, improve, and evaluate school-university partnerships and build on an existing literature.

From a policy standpoint, the findings suggest that funding invested in collaborative partnerships between teacher education programs and schools must be significant enough to surmount organizational barriers and provide incentives for the intensive, long-term work required. If we wish to address critical issues related to social justice and educational equity, we must do it together. <sup>SUP</sup>

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