A ROLE OF THE RURAL ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL:

INCREASING READING LITERACY IN THIRD GRADERS LIVING IN POVERTY

THROUGH ADVOCATING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Education

with a

Major in Educational Leadership

in the

Department of Graduate Education
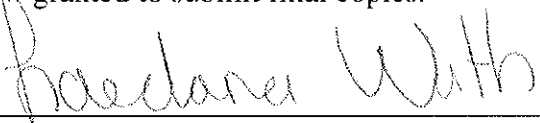
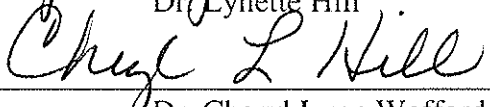Northwest Nazarene University

by

Wendy L. French

May 2014

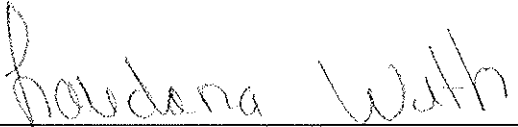Major Professor: Loredana Werth, PhD, MS

AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT DISSERTATION

This dissertation of Wendy French, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major

in Educational Leadership and titled "A Role of the Rural Elementary Principal: Increasing

Reading Literacy in Third Graders Living in Poverty through Advocating Community

Partnerships," has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and

dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies.

Major Professor _____ Date 4-11-14
Dr. Loredana Werth

Committee
Members _____ Date 4-11-14
Dr. Lynette Hill

_____ Date 4/11/14
Dr. Cheryl Lynn Wofford Hill

Program
Director _____ Date 4-11-14
Dr. Loredana Werth

Discipline's
College Dean _____ Date 4-11-14
Dr. Paula Kellerer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a great debt of gratitude to numerous individuals who have assisted me along this journey to the final dissertation. First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge the professional and spiritual guidance of the professors at Northwest Nazarene University, in particular, Dr. Paula Kellerer, Dr. Mike Poe, and Dr. Loredana Werth. From you I have gained a true understanding of servant leadership. Second, I would like to thank the individuals on my dissertation committee, in particular, Dr. Loredana Werth, Dr. Lynette Hill, and Dr. Cheryl Lynn Wofford Hill, for providing the framework of support I needed to complete this goal in my life. Individually, you have been my mentors, my inspirations, and my sisters in Christ. Third, I would like to thank Mr. John Asher for his example of leading a school with compassion. Your example is a gift to the school community; one of hope for children and their families living in poverty. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for He is my rock, my salvation, and my forever friend.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my loving father and mother, Joe and Velma French, who taught me to pursue my goals and dreams with hard work and faithful diligence. I also wish to dedicate this work to my children, Kali Jo (Steve), Rocky, and Richie (Maggie), who continue to stand by me through all of life's challenges. My precious children, I love you beyond words. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Stanton D. Tate, who has been a dear friend, mentor and my "cheerleader" for over 40 years. His dedicated work with troubled youth inspired and directed my path as an educator and servant leader. Dr. Tate remains the inspiration behind my career and the reason I embrace the importance of community partnerships with such great passion.

ABSTRACT

Bridging the achievement gap for elementary students living in poverty can be accomplished by creating relationships with community partnerships. It is also reasonable to believe that the role of the elementary principal has the potential for building capacity with community partners, while also improving student achievement for young readers through advocating these partnerships. For the purpose of this case study, mixed-methods afforded an in-depth investigation of this role. The theoretical framework of community partnership expert, Joyce Epstein, was woven into this study to explore the three research questions guiding this study. A focus group meeting with ten community partners and parents highlighted the importance of the principal having compassion and a non-judgemental, welcoming demeanor, especially when families and partners visit the school. The information gleaned from the focus group can be used for schools desiring to start, or improve upon community partnership activities. The online, Likert scale survey distributed statewide to 169 rural elementary principals leading in high poverty populations, revealed four, primary themes of importance to the role of the principal: 1) one who advocates partnerships, 2) one who offers volunteer opportunities in the school, 3) one who effectively communicates, and 4) one who takes time to meet with partners. Analysis of reading test scores provided evidence of a strong correlation relationship between reading proficiency and rural students who are identified as economically disadvantaged (.663). A welcomed discovery in the findings revealed that the state reading literacy proficiency scores for the third graders at the target school (91%) were actually higher than the state reading proficiency for all third graders by two percentage points. This study fills the gap that exists in literature concerning the role of the rural, elementary principal and the impact this role has on community partnerships in high poverty, rural schools. Implications for educational policy can

be made as a result of this study, but only if policymakers are willing to endorse school and

community partnerships as a proven strategy to improve educational outcomes for students living

in high poverty.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter V Discussion

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter I

Introduction

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) published a 2014 report declaring that the impact of child poverty costs the Nation an estimated $500 billion per year. The CDF (2014) based this monetary cost on its research, proclaiming that poor children likely start school behind their peers and lack health insurance and needed care, they are also less likely to graduate and more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system as adults. O'Hare (2009) claims that one-fifth of all children in poverty live in rural America and describes children of poverty as the "forgotten fifth," since most programs and policies are designated for urban rather than rural areas. Rural schools face the challenges of limited resources, inadequate availability of qualified personnel, and communities unable to support and participate in engaging, student activities (O'Hare, 2009). Isolation, remote resources, scarce opportunities, and few people to fill vital roles in the community may further exacerbate significant rural challenges (O'Hare, 2009).

Research has thoroughly evidenced the positive impact of parental involvement and community partnerships on student achievement (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Jeynes, 2005; Marzano, 2003; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Payne, 2005; Sanders, 2008; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; WestEd, 2007). Payne (2005), a leading expert in the US on poverty, claims the key to increasing student achievement for students living in poverty is in building relationships. The US Department of Education contracted with WestEd (2007) to produce a research-based publication guide that highlights the power of strong parent-school partnerships as an effective strategy for raising student achievement scores. Taylor and Pearson (2004) specifically addressed the reading success of children in grades K-3. The outcomes from this three-year study underscored the importance and necessity of leadership, collaboration, sustained

professional development, and positive home-school connections in order to increase student reading achievement.

Many researchers confirm strong school leadership as an essential component effecting school and community partnerships (Auerbach, 2011; Gordon & Seashore Louis, 2009; Hogue, 2012; Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007; Kearney, Herrington, & Aguilar, 2012; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Mutch & Collins, 2012; Sheldon, 2008; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; Touchton & Acker-Hocevar, 2001; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009; Woody, 2010). Mutch and Collins (2012) identified the importance of the role of the principal as one who could strengthen a program by simply valuing partnerships with community members. In other words, leadership plays a crucial role in creating meaningful and respectful partnerships with the school community. Mutch and Collins (2012) also affirmed that engagement between schools and communities works particularly well when leaders offer a vision and commitment to working in partnership with all parents.

This case study investigates and examines two fundamental catalysts, which may improve student learning. First, it investigates the role of the rural, elementary school principal as a catalyst for encouraging community partnerships with local businesses and parents. Second, it examines the effect of partnerships on the reading literacy levels of third graders who live in rural poverty. Information gleaned from a focus group meeting with parents and business and civic community partners provided substantial investigative, qualitative data related to this phenomenon. Analyses from an online, statewide survey sent to rural elementary principals across the state, a community focus group discussion, and an outcome-based literacy testing among third-grade students at those schools utilized a mixed-methods approach to determine the impact of partnerships on student learning.

Statement of the Problem

Rural, high-poverty elementary schools lack parent and community involvement (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; O'Hare, 2009; Payne, 2005; Tavernise, 2012). Scholars have determined that poverty negatively impacts student achievement and can negatively influence children's literacy (Cairney & Ruge, 1999; Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002; Tavernise, 2012). This growing achievement gap could result from wealthy parents investing more time and money on their children, while lower-income families are increasingly stretched for time and resources (Tavernise, 2012). A qualitative study of 261 literacy programs by Cairney and Ruge (1999) linked poverty and low levels of literacy among children. Results from Miedel and Reynolds (1999) indicated that parental involvement can counter-act factors leading to underachievement. Their results pointed to a convincing correlation between parent involvement and higher reading achievement scores. Three areas of importance concerning parent involvement include: (a) parent involvement should be a part of early childhood programs, (b) parent involvement lays a strong foundation for good family-school relations, and (c) parent involvement can counter-act risk factors leading to underachievement (Miedel and Reynolds, 1999).

The second problem involves the significant lack of mixed-methods studies that examine the role of the rural, elementary principal leading in high-poverty schools, and, specifically, the principal's role in advocating community partnerships (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Gordon & Seashore Louis, 2009; Lindahl, 2010; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2001). A comprehensive understanding of how and to what extent the principal's role can enhance school and community relationships is imperative and can be developed through mixed-method studies.

Purpose of the Study

Many researchers affirm the necessity of strong school leadership to building school and community partnerships (Hogue, 2012; Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007; Kearney, Herrington, & Aguilar, 2012). The principal must implement the use of partnerships to create meaningful connections with all school constituents (Woody, 2010). Adding to the importance of meaningful connections, Sheldon (2008) revealed the role of the principal as a person who could strengthen a program by simply valuing the partnership.

Potential Significance of the Study

Community partnership "guru" Joyce Epstein (1995) asserts that if parents, teachers, students, patrons, businesses, and programs viewed each other as partners, they could build a caring community that surrounds a child and makes a difference. Epstein's later study (2010) added eight "essential elements" to her theoretical framework regarding effective partnerships, which include leadership, teamwork, action plans, implementation of funds, funding, collegial support, evaluation, and networking. Taylor and Pearson (2004) conducted a qualitative study more specifically related to the reading success of children in grades K-3. Similar to the outcomes of Epstein's work, Taylor and Pearson's (2004) study pointed to the importance of leadership, collaboration, sustained professional development, and positive home-school connections as necessary to increase student reading achievement. Research affirms the importance of the aforementioned themes; however, it lacks specific reference to the role of the elementary principal as a catalyst for community partnerships in high poverty schools (Lindahl, 2010).

Research also lacks data regarding the correlations between community partnerships, the role of the rural, elementary principal, and the increased reading literacy levels among primary-aged children living in rural poverty (Cairney & Ruge, 1999; Lindahl, 2010; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010). It is reasonable to believe that the role of the elementary principal has the

potential for building capacity with community partners, while also improving student achievement for young learners. Transferring this belief to rural America and, specifically, to a district with high poverty, could prove beneficial beyond expectations.

Theoretical Framework

Based on her theory, "Overlapping Spheres of Influence," Epstein's (1995) theoretical framework can be represented by three interconnected spheres that include the home, school, and community, with the child in the middle. Epstein (1995) avers that the interaction of the spheres can positively or negatively impact the child. Epstein (2010) later added the following six types of involvement to her framework:

1. Parenting

2. Communicating

3. Volunteering

4. Learning at home

5. Decision-making

6. Collaborating with the community (p. 43-44).

A school environment employs all of Epstein's six types of involvement. Encouragement of these areas of involvement makes increased student achievement possible, as schools and community partners work together to support students in this endeavor (Curtis, 2013; Epstein, 2010). Applying the theoretical framework of overlapping spheres, the six types of involvement, and a strong partnership design, this study seeks to provide the foundation for answering several research questions.

The Research Questions

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) describe how research questions provide a simple and direct format for the researcher to develop a design to answer the questions. Mills (2007) further

describes the questions as a means to validate a workable plan for proceeding with the research investigation. In this dissertation study, several research questions help to explore the topic at hand in greater detail. The central research questions for this research study include the following:

1. What is the role of the rural, elementary principal concerning the involvement of local businesses, civic groups, and parents in community partnerships?

2. In what ways do community partners believe the rural, elementary principal is making a difference with partnerships?

3. What impact do partnerships have on third graders' reading literacy?

Description of Terms

Several technical terms describe community partnerships. Based on the research literature in this study, this section endeavors to clarify these terms.

Authentic partnerships. "Respectful alliances among educators, families, and community groups that value relationship building, dialogue across difference, and sharing power in pursuit of common purpose in socially just, democratic schools" (Auerbach, 2011, p. 5).

Community. People and institutions interested in and impacted by the quality of education as well as families with children in schools (NNPS, 2006).

Community involvement. People or institutions supporting the mission of the school in a variety of ways, including but not limited to, financial contributions, provision of resources, and volunteer time (Hogue, 2012).

Poverty. As defined by the U.S. Census Bureau's official measure: "Children in families with income less than 100 percent of the poverty threshold are considered poor. Children in families with income less than 200 percent of the poverty threshold are considered low income"

(Addy & Wight, 2012, p. 8). Extreme poverty is defined as having a gross income under $11,511 for a family of four (ASPE, 2012).

Rural. Demographic areas other than urban (Groves 2011).

School culture. The degree to which the principal nurtures shared beliefs and an awareness of community and cooperation within a school (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

School-community partnerships. People or institutions in the community and schools participating together in activities and decision-making processes in which key roles and responsibilities are formed to improve schools (Epstein, 1995).

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

Much research has taken place related to poverty in America, as well as internationally, as well as on the effects of community partnerships on student achievement for students living in poverty (Addy & Wight, 2012; ASPE, 2012; CDF, 2014; Epstein, 1995, 2005; Goos, Lowrie, & Jolly, 2007; O'Hare, 2009; Payne, 2005; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; WestEd, 2007). This chapter's literature provides greater understanding of the role of school leadership and community partnerships. It examines the following five categories: (a) the impact of poverty on student learning, (b) the role of parent involvement and community partnerships, (c) building and implementing community partnerships, (d) school leadership in the education of economically disadvantaged students, and (e) Epstein's theoretical framework and guidelines for involvement and partnerships. Figure 1 displays the categories of literature reviewed. The chapter concludes with an overview statement regarding the themes in the research and suggestions for future studies.

Forming a partnership between the school and the community requires a leader to step forward to nurture relationships and sustainability or to maintain a program over time (Sanders, 2012). In practice, this requires creating what Epstein (2012) identifies as "partnership schools," or schools that welcome all individuals who enter their doors. The third category of reviewed literature focuses on the role of school leadership and the understanding of the distinct characteristics, practices, and attributes needed by the school leader in order to build and sustain partnership schools. This chapter also reviews the most influential categories in answering this

study's research questions, which include the role of school leadership, the study of the impact of partnerships on student achievement, and the fifth category, Epstein's theoretical framework.

Figure 1

Categories of the Literature Review

The Negative Impact of Poverty on Children

     Several studies specifically point to the prevalence of children living in rural areas and in extreme poverty (Addy & Wight, 2012; ASPE, 2012; CDF, 2014; O'Hare, 2009). O'Hare (2009) describes these children as "the forgotten fifth" (para. 2). O'Hare (2009) added an interesting finding indicating that numerous problems among poor children living in rural areas increase as a result of isolation and limited access to support services. Addy and Wight (2012) presented an updated description of the demographic, socio-economic, and geographic representations of children and parents in the United States. Their study of the 2010 American Community survey (ACS) revealed that 44 % (31.9 million) children live in low-income families, and 45% of children in the West (7.9 million) live in low-income families (Addy &

Wight, 2012). Adding to child poverty statistics, a report by the CDF (2014) declared that child poverty rates appeared highest in cities (29.1%) followed by rural areas (26.7%).

Extreme poverty is defined as having a gross income under $11,511 for a family of four (ASPE, 2012). Data reported by the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, under the direction of the US Department of Health and Human Services, provided a current look at information about income and poverty in 2011. Based on data released by the Census Bureau, the ASPE (2012) brief reported the following: the 16.1 million children (persons under 18) lived in extreme poverty in 2011 and that statistic had not significantly changed from 2010. Figure 2 and Figure 3 of this section depict the trend in child poverty in the United States from 2000 to 2011. Wihbey (2014) reported the 2012 child poverty rate as 21.8%, which reflects a slight decrease from 21.9% in 2011. Figure 3 reveals the high incidence of minority children living in poverty.

Figure 2

Poverty Rates of Children Under 18
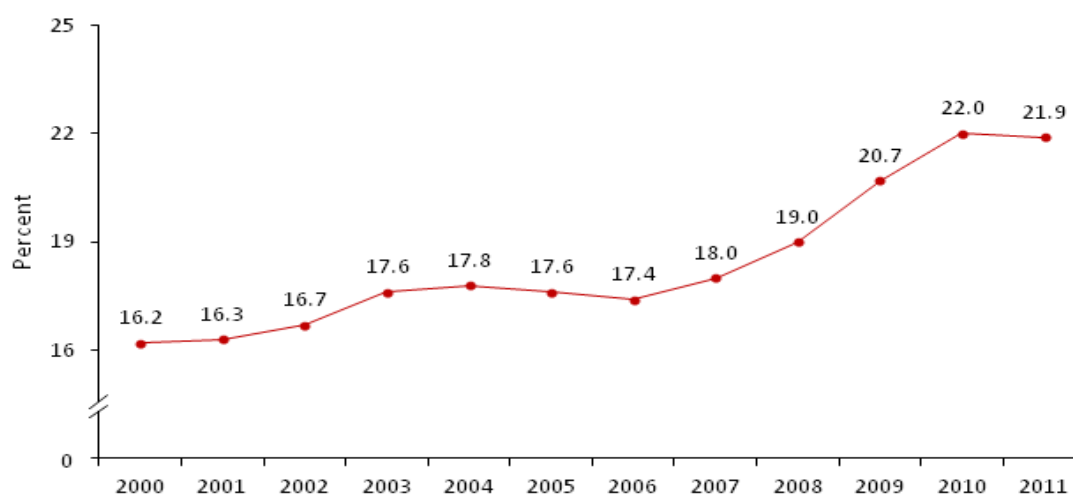
Note. The line graph displays upward US trend in child poverty from 2000-2011, with a slight decrease from 2005-2006 and from 2010-2011 (ASPE, 2012, p. 4).

Figure 3

Child Poverty by Race and Ethnicity
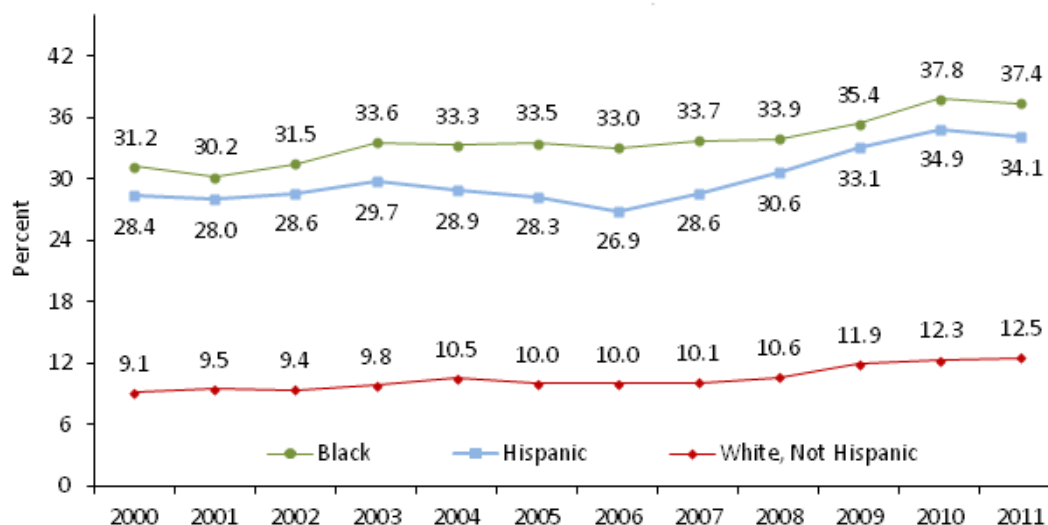
Note. The line graph indicates the US trend in child poverty from 2000-2011, across the various races and ethnicity. (ASPE, 2012, p. 7)

Several research studies support the premise that poverty negatively impacts student achievement (Austin, Lemon, & Leer, 2005; Cairney & Ruge, 1999; Children's Defense Fund, 2014; Nadel & Sagawa, 2002; Pianta et al., 2002; Provasnik, Ramani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007, Tavernise, 2012). One negative result of poverty appears as a widening achievement gap. Led by Professor Reardon of Stanford University, researchers analyzed 12 sets of standardized test scores beginning in 1960 and ending in 2007 (Tavernise, 2012). The study compared children from families in the 90th percentile of income (the equivalent income of $160,000 in 2008), and those from the 10th percentile ($17,500 in 2008). The outcomes showed the achievement gap by income had grown by 40 percent (Tavernise, 2012). The high school drop-out rate appeared higher for rural students, also (Provasnik et al., 2007). Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, and Bradley (2002) conducted a qualitative study of 233 suburban and rural public

school kindergarten classes, which showed lower positive teacher interactions and fewer child-centered activities for children from low-income families.

The outcomes from Cairney and Ruge's (1999) extensive qualitative study of 261 literacy programs revealed a correlation between children with low levels of literacy and those with socio-economical disadvantages. These researchers strongly concluded that socio-economically disadvantaged children more likely experience difficulty in learning than children not living in poverty (Cairney & Ruge, 1999). Teachers also reported a higher incidence of behavior problems in rural schools than in suburban schools (Provasnik et al., 2007).

Interviewing of the "voices of poverty," Nadel and Sagawa (2002) revealed that education often falls short for economically-disadvantaged children, since it offers limited child and youth development activities. Other outcomes revealed the following: 1) communities need to build human capital in rural areas by providing incentives to recruit and retain skilled adults, 2) communities need to build and support community centers, and 3) communities need to find ways to target public and private partnerships (Nadel & Sagawa, 2002). Adding to the research about community needs, Austin, Lemon, and Leer (2005) proposed successful intervention methods to alleviate the negative impact of poverty. These researchers based the interventions on family and community protective factors, such as parental employment, a stable family environment, communities that support parents and children, and caring adults outside of the family.

The Positive Impact of Parent Involvement and Community Partnerships

One critical aspect of this study involved determining the impact of community partnerships on student achievement. Several research studies support the positive impact of parental involvement and community partnerships on student achievement (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Jeynes, 2005; Marzano, 2003; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Payne, 2005; Sanders, 2008;

Sheldon, 2003; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; WestEd, 2007). Marzano (2003) conducted over 35 years of research, which revealed parent and community involvement had a greater impact on student achievement than teacher effectiveness and orderly schools. Marzano (2003) presented three aspects of community involvement important to student achievement: communication, involvement in daily activities, and governance structures.

WestEd (2007) produced a research-based publication guide for the US Department of Education that highlights the power of strong parent-school partnerships as an effective strategy for raising student achievement scores. Researchers for this project successfully produced many lessons and activities proven effective in encouraging partnerships and increasing achievement (WestEd, 2007). A more elaborate, meta-analysis project by Jeynes (2005) encompassed 41 studies that focused on the relationship between parental involvement and the academic success of elementary school children. The findings suggest a strong correlation between academic success and parental involvement that includes the discovery that parent involvement may effectively contribute to reducing the achievement gap between urban students and their counterparts in non-urban areas (Jeynes, 2005). Interestingly, this finding proved accurate for both Caucasian and minority children, as well as for both boys and girls (Jeynes, 2005). The connection between school, family, and community points to increased test scores (Sheldon, 2003).

Even larger than the work of Jeynes (2005), Galindo and Sheldon conducted a national study of 16,425 kindergartners from 864 schools. Based on Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres, the Galindo and Sheldon (2012) study further supported that engaging families predicts greater family involvement in school and higher levels of student achievement in reading and math. Numeracy education studies pointed to the importance of developing activities that engage families at home and at school and suggest that elementary and secondary schools, which

encourage family involvement in math learning, more likely result in higher student achievement on standardized math tests (Goos, Lowrie, & Jolly, 2007; Sheldon & Epstein, 2001).

Miedel and Reynolds's study (1999) postulated that parental involvement actually counteracts factors leading to underachievement. The results of their study pointed to a definite correlation between parent involvement and higher reading achievement scores. It outlined three areas of importance concerning parent involvement: 1) parent involvement should be a part of early childhood programs, 2) parent involvement lays a strong foundation for good family-school relations, and 3) parent involvement can counter-act risk factors leading to underachievement (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999).

Several research studies explored the importance of parent liaisons, leadership, and family involvement on raising student achievement (Goos, Lowrie, & Jolly, 2007; Sanders, 2008; Taylor & Pearson, 2004). Sanders (2008) focused on the roles of parent liaisons in the schools, and how these supports improved parental involvement and school-based partnership. In their roles, the liaisons provided direct services to parents, instructional assistance for teachers, supports for school-based partnerships, and data for program improvement. The data gathered by the parent liaisons demonstrated increased student achievement and attendance during the program study (Sanders, 2008).

Dorfman and Fisher (2002) involved six high-poverty schools in their study related to the impact of parent involvement. The outcomes revealed the need for involvement strategies that use curriculum to connect students, families, and their communities. When schools provided tools for families to support their children, results confirmed mutually-respectful relationships and higher student achievement (Dorfman & Fisher, 2002). Taylor and Pearson's (2004) qualitative study provides more specific information related to the reading success of kindergarten through third-grade children. Outcomes from this three-year study highlighted the

importance of leadership, collaboration, sustained professional development and positive home-school connections needed to increase student reading achievement. Numeracy education studies pointed to the importance of developing activities, which engage families at home and at school, and suggest that elementary and secondary schools that encourage family involvement in math learning more likely produce higher scores on standardized math tests (Goos, Lowrie, & Jolly, 2007). Providing a strong, welcoming partnership climate with families may also help schools improve the percentage of students performing successfully on math achievement tests (Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010).

A case study conducted by Epstein (2005) highlighted Partnership Schools and the effectiveness of partnerships on raising student achievement. School action teams provided plans and reflective, end-of-year evaluations. Participants on these school action teams included administrators, faculty, facilitators, parents, and community partners. The Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) study resulted in a CSR model implemented at a Title I elementary school (Epstein, 2005). Over a period of three years, the Partnership Schools-CSR model improved school, family, and community involvement. Epstein (2005), however, recommended further study in diverse locations, such as in rural communities, and at varying school levels in order to assess the effectiveness of this model more fully.

Research confirms that encouraging parents as partners in education produces positive rewards, in particular for parents (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; McMahon, Browning, & Rose-Colley, 2001; Parker & Flessa, 2009; Sanders, 2008; Smith, 2006; Warren et al., 2009). Smith (2006) concluded that the development of intentional programs to engage parents increased parental involvement in schools. In turn, these intentional activities positively impacted teachers' perception of parental involvement. McMahon et al. (2001) conducted a four-year, school-community case study in a high-poverty elementary school. Their findings

revealed that partnership activities, such as brainstorming sessions with parents, educators, and community partners, re-focus efforts and resulted in further development of new partnerships to meet the needs of the school community.

Warren et al. (2009) highlighted findings indicating that high-achieving schools exhibited high parental involvement and expressed pride in their communities. These authors provided examples of parent coordinating programs in the Boston Public Schools and in the Los Angeles School District's partnership with a parent resource center. Research also confirmed that partnership activities promoted a substantial increase in parent involvement in school activities, including an increase in volunteerism (McMahon et al., 2001). Parker and Flessa (2009) emphasized that engagement of parents and community members in student-related activities appears at the core of successful schools. In summary, these studies brought to light the importance of parents as invested members in the school community.

Henderson et al. (2007) investigated the efforts of community-based organizations (CBOs) to engage parents of low socio-economic status in school-community collaborations. These researchers assert that such efforts enhanced cultural awareness and provided resources to parents in areas of need, such as mental health counseling. This qualitative study's outcomes stressed the importance of working on three areas in order to enhance parental involvement: 1) good relationships with parents, 2) leadership development of parents, and 3) "bridging the gap" between parents and educators (Henderson et al., 2007). An ethnographic study by Dotson-Blake (2010) focused on Mexican immigrants living in rural North Carolina. Like the study by Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007), this study examined strategies for engaging family-school-community partnerships in order to open doors to cultural inclusiveness and stronger partnerships. Its key finding revealed that full and active involvement by all members

of the partnership as an essential component to the success of efforts---no matter the cultural differences (Dotson-Blake, 2010).

Implementing and Building Partnerships

Implementing a community partnership program involves a basic theoretical framework, specific elements, and guidelines (Andrews, Newman, Meadows, Cox, & Bunting, 2012; Auerbach, 2011; Blank & Hanson Langford, 2000; Cole, 2010; Epstein, 1995, 2005; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; WestEd, 2007). Along with Blank and Hanson Langford (2000), Cole (2010) affirmed that building a partnership involved engagement in a process to define a vision, theory, and clear goals and objectives. The theory and work of Epstein (1995, 2005) has been highly regarded in the field of community partnerships, and, in particular, her development of the model known as, "the external model of overlapping spheres" (1995, p. 2). The work of Warren et al. (2009) stressed the importance of open communication among the community members, parents, and superintendent.

Andrews, Newman, Meadows, Cox, and Bunting (2012) declared that readiness for partnering begins with a "goodness of fit." In other words, if the partnership is deemed a good fit, then the next steps involve assessing the capacity for the partnership. The outcomes of this case study of 36 academic and community members highlighted key indicators to assess the capacity for partnerships within an organization. These key indicators include: 1) the process is iterative and dynamic, 2) readiness is issue specific, 3) readiness is influenced by a range of environmental factors, and 4) readiness is essential for sustainability and promotion of social change in a community (Andrews, Newman, Meadows, Cox & Bunting, 2012). WestEd (2007) produced a comprehensive "how to" guide with research-based ideas and activities, which proved successful in encouraging partnerships in communities.

Focused studies with school communities revealed themes and insights important to building partnerships (Bosma, Sieving, Ericson, Russ, Cavender, & Bonine, 2010; Parker, Grenville, & Flessa, 2009; Lewis, 2010; Phelps, 2010). Parker, Grenville, and Flessa (2009) conducted an extensive qualitative study involving 11 elementary schools and more than 100 participants. These researchers endeavored to report on the success stories of students and communities affected by poverty. They produced narratives, which described the ways that teachers, parents, administrators, and community partners thought about their work with students living in poverty. Five themes resulted from this study: commitment to high-quality collaboration, teacher mentorship, community-building, parent and community partnerships, and administrative leadership and the culture of learning. These themes supported the critical areas that participants determined crucial to building partnerships (Parker, Grenville, & Flessa, 2009).

Additional themes discovered by Bosma et al. (2010) produced a total of 10 emerging themes related to the success of a middle school partnership known as Lead Peace: communication, shared decision-making, shared resources, expertise and credibility, sufficient time to develop and maintain relationships, champions and patron saints, being present, flexibility, a shared youth development orientation, and recognition of other partners' priorities (Bosma et al., 2010). Phelps (2010) added to the literature on school partnership themes with a case study utilizing evidence from over four decades of research with the purpose of eliciting insights into the practices that support a home-school partnership. The study focused on Native American families and three schools on the reservation. Its findings revealed that schools must do the following: take the responsibility for encouraging families to be involved, seek approaches for identifying contextual considerations that influence family involvement, and

identify means for creating a culture of community that promotes partnerships of commitment and respect (Phelps, 2010).

Several researchers, including Epstein and Sheldon (2006), exhibited concerns about the sustainability of partnerships and equity (Blank & Hanson Langford, 2000; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; McBride, 2003; Smith, 2006). Their research primarily focused on the promotion of greater equity in the involvement of families in poverty. Smith (2006) brought attention to the importance of engaging low-income parents in intentional parental involvement activities, such as family math nights and parent volunteers in the classroom. McBride's 2003 study of pre-kindergarten focused on the sustainability of programs in nine rural communities. Its outcomes identified barriers related to the perceptions of parents and community stakeholders pertaining to the purpose and functions of community partnerships (McBride, 2003). Implications of this study points to the importance of stating a clear purpose and establishing functions for an effective family-school-community partnership. Blank and Hanson Langford (2000) added sustainability of partnership programs as a possible outcome when partners connect, coordinate, and leverage resources from a variety of funding sources.

One final, unique perspective on sustainability focused on a group of key players within the school. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) placed the bearing of the weight of sustainable educational change on teachers working closely and effectively with students and peers; students learning and supporting each other; and this collective group engaging with parents and community with the sole purpose of developing and deliberating as one. Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) provided this powerful statement as support: "Inspiring purposes developed and achieved with others are the foundation of successful and sustainable educational change" (p. 73).

Some research specifically focuses on the roles of the teacher and the paraeducator, and how these roles impact the building of a community partnership (National Council of Jewish Women, 1996; Manz, Power, Ginsburg-Block & Dowrick, 2010; Pianta et al., 2002; Powell-Smith, Stoner, Shinn, & Good, III, 2000; Smith, 2006; Warren et al., 2009). The quantitative study of surveys and extensive literature reviews of over 200 articles by the National Council of Jewish Women (1996) pointed to the lack of teacher training concerning ways to nurture parents and school interactions. Observing the impact of poverty in the classroom and of the role of the teacher, Pianta et al. (2002) focused their research on them. The study's outcomes revealed that the teacher's positive interactions, as well as child-centered activities, decreased in high poverty schools. Teachers responded as feeling overwhelmed by the challenges of their classrooms, and the researchers believed the teacher role could improve with effective partnerships with parents. The success of Parents as Learning Partners in a study by Warren et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of training teacher to work with parents collaboratively.

In separate studies by Gordon and Seashore Louis (2009) and Smith (2006), the importance of engaging parents in intentional programs changed the teachers' perception of parental involvement, thus, increasing teacher support of community partnerships. Additionally, teacher perceptions regarding greater parent involvement were associated with an increase in student math achievement (Gordon & Seashore Louis, 2009). Interestingly, a study by Powell-Smith et al. (2000) highlighted concerns raised by educators that parents may do greater harm than good. On the other hand, however, individual students involved in a home-based tutoring program managed by parents experienced gains. After learning the results, parents, students, and teachers viewed the tutoring program as worthwhile (Powell-Smith et al., 2000).

Manz, Power, Ginsburg-Block, and Dowrick (2010) conducted a study focusing on the role of community residents as paraeducators in schools. The paraeducator program provided adult mentors to students and family members with whom they could form important attachments, and who fostered student academic success. The study also supported the importance of empowering community paraeducators to view themselves as equal partners with professional school staff, a continuous process in the community partnership model became attainable (Manz, Power, Ginsburg-Block, & Dowrick, 2010). This research also discovered that comprehensive pre-service and in-service training of paraeducators as necessary in order to develop the competencies they needed to fulfill their responsibilities. In addition to the training, supervision played a key role to the sustainability of the effectiveness of the community paraeducators (Manz, Power, Ginsburg-Block, & Dowrick, 2010).

The Role of School Leadership

According to Touchton and Acker-Hocevar (2001), stakeholders must embrace the role of the leader in schools of poverty in order to transform the opportunities for children of poverty and not maintain the status quo. Lindahl (2010) simply stated, "Outstanding principals make a difference in schools" (p. 43). Lindahl (2010) compared teacher perceptions of specific principal behaviors in high-performing elementary and middle schools with teacher perceptions at low-performing, high-poverty schools. The source of Lindahl's data originated from 30,000 educator responses to *Take20: Alabama Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey,* an online instrument that New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz and LEARN North Carolina developed, administered, and analyzed (Lindahl, 2010). Overall, teachers in the high-performing schools perceived their principals as more effective than their peers in the low-performing school at leading, setting high expectations, and creating a culture of learning (Lindahl, 2010). Teachers

noted little difference in the principals' involvement of teachers in key school decisions and in the performance of the principals when engaging and creating shared responsibility with the community (Lindahl, 2010). Lindahl's (2010) study validates that teacher perceptions do indeed vary among school populations, but they appear not so different when the focus is on a principal's ability to engage and create effective community partnerships.

Strong school leadership and practices are essential for school and community partnerships to be effective (Auerbach, 2011; Gordon & Seashore Louis, 2009; Jacobson et al., 2007; Hogue, 2012; Mutch & Collins, 2012; Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Sheldon, 2008; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; Touchton & Acker-Hocevar, 2001; Waters et al., 2003; Witten, 2010; Woody, 2010). Grounded in research of over 30 years, Waters et al. (2003) provided a comprehensive review of their framework of balanced leadership. The actual framework in the study identified 21 key leadership responsibilities, which positively impact student achievement. The authors added two specific leadership practices relating to community: 1) understanding and valuing people within the school community, and 2) the ability to recognize different ways that change might impact their communities (Waters et al., 2003). Waters et al. (2003) provide a thorough overview of the importance of the role of the school leader, as it relates directly to community partnerships, by stating:

> Successful school leaders protect their school environment, and they encourage active participation by and partnerships with all members of the school community. This is because a successful school requires interaction and joint responsibility from everyone in order to use the talents of its leaders and teachers, and to engage the students and their communities. (para. 5)

Mutch and Collins (2012) and Sheldon (2008) revealed the importance of the role of the principal as a person who could strengthen a program by simply valuing partnerships with community members. In other words, leadership is crucial in creating meaningful and respectful partnerships with the school community. Mutch and Collins (2012) also asserted that engagement between schools and communities works well when leaders have shared a vision and commitment to working in partnership with all parents. Connecting with parents and community and engaging all stakeholders in purposeful activities are important to sustainability of partnerships (Blank & Hanson Langford, 2000; Witten, 2010; Woody, 2010). The principal must effectively practice this important aspect of partnerships in order to create meaningful connections with all school constituents (Witten, 2010; Woody, 2010). This close relationship with community helps schools enact high expectations and facilitate principal leadership (Barley & Beesley, 2007).

An additional area of research focused on the necessary leadership practices for administrators to succeed in partnering with their school communities. Auerbach (2011) described the role of leadership as an authentic partnership invested in a moral obligation to the school community, despite demographics differences. In this context of social justice leadership, Auerbach (2011) believed this as "a destination toward which leaders and their schools should strive" (p. 40). Auerbach (2011) also established the need for a partnership-leadership continuum framework. This continuum focused on three components: leadership that prevents partnerships, leadership that encourages minimal partnerships, and leadership that produces traditional partnerships (Auerbach, 2011). Adding to the framework of leadership practices, Taylor and Pearson (2004) conducted a three-year research study, which revealed that a framework of leadership, collaboration, and sustained professional development needs to be in

place in order for a program to be effective. Clearly stated, principal leadership practices in productive schools promote strong social ties between school and community and create a viable professional community among staff (Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

With an emphasis on increasing openness and making the school more democratic, Gordon and Seashore Louis (2009) studied the principal's influence over the culture of the school and determined that this role may have a subtle and indirect influence on student achievement. In this study, the researchers determined that the greater the diversity among the teams, the greater the openness members exhibited to community involvement (Gordon & Seashore Louis, 2009). In other words, diversity increases involvement, versus a partnership-leadership continuum, described the Auerbach (2011) study.

Research has identified the significance of administrator preparation programs and practice in modeling the core skills for school success as an area of need (Jacobson et al., 2007). Touchton and Acker-Hocevar (2001) pointed out the importance of the leader's awareness regarding the effects of poverty on teaching and learning, what the effective practices incorporate, and how to support these practices in their schools. A principal with strong leadership and a belief in engaging community partners in student-related activities has the potential to build capacity between a school and its community (Hogue, 2012).

Distinct characteristics of a school leader. An additional area of research touched on the distinct characteristics of a school leader, such as leadership abilities and attributes (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Kearney, Herrington, & Aguilar, 2012; Lindahl, 2010; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Mulford, Kendall, Ewington, Edmunds, Kendall, & Silins, 2008; Parker & Flessa, 2009; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010; Touchton & Acker-Hocevar, 2001; Warren et al., 2009). A common trait found in high-performing, high-poverty schools is the successful, high-

performing leader (Mulford et al, 2008). In fact, principals at high-performing schools are viewed as more effective and approachable and perceived as effective in motivating and driving change and innovation (Lindahl, 2010). Parker and Flessa (2009) focused on strong leadership abilities as essential for a principal to engage parents and community partners effectively.

Kearney, Herrington, and Aguilar (2012) and Masumoto and Brown-Welty (2009) conducted separate case studies of high-performing, high-poverty schools that resulted in critical findings about educational leaders. Kearney, Herrington, and Aguilar's (2012) study revealed several leadership attributes necessary for success, such as effective hiring practices, ability to lead staff development, openness to staff input, and strong leadership skills. Masumoto and Brown-Welty's (2009) research revealed leadership attributes related to effective targeting of multiple practices to improve student outcomes, the establishment of multiple linkages with outside entities to accomplish missions, and actively involving parents and mobilizing external and community resources. The leadership attributes extend beyond the school-level to the district-level, where high-achieving schools have boards and superintendents, who can identify improvement goals and plans for success, and who can encourage parental involvement and partnerships (Warren et al., 2009).

Finally, the ability to provide a supportive relationship with community and to honor the uniqueness of school and community help facilitate principal leadership (Barley & Beesley, 2007). Barley and Beesley (2007) conducted a descriptive, exploratory study to identify factors thought to contribute to successful rural schools and determined principal leadership as one of the factors required for success in rural schools, along with relationship-building with the community, high teacher retention, and high expectations for students (Barley & Beesley, 2007). The aspect of relationship-building embraces the school leader's dedicated efforts to develop a

welcoming and supportive climate for students and their families (Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010). It also represents an active trust that develops when professionals and parents work side by side to serve the children for whom they care (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

Epstein's Theoretical Framework

Community partnership "guru" Joyce Epstein (1995, 2001) affirms that if parents, teachers, students, patrons, businesses, and programs view each other as partners, they can build a caring community that surrounds a child and makes a positive difference. Epstein's (1995) work with partnerships and particularly her work relating to the Overlapping Spheres of Influence provides practitioners with a theoretical model to use when developing effective partnership programs. Epstein (1995) clarified the meaning of this theory with a visual representation of the three, interconnected circles, the Overlapping Spheres of Influence, with the child placed in the middle. Figure 4 presents a visual of the Overlapping Spheres of Influence.

Figure 4

The Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Note. The visual depicts the Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 1995).

This premise asserts that the interaction of the spheres can positively or negatively impact the child, and those external forces, such as age, experience, philosophy, and practices,

determine the strength of this interaction (Curtis, 2013; Epstein, 2001). These forces create differing levels of influence and appear most impactful when the forces overlap (Curtis, 2013). It stands to reason, therefore, that if parents take an active roles in their children's education, then the overlap between family and school will increase (Epstein, 1995).

Epstein (1995) determined that if a child felt cared for and was encouraged to work hard in his or her role as a student, then the child would become more self-motivated to read, to write, to learn new skills, and to remain in school. Elish-Piper and Lelko (2012/2013) corroborate the importance of the circles by postulating that positive outcomes for a child occur when the spheres mutually bond and support the child in the community and most certainly echoes the tribal saying, "It takes a village" (p. 55-56).

When schools purposefully organize and coordinate goal-oriented activities across the six types of involvement, they are more likely to engage families in shared goals, which support student success and achievement (Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010). Epstein (2010) identifies six types of involvement for successful partnerships as represented in Table 1. The sixth type of involvement, "collaborating with community," piques particular interest, since this type of involvement most directly connects to this study. Based on Epstein's theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, building positive relationships between school and community influences student learning and raises student achievement scores (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2010). Collaboration also sends a message to students that the community is interested in their success (Elish-Piper & Lelko, 2012/2013).

Table 1

Six Types of Involvement

Types	Description
Type I: Parenting	Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.
Type 2: Communicating	Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.
Type 3: Volunteering	Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.
Type 4: Learning at home	Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.
Type 5: Decision-making	Include families and participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.
Type 6: Collaborating with community	Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

Note. Adapted from Epstein, 2010, p. 43-44.

Sanders's (1996) study of 826 students from an urban district provided a research application of the sixth type of involvement, "collaborating with community." In the study, students responded to an in-depth questionnaire. Additionally, student interviews took place in

order to enhance the interpretation of the questionnaire data. The findings identified student

academic self-concept, achievement ideology, and school behavior as qualities influenced by the

school, family, and church. Students benefitted the most when all three contexts worked toward

the same goal of helping students achieve (Sanders, 1996). Epstein later added eight "essential

elements" to her framework theory related to effective partnerships. These elements include

leadership, teamwork, actions plans, implementation of funds, funding, collegial support,

evaluation, and networking (Epstein, 2010). By adding the eight essential elements, Epstein

(2010) has provided a more complete model with the goal of improving partnership program

quality and outcomes.

A noteworthy aspect of the framework involves the design of the partnership programs

(Epstein, 2001). Epstein (2001) metaphorically connects the concept of bridges with partnerships

and states, "Poorly designed bridges—or bridges unbuilt—leave students without the support

they need to do their best work in school, and leave families unconnected to their children's

schools" (p. 161). According to Epstein (2001), the best design produces positive results and

good quality connections. She offers seven statements to strengthen the design of partnerships:

1. Families care about their child's success but need better information.

2. Students learn more than academic skills.

3. Students are influenced by their peers.

4. Community-based programs support student success.

5. Community-based programs that are connected to schools are likely to assist families
   and increase student success.

6. Partnership programs should be goal oriented (write plans for partnership activities).

7. There is a need for greater equity in the design and implementation of school, family,

and community partnerships (p. 161).

Epstein's framework provides a clear picture concerning community partnerships and, specifically, the importance of home, school, and community working together in order to design and implement successful partnerships (Epstein, 2001). Schools, families, and communities must assist one another in raising healthy, successful children (Sanders, 1996). This framework of overlapping spheres, six types of involvement, and a strong partnership design provides a foundation for answering this study's research questions (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2001; Epstein, 2010).

Conclusion

The literature review supports students' levels of poverty determining their levels of academic success (Epstein, 1995, 2005; Goos, Lowrie, & Jolly, 2007; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; WestEd, 2007). The following four themes derive from the literature: 1) poverty negatively impacts a child's academic achievement, 2) parent involvement and/or a community partnership positively impact academic achievement, 3) relationship building and collaboration are important to partnership-building, and 4) the role of school leadership plays important in fostering and sustaining community partnerships. A fifth area within the literature, a descriptive overview of Epstein's theoretical framework, provides a foundation for this study regarding the impact of school leadership on community partnerships.

The first theme focused on the negative impact of poverty on children. Specifically, literature supported the challenges of isolation, the lack of academic-related and monetary resources, and decreased student achievement. The studies highlighted that many problems of economically-disadvantaged children living in rural areas increase due to limited access to support and youth development services (Cairney & Ruge, 1999; Nadel & Sagawa, 2002; Pianta

et al., 2002; Provasnik et al., 2007, Tavernise, 2012). A study by Nadel and Sagawa (2002) even went so far as to state that education appears sub-standard for economically-disadvantaged children.

A second theme focused on the positive impact of parental involvement and community partnerships and revealed improved student achievement in specific areas of reading and numeracy (Goos, M., Lowrie, T., & Jolly, L., 2007; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). Some school districts even coordinated parent liaison and involvement programs, which increased parent leadership and positive supports from teachers (Sanders, 2008).

The third theme, the implementation of community partnerships, offered an extensive research related to theories, frameworks, and guidelines essential to an effective partnership program (Auerbach, 2011, Epstein, 1995, 2005; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; WestEd, 2007). Themes and insights focused on areas related to relationship-building and collaboration among community members (Bosma, Sieving, Ericson, Russ, Cavender, & Bonine, 2010; Parker, Grenville, & Flessa, 2009; Phelps, 2010). Teachers also have an influential role in working with parents, since the teacher in the classroom frequently has firsthand knowledge of the effectiveness of the parents assisting students in the classroom. Of interest, Smith (2006) determined the importance of engaging parents in intentional programs, which changed teachers' perceptions of parental involvement and provided a perspective on how positive engagement in student-related activities can change parents' views.

The research on community paraeducators brought to light the importance of connecting community members in the classroom with at-risk students as a means of raising achievement levels (Manz, Power, Ginsburg-Block & Dowrick, 2010). Additionally, valuing the training of

community members resulted in sustainability and effectiveness of the partnership program (Manz, Power, Ginsburg-Block, & Dowrick, 2010).

The fourth theme, the role of school leadership, placed importance on leadership practices and the valuing of school community members in order to build partnerships (Auerbach, 2011; Gordon & Seashore Louis, 2009; Jacobson et al., 2007; Hogue, 2012; Mutch & Collins, 2012; Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Sheldon, 2008; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; Touchton & Acker-Hocevar, 2001; Waters et al., 2003; Woody, 2010). Hogue (2012) and Mutch and Collins (2012) stressed the importance of a principal believing in community engagement and, by doing so, successfully implementing and encouraging sustainability of community partnerships. In other words, school leadership plays a key role fostering positive and sustainable partnerships.

The final topic of the literature review focused on Epstein's (1995) theoretical framework, whose model has been used extensively by the research community, and which provides guidelines and a framework for this study which involves community partnerships (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2001). Epstein's (1995) work with partnerships, particularly her work related to the Overlapping Spheres of Influence, provides practitioners with a theoretical model for use when developing effective partnership programs. The Overlapping Spheres of Influence, the six types of involvement, and the guidelines for a strong partnership design provide a robust foundational framework for answering this study's research questions (Epstein, 2010).

In conclusion, research literature supports the positive impact on student achievement resulting from community partnerships but also the building of relationships with community members and parents (Henderson et al., 2007; Parker & Flessa, 2009; Sanders, 2008; Smith, 2006). Additionally, strong school leadership and practices appear essential for school and

community partnerships to become effective and sustainable (Auerbach, 2011; Bennett & Thompson, 2011; Calabrese, Hester, Friesen, & Burkhalter, 2010; Gordon & Seashore Louis, 2009; Jacobson et al., 2007; Hogue, 2012; Mutch & Collins, 2012; Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Sheldon, 2008; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; Touchton & Acker-Hocevar, 2001; Waters et al., 2003; Woody, 2010).

Although the literature supports the importance of school leadership in promoting and sustaining partnerships, the research appears inadequate in the area specific to the role of the rural, elementary school principal and any correlations, which might occur between this role, community partnerships, and the reading literacy for young learners living in rural poverty (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Gordon & Seashore Louis, 2009; Lindahl, 2010; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2001). This research study seeks to investigate these correlations, and by doing so, adds to the present body of literature.

Researchers echo the need for further study, specifically, in the areas of how the school-home relationships function as an aspect of school climate, and how the teacher and principals perceive the effects of principal behaviors and practices (Epstein, 2001; Lindahl, 2010; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010). Sheldon et al. (2010) conclude that studies should consist of larger samples in order to confirm the connectedness of partnership practices, climate, student achievement, and theory. In addition to laying the foundation for the development of models and conceptual frameworks, connectedness to theory through research provides clearer definitions and ways of measuring outcomes (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2001). Epstein (2001) recommends additional studies that isolate the effects of home, school, and community on peer interactions, on the selection of friends, and on the influence of friends and peers on important attitudes, behaviors, and achievements.

Chapter III

Design and Methodology

Introduction

Marshall and Rossman (2011) consider the selection of setting, site, population, and phenomenon as "fundamental to the design of the study and serves as a guide for the researcher" (p. 99). This chapter discusses the research design and the methods used to gather and analyze data related to the perspective school and community partnerships. It includes a description of the researcher's role, as well as details about the study's setting, site, population, and phenomenon. Included is a discussion on trustworthiness of data and ethical considerations. Instruments, such as the field observation form, online survey and focus group protocols, and informed consent form, can be found in the appendices of this study.

In this dissertation study, several research questions helped to explore the topic at hand in great detail. The central research questions for this research study included:

1. What is the role of the rural elementary principal concerning the involvement of local businesses, civic groups, and parents in community partnerships?

2. In what ways do community partners believe the rural, elementary principal is making a difference with partnerships?

3. What impact do partnerships have on third graders' reading literacy?

Research Design

This study investigated the role of the rural elementary principal and the impact of community partnership programs on the reading literacy levels of third graders living in poverty. Mixed-methods research, specifically, the exploratory research design, provided the researcher a means of collecting, analyzing, and using both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Garrett, 2008; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Using quantitative data to further explore

relationships discovered during focus group discussions, allowed the researcher to quantify the connections established during the qualitative phase (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). When created simultaneously, the research outcome is stronger than either method performed separately (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Malina, Norreklit, & Selto, 2011).

For the purpose of this case study, mixed-methods afforded an in-depth investigation of the role of the rural elementary principal and provided perspectives of the participants on school and community partnerships. The inquiry approach of the qualitative aspect in this study allowed the researcher to collect data through interactions with selected individuals in their settings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Qualitative research lends itself to occurring in a natural setting, draws on multiple methods that honored ethical practices, was content-focused, emergent, evolving, and fundamental in interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In comparison, quantitative research is data-driven and often answers the "How many?" and "How often?" questions, tests for reliability and validity, determines statistical significance, and analyzes data to determine any correlations between variables (Gliem & Gliem, 2003; Malina et al., 2011; Tanner, 2012). Tanner (2012) added that numbers are economical when it comes to record keeping.

In this case study, the focus was on one phenomenon, and the emergent design allowed for purposeful sampling, data collection, and analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The researcher was able to explore a specific case over time, utilized multiple sources of data, and reported on the case based on themes (Creswell, 2007). The challenge, according to Creswell (2007), involves gathering enough information to ensure an in-depth picture of the case. In order to provide rigor in the study, Table 2 outlines the types of data collected.

Table 2

Data Collection Methods

Data Collection
Online surveys
Focus groups
Outcome-based literacy levels
Researcher reflective journal
Field Notes

Marshall and Rossman (2011) refer to role of the researcher as "*the instrument*." The researcher enters the lives of the participants, whether for a brief time during an interview or during directly observing and immersed in an activity for a sustained period of time. Conducting focus groups, writing in a reflective journal, and taking field notes provided a means for retaining a reflective stance (Hogue, 2012). Disruptions to the daily routine of participants remained limited or minimal, and every precaution was taken to avoid skewing or influencing outcomes (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Establishing trust and rapport was an important aspect of this study. As an educator in the district where the study occurred, a priority focused on building trust in this established relationship. An awareness of the ethical issues which may arise existed, in addition to implementing ethical procedures. Examples of ethical procedures included the requirement of attaining informed consent from active participants in the study. (See Appendix A.)

Target school for focus group activities. Brownlee Elementary (pseudonym), a Title I school-wide elementary school, is located in a rural district located in the northwest region of the United

States. The school serves a predominantly Caucasian population of approximately 350 students from a low, socio-economic community.

The US Department of Education (2011) defines a Title I school-wide program as one which provides effective, timely assistance to all students who can benefit from additional supports beyond the regular classroom. Furthermore, to qualify for Title I school-wide services, a minimum of 40% of a school's enrolled students must be receiving free and reduced lunches (US Department of Education, 2011). Brownlee Elementary met this requirement with 83% of its student population receiving free and reduced school lunches, based on federal poverty guidelines. Title I school-wide programs must also develop a school-parent compact, a cooperative agreement between parents, school, and community (US Department of Education, 2011). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has supported Title I school-wide programs as a means for an entire school to become the target of change and to offer the most disadvantaged youth a path to success (US Department of Education, 2011).

Brownlee Elementary was selected as the research site for focus group meetings based on its designation as a rural school with 83% of students on the free and reduced lunch program, as well as on its reputation as a school with strong community partnerships and parent-teacher organization. Noteworthy, the parent-teacher organization has a slogan, which encompasses the belief that (together) they can make a difference. Conducting research at this site provided a deeper understanding of the role of the rural elementary principal and the impact of community partnerships on student learning.

After meeting with Brownlee's principal, Mr. Smith (pseudonym), on June 12, 2013, and sharing research ideas, Mr. Smith gave his full support and agreed with the school district superintendent's written approval of this study, dated May 10, 2013. (See Appendix J.) Table 3 presents the research activity timeline.

Table 3

Research Activity Timeline

Research Activity	Dates
Data collection and organization	End of August, 2013
Survey validation/Distribute survey	September-October, 2013
Analysis of data	October-February, 2014
Review & analysis of literacy state data	November-December, 2013
Validation of focus group questions	October, 2013
Focus group meeting	November, 2013
Transcription of focus group meeting	December-January, 2014

Awarded a Four-Star School rating in 2012, Brownlee Elementary met 67% of the established criteria in the following three areas: academic growth, academic proficiency, and participation. Four-Star and Five-Star Schools receive public recognition for their excellent performance as top-performing schools across the state. Brownlee Elementary attained Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in math, reading, and language on state achievement tests, Spring 2012. On a separate, Spring 2013 state reading indicator test, 91% of third graders, who were designated as economically disadvantaged, read proficiently. The remaining 9% scored strategic (near grade level in reading) or intensive (below grade level). In comparison, district-wide, 92% of third graders achieved proficiency.

Participants. Purposeful sampling took place, which lent itself to attaining rich information for an in-depth study and provided the researcher the flexibility to select a sampling that was representative of the population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The random sample

size for this quantitative aspect of the study was 350 third-grade students (ex-post facto data) and

up to 169 rural, elementary principals participated in an online survey. Ten community partners,

including parents and business/civic partners serving Brownlee Elementary, participated in the

qualitative aspect of the study. McMillan and Schumacher (2009) provide a general rule for

sample size: "…obtain a sufficient number to provide a credible result" (p. 127).

The Brownlee Elementary principal identified business or civic partners as individuals

with past involvement history with the school. The parent participants in this portion of study

originated from two target populations: parents who have volunteered at the school and/or

individuals who have been active in the parent-teacher organization. The target was to recruit up

to five parents and five business/civic partners for a total of 10 participants. Community partners

and parents were recruited through an online survey explaining the study to solicit their

participation. (See Appendix E.) The researcher also attended a parent-teacher meeting to solicit

potential participants for the study. Using positive responses from the parent-teacher meeting

and the online survey, potential participants were again contacted through email to confirm

participation, or called on the phone using a telephone script. (See Appendix F.) The focus

group meeting took place in the Brownlee Elementary Library on November 25, 2013, from

11:30 AM to 1:00 PM.

Data Collection

An important process with a specific purpose in a study, data collection for this case

study took place between August 15, 2013, and January 15, 2014. Marshall and Rossman (2011)

assert, "Its purpose is to guide the proposal writer in stipulating the methods of choice for his

study and in describing for the reader how the data will inform his research questions" (p. 137).

The focus group meetings were recorded with the use of an audio recorder, and limited field

notes were taken to support the recording. The recording was transcribed by a professional

transcriptionist and reviewed through member-checking with participants. All participants received member-checking emails. (See Appendix G.) Focus group questions were validated with seven education experts who did not participate in the study. Only one expert recommended minor edits to three questions, which produced increased clarity to the questions. The primary investigator attempted to accommodate the schedules of all participants by conducting the meeting at a time most convenient for the participants.

A reflective journal was retained by the primary investigator as a means of applying reflexivity or a path to a deeper understanding of the research process and the role of the researcher in the process (De Loo & Lowe, 2011; Mills, 2007). The journal provided an avenue for addressing any personal biases, while also monitoring thoughts while in the role of research instrument (Janesick, 2004; Hogue, 2012; Mills, 2007). Interestingly, Janesick (2004) identified the reflective journal as a tool to "awaken the imagination" (p. 149). Collecting qualitative data, a rigorous and useful process, provided an opportunity to triangulate the data in order to build themes based on a variety of sources (Marshall and Rossman, 2011).

The collection of ex-post facto literacy data was generated from a state reading assessment. This assessment was administered, statewide, to third graders during the Spring 2013 semester. Third grade is the first year in which students participate in the statewide reading assessment, therefore, supporting the rationale for targeting this grade level. Table 4 details the specific, ex-post facto data requested from the State Department of Education (SDE), August 16, 2014. The SDE provided a response letter via email, and included an attached document with the requested data on November 19, 2013 (see Appendix M).

Table 4

Reading Ex-post Facto Data Collected from the SDE

Type of Data
3rd Grade only
Rural schools
Economically-disadvantaged schools (Title I Schools)
Gender
Ethnicity

The other aspect of the quantitative data collection originated from an online Likert scale survey. Special care was given to the design of the questions of the survey. The use of both positively- and negatively-worded items minimizes response bias and has been advocated for years by researchers (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011). The online survey, generated from the use of the software program, Qualtrics, was dispersed to state-identified, rural elementary principals. The number of rural, elementary principals set to receive the survey was a minimum of 165, with a response rate target of no less than 56, or 34%. Before emailing the Qualtrics survey to the participants, seven education experts (who were not study participants) validated the survey. Individuals receiving the survey questions (via email) included volunteers willing to assist and provide feedback on each question. This feedback assisted with content validity of the instrument.

Greeno (2003) impressed upon researchers the importance of having and voicing opinions about measures and procedures, since this approach to validity provides a means to bridge the gap between research and practice. Gliem and Gliem (2003) added that ensuring

reliability is necessary for validity and supports the use of Cronbach's alpha for accomplishment of this task. Greeno (2003) defined reliability as "the ability of the measurement tool to get the correct measurement" (p. 433). In other words, an instrument is reliable if it draws the same response multiple times. Tanner (2012) referenced Cronbach's alpha as a common statistic for analyzing reliability, in particular, when the test is administered just once. Gliem and Gliem (2003) also affirmed it imperative to calculate Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency of any scale used.

The normal range for Cronbach's alpha lies between 0 and 1 with an alpha of 0.8 as a reasonable goal (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). George and Mallery (2003) provide the researcher with a detailed scale for Cronbach's alpha: ">.9 - excellent, >.8 - Good, >.7 - Acceptable, >.6 - Questionable, >.5 - Poor and < .5 - Unacceptable" (p. 231).

Item analysis, including the alpha reliability coefficients, was calculated through using the SPSS software. The focus group and online survey questions are found in Appendix B.

Analytical Methods

The type of data collected determines the data analysis techniques the researcher selects to use (Mills, 2007). After analyzing the data, the researcher then interprets and finds meaning in it. Simply stated, the analysis involves the summary of data, and interpretation involves finding meaning in those data (Hogue, 2012; Mills, 2007). Marshall and Rossman (2011) explain a "how to" aspect of analyzing data with the application of seven phases. These phases include: organizing data, immersion in data, generating of categories and themes, coding data, analytic memos, seeking alternate understandings, and writing the report (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Of importance, as stated by the authors, is the need to produce manageable data (data reduction), while bringing meaning (interpretation) to the words and actions of the participants.

The organizational aspect began with a system of documentation and collection, which included the housing of the data in a safe environment. The study data were stored on a minimum of two external, password-protected thumb drives. All quantitative and qualitative spreadsheets and transcripts were accessible only with a password, and only the researcher knew all passwords.

With respect to the qualitative component of the study, coding of data from the focus group meeting led to the emergence of patterns and meanings in the descriptive data (Hogue, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Mills, 2007). Open coding provided themes from the literature review and in the data collection, while axial coding placed these themes into categories (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Although extremely time-consuming, the process ensured that the analyzed data were reliable and correct (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Mills, 2007). Furthermore, Marshall and Rossman's (2011) seven phases served to guide this researcher's path on the transformational journey of qualitative analysis.

Regarding quantitative data, descriptive and inferential statistics assisted in the process of describing and drawing inferences about a specific data set (Tanner, 2012). Additionally, the researcher employed the decision tree to serve as a guide through a series of focused questions to the eventual selection of the most appropriate statistical procedure for the research study (Wiesner, Eckstein, Li, & Zepp, 2008). In other words, the researcher approaches the most complex phenomena with basic inferential statistical analyses, such as the t-test and the ANOVA, resulting in meaningful graphics for interpretation (Wiesner et al., 2008). In this study, the decision tree guided the researcher to select tests to analyze the correlation and strength between variables, specifically the Pearson correlation. The Pearson correlation allowed the researcher to correlate independent variables with a criterion variable (Salkind, 2011; Tanner, 2012). Once the statistical tests were in place, analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS

Statistical Software Version 20 (IBM SPSS, 2013). Table 5 displays the quantitative and

qualitative analytical methods selected for this study.

Table 5

Analytical Methods

Quantitative Methods	Qualitative Methods
Qualtrics	Descriptive Exploratory Analysis
SPSS	Open Coding – themes
Mann-Whitney U - ordinal data	Axial Coding – categories
Cronbach's alpha – internal consistency	
Pearson Correlation	
Effect Size Estimator	

Third-grade student demographic and reading assessment data were retrieved from the

State Department of Education (SDE), which provided the researcher with a means to study

correlations and associations between gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and proficiency

levels. The reading achievement data was available in percentage distribution and described

using the following categories: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. A Likert scale

online survey, designated for completion by rural, elementary principals, was generated and

distributed by the Qualtrics (2013) software program. Qualtrics (2013) provided graphic displays

of the data, filtered data into subgroups, compared data for similarities and differences, and

provided statistical data results (mean, variance, standard deviation, and totals) for each question.

Tanner (2012) recommends the Mann-Whitney U test for ordinal data common to Likert scale

surveys, as this test provides a powerful analysis of survey results. All other aspects of the data

in this study were analyzed on a correlation matrix in order to discover the greatest indicator of

student success (Curtis, 2013). For the purpose of all statistical tests, a resulting *p*-value equal

to, or less than 0.05 was considered significant.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that researchers can establish trustworthiness by

addressing the following: credibility (rigorous methods), transferability (usefulness to others),

dependability (stability of the data), and confirmability (neutrality or objectivity of the data).

Trustworthiness certainly provided rigor, usefulness, and value to the well-done qualitative study

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By utilizing member checks, audit trails, a peer reviewer, the researcher

reflective journal, and field notes, the ability to ensure that the data were trustworthy became

attainable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

Marshall and Rossman (2011) highlighted the importance of ethical research practice as

being "grounded in the moral principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice" (p. 47).

The primary researcher took great care to avoid ethical dilemmas. The confidentiality of

participants was protected. Collecting, or observing individuals without their permission or

knowledge would be considered unethical, as well as the reporting results using the subjects'

names. The practice of strict confidentiality and anonymity remained necessary throughout the

study in order to avoid potential harm and privacy invasion to the subjects (Mills, 2007). Any

and all identifying student information, not relevant to this study, was purged and not included,

in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 U. S. C. § 1232g; 34 CFR

Part 99).

Second, informed consent was obtained as an assurance and declares that the participant

was fully aware of the purpose of the study and freely agreed to participate. (See Appendix

A.) The participant was afforded guarantees of confidentiality and protection from harm. In case

of a minor, the parent must grant permission for participation and the minor needs to assent. It was the responsibility of the researcher to discuss thoroughly and state clearly this understanding with the participants and/or parents. If there were questions about the study by participants and/or parents, the researcher would be available to respond.

Third, it was important to ensure the participants were not harmed by involvement in the study either physically or mentally. As a safeguard to ensure the protection of the participant, there was an opportunity to submit this research proposal for approval to the dissertation committee at Northwest Nazarene University. Finally, the researcher remained aware of potential biases, boundaries of competence, and limitations of expertise to ensure no unjust practices (Mills, 2007). Perhaps this statement by Mills (2007) sums up the primary importance of sound ethical standards in research by stating, "Respect and concern for your own integrity and for your participants' dignity and welfare are the bottom lines of ethical research" (p. 106).

Limitations

The limitations in case study relates to the actual scope of the study. The first limiting step involved the choice of the problem itself. Inherent are other, related problems that could have been chosen but were rejected after thorough review. Other limiting aspects of the study included the sampling of the online surveys and focus groups. The study was limited to a focus group of up to10 community partners that included parents and business/civic members from the local school district who served the one school in high poverty. Online surveys were dispersed to only rural, elementary schools identified by the state as rural. The limits set on the groupings resulted from time constraints involved in organizing and administering these activities and the subsequent data analysis. Marshall and Rossman (2011) stressed that generalization, replicability, and control groups common in quantitative research are not the criteria for the

limitations of qualitative study. The research design, the site, the sampling, and management of data drive the limitations in qualitative studies.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

There is an agreement that research lacks data regarding the correlations between community partnerships, the role of the elementary principal, and the increased reading literacy levels among primary-aged children living in rural poverty (Cairney & Ruge, 1999; Lindahl, 2010; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010). The research also lacks specific reference to the role of the elementary principal as a catalyst for community partnerships in high poverty schools (Lindahl, 2010). It is, therefore, reasonable to believe that the role of the elementary principal has the potential for building capacity with community partners, while also improving student achievement for young learners. Transferring this belief to rural America and, specifically, to a district with high poverty, could prove beneficial beyond expectations.

The purpose of this study was to examine two fundamental catalysts, which can improve student learning. First, it investigated the role of the rural, elementary school principal as a catalyst for encouraging community partnerships with local businesses and parents. Second, the study examined the effect of partnerships on the reading literacy levels of third graders living in rural poverty. The roles of the principal, parents, and community business partnerships are influential when it comes to building and sustaining partnerships (Hogue, 2012). The questions guiding this dissertation study included the following:

1. What is the role of the rural, elementary principal concerning the involvement of local businesses, civic groups, and parents in community partnerships?

2. In what ways do community partners believe the rural, elementary principal is making a difference with partnerships?

3. What impact do partnerships have on third graders' reading literacy?

As discussed in Chapter III, the methods for data collection included:

- Likert scale surveys distributed to rural, elementary principals across the state, which focused on the role of the rural, elementary principal and their involvement with community partnerships

- Ex-post facto, literacy levels from a standardized, state assessment of 350 randomly selected, third-grade student records, which were studied to determine if partnerships made a difference

- A focus group consisting of 10 parents and community partners provided unique perspectives on the role of the rural, elementary principal and partnerships

- A researcher reflective journal, as a way to apply reflexivity, or a path to a deeper understanding of the research process and the role of the researcher

- Field notes as written records of observations, quotes, details, and reflections

This chapter outlines the results of the study. Organization of data results was based on the three research questions which mirrored or complemented the order in which the study was conducted: 1) rural, elementary principal online Likert scale survey; 2) community partner focus group; and 3) ex-post facto, third grade reading literacy data. Graphic tables and figures were used as a practical way to encapsulate the findings of this study (Mills, 2007).

This study used a triangulation matrix as a guide to show the various types of data sources that were used to answer the three research questions in this study. Mills (2007) suggests the strength of research lies in triangulation, a process of collecting data from numerous sources and not just relying on one. Table 6 represents the triangulation matrix for this study.

Table 6

Triangulation Matrix

Research Questions	Data Source		
	Source 1	Source 2	Source 3
1. What is the role of the rural, elementary principal concerning the involvement of local businesses, civic groups, and parents in community partnerships?	Rural, Elementary Principal Online Likert Survey (quantitative/ qualitative)	Focus Group Meeting with Community Partners (qualitative)	
2. In what ways do community partners believe the rural, elementary principal is making a difference with partnerships?	Focus Group Meeting with Community Partners (qualitative)		
3. What impact do school-community partnerships have on third graders' reading literacy?	Ex-post Facto State Reading Literacy Third Grade Data (quantitative)	Focus Group Meeting with Community Partners (qualitative)	Rural, Elementary Principal Online Likert survey (quantitative/qualitative)

Research Question #1: The Rural, Elementary Principal Online Survey

Although the literature supports the importance of school leadership in promoting and

sustaining partnerships, research appears inadequate in the area specific to the role of the rural,

elementary school principal and any correlations which might occur between this role and community partnerships (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Gordon & Seashore Louis, 2009; Lindahl, 2010; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2001). With that in mind, the first research question introduced in the study asked:

> What is the role of the rural, elementary principal concerning the involvement of local businesses, civic groups, and parents in community partnerships?

Using this research questions as the premise, a Likert scale survey was generated using the software program, Qualtrics, and was dispersed to state-identified, rural elementary principals. Data were also collected using Qualtrics. Participants were presented with questions which focused on the role of the rural, elementary principal, as this role relates to school-community partnerships. Survey questions were rated using a five-item Likert scale; a scale which supports a strong internal consistency (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011; Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Participants were asked to respond with their level of agreement to each question using the following five-point scale:

> 1 = Strongly disagree
>
> 2 = Disagree
>
> 3 = Neither agree or disagree
>
> 4 = Agree
>
> 5 = Strongly agree

Survey Validity and Reliability

Content validity index (CVI). Polit and Beck (2006) purport content validity as a way to measure the construct of a sample of items and the CVI as the most utilized index for measuring content validity (Lynn, 1986; Polit & Beck, 2006). As part of the two-step process to

achieve content validity, the researcher thoroughly conceptualized the subject before distributing the electronic survey to seven education experts who were not study participants for assessment (Polit & Beck, 2006).

The experts received the survey questions via email and provided feedback on each question. An email was sent on August 17, 2013, requesting this feedback, with the final and seventh expert responding on September 25, 2013. (See Appendix N.) From the feedback, an overall CVI, or referred as S-CVI, was determined. An acceptable S-CVI to validate this survey was 90% or above on the 21 demographic and focused school-community partnership questions (Lynn, 1986; Polit & Beck, 2006). Any questions rating below 86% would be either rewritten or eliminated. Two experts recommended minor edits to individual words on two of the survey questions. The S-CVI mean for the survey fell at 98%, well above the acceptable S-CVI of 90%. Polit and Beck (2006) proposed a rating scale to measure the strength of each question:

4 = Very Relevant

3 = Quite Relevant

2 = Somewhat Relevant

1 = Not Relevant

Ratings of a "3" or a "4" indicated the expert's endorsement of the item (Polit & Beck, 2006). Appendix C presents the content validated questions dispersed to the rural, elementary principals. Appendix O includes the CVI table of results.

Cronbach's alpha. Tanner (2012) referenced Cronbach's alpha as a common statistic for analyzing reliability, in particular when the test is administered just once. Gliem and Gliem (2003) also believed it imperative to calculate Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency of any scale used. With this in mind, the online survey underwent Cronbach's alpha testing of the 15 questions focused on the role of the rural, elementary principals and school-

community partnerships. The Cronbach's alpha results were equal to 0.80. The normal range for

Cronbach's alpha lies between 0 and 1, with an internal consistency of 0.80 or above as a

reasonable goal (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). The survey questions met this criteria.

The Rural, Elementary Principal Online Survey Results

The next phase involved the collection of data through the use of the online survey

devised by the researcher and created using the Qualtrics software. The number of rural,

elementary principals receiving the online survey via email totaled 169 individuals. The survey

was sent after a lengthy process of filtering out all of the rural, elementary principals from an

extensive list of all principals in the state in which the study occurred. The filtering process

began with first determining rural districts by applying specific criteria established by the state.

After the rural districts were pinpointed, the filtering process of selecting elementary principals

from the districts was a doable task. The survey was then sent to the participants' school email

addresses using the Qualtrics software. The survey window was open from October 19, 2013

through November 21, 2013. Two weeks after the survey was opened, the researcher sent a

reminder email to participants who had yet to complete the survey. This task was achieved,

anonymously, through the Qualtrics software system. This same system also sent a note of

thanks to participants who had completed the survey process. The next section further details the

survey response, participation rate, and demographics of the survey participants.

Survey response and participation rate. The comprehensive analysis of the survey

begins with a focus on the response and participation rates, followed by table and graphic

displays of demographic data. A total of 169 electronic surveys were emailed to rural,

elementary principals serving Title I schools across the state. Of the 169 surveys, a total of 76

responses were received. This represents an overall response rate of 45%. Of the 76 total

responses, 69 respondents completed the entire survey for a 41% participation rate. Cook,

Heath, and Thompson (2000) conducted 56 web-based surveys in 39 studies with a mean

response rate of 34.6%. It is believed that a response rate between 25 and 30% can be expected

when there are no follow-up email reminders, and higher response rates with follow-up

reminders (Cook et al., 2000). A reminder email was sent to participants in this study, which

supports the claim by Cook, Heath, and Thompson (2000) that reminders increase response rates.

As noted, this study's overall response rate was 45%. Ultimately, a strong response rate provides

confidence when generalizing results (Creswell, 2007). Table 7 summarizes the overall response

rate and participation by rural, elementary principals.

Table 7

Overall Survey Response Rate

Response and Participation	Total
Surveys Sent	169
Survey Responses	76
Surveys Completed	69
Surveys Incomplete	7
Response Rate	45%

Demographic section. While 70 respondents completed the demographic section

concerning gender, age, experience as a principal, and percentage of students on free-reduced

lunch program questions, 69 respondents answered the demographic question concerning the

highest education level. The tables in the demographic section reflect a completion rate based on

the number of respondents for the specific questions.

Demographic data for the gender of the elementary principals completing the survey

revealed that 36 males and 34 females completed the survey. The overall interpretation of this

data would indicate the genders were closely distributed at 51% and 49%, respectively, for males

and females taking the survey. This close, gender distribution proved necessary to the inferential

statistical testing component of the study, in which the male and female responses were

compared to determine if there existed a discrepancy. Table 8 represents the gender distribution

and the completion rate for each gender.

Table 8

Percentage of Each Gender Completing the Survey

Gender	Completion Number	Percent
Male	36	51%
Female	34	49%
Total	70	100%

The age distribution of the elementary principals taking the survey is presented in

Table 9. The completion rate in the table revealed that the majority of the elementary principals

taking the survey were in the age groups of 46 years to 55 years and older (total of 68% for these

age groups). The principals between the ages of 26 and 35 years comprised 32% of the study

group, or 22 respondents.

Table 9

Age Distribution of the Elementary Principals

Age (Years)	Completion Number	Percent
18-25	0	0%
26-35	6	9%
36-45	16	23%
46-55	31	44%
56-65	16	23%
66+	1	1%
Total	70	100%

The highest level of education of the elementary principal revealed that 55 of the respondents, or 80%, had a Master's degree. Elementary principals with an Education Specialist degree made up 16% of the respondents, with only two, or 3%, possessing a Doctorate degree. One elementary principal in the study has a Bachelor's degree. Table 10 summarizes the breakdown of the degrees held by the elementary principals in this study.

Table 10

Highest Level of Education Held by the Elementary Principals

Degree Held	Completion Number	Percent
Bachelor's	1	1%
Master's	55	80%
Education Specialist	11	16%
Doctorate	2	3%
Other	0	0%
Total	69	100%

Figure 5 provides a pictorial display of the highest level of education held by the elementary principals. The red portion of the graphic is representative of the 80% of elementary principals with a Master's degree.

Figure 5

Pictorial Display of the Highest Level of Education Held by the Elementary Principals

Highest Level of Education Held by the Elementary Principals

- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Education Specialist
- Doctorate
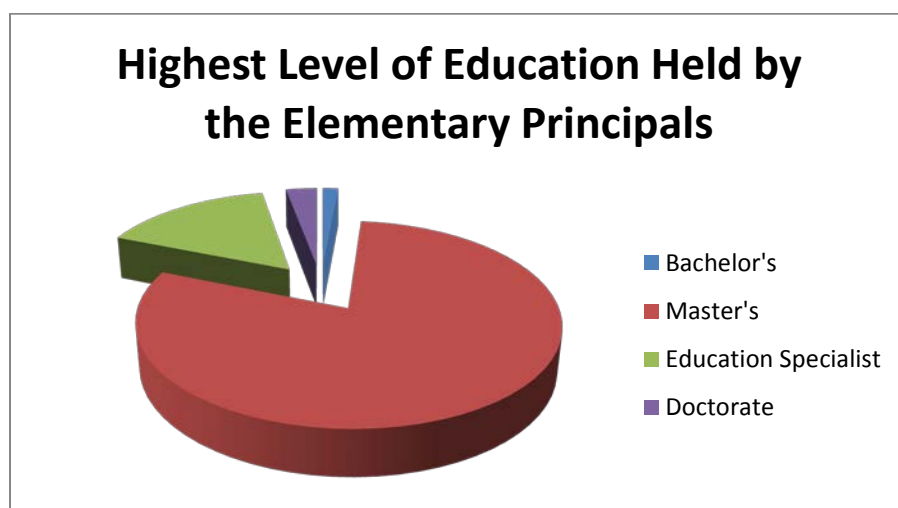
Rural, elementary principals reporting less than five years of experience as a principal were responsible for 33 responses of the surveys completed; this represents a rate of approximately 47%. Principals reporting five to 10 years of experience as a principal were responsible for 24 responses of the surveys completed; this represents an approximate rate of 34%. Principals reporting over 10 years of experience as a principal were responsible for 13 responses of the completed survey; this represents an approximate rate of 19%. Table 11 summarizes the years of experience reported by the elementary rural principals, surveys completed, and a resulting completion percentage.

Table 11

Return and Completion Percentages Using the Principal Experience

Principal Experience (Years)	Surveys Completed	Percent
Under 5	33	47%
5-10	24	34%
Over 10	13	19%

The final demographic area focuses on the elementary principal's reporting of the percentage of students on the Free-Reduced Lunch Program (FRLP) at their school. The summary provided by Figure 5 is quite revealing concerning the poverty levels most prominent in the state. The majority of Title I school principals reported that 40% and higher of their student populations were participating in the FRLP. Three principals (4%) were unsure of their student FRLP participation. Figure 6 provides a pictorial display of the percentage of students on the FRLP lunch program.

Figure 6

Percentage of Students on the Free-Reduced Lunch Program
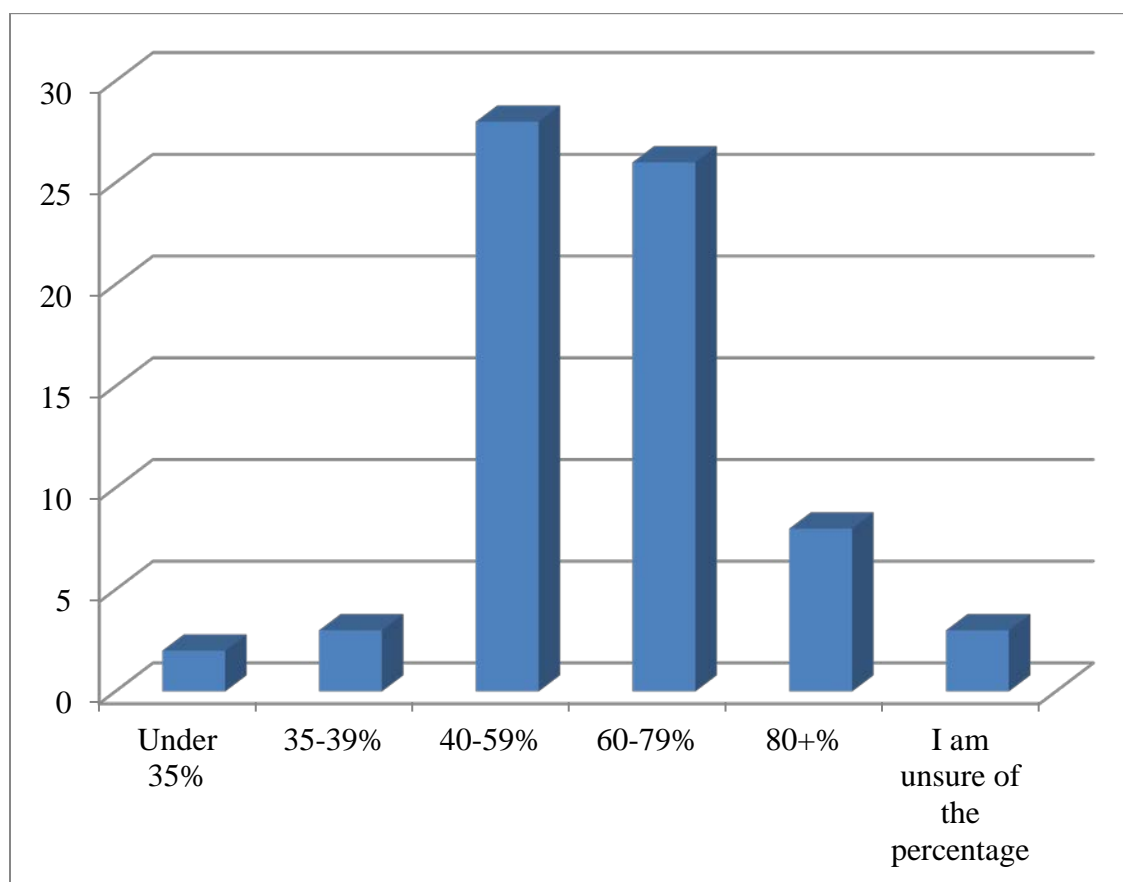
Quantitative results. Sheldon (2008) revealed the role of the principal as a person who could strengthen a program by simply valuing the partnership. One of the primary purposes of this study was to investigate the role of the rural, elementary principal as a catalyst for encouraging community partnerships with local businesses, civic groups, and parents. With this in mind, online survey questions were developed to answer the following research question:

What is the role of the rural, elementary principal concerning the involvement of local businesses, civic groups, and parents in community partnerships?

The primary purpose of the survey was to glean information from fifteen, Likert scale survey questions asking participants to indicate their level of agreement using a five-point scale:

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree or disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly agree

In addition to a set of five, basic demographic questions previously discussed in this section, a multiple choice question was added, requesting information on the frequency in which the principals met with community partners. The final question encouraged principals to provide input and reflections on their experiences with community partnerships, in more of an open-ended, qualitative format.

Five of the Likert scale questions were identified as specific to the role of the rural, elementary principal and core to answering research question one. Table 12 illustrates these five particular questions. One survey question was identified as relevant to answering research question three and receives discussion in the section specific to that question.

Table 12

Survey Questions Focused on the Role of the Rural, Elementary Principal

Question Number	Question
4	Meeting with community business partners on a regular basis is important to me.
5	As a rural elementary principal, establishing and maintaining school-community partnerships with local businesses is a top priority.
6	One role of the rural, elementary principal is to encourage partnerships by offering volunteer opportunities in the classroom.
12	One role of the rural, elementary principal is to communicate with local businesses.
15	I am a strong advocate for school-community partnerships.

Inferential statistical data. Inferential statistics allows the researcher to draw inferences about the larger group through the study of the smaller group's characteristics (Tanner, 2012). It is through statistical tests, such as the Mann-Whitney U, that these inferences can be drawn. In this study, the Mann-Whitney U was used to study the ordinal data of the two, specific demographic groups, comprising of the male and female rural, elementary principals. The purpose was to determine if significant differences existed between these two groups in their responses to the five questions. In order to do so, the gender distribution had to be close. After demographic analysis of the data, it was determined that the genders of the elementary principals were closely distributed at 51% and 49%, respectively, for males and females.

Table 13 displays the Mann-Whitney U data results. Statistical significance occurs when there is a z-value +/- 1.96 and a p-value equal to or less than 0.05. Each of the five questions, as presented in Table 13, had a z-value well-below 1.96 and a p-value well-above 0.05. The findings, as presented in Table 13, indicate a lack of significance for each of these questions. An effect size estimator was used to measure for any overlap of the distributions (Grissom & Kim, 2012).

Table 13

Mann-Whitney U Test Statistics (males/females)

Question Number	Question	Mann-Whitney *U*	*z*	*p*-value
4	Meeting with community business partners on a regular basis is important to me.	565.5	.164	.870
5	As a rural elementary principal, establishing and maintaining school-community partnerships with local businesses is a top priority.	522.5	.722	.474
6	One role of the rural, elementary principal is to encourage partnerships by offering volunteer opportunities in the classroom.	554.0	.560	.576
12	One role of the rural, elementary principal is to communicate with local businesses.	531.0	.867	.386
15	I am a strong advocate for school-community partnerships.	573.5	.285	.776

Note. If *z* +/- 1.96, the value is statistically significant at *p*<0.05

Effect size. Grissom and Kim (2012) defined effect size as a measure of the degree to which a null hypothesis is wrong. They suggested an effect size estimator for non-parametric tests, such as the Mann-Whitney *U*. Utilizing the Mann-Whitney *U* value, this test estimates the probability that one score randomly drawn from a population is greater than one score randomly drawn from another population (Grissom & Kim, 2012). The formula for this test: $\widehat{p}_{a.b} = \dfrac{U}{n_a n_b}$,

where probability is represented by $\widehat{p}_{a.b}$ and $n_a n_b$ represents the two sample sizes (Grissom &

Kim, 2012). This effect size computation explains if there is an overlap of the distributions

(Grissom & Kim, 2012). Table 14 displays the results of the effect size estimator calculations

for the five survey questions.

Table 14

Effect Size Estimator Results (n_a = 36 males, n_b = 34 females)

Question Number	Question	Mann-Whitney U	$\widehat{p}_{a.b}$
4	Meeting with community business partners on a regular basis is important to me.	565.5	.46
5	As a rural elementary principal, establishing and maintaining school-community partnerships with local businesses is a top priority.	522.5	.43
6	One role of the rural, elementary principal is to encourage partnerships by offering volunteer opportunities in the classroom.	554.0	.45
12	One role of the rural, elementary principal is to communicate with local businesses.	531.0	.43
15	I am a strong advocate for school-community partnerships.	573.5	.47

Note. $\widehat{p}$ >.50 indicates a degree of overlap of the distribution.

   Descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics allow the researcher to summarize specific

characteristics about a data set, including graphs and figures to describe this data (Tanner, 2012).

In this study, the descriptive statistical data was analyzed to determine the mean responses to the

five, identified questions and standard deviations. Table 15 displays the results of the descriptive

statistical data analysis. The mean range for the five questions was 3.26 to 4.49. A mean of 3.0

would indicate a neutral stance on a question. With the overall means above 3.0, the summary of

this table would indicate the principals were either in agreement or strongly agreed with each

focused question relevant to the role of the rural, elementary principal and the involvement of

community partnerships.

Table 15

Descriptive Statistics of the Means and Standard Deviations

Question	Strongly Disagree/Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree/Strongly Agree	*n*	Mean	SD
4	5	36	27	68	3.35	.728
5	14	22	32	68	3.26	.891
6	0	4	65	69	4.49	.609
12	2	18	49	69	3.81	.692
15	1	14	54	69	4.01	.717

A Closer Look at the Questions Related to the Role of the Rural, Elementary Principal

Calculating the frequency of responses to the Likert scale online survey brought to light

the specific roles of the rural, elementary principal and specifically, concerning their

involvement with community partnerships. The five questions highlighted in Table 15 are

summarized to provide details and information relevant to answering question two of this study:

What is the role of the rural, elementary principal concerning the involvement of local

businesses, civic groups, and parents in community partnerships?

A role of the rural, elementary principal in meeting with community partners is the focus

of question 4. A total of 68 participants responded to this question (Figure 7). Fifty-three

percent of those respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the importance of meeting on a

regular basis with community partners while another 35% agreed and 4% strongly agreed it was important to meet. On the other end of the scale, only 6% disagreed with the importance of meeting and 2% strongly disagreed concerning the importance of meeting on a regular basis. Of interest is the higher percentage of principals (58%) who responded they meet on a monthly basis with school-community partners, while an additional 17% meet on a weekly basis. When reflecting on the 53% of principals who responded they neither agree nor disagree with the importance of meeting with community partners, the result that a total of 75% of principals either meet weekly or monthly seems to negate the result of question 4 on the survey (see Figure 8).

Figure 7

Question 4- Meeting with community business partners on a regular basis is important to me.
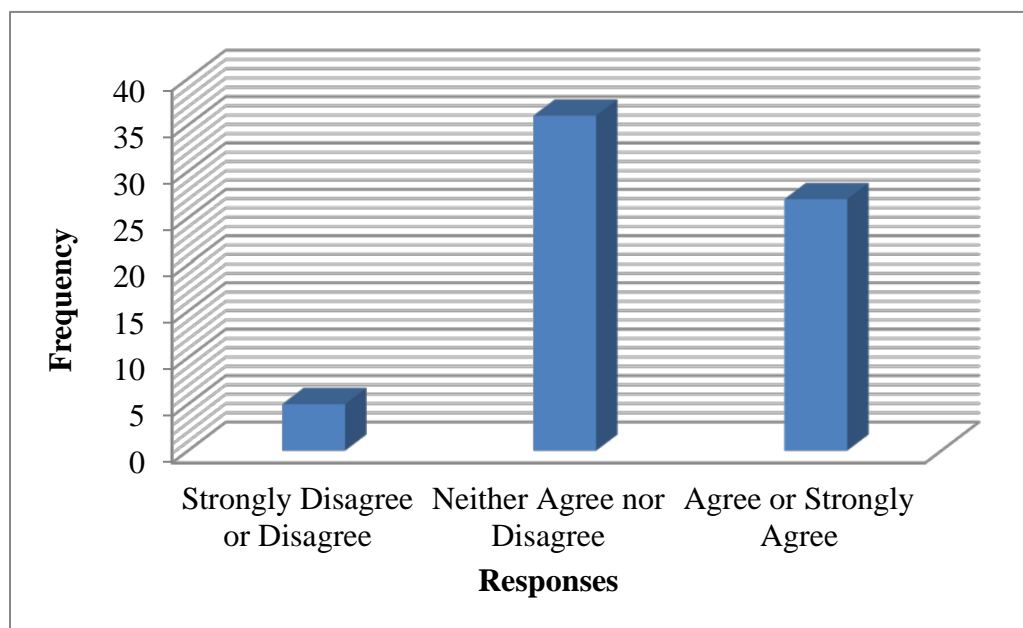
Figure 8 displays the one, multiple choice question which asked the principals how frequently they met with school-community partners.

Figure 8

Frequency Principals Meet with School-Community Partners

Question	Response		Frequency	Percent
1	Weekly		12	17%
2	Monthly		40	58%
3	Quarterly		7	10%
4	Bi-annually		3	4%
5	Annually		1	1%
6	Other		6	9%
	Total		**69**	**100%**

A role of the rural, elementary principal in establishing and maintaining school-community partnerships as a top priority is the focus of question 5 (Figure 9). Of the 68 respondents, 44% were in agreement that establishing and maintaining partnerships was a top priority in their role, with an additional 3% strongly agreeing. Twenty-two participants neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement, while 12 participants disagreed and two strongly disagreed with establishing and maintaining partnerships as a top priority.

Figure 9

Question 5 - As a rural elementary principal, establishing and maintaining school-community

partnerships with local businesses is a top priority.
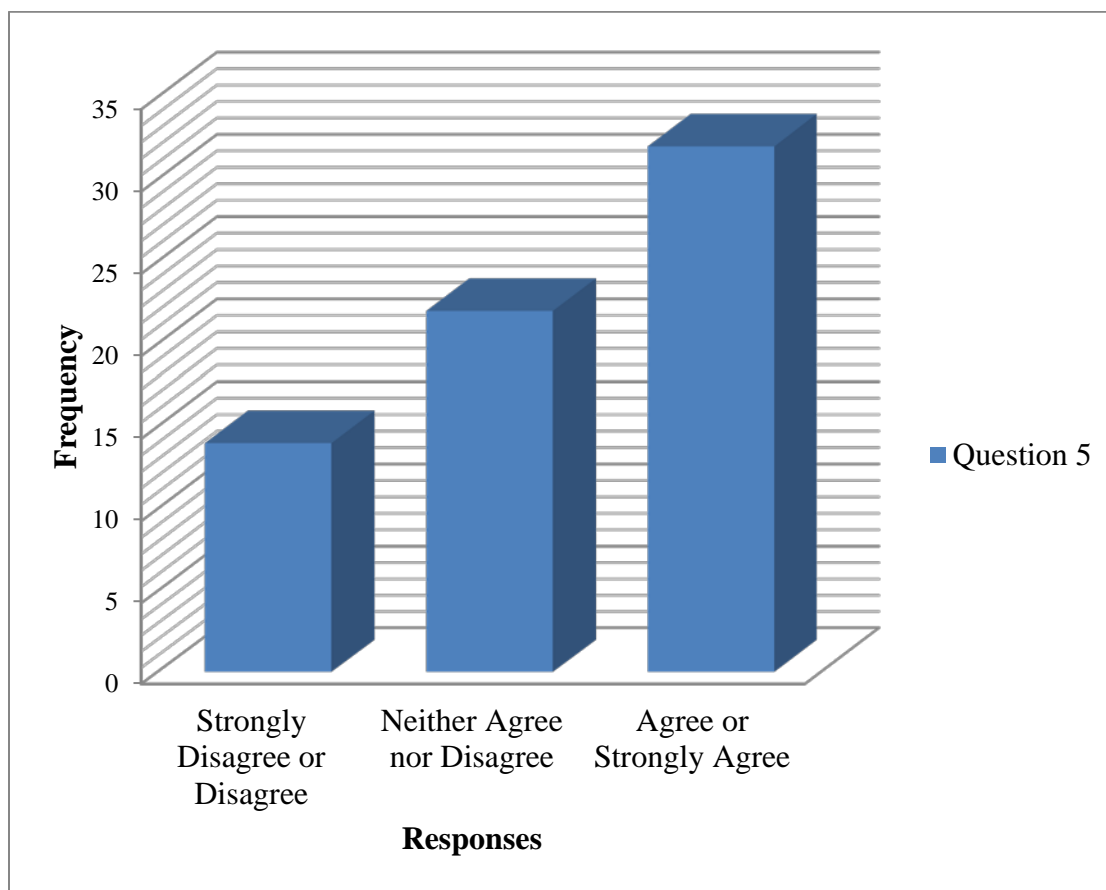
A role of the rural, elementary principal as an encourager of partnerships by offering volunteer opportunities in the classroom is the focus of question 6 (Figure 10). Overwhelmingly, 55% of the respondents strongly agreed with this statement, with an additional 39% agreeing for a total of 94% (65 respondents). This question received the strongest response of the five questions. Only four individuals responded with neither agree nor disagree. No respondents agreed or disagreed.

Figure 10

Question 6 - One role of the rural, elementary principal is to encourage partnership by offering

volunteer opportunities in the classroom.
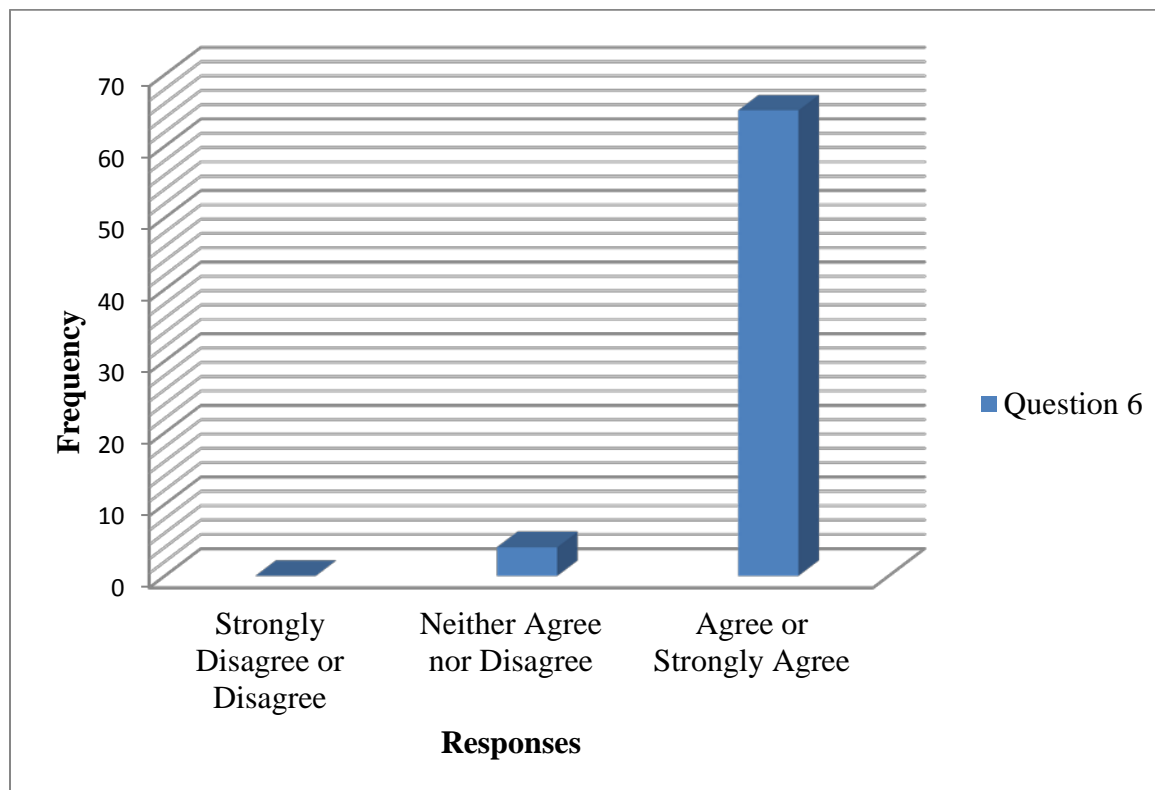
Communication was the focus of question 12, as principals were asked to respond to a statement regarding their role to communicate with local businesses. The principals significantly responded with 40 respondents (58%) in agreement concerning the role to communicate with local businesses with an additional 13% strongly agreeing. Twenty-six percent responded with neither agreeing nor disagreeing, while only 3% disagreed with the statement. Figure 11 displays this data.

Figure 11

Question 12 - One role of the rural, elementary principal is to communicate with local

businesses.
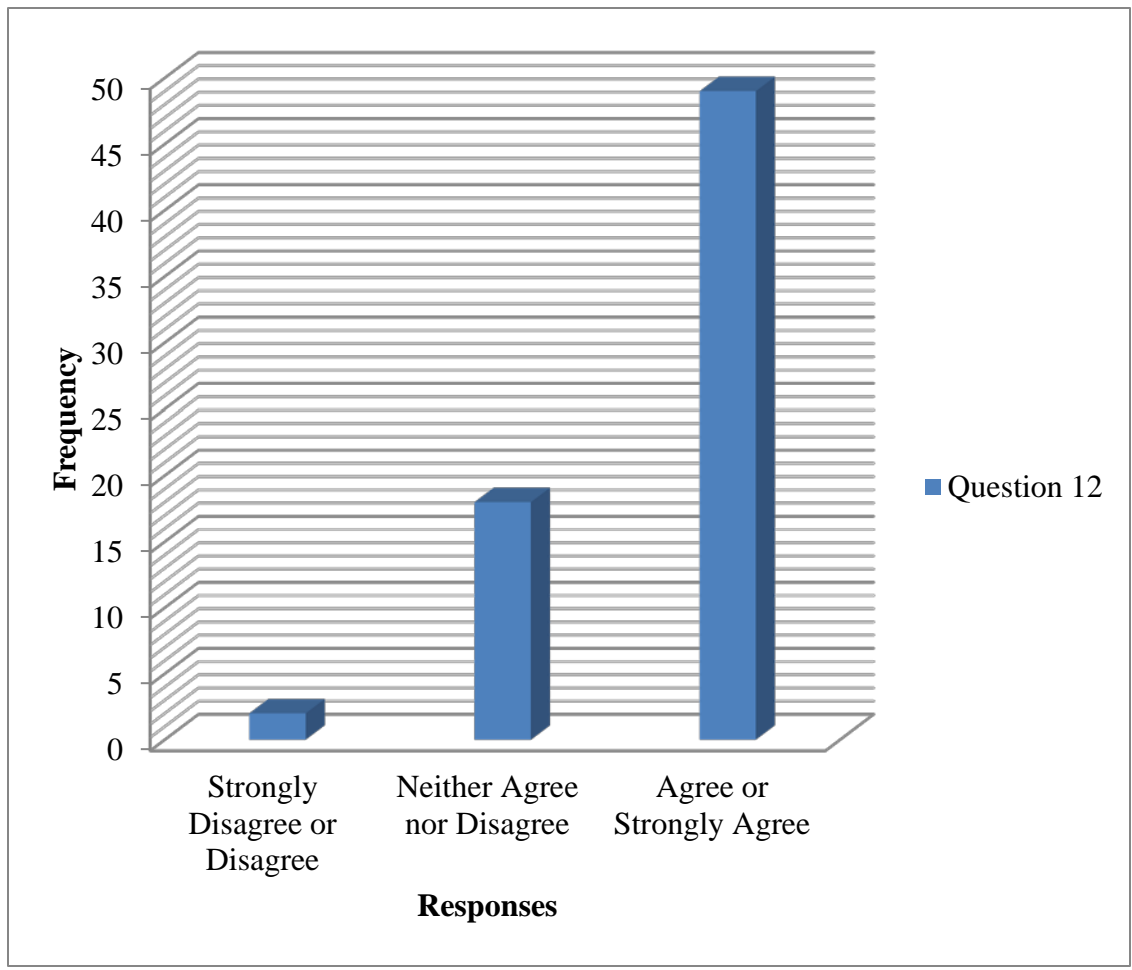
Finally, the fifth question focused on the role of the principal as an advocate for community partnerships. A total of 69 participants responded to this question with 54% agreeing and 25% strongly agreeing with this statement, for a total of 79%, or 54 respondents. Fourteen respondents (20%) remained neutral, while only 1 respondent disagreed. This data is revealed in Figure 12.

Figure 12

Question 15: I am a strong advocate for school-community partnerships.
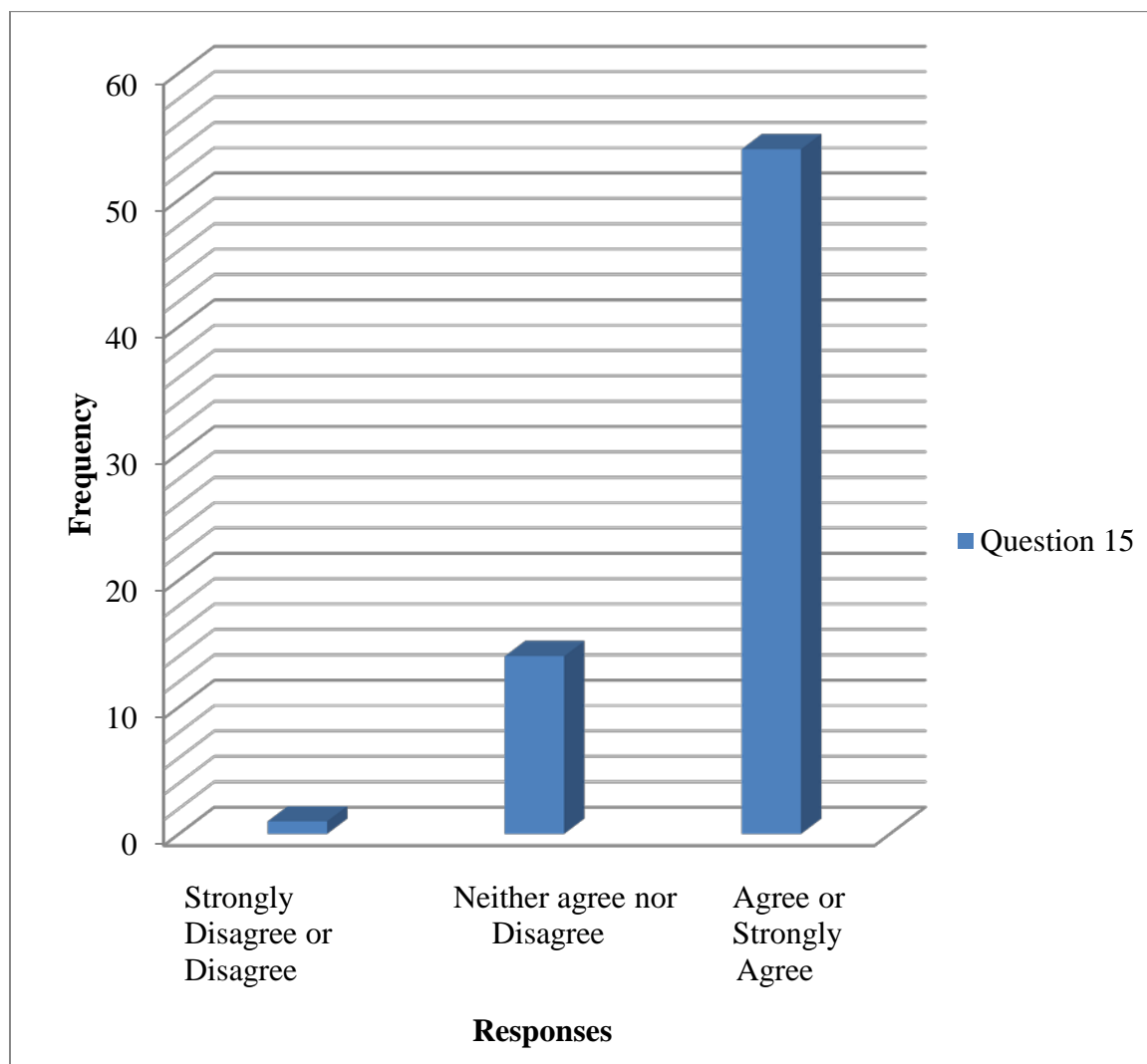
The Survey Asks Principals about the Impact of Partnerships on Reading Achievement

The rural, elementary principals were asked to respond to a question about the impact of school-community partnerships on student achievement in reading. This question directly answered the third research question in this study:

What impact do partnerships have on third graders' reading literacy?

Table 16 displays inferential statistical data, the Mann-Whitney *U* test, to assess if there were differences in the gender responses to this question. No statistical difference was detected.

Table 16

Mann-Whitney U Test Statistics – Question 10

Question Number	Question	Mann-Whitney *U*	*z*	p-value
10	School-community partnerships can raise student achievement in reading	534.0	-.809	.418

Note. If *z* +/- 1.96, the value is statistically significant at p=0.05

Table 17 presents the descriptive data for question 10. Fifty-nine (86%) of the principals

agreed or strongly agreed that school-community partnerships can raise achievement in reading,

nine (13%) were neutral, and one disagreed.

Table 17

Descriptive Statistics of the Mean and Standard Deviation – Question 10

Question	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree or Strongly Agree	*n*	Mean	SD
10	1	9	59	69	4.17	.706

Figure 13 graphically summarizes the responses by the rural, elementary principals to

question 10.

Figure 13

Question 10: School-community partnerships can raise student achievement in reading.
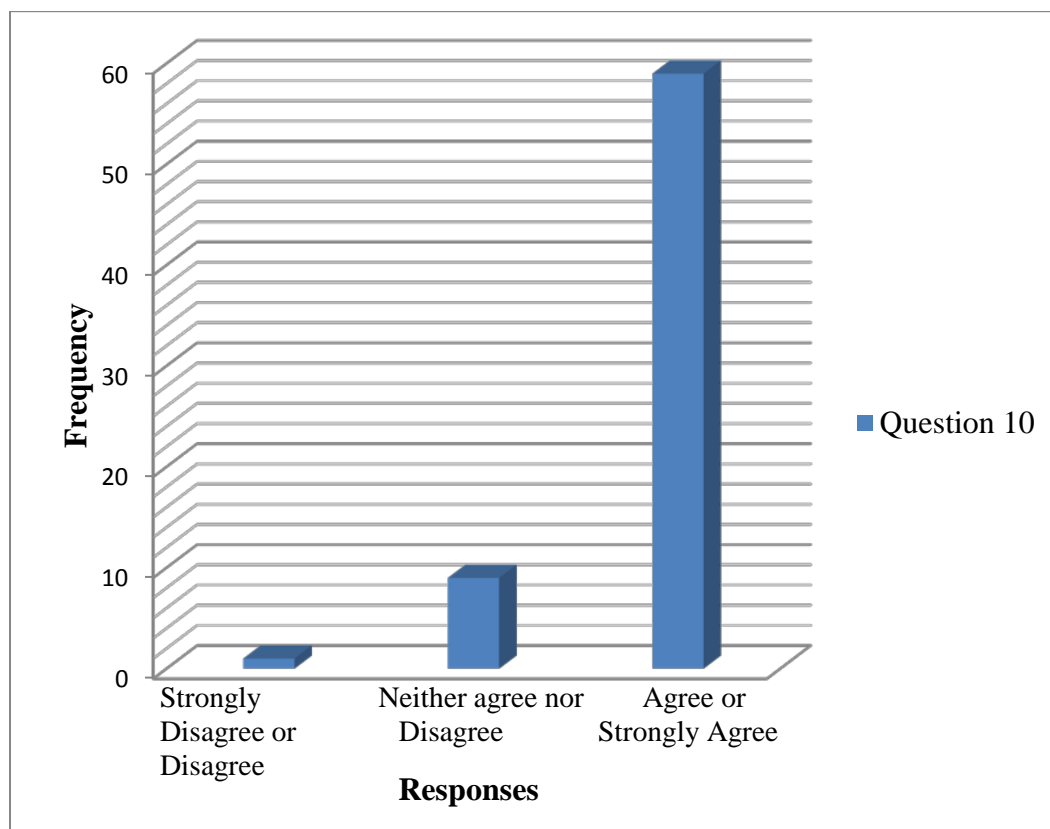
Qualitative component of the survey. A total of 19 rural, elementary principals

provided responses to the following open-ended question:

> Please type in any thoughts or suggestions that you have which may clarify your
>
> responses or help to better understand your responses. If you believe I have left any
>
> important items out, feel free to inform here.

The primary purpose behind this question was to afford principals an opportunity to reflect on

their own personal experiences with school-community partnerships, which the survey may not

have covered. From this input, three themes emerged, along with supporting details. Figure 14

provides a summary of these themes.

Figure 14

Emerging Themes from the Online Survey

Limited Number of Businesses to Partner with	Lack of Funding and Resources	Ideas for Fostering Partnership
• Businesses are often overwhelmed by requests from rural schools • Not enough businesses to meet all the needs of every rural school	• Lack of money to support programs • Lack of product and services to maintain partnership • Lack of time to promote and sustain partnerships • Most rural school do not have a full-time principal available to support partnerships	• A business adopts a school • Donations from businesses support student achievement awards (food coupons and certificates), toy puppies to encourage 1st grade students to read • Provide governmental and service agencies (police & fire), and parents with ways to give input on the education of students

Research Question # 2: Community partner focus groups

Mutch and Collins (2012) also asserted that engagement between schools and communities works well when leaders have shared a vision and commitment to working in partnership with all parents. Connecting with parents and community and engaging all stakeholders in purposeful activities is important to sustainability of partnerships (Blank & Hanson Langford, 2000; Witten, 2010; Woody, 2010). With that in mind, the second research question introduced in the study asked:

> In what ways do community partners believe the rural, elementary principal is
>
> making a difference with partnerships?

As discussed in chapter three, the qualitative methods of data collection for this portion of the case study are: a focus group meeting with community partners, a reflective journal, and

field notes. This section also presents validity and trustworthiness, which is critical to qualitative studies (Guba, 1981). A detailed description of focus group participants is included, but not so descriptive to breach confidentiality. The ten community partners were given pseudonyms representing childhood family friends of the researcher. Finally, emerging themes not only address research question two, but also provide additional perspectives on the role of the rural, elementary principal (research question one) and the impact that community partner believe they have on student learning (research question three).

Validity and Trustworthiness

Guba (1981) believed validity and trustworthiness of qualitative research could be established through addressing the characteristics of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. This focused, qualitative section of the study was guided by selected components of Guba's strategies for validity and trustworthiness, as summarized in Table 18. The researcher took the highest of care to ensure the listed strategies were performed in a professional, ethical, and timely manner.

Table 18

Guba's Criteria for Validity & Trustworthiness

Criteria	Definition	Strategies
Credibility	The researcher takes into account complexities that are present in a study and deal with patterns not easily explained.	Perform the following: Peer debriefing Triangulation Member checks Structured corroboration
Transferability	Researcher's belief that everything is contextual.	Collect and develop detailed descriptive data
Dependability	The stability of the data	Overlap of methods
Confirmability	Based on neutrality and objectivity of data	Triangulation and reflexivity

Note. Adapted from Mills (2007).

Content validity index (CVI). The content validation process followed the same

protocol this researcher followed for the online survey in this study. First, the researcher looked

at the content of the questions being asked and the relevance of the questions to answering the

second research question. Then, based on Polit and Beck's (2006) endorsement of experts

assessing the relevance of the questions, seven education experts who were not study participants

volunteered to assist and to provide feedback on each question. The experts received the

questions via email on November 13, 2013, with an additional, hard copy hand-delivered to three

of the experts. All experts responded within one week and from this feedback, an S-CVI, or

overall CVI, was determined. An acceptable S-CVI for this survey would be 90% or above to

validate the instrument (Lynn, 1986; Polit & Beck, 2006). Any questions rating below 86%

would be either rewritten or eliminated.

Six of the seven experts provided only minor edits to individual words on two of the

questions, but agreed the proposed questions were appropriate for the focus group. One expert

suggested combining some of the questions to bring the total number to less than 10 questions, as more than 10 questions may be overwhelming for the group to adequately discuss within the projected meeting time of 90 minutes. After great consideration of the input by this expert, the questions were combined to bring the total number of questions to nine. The questions were then presented to the seven experts, again, and were overwhelmingly approved by the group. The resulting S-CVI was 100% on the entire instrument. Polit and Beck (2006) proposed a rating scale to measure the strength of each question:

4 = Very Relevant

3 = Quite Relevant

2 = Somewhat Relevant

1 = Not Relevant

Ratings of a "3" or a "4" indicated the expert's endorsement of the item (Polit & Beck, 2006). The focus group questions can be found in Appendix B. The CVI table of results can be found in Appendix P.

The Participants

In order to provide a clearer picture of the focus group participants, a demographic description of the four parent participants is provided in Table 19. The age range of parent participants was from 29 years to 43 years, and the number of years as a volunteer was from 1.5 years to 11 years.

Table 19

Parent Participants in the Focus Group

Parent Participant	Age	Race	Number Years as Parent Volunteer	Type of Volunteer Work at School
Mrs. Statsny	39	Caucasian	10	Parent and school committees, classroom volunteer , intramurals and homework club volunteer, volunteer on grant proposals
Mrs. Reinhart	43	Caucasian	11	Classroom volunteer, Parent-Teacher Organization President, Title I Parent Advisory Board member
Ms. Yardley	36	Caucasian	1.5	Classroom volunteer, school committees, Donation of time and services to a variety of school functions (Book Fair, popcorn sales)
Ms. Miller	29	Caucasian	4	Classroom volunteer, parent meetings and school committees, Cub Scouts, soccer coaching

A summary of the six community partner participants can be found in Table 20. The age of community partner participants ranged from 42 years to 62 years, and the number of years as a partner ranged from 16 years to 37 years. This information for all participants was gathered during the focus group meeting on November 25, 2013.

Table 20

Community Partner Participants in the Focus Group

Community Participant	Age	Race	Number of Years as Partner	Partnering Activity
Mrs. McGhee	62	Caucasian	37	Retired teacher involved in reading education at the school with the help of an assistance dog.
Officer Tompkins	42	Caucasian	20	Local police officer who visits schools and is visible in the community.
Mayor Tate	59	Caucasian	16	City Mayor
Mrs. Dollar	59	Caucasian	22	Teacher, Coordinates community and school donations to supply clothing for students; started a community garden to grow food for the needy.
Mr. Norris	57	Caucasian	21	City Council member
Mrs. Carroll	50	Caucasian	21	Collaboration with school, donation of products for reading program, volunteer

In order to create a deeper understanding of the focus group activity and its participants, excerpts from the transcribed meeting, field notes, and reflective journal are included in this section. Quotes were included in the manuscript, as quotes can provide sound evidence for interpretation of themes (Creswell, 1998). In particular, this information provides perspectives the members have concerning their personal role as a partner, the role of the principal, the importance of community partnerships in schools, and the impact of partnerships on reading literacy. Throughout the focus group meeting process, the researcher was repeatedly reminded of these perspectives, and how they applied to the research questions in this study.

Mrs. Statsny. Mrs. Statsny has been active as a parent volunteer and school committee member for 10 years. She has helped with the school homework club, which is an after-school program that assists student who just need the time to get homework done. Recently, the homework club focus was broadened to include tutoring in content areas. Mrs. Statsny believes this serves more students and broadens partnerships with the high school, which is supplying student tutors. She has also assisted with intramural programs during the school lunch time recess, which focuses on the upper, elementary grades and learning the rules of play. When asked about the amount of involvement she has in the school, Mrs. Statsny remarked, "If there is something they [the school] wants me to do, I come in and help. Otherwise, I am here weekly."

Mrs. Statsny discussed the role of the principal as one who sets the tone for the school. She stated:

> If you ask a substitute or a parent who comes into the school, and I do all the time, and they almost always say this is the best place to be. That is a strong statement because in a rural city setting, we have some of the most challenging students here. …but substitutes would prefer to substitute at Brownlee Elementary.

Mrs. Statsny has a genuine desire to work in the school and to support students, staff, and partnerships. She is open to accepting new assignments, and works wherever needed.

Mrs. Reinhart. Mrs. Reinhart is a parent and president of the parent-teacher organization at the school. She has been involved at Brownlee Elementary for 11 years and plans on moving after this year, since her son enters junior high this fall. Mrs. Reinhart was a former Vista reading volunteer, and also worked as a volunteer coordinator at Brownlee Elementary. In the past, she volunteered on a daily basis, but now participates on an "as needed" basis.

Reinhart shared her own personal reflection on living in poverty:

When I moved here we moved because of financial hardship. I was really nervous about putting my kids into schools. The school [Brownlee Elementary] was so welcoming and I could see the staff, how close they work. It is like a family. I think Mr. Smith is doing a very good job.

Mrs. Reinhart's reflection impressed on the group the importance of feeling welcomed, especially if the family is living in poverty. Her reflection also supported the importance of the principal in encouraging this welcoming school climate

Mrs. Yardley. Mrs. Yardley has served as a parent volunteer for one and one-half years. She assists in the classroom, helps with popcorn sales, and has co-chaired the book fair. She also serves in a paid position, as breakfast and noon duty. She volunteers daily and whenever needed.

After introducing herself, Mrs. Yardley quietly listened to the comments of those around her. I noted she would nod in agreement with statements.

Mrs. Miller. Mrs. Miller has been involved in volunteer activities at the school for the past 4 years. She is a single mother of a son who attends the school. Mrs. Miller is a classroom volunteer, on school and parent committees, a Cub Scout leader, soccer coach, in charge of popcorn sales, and the organizer for noontime intramurals. She also runs the school jump rope club. Mrs. Miller has a "full plate" of volunteer activities, in addition to working at the school in a paid, custodial position.

Mrs. McGhee. Mrs. McGhee taught at Brownlee Elementary for 30 before retiring in 2007. She continues to volunteer in the Title I program at the school on a weekly basis. She also volunteers with her German Shepherd dog, as part of an animal reading therapy program with first grade students. As Mrs. McGhee shared, it was easy to see the pride she has in her dog, and in the extensive training they went through to be registered as pet therapy partners. Mrs. McGhee described how she and her dog engage with the students in this program:

So the kids sit down and read to her [the dog] one-on-one. We give them a book to take

home. When they [the children] bring their book back signed…she [the dog] puts her

'paw-o-graph' in the book with a little note which says, 'put your paws on a good book to

read.' The book is theirs [the child's] to keep forever. It is just a wonderful thing… like

magic.

Although standardized testing in reading does not occur until third grade, the impact of

Mrs. McGhee's reading program with first grade students is observed in their excitement to share

quality time reading with the dog, and in their eagerness to take home a special book to read with

their families. Engaging students and involving their parents in the process has the potential to

impact reading literacy (Dorfman & Fisher, 2002) and begins a path to a lifelong love of reading.

Mrs. McGhee remarked that she is fully supported by Mr. Smith and the staff at Brownlee

Elementary. She is convinced that her program is making a difference for students.

Officer Tompkins. Officer Tompkins attended the meeting, on behalf of the city police

chief. She has been a partner with Brownlee Elementary for 20 years. Officer Tompkins

believes a positive presence in the schools and in the community is important to developing

relationships with students and can be accomplished through activities, such as being in

attendance at the year-end assembly. She remarked, "kids see us not always in the negative."

Officer Tompkins also mentioned being at the school to hand out free Happy Meals for kids

wearing helmets.

Officer Tompkins gave credit to her police chief for encouraging his officers to visit and

attend activities in the school. She remarked,

He encourages us to come down here and do things and visit with the kids. He is a strong

supporter of that. We have officers who will go in and read, if a teacher asks. We tell

them they [the officers] have to be animated.

Officer Tompkins believes a positive presence (and humor) is important to developing a working relationship with students and with the school community. The aspect of officers coming into the school to read with students is yet another example of community partners supporting the literacy of students in high poverty schools.

Mayor Tate. Mayor Tate**,** a robust man in his late 50's, spoke with authority about his 16 years of partnering with the school.

> We [the City] supply the infrastructure to the school. We are responsible for transportation, water, sewer, and we have an ongoing partnership with Brownlee Elementary, as well as the school district. We share responsibilities. We own the ball fields that are behind Brownlee Elementary and we work to keep up the relationship.

Mayor Tate also mentioned a financial partnership relationship with the district office when paving occurred in and around Brownlee Elementary. He described this as a close, working relationship and the superintendent as "a wonderful person to work with."

Mayor Tate spoke extensively about a professional center, which was jointly created by the City and the schools. Although the topic was not directly related to partnering at Brownlee Elementary, it brought to light the importance of educating students to be productive members of society and in their communities, and the importance of school-community partnering to make this happen.

Mrs. Dollar. Mrs. Dollar was the most versed on the topic of working with children living in high poverty. She has been a teacher at Brownlee Elementary for 22 years, and helped to start the Cub Closet (pseudonym), which provides clothing items for children in need, such as winter boots, hats, coats, and snow pants. Mrs. Dollar described the partnership activities which have supported the Cub Closet:

We [Brownlee Elementary] have gotten donations from staff members and city businesses, who are donating through their business. We also use some of the things that would normally go to the Goodwill from our lost and found here at the school. I saw a great need, but now we can actually document it [the need] and see what the need is and what kinds of things the children need.

Mrs. Dollar mentioned a discussion she had with Mr. Smith, the principal, concerning the lost and found items. She asked him if the things [clothing] could be cleaned and put in rubber tubs for kids at the school that needed the clothing. She said he looked at her and said, "Why have we not been doing that?" Mrs. Dollar considered this question as the response she needed to open the door to the Cub Closet. Mr. Smith provided her with a room for the items and support to make it happen. She stated that he [Mr. Smith] has been very helpful. Mrs. Dollar also described her partnership involvement with a city community garden project, and has brought the concept of gardening to Brownlee Elementary. She referred to this program at the school as the Cub Patch (pseudonym).

I see a great need for the children to be outside and working in the garden, and learning how to grow their food…I hope that it [community gardening] benefits a lot of the children and that they take the information home to talk to their parents.

As Mrs. Dollar continued her discussion on gardening and then about environmental issues, such as recycling in the school with students, her passion for helping those less fortunate was clear. She also added, like with the Cub Closet, Mr. Smith has been equally supportive of this project and has been "encouraging us to use it [the garden] to benefit the kids." It is Mrs. Dollar's belief that "we need to take care of the children."

When asked how the principal is making a difference with partnerships, Mrs. Dollar was most descriptive of Mr. Smith. She was on staff when he was first hired at Brownlee

Elementary, and has viewed him as "gun-ho about implementing anything that works for our students." She referred to several personal characteristics when talking about Mr. Smith's involvement with families living in poverty:

> I always saw as his [Mr. Smith's] vision that school, community, and parents were all 'our family.' This is one of his driving visions. Then, to go with that we have an individual who is compassionate, has very good manners, and is respectful and non-judgemental. I think this is something people in poverty are not used to. All those things you see in him kind of filters down to the teachers…just being compassionate and knowing that everybody is doing the best that they can.

In reference to her hope for the future of partnerships at Brownlee Elementary, Mrs. Dollar sees a need for families living in poverty. She would like to see a partnership in which families in poverty have to participate in a program where they would be learning skills to help them move forward out of their situation. "I am thinking the cycle of poverty is continuing. We need to stop the cycle…we have business partners who donate, but I want to see an end to it [poverty] and a light at the end of the tunnel."

Mr. Norris. Mr. Norris has a deep history in the district since 1991, as a teacher and administrator. He has taught at Brownlee Elementary for 17 years, and has been on the city council for around 12 years. He believes it is good to have school employees on the city council, as the schools and the city participate in numerous partnerships. He remarked that he has enjoyed the school-community partnerships and sees a "connection" for his participation in the focus group meeting.

Mrs. Carroll. An insurance agent and a community partner with a unique first-grade reading program, Mrs. Carroll has been an actively partnering at Brownlee Elementary for 21 years. With help from a local Toyota dealership, she delivers a stuffed puppy to every first

grader who participates in a reading program in the county. Mrs. Carroll reported that 1,578

puppies were delivered to first graders this year. Also, in partnership with the Toyota dealership,

every sixth grader with perfect attendance is awarded a bicycle and helmet. Last year, 208

bicycles and helmets were delivered in the county.   Mrs. Carroll sees the purpose of the

partnership going beyond just awarding good attendance:

> As far as our business, we hope that it [the attendance program] teaches the students
>
> goals and when you strive for something at the beginning of the year and you show up for
>
> school every day, in the future you will be a better employee and can be counted on. We
>
> are hoping that this is what it teaches them down the line.

Mrs. Carroll also credits Mr. Smith for being "on-board and supportive from the 'get go'"

of the reading program in the school. She shared her philosophy for starting the reading program

in the first grade:

> I believe with the puppy projects, that if you can get kids to love to read, by the time they
>
> are out of the first grade they will become productive members of society…I think that if
>
> you can learn to read you can read to earn, whether you want to be a teacher, or an
>
> insurance agent, or training therapy dogs. You have to know how to read and I think that
>
> is the key, and that is what drives us.

After listening to Mrs. Dollar describe the needs of students living in poverty, Mrs.

Carroll remarked that if they knew exactly what the schools needed to help the students, they

[the partners] would be willing to help. Her [Mrs. Carroll's] plea to the school for increased

communication concerning needs of children in poverty at the school was affirmation that

community partners do want to impact schools in a very positive and useful way. She added,

"We love to hear from the teacher and principals because it makes us feel like we are your

community, and sometimes I think it gets forgotten."

Emerging Themes

Analyzing qualitative data begins with a look at the "big picture" and identifying emerging themes from the literature review and in the data collection (Mills, 2007). Simply stated, the analysis involves comprehensively reviewing data and determining the themes that emerge. Throughout the process of this qualitative aspect of the study, the data was carefully and meticulously analyzed from the focus group meeting, field notes, and the researcher's reflective journal. After analyses, a member check email was sent to all focus group participants (see Appendix H) to establish credibility of the emerging themes, a process recommended by Guba (1981). The email responses from participants indicated support of the emerging themes.

The focus group meeting had a goal of answering research question two, the ways the principal is making a difference with partnerships. Table 21 represents the six frequency codes with key phrases and the number of partners responding with that phrase.

Table 21

Frequency Codes from the Focus Group Meeting

Ways the principal is making a difference with partnerships	Number of partners responding
Supportive of new ideas and projects – onboard with implementing something that works	6
Supportive of staff and everybody that comes into the school	4
Open to community and outside resources coming into the school - welcoming	4
Has a vision that school, community, and parents are all "our family"	3
Sets the tone for the school and for the partnerships	2
Strong, core leadership has strengthened the partnership	2

There were three major themes which emerged from the frequency codes listed in Table 21. The three themes are: 1) supportive of new ideas and projects, 2) collaborative character, and 3) core leadership characteristics. The themes are displayed in Figure 15.

Figure 15

Three Emerging Themes – How the Principal is Making a Difference

Supportive of New Ideas & Projects	Collaborative Character	Core Leadership Characteristics
Foundational	Building relationship	Vision
Necessary for implementation	Welcoming demeanor	All "our family"
		Sets the tone
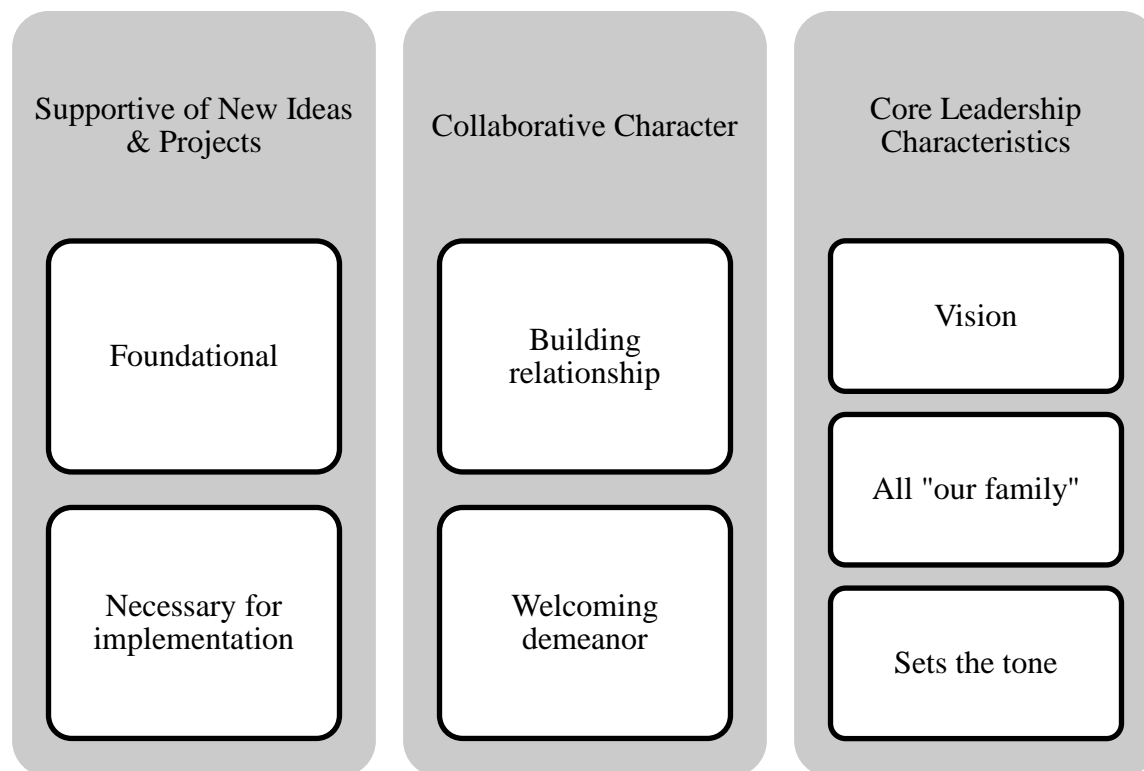
Although the goal was to answer research question two, this researcher discovered that six themes emerged which were descriptive of the role of the rural, elementary principal (research question one). The six themes are: 1) virtues of compassion, good mannerisms, non-judgemental demeanor, and respectfulness; 2) sets the tone for the school; 3) involves business partners; 4) provides a physical space for partnership activities; 5) openness to new ideas; and, 6) possesses a vision for the partnership. These themes are displayed in Figure 16.

Figure 16

Emerging Themes - Role of the Rural, Elementary Principal
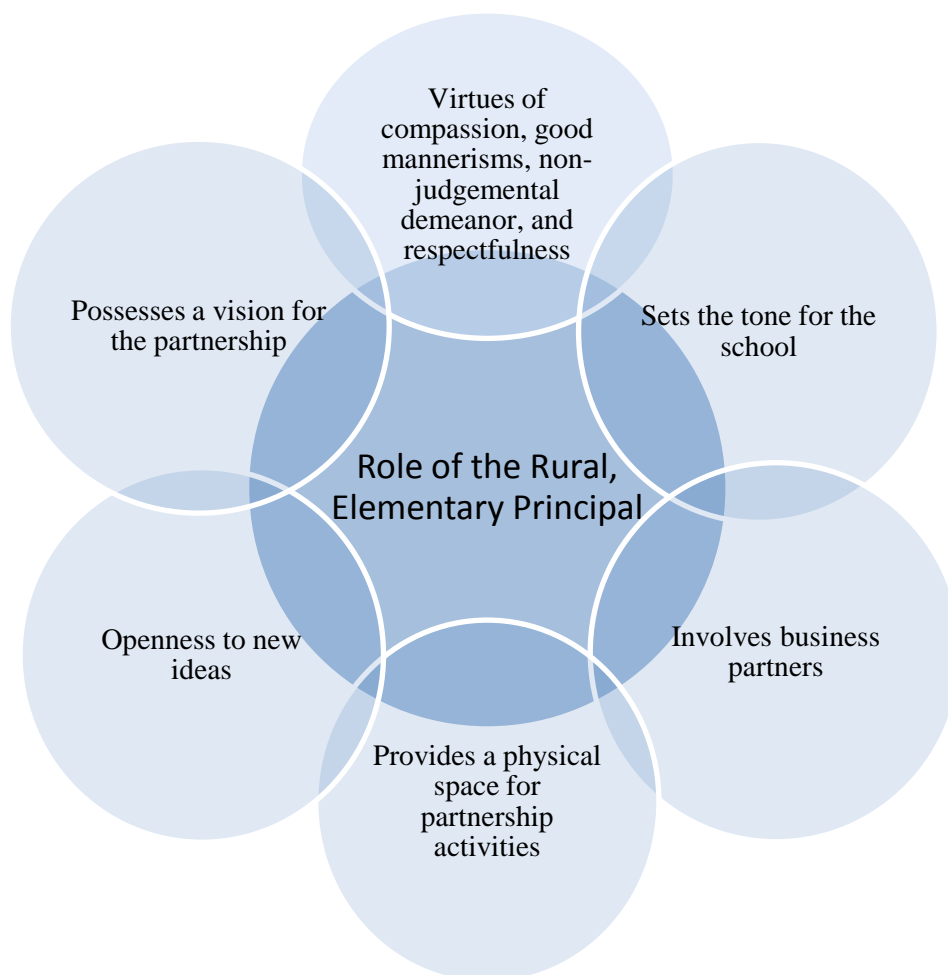
Finally, an unexpected outcome: three themes emerged which described the impact of partnerships on the literacy of young readers (research question three). The three themes are revealed in Table 22. This researcher realized the aspect of measuring the impact of reading need not rely solely on the analysis of quantitative data; but instead, in tandem with the emerging qualitative themes, a potentially clearer picture of the impact of partnerships on third grade reading literacy was soon realized. In other words, with these mixed-methods analyses working in a simultaneous manner, the research outcome can be stronger than either method performed separately (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Malina et al., 2011).

Table 22

Qualitative Emerging Themes - The Impact of Partnerships

Impact Partnerships have on Third Graders' Literacy	Frequency
Partnerships need to promote reading projects that get kids to love reading, starting in pre-3rd grade.	6
Empowering parents through partnerships provides ways parents can help their child to read, or help their child with homework.	4
Increasing communication with partners about the needs of students living in poverty provides supports for learning, which may otherwise go unmet.	4

The role of the school leadership and the characteristics of successful community partnerships discussed in the literature coincided with the results found in this study. Each emerging theme for the role of the rural, elementary principal appears supported the themes important to the ways the principal is making a difference with partnerships. These themes can be considered significant to building and maintaining school-community partnerships, and together, can accomplish the areas of impact found in Table 22. In conclusion, the potential for impacting reading literacy in third graders is possible with successful implementation of the key themes revealed in this qualitative portion of the study.

Research Question #3: Ex-Post Facto Reading Literacy Data

If community partnerships can affect student reading literacy, they can establish activities for students to increase student success. For this aspect of the study, quantitative research methods were determined to be the most effective way to answer the final research question, which is:

What impact do partnerships have on third graders' reading literacy?

Ex-post facto data was requested from a state education agency for the purposes of evaluating third-grade reading literacy data, specifically looking at proficiency data for rural

students from standardized testing taken Spring 2013. For clarification, the reading proficiency

numerical parameters for testing were:

Proficiency = 192 and above

Below Proficiency = Less than 192

The data provided by the state agency was a much larger sample of over 11,550 student

records. It was discovered that the records contained *all* Title I schools in the State, not just rural

schools. The process of removing the excess data was time-consuming and tedious, and could

not have been accomplished without a roster of districts supplied by the state agency. For further

clarification, this form included a definition of "rural" and parameters by which the state uses to

define this term. Basically, a district must meet one of two indicators to qualify as rural: (a)

student enrollment less than 20 per square mile, and (b) county population of less than 25,000.

With these parameters as guides, the non-rural districts were removed from the sample with the

final student record count at 8505. The student records were compiled and provided to the

researcher devoid of any identifying qualities, thus ensuring the anonymity of the sample.

Although the intention of this study was to analyze 350 ex-post facto student records, this

researcher believed a simple, demographic overview of the larger sample had the potential to

provide insightful information relevant to the study of the much smaller, 350 student sample.

Table 23 displays a demographic comparative of the ex-post facto data for all third

graders, which was extracted from the information provided by the state education department

online website. The first column details demographics for all third graders, the second column

focuses on third graders and the third column summarizes the differences between the two

columns. Of interest, the reading proficiency for all third graders was 89% and the proficiency

level for rural third graders was 85%. Also, the overall percent of students identified as

economically disadvantaged is 3% higher among the rural only demographic.

Table 23

Ex- Post Facto Demographic Data – Comparative All Third Graders to Rural Third Graders

Variable	All Third Graders	Rural Third Graders	Difference (All – Rural)
Male	11,268	4,447	6,821
Female	10,650	4,048	6,602
Total Students	21,918	8,505	13,413
Total Proficient in Reading	19,582 (89%)	7,253 (85%)	-12,329 (4%)
Gender Proficiency			
Male	9,837 (50%)	3,684 (51%)	(-1%)
Female	9,745 (50%)	3,569 (49%)	(1%)
Economically Disadvantaged Totals	11,558	4,742	6,816
Number Proficient in Reading	9,824 (53%)	3,909 (54%)	5,915 (-3%)

Note. State Department data

Table 24 provides a comparative view of data for third grade students meeting

proficiency in reading, only. Of importance is the percentage of third graders, identified as

economically disadvantaged, accounting for 54% of the total number of rural, third grade

students achieving proficiency. The overall percentage of rural, third grade students meeting

proficiency was 85%, which was only 4% less than the overall, rural and urban proficiency in

reading (89%). Of greater interest to this study of data was the decreasing proficiency

percentages of rural students identified as economically disadvantaged when compared to all

rural third graders, and then compared to all third graders, urban and rural. The comparative

percentages were 46% and 34%, respectfully.

Table 24

Ex-Post Facto Demographic Data – Comparative Look at Proficiency in Reading

Variable	Number	Percentage
All Students meeting proficiency	19,582	89%
Rural Students Meeting Proficiency	7,253	85%
Rural Economically Disadvantaged Proficiency, as compared to *all* Rural Third Graders (Proficient)	3,909/7,253	54%
Rural Economically Disadvantaged Proficiency, as compared to *all* Rural Third Graders (Proficient/Not Proficient)	3,909/8,505	46%

Note. State Department data

Focusing on 350 ex-post facto student records. The randomization of 350 ex-post

facto student records was accomplished by use of Excel. The records were analyzed using

descriptive statistics and correlations. Table 25 provides a demographic look at the much

smaller data set with an added component of ethnicity. Ethnicity was included in the

demographics, as this was one of the four variables to be correlated.

Table 25

Demographics on Ex-Post Facto Data (n=350)

Variable	Number	Percentage
Male	201	57%
Female	149	43%
White	199	57%
Hispanic or Latino	64	18%
Dedacted (less than 10 students)	87	25%
Economically Disadvantaged	235	67%
Proficient students	183	78%
Not proficient students	52	22%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	115	33%

Note. State Department data

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 26. The four variables are: proficiency, gender, economically disadvantaged, and ethnicity.

Table 26

Descriptive Statistics for Ex-Post Facto Data (n=350)

Variable	Mean	SD
Proficiency	1.18	.38
Gender	1.40	9
Economically Disadvantaged	1.33	.47
Ethnicity	1.68	.85

Proficiency and the third graders at Brownlee Elementary. Spring 2013, ex-post

facto proficiency data for individual schools and grade-levels were reported on the state website

and retrieved by the researcher. The results from the state data revealed that 91% of the third

graders, who were designated as economically disadvantaged at Brownlee Elementary, were

proficient in reading. This is above the state data for all third graders in the state by two

percentage points.

Pearson correlation. An effective way to analyze the relationship between a predictor,

or independent variables, and a criterion (dependent variable) is by using a bivariate correlation,

such as Pearson's correlation (Salkind, 2011). The Pearson's correlation examines the

relationships in populations which are normally distributed and are measured on at least an

interval scale (Tanner, 2012) In this study, the predictor variables of gender, ethnicity, and

students identified as economically disadvantaged were correlated with state reading proficiency

scores, the criterion variable, to determine if any had a significant relationship with proficiency

in reading. The SPSS output provided Pearson's Correlation, with a correlation measured by

using a range from -1 to 1 (Salkind, 2011; Tanner, 2012). The actual distance from 1 or -1 is the

determinant of the strength of the correlation (Curtis, 2013; Salkind, 2011; Tanner, 2012).

Salkind (2011) proposed a quick way of assessing the strength of the relationship between the

variables by using what he referred to as the eyeball method. The values are interpreted as:

    .8 -1.0 Very strong relationship

    .6-.8   Strong relationship

    .4-.6 Moderate relationship

    .2-.4 Weak relationship

    .0-.2 Weak or no relationship (p. 129)

For the purpose of the study, the null hypothesis was tested as $H_o = \rho = 0$. The null

hypothesis indicates no correlation between the criterion variable (reading proficiency scores),

gender, ethnicity, or students identified as economically disadvantaged. Correlations were

calculated by using SPSS software with statistical significance at $p < .05$. The SPSS

automatically calculates *ANOVA* for all predictor variables, and *t*-tests of the individual

predictors (Tanner, 2012). Tanner (2012) describes a statistically-significant *t*-test as one in

which "the individual x is a better-than-chance predictor of the value of the criterion variable, y"

(p. 324).

Table 27 displays a matrix which correlates reading proficiency with gender, ethnicity,

and students identified as economically disadvantaged. The correlations of proficiency, gender,

economically disadvantaged, and ethnicity are statistically significant at $p < .01$. With the focus

on reading proficiency and how this dependent variable correlated with the other three variables,

the table revealed two strong correlations with reading proficiency: ethnicity (.724) and

economically disadvantaged (.663). The weakest correlation relationship occurred between

proficiency and gender (.419), although this value is considered a moderate correlation

relationship (Tanner, 2012). The highest correlation occurred between ethnicity and the economically disadvantaged (.891) and another very strong correlation between ethnicity and gender (.839). The economically disadvantaged student produced a strong correlation relationship with gender (.738). This two-tailed test produced moderate to high correlation relationships with 99% confidence, which supports that a relationships does indeed exist between the variables, and likely to have not occurred by chance (Tanner, 2012).

Table 27

Pearson Correlation Matrix (*n*=350)

Variables	Proficiency	Gender	Economically Disadvantaged	Ethnicity
Proficiency	1	.419**	.663**	.724**
Gender	.419**	1	.738**	.839**
Economically Disadvantaged	.663**	.738**	1	.891**
Ethnicity	.724**	.839**	.891**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The model summary (Table 28) provides the correlation of determination, or r^2 which is calculated to validate that the variables have information in common (Salkind, 2011; Tanner, 2012). In other words, significant relationships have little variance between the variables. The *R* value of .80 indicates the predictor variables had a high correlation with the criterion variable, so this supports the values calculated in Table 27. The value .65 is converted to a percentage of 65%, and through the independent variable, r^2 explains 65% of the variability of the dependent variable (IBM SPPS, 2013). The value for *F* indicates a less than 1 in 1000 chance that the correlations occurred by chance (Tanner, 2012).

Table 28

Model Summary – Dependent Variable: Proficiency

Model	R	r^2	Adjusted r^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					r^2 Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.80[a]	.65	.64	.23	.65	210.73	3	346[a]	.000

Note. a. Predictors: (Constant), Ethnicity, Gender, Economically Disadvantaged

Table 29 displays all significant correlations and p-values, as determined by the SPSS

output. Any p-value <.05 was considered significant.

Table 29

Significant Correlations

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Value	r^2	p- value
Proficiency	Gender	.419	.176	.000
	Economically Disadvantaged	.663	.440	.000
	Ethnicity	.724	.524	.000
Gender	Economically Disadvantaged	.738	.545	.000
	Ethnicity	.839	.704	.000
Economically Disadvantaged	Ethnicity	.891	.794	.000

Correlation is significant at p<.05 (2-tailed)

All of the correlations presented in Table 29 provided the necessary evidence to reject the

null hypothesis as there exists significant correlations between the multiple variables of reading

proficiency, gender, ethnicity, and students identified as economically disadvantaged.

Conclusion

In Chapter IV the triangulation matrix served as a guide for investigating the various types of data sources that were used to answer the three research questions in this study. Furthermore, the strength of this research study was in the triangulation; a process of collecting and analyzing data from numerous sources and not just relying on one source (Mills, 2007). The data sources for research question one were the rural, elementary principal online survey and the focus group meeting. The focus group meeting was the data source for research question two. All three data sources (the rural, elementary principal online survey; the focus group meeting; and, the ex-post facto data) were used to investigate research question three. Table 6 (p. 51) represents the triangulation matrix used in this study.

The focus of Chapter IV was to summarize the findings of both quantitative and qualitative data collection focused in the area of community partnerships. In particular, the role of the rural, elementary principal was highlighted as an individual of importance to the nurturing and encouraging of these partnerships. The additional benefit to this collaborative relationship focused on the community partnership as a strategy to positively impact the reading literacy of third graders living in poverty.

In the following chapter, the researcher provides a detailed look at the role of the rural, elementary principal and expands upon the numerous themes which emerged in the focus group meeting and in the rural, elementary principal online survey. Connecting the impact of partnerships on third grade reading literacy challenged this researcher and the results provided a most refreshing perspective to the importance of the community surrounding a child and making a difference (Epstein, 1995).

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to discuss the results of this study. A summary of the study includes a synopsis of the problem, purpose of the study and research questions, methodology review, and major findings. Any inconsistencies in the results are identified, and the impact of any limitations is provided. The chapter ends with a summary conclusion and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

Scholarly research has focused on poverty in America and internationally as well as on the effects of community partnerships on student achievement for students living in poverty (Addy & Wight, 2012; ASPE, 2012; CDF, 2014; Epstein, 1995, 2005; Goos et al., 2007; O'Hare, 2009; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; WestEd, 2007). Touchton and Acker-Hocevar (2001) suggest stakeholders must embrace the role of the leader in schools of poverty in order to transform the opportunities for children of poverty and not maintain the status quo. Lindahl (2010) declared that outstanding principals make the difference in schools. It is reasonable to believe that the role of the elementary principal has the potential for building capacity with community partners, while also improving student achievement for young readers through advocating these partnerships.

Synopsis of the problem. Many researchers affirm the necessity of strong school leadership to building school and community partnerships (Hogue, 2012; Jacobson et al., 2012). The principal must implement the use of partnerships to create meaningful connections with all school constituents (Woody, 2010). While research adequately includes studies focused on

urban schools in poverty, there is a lack of studies that examine the role of the rural, elementary principal leading in high-poverty schools, and, specifically, the principal's role in advocating community partnerships (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Gordon & Seashore Louis, 2009; Lindahl, 2010; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2001). Research also lacks data regarding correlations between community partnerships, the role of the rural, elementary principal, and the increased reading literacy levels among primary-aged children living in rural poverty (Cairney & Ruge, 1999; Lindahl, 2010; Sheldon et al., 2010).

Purpose of the study and research questions. For the purpose of this case study, mixed-methods afforded an in-depth investigation of the role of the rural elementary principal and examined the relationship between Brownlee Elementary and the community partnerships that support it. Using quantitative data to further explore relationships discovered during focus group discussions, allowed the researcher to quantify the connections established during the qualitative phase (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).
Specifically, the questions investigated in this study were:

1. What is the role of the rural, elementary principal concerning the involvement of local businesses, civic groups, and parents in community partnerships?

2. In what ways do community partners believe the rural, elementary principal is making a difference with partnerships?

3. What impact do partnerships have on third graders' reading literacy?

The completion of this study led the researcher to a deeper understanding and discovery of answers to these questions.

Methodology review. Mixed-methods research was selected as the methodology for this case study to provide the researcher a means of collecting, analyzing, and using both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Garrett, 2008; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). When created

simultaneously, the research outcome is stronger than either method performed separately (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Malina et al., 2011). Furthermore, using this methodology revealed how the role of the rural, elementary principal and partnerships function in relation to building and maintaining partnerships, in addition to their impact on student learning.

In this study, three primary forms of data collection were conducted in an order, which complemented the order of the three research questions: 1) rural, elementary principal online Likert scale survey; 2) community partner focus group; and 3) ex-post facto, third grade reading literacy data. The Likert scale survey was distributed (online) to rural, elementary principals and focused on their role and involvement with community partnerships. Next, a focus group meeting with parents and community partners was designed to determine perceptions regarding the role of the rural, elementary principal and partnerships, and the impact of community partnerships on reading literacy. Lastly, ex-post facto data from third-grade student records provided insights into rural, reading proficiency and correlations with demographic data related to gender, economically disadvantaged, and ethnicity. Proficiency scores also provided perspectives on the impact of partnerships on reading literacy. In addition, a researcher reflective journal and field notes were kept as a way to apply reflexivity or a path to a deeper understanding of the research process and the role of the researcher.

Major Findings

The theoretical framework of Joyce Epstein (1995, 2010) was used in this study to better understand school and community partnerships and their influence on student learning. In particular, her Overlapping Spheres of Influence model provided an in-depth understanding of the importance of parents, teachers, students, patrons, businesses, and programs all working together to build a caring community that surrounds a child and makes a positive difference.(Epstein, 1995). Although this figure was shared in Chapter II of this study, the

researcher believes its importance is worth including when reflecting upon the major finding in this study. Figure 17 illustrations this model.

Figure 17

The Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model
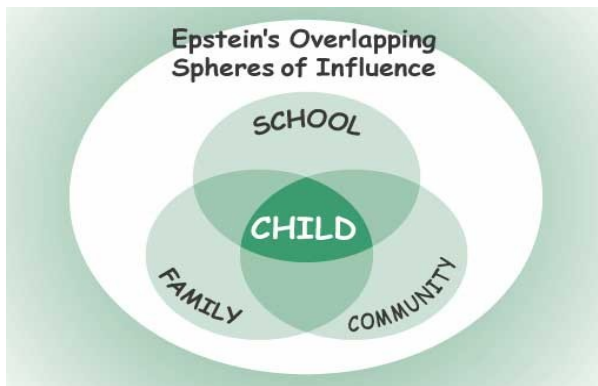
Note. The visual depicts the Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 1995).

Epstein (2010) later identified six types of involvement for successful partnerships:

1. Parenting

2. Communicating

3. Volunteering

4. Learning at home

5. Decision-making

6. Collaborating with the community (p. 43-44).

In particular, the sixth type of involvement, "collaborating with community," connects most directly with this study. This type of involvement sends a message to students that the community is interested in their success (Elish-Piper & Lelko, 2012/2013).

The major findings from the three, primary forms of data collection is discussed individually and in the order the research took place in this study: 1) rural, elementary principal

online Likert scale survey; 2) community partner focus group; and 3) ex-post facto, third- grade reading literacy data.

Rural, Elementary Principal Online Likert Scale Survey

The rural, elementary principal online Likert scale survey was generated using the software program, Qualtrics, and was dispersed to state-identified, rural elementary principals (see Appendix C). Data was also collected using Qualtrics. Participants were presented with questions which focused on the role of the rural, elementary principal, as this role relates to school-community partnerships. Survey questions were rated using a Likert scale survey with five possible ratings. Participants were asked to respond with their level of agreement to each question using the following five-point scale:

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree or disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly agree

The number of rural, elementary principals receiving the online survey via email totaled 169 individuals. The survey was sent after a lengthy process of filtering out all of the rural, elementary principals from an extensive list of all principals in the state in which the study occurred. The survey was then sent to the participants' school email addresses using the Qualtrics software. Of the 169 surveys, a total of 76 responses were received and 69 surveys were completed. This represents an overall response rate of 45% and a participation rate of 41%, respectfully. Table 7 (p. 55) summarizes the overall response and participation rate.

The online survey of rural, elementary principals necessitated an in-depth look at demographic data and descriptive statistics at Title I schools across the state. For this study, the US Department of Education (2011) defines Title I schools as schools which provide effective, timely assistance to all students who can benefit from additional supports, beyond the regular classroom. Furthermore, to qualify for Title I school-wide services, a minimum of 40% of a school's enrolled students must be receiving free and reduced lunches (US Department of Education, 2011).

Regarding demographic data, the gender distribution was nearly equal with 36 males (51%) and 34 females (49%) completing the survey. A majority of the elementary principals' ages fell at 46 year and older (68%). Most principals had a Master's degree (80%) with 47% of principals having less than five years of experiences. The final demographic area asked the principals for an indicator of the poverty level, their Free-Reduced Lunch Program (FRLP) percentages. Sixty-two principals reported a FRLP of 40%, which equates to 88% of the principals. Four principals were unsure of their FRLP rate, which could have increased the FRLP state rate even higher had they reported a rate. Figure 6 (p. 60) provides a graphic view of the reported FRLP rate.

The inferential statistical aspect of the survey involved the use of the Mann-Whitney *U* test. This test was performed to establish if the female principals responded differently than the male principals to the five questions on the survey. No significance was discovered. Table 13 (p. 63) and Table 16 (p. 72) displays the Mann-Whitney *U* results. An effect size estimator for non-parametric tests was calculated to determine any overlap of the distributions, as indicated by a probability >.50 (Grissom & Kim, 2012). This value was <.50, thus indicating no overlap in the distributions. Table 14 (p. 64) displays this value.

The descriptive statistical portion of the survey evaluated the role of the rural, elementary principal. Identified by the researcher were five questions which were specific to the role of the principal (p. 61), and one question (question 10) focused on the principal's response to the impact of partnerships on the reading literacy of third graders. The overall, mean range for the five questions was 3.26 to 4.49, indicating the principals agreed or strongly agreed with each question focused on the principal's role as one which encourages and nurtures community partnerships. A mean of 3.0 would indicate a neutral stance. Table 15 (p. 65) displays the overall results of this data. The mean response for question 10 was 4.17, indicating the principals agreed or strongly agreed that school-community partnerships can raise student achievement in reading.

Investigating each of the questions is warranted, particularly in light of the multiple studies in research. Waters et al. (2003) provided a thorough overview of the importance of the role of the school leader, as it relates directly to community partnerships, by stating: "Successful school leaders protect their school environment, and they encourage active participation by and partnerships with all members of the school community" (para. 5).

Among the five questions highlighted in the survey, the strongest response was elicited when principals were asked to rate their role as one who encourages partnerships by offering volunteer opportunities in the classroom. Overwhelmingly, 94% agreed or strongly agreed. The importance of the principal engaging parents and community partners in student-related activities builds capacity between a school and its community (Hogue, 2012). Parker and Flessa (2009) also believe that engagement of parents and community members in student-related activities appears at the core of successful schools. Epstein (2010) included volunteering as an involvement item critical to successful partnerships.

Epstein (2010) also listed communication as one of the six types of involvement necessary for successful partnerships. The work of Warren et al. (2009) stressed the importance

of open communication among community members, parents, and the superintendent. In the survey, 71% of principals agreed or strongly agreed that one role is to communicate with local businesses. Question 15 of the survey focused on the principal as an advocate for community partnerships. Seventy-eight percent of the principals agreed or strongly agreed this role was important to partnerships. The role of advocacy identifies the principal as a person who could strengthen a program by simply valuing partnerships with community members (Mutch & Collins, 2012).

Question five, which focused on the role of the principal to establish and maintain community partnerships with local businesses as a top priority, received the highest negative response to the role of the principal. Fourteen (21%) strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement, while 22 (32%) retained a neutral response. Question four asked principals to respond to meeting with community partners on a regular basis as important. The response to this question received the highest neutral stance with 53%, with an additional 7% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with this statement.

The one, multiple choice question (Figure 8, p. 67) in the survey asked principals how frequently they met with school-community partners. Of interest, 58% of the principals stated they met on a monthly basis, while an additional 17% met on a weekly basis. This number equates to a total of 75% of the principals meeting on a weekly or monthly basis. This high percentage appears in conflict with question four, in which 53% of the principals took a neutral stance to the importance of meeting with business partners on a regular basis as important. This also seems to conflict with research and the importance of sustaining partnerships through consistently connecting with parents and community and engaging all stakeholders in purposeful activities (Blank & Hanson Langford, 2000; Epstein, 2010; Mutch & Collins, 2012; Witten, 2010; Woody, 2010). These results pointed to an interesting interpretation. Concerning the

frequency of meeting, several scenarios may exist, including the principal who meets with business partners out of obligation or because of an established relationship. Nevertheless, the finding from the multiple choice question indicated meetings are occurring. On the other hand, the overwhelming neutral stance to the importance of meeting on a regular basis (question four), brings to light the degree to which the principal "values" or does not value the partnership relationship. The researcher endorses what the current body of literature purports: successful partnerships are sustainable when principals meet on a regular basis and place importance on the relationship. In other words, frequency and importance must go hand-in-hand if school-community partnerships are to be successful over time.

Question 10 of the survey asked principals to respond to whether or not school-community partnerships can raise student achievement in reading. The results from this question would provide critical data related to the third research question in this study:

What impact do partnerships have on third grade reading literacy?

A total of 86% of the principals agreed or strongly agreed that school-community partnerships can raise achievement in reading. Nine respondents were neutral, and one disagreed with this statement. This high percentage of agreement by principals supports research about the positive impact of parental involvement and community partnerships on student achievement (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Jeynes, 2005; Marzano, 2003; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Sanders, 2008; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; WestEd, 2007). WestEd (2007) produced a research-based publication guide that highlights the power of strong parent-school partnerships as an effective strategy for raising student achievement scores. Specifically, Taylor and Pearson (2004) addressed the positive impact of community partnerships on the reading success of children in grades K-3. The high, positive response to this question is encouraging, in light of its significance to research question three. With this research in mind, if principals strongly believe

school-community partnerships can make a difference, then the presence of partnerships in the school will increase student achievement, and specifically in the area of reading.

The qualitative component of the survey asked the principals to share or comment on any area not covered in the survey regarding partnerships. Three major themes emerged as a result of the data collection and analysis: 1) limited number of businesses to partner with, 2) lack of funding and resources, and 3) ideas for fostering partnerships. Each emerging theme from this qualitative component of the survey has elements which are prevalent in O'Hare's (2009) research on rural schools. His research pointed out the rural challenges of limited resources, inadequate availability of qualified personnel, and communities unable to support and participate in engaging, student activities (O'Hare, 2009).

The first theme, limited number of businesses with which to partner, focused on the overwhelming requests from rural schools and not enough businesses to meet the needs of every rural school. The second theme, lack of funding and resources focused on lack of money, products, services, and time to promote and sustain partnerships. Also, most rural schools do not have a full-time principal to support the partnership. The responses indicated that a lack of resources greatly concerned the principals, especially if there was no full-time principal to sustain the relationship. In summary of these findings, sustainability of partnerships in rural schools is dependent upon adequate resources to support the partnerships. This adds to the present body of literature on rural schools. The final theme, ideas for fostering partnerships, provided numerous topics for consideration: adopting a school, donations to support student achievement (i.e. awards, food coupons, certificates, toy animals), and provides ways for governmental and service agencies (i.e. fire and police agencies) to give input on the education of students. This emerging theme is based on connecting and collaborating with community partners, and included partner donations of recognition awards to encourage student learning.

This is further evidence supporting the principals' belief that partnerships can make a difference in student achievement. Figure 14 (p. 74) provides a graphic summary of these themes.

The Community Partner Focus Group

The community partner focus group consisted of a volunteer group of parents and community partners representing the Brownlee Elementary (pseudonym) school community. This meeting gleaned perceptions the partners had about the role of the rural, elementary principal, partnering activities, and the impact of community partnerships on reading literacy. The Brownlee Elementary principal identified business or civic partners as individuals with past involvement history with the school. The parent participants in this portion of study originated from two target populations: parents who have volunteered at the school and/or individuals who have been active in the parent-teacher organization. Community partners and parents were recruited through an online survey explaining the study to solicit their participation (see Appendix E). The researcher also attended a parent-teacher meeting to solicit potential participants for the study. Ten participants were recruited from this process.

The community partner focus group meeting lasted for 90 minutes and took place in the Brownlee Elementary school library. Principal Smith remained in the room to welcome the group to the school and during the introduction phase of participants. He [Principal Smith] departed as the audio recorder was cued to begin the study questions for the focus group. His participation in the meeting was discussed with the researcher prior to the meeting date. Principal Smith believed connecting with partners at the meeting provided an opportunity to not only make a statement of support for the researcher's study, but also to visibly show he values every community partner walking through the doors of the school. This outward, welcoming demeanor was identified as a collaborative character theme in this study, and supports the way the principal is making a difference with partnerships (research question two).

Numerous themes emerged in this qualitative aspect of the study. The triangulation matrix used in this study identified the community focus group as a data source for the three research questions in this study (Table 6, p. 51). Separate discussions of the themes, related to each research question, provided an opportunity for the researcher to thoroughly study and reflect on the emerging themes and their relevancy to the research in literature.

Three major themes relevant to research question two. The six frequency codes displayed on Table 21 (p. 88) merged into three major themes regarding the ways community partners believe the rural, elementary principal is making a difference with partnerships. The emerging themes are grounded in Epstein's theoretical framework and the six types of involvement, specifically in the areas of communicating, decision-making, and collaboration (Epstein, 1995, 2010)

The first theme, supportive of new ideas and projects, emerged as foundational to implementing partnership strategies that work. The second theme describes a collaborative character where the principal is supportive of staff, community, and outside resources. This collaborative character adds sustainability to partnerships as a possible outcome when partners connect, coordinate, and leverage resources from a variety of funding sources (Blank & Hanson Langford, 2000). In addition, the principal places priority on building relationships with those coming into the school. This was viewed as a "welcoming" demeanor by focus group partners. In practice, this requires creating what Epstein (2012) identifies as schools that welcome all individuals who enter through their doors. The third theme focused on the principal having core leadership characteristics and a vision that the school community members are all "our family," thus setting the tone for the school and partnerships. When leaders offer a vision and commitment to working in partnership with all members, the result is a working partnership model of engagement between schools and community (Mutch & Collins, 2012).

The six major themes relevant to the first research question. The community partner focus group also included a discussion about the role of the rural, elementary principal concerning community partnerships. This discussion would support research question one. The emerging themes had common threads with the themes about the ways the principal is making a difference with partnerships. Six major themes emerged which were descriptive of the role of the rural, elementary principal:

- Virtues-compassion, good mannerisms, non-judgemental demeanor, respectfulness

- Involves business partners

- Provides a physical space for partnership activities

- Openness to new ideas

- Possesses a vision for the partnership

- Sets a tone for the school

The role of the principal has long been thought of as only authoritative. When it comes to partnerships, however, this role broadens and deepens to that of an ambassador and advocate in the community.. Meaningful connections with the community, including a demonstration of the virtues of compassion and respectfulness, set the tone for the principal to inspire and nurture partnerships (Woody, 2010).

The community focus group described the personal characteristics of the principal at Brownlee Elementary, Mr. Smith. They [the community focus group] directly related these characteristics to his role of the principal in community partnerships. Focus group member, Mrs. Dollar, provided a description of Mr. Smith which is representative of the personal characteristics mentioned by numerous focus group members:

I always saw as his [Mr. Smith's] vision that school, community, and parents were all 'our family.' This is one of his driving visions. Then go with that we have an individual who is compassionate, has very good manners, and is respectful and non-judgemental. I think this is something people in poverty are not used to. All those things you see in him kind of filters down to the teachers…just being compassionate and knowing that everybody is doing the best that they can.

A unique aspect of partnerships is the role of the principal in the partnership. In summary of the themes, forming a partnership between the school and the community requires a leader to step forward to nurture relationships and inspire sustainability (Sanders, 2012). In this role, the principal believes in the benefits of partnering, has a vision in mind, welcomes the community in the school, is non-judgemental of others, and advocates and collaborates with partners. The principal's role is much more than the authoritative figure of the past.

Three more themes relevant to the third research question. An added bonus from the meeting with the community focus group was the emergence of three themes. These themes focused on the ways community partnerships can impact the reading literacy of third graders:

- Promote reading projects that get kids to love reading, starting pre-3rd grade

- Empower parents with skills to help their child read and complete homework

- Communicate with partners about the specific needs for students living in poverty

The themes are focused on keeping the partnership student-centered and supported by family and community. When schools provide tools for families to support their children, mutually-respectful relationships and higher student achievement abound (Dorfman & Fisher, 2002). Simply-stated, the community and school need to stay focused on supporting the child and his or her family, and by doing so, develop goals to improve student achievement (Hogue, 2012).

During the focus group meeting, Mrs. Carroll was the most vocal of the business partners in attendance. She is a proponent for early reading and echoes the importance of good communication between school and community. Mrs. Carroll remarked that if they knew exactly what the schools needed to help the students, they [the partners] would be willing to help. Her [Mrs. Carroll's] plea to the school for increased communication concerning needs of children in poverty at the school was affirmation that community partners do want to impact schools in a very positive and useful way. She added, "We love to hear from the teacher and principals because it makes us feel like we are your community, and sometimes I think it gets forgotten."

This was the intention of Epstein's work with the Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 1995). She determined if a child felt cared for and was encouraged to work hard in his or her role as student, then the child would be more self-motivated to read, write, learn new skills, and to remain in school (Epstein, 1995). Epstein (2010) also stressed the importance of developing parenting skills so that parents feel empowered to help their child, communicating with parents about student progress, and collaborating with community about student program needs.

Adding to Epstein's theoretical framework were statements intended to strengthen the design of partnerships (Epstein, 2001). These statements serve as guides to the partnerships process and support the themes of importance to the community focus group:

1. Families care about their child's success, but need better information.

2. Students learn more than academic skills.

3. Community-based programs support student success.

4. Community-based programs that are connected to schools are likely to assist families

and increase student success. (Epstein, 2001, p. 161).

Providing strategies to support students, both inside and outside of the classroom, are important to student success. Activities with students must align with the vision of the partnership program. The feedback provided by the community focus group not only aligned with Epstein's theoretical framework, but also pointed out the importance of promoting student-centered partnerships which focus on supporting families in the process. Also of importance were open lines of communication, which must include the expression of expectations, needs, and appreciation. Feedback from all involved partners should be encouraged and respected. Partners are willing and open to support the learning and welfare of students. They [the partners] just need to be informed.

The benefits of partnerships are numerous. Business and civic partners benefit schools through partnering, volunteering, and providing financial supports. In turn, schools benefit the community by producing students who are successful and productive citizens. Several focus group members provided examples of their involvement with students. One member, local police officer, Officer Tompkins, believes a positive presence (and humor) is important to developing a working relationship with students and with the school community. An officer coming into the school to read with students is yet another example of community-based programs supporting student success in high poverty schools. Any partnering activity, which encourages community engagement and produces successful results for students, needs to be valued and nurtured for sustainability. The police officer reading program is one such activity.

Ex-Post Facto, Third-Grade Reading Literacy Data

The final aspect of the data collection involved the analyses of ex-post facto reading literacy proficiency data from the state education agency. For clarification regarding proficiency, the parameters are:

- Proficiency = 192 and above

- Below Proficiency = Less than 192

A random sampling of third-grade student records (*n*=350) was extracted from over 11,550 total records. This random sampling was nearly equal in gender with 201 students being male (57%) and 149 were female (43%). Of the sample, 235 were categorized as economically disadvantaged (67%) and 155 were not economically disadvantaged (33%). The ethnicity from the random sampling revealed 199 were white (57%), 64 were Hispanic or Latino (18%) and 87 (25%) records were dedacted (not included), as there were less than 10 students in the category.

Multiple research studies have determined that poverty negatively impacts student achievement and can negatively influence children's literacy (Cairney & Ruge, 1999; Pianta et al., 2002; Tavernise, 2012). With this in mind, ex-post facto student records were examined to determine the strength of relationship between reading proficiency and the following three variables:

- Gender

- Economically disadvantaged

- Ethnicity

Pearson's correlation found statistically significant relationships between the variables of reading proficiency, gender, ethnicity, and students identified as economically disadvantaged. Table 27 (p. 98) illustrates the Pearson Correlation Matrix and Table 29 (p. 99) displays the significant correlations. For the purpose of the study, the null hypothesis was tested as $H_o = \rho=0$.

The null hypothesis indicates there is no correlation between the criterion variable (reading proficiency scores), gender, ethnicity, or students identified as economically disadvantaged.

The correlations of proficiency, gender, economically-disadvantaged, and ethnicity were statistically significant at p<.01. These relationships exist with 99% confidence level, which support that a relationships does indeed exist between the variables, and likely to have not occurred by chance (Salkind, 2011; Tanner, 2012). With the focus on reading proficiency and how this dependent variable correlated with the other three variables, two strong correlations with reading proficiency occurred: ethnicity (.724) and economically disadvantaged (.663).

The highest correlation occurred between ethnicity and the economically-disadvantaged (.891) and another very strong correlation between ethnicity and gender (.839). The economically-disadvantaged student produced a strong correlation relationship with gender (.738). With this strong correlation in mind, several research studies support the premise that poverty negatively impacts student achievement (Austin et al., 2005; Cairney & Ruge, 1999; Children's Defense Fund, 2014; Nadel & Sagawa, 2002; Pianta et al., 2002; Provasnik et al., 2007, Tavernise, 2012). Perhaps the most extensive correlation research was performed by Cairney and Ruge (1999). This qualitative study of 261 literacy programs revealed a correlation between children with low levels of literacy and those with socio-economical disadvantages (Cairney & Ruge, 1999). The weakest correlation relationship occurred between proficiency and gender (.419), although this value is considered a moderate correlation relationship (Salkind, 2011; Tanner, 2012).

A model summary was calculated (Table 28, p. 99) and the correlation of determination, or r^2, which is calculated to validate that the variables have information in common (Salkind, 2011; Tanner, 2012). In other words, significant relationships have little variance between the variables. The R value of .80 indicates the predictor variables had a high correlation with the

criterion variable, so this supports the values calculated in Table 29 (p. 99). Thus, the moderate

to strong correlations provided the necessary proof to reject the null hypothesis.

Researchers strongly conclude that socio-economically disadvantaged children more

likely experience difficulty in learning than children not living in poverty (Cairney & Ruge,

1999). For this reason, demographic data provided a comparative look at the reading proficiency

levels of rural, economically disadvantaged students to those not categorized in that area.

Table 23 (p. 93) displayed ex-post facto data for all third graders (n=11.268), rural third graders

(n=4,447), and the difference between the two categories. Table 24 (p. 94) breaks down the

reading proficiency data into four variable groups and shares the proficiency percentages for

each group. All third grade students, regardless of where they live and socio-economic status

were 89% proficient. Only 4% lower were rural students (85%).

The most concerning finding was revealed when comparing rural, economically

disadvantaged student proficiency to all rural third graders (proficient/not proficiency). The

proficiency for rural, economically disadvantaged proficiency drops to 54%. Multiple studies

address that poverty negatively impacts student achievement (Austin et al., 2005; Cairney & Ruge, 1999;

Children's Defense Fund, 2014; Nadel & Sagawa, 2002; Pianta et al., 2002; Provasnik et al., 2007,

Tavernise, 2012).   The findings investigated by the analyses of the state data of all rural,

economically disadvantaged students further supports the current body of literature and brings to

light the importance of addressing poverty in schools, or this demographic category of students

will continue to perform below their peers.

Proficiency and the random sampling of 350 ex-post facto student records. The

demographic data for the random sample of 350 student records is illustrated in Table 25 (p. 95).

Gender, ethnicity, and economically disadvantaged data were shared earlier in this section. Of

greater interest on Table 25 are the proficiency numbers and percentages for the random

sampling of 350 students. In comparison to the proficiency for all rural, economically-disadvantaged students in the state (54%), the proficiency for the random sample of economically disadvantaged students *(n=235)* was 78%. This percentage equates to a proficiency level of 24% higher than the proficiency level for all rural, economically-disadvantaged students in the state (Table 23, p. 93).

Although lower than the proficiency of 89% for all third-grade students, and 85% for all rural, third graders, the proficiency level of 78% for the random sampling of rural, economically-disadvantaged students provides a glimmer of hope that for the random sampling of students, parent involvement and partnership activities are impacting reading literacy for these students. What must be clearer in this research are the potential reasons for the greater success of the random sampling group. If purely based on the current body of literature, the proficiency of the random sampling group points to a connection between school, family, and community, as the product of successful partnerships are increased test scores.

Impact of Limitations

After concluding the data collection and analysis, the impact of limitations was evident. The first limitation involved the number of study participants. Ten community members volunteered on the focus group from the local school district serving the one school in high poverty. Great attempts were made to ensure that all members would be in attendance at the focus group meeting. The recruitment process was time-consuming for the researcher, and on the day of the meeting, the level of anxiety was heightened by the thought that not all members would be in attendance. The researcher sent out email reminders and invitations and verified that the participants knew refreshments would be provided. In a small community, available participants are a valuable commodity, so ensuring that the one meeting took place was critical.

Re-scheduling the meeting would have delayed or potentially discontinued this aspect of the study.

The second limitation involved the online survey, which was dispersed to only rural elementary schools identified by the state as rural. There were limits of time constraints involved in organizing and administering the activities through the Qualtrics software system. Several reminders were sent to rural elementary principals who failed to complete the survey or only partially completed the survey. Although the participation rate exceeded 40%, the process was very time-intensive for the researcher.

The third limitation was the use of one ex-post facto test to analyze the reading proficiency of economically disadvantaged third graders. The data received from the state had to be filtered from over 11,500 records to a random sampling of 350 records. An exhaustive process, these steps required extensive time to review the data to ensure variables were correct for analysis. After reflecting on this task, the researcher would have sought out another assessment, perhaps a norm-referenced benchmark reading test used at the research site.

The final limitation of this study involved the lack of qualified individuals to transcribe the qualitative activity of the study, specifically, transcription of the audio-recording of the focus group meeting. In a rural community, lack of resources and supports are impactful to a study.

Conclusion

Specifically, the questions investigated in this study were:

1. What is the role of the rural, elementary principal concerning the involvement of local businesses, civic groups, and parents in community partnerships?

2. In what ways do community partners believe the rural, elementary principal is making a difference with partnerships?

3. What impact do partnerships have on third graders' reading literacy?

In this case study, mixed-methods afforded an in-depth investigation to answer the research questions investigated in this study. The conclusion takes a comprehensive look at each question and highlights findings from the three data collection activities: (a) rural, elementary principal online Likert scale survey; (b) community partner focus group; and (c) ex-post facto, third-grade reading literacy data.

Research question one. The rural, elementary principal online Likert scale survey was dispersed to 169 state-identified, rural elementary principals of Title I schools. Among the five questions highlighted in the survey, the strongest response was elicited when principals were asked to rate their role as one who encourages partnerships by offering volunteer opportunities in the classroom. Ninety-four percent of the principals agreed or strongly agreed that their role of offering volunteer opportunities was important. The role of the principal engaging parents and community partners in student-related activities has importance to building capacity between a school and its community (Hogue, 2012). Volunteering is considered an involvement item critical to successful partnerships (Epstein, 2010). Principals also perceive their role as an advocate for community partnerships as important. The role of advocacy identifies the principal as a person who could strengthen a program by simply valuing partnerships with community members (Mutch & Collins, 2012).

Six themes emerged from the community focus group surrounding the topic of the role of the principal. For participants in the focus group, the topic of the role of the principal was a personal one, often eliciting endearing examples and experiences. Having worked with the principal longer than any other member of the focus group, Mrs. Dollar shared observations of Mr. Smith's character, which mirrored comments by other participants:

> I always saw as his [Mr. Smith's] vision that school, community, and parents were all
> 'our family.' This is one of his driving visions. Then, to go with that we have an

individual who is compassionate, has very good manners, and is respectful and non-

judgemental. I think this is something people in poverty are not used to. All those things

you see in him kind of filters down to the teachers…just being compassionate and

knowing that everybody is doing the best that they can.

The researcher's reflective journal produced personal thoughts after meeting with the

focus group. One perspective drawn from the focus group discussion was their spoken

admiration and respect for Mr. Smith. The partners value his leadership, his virtues, and the

welcoming environment he has established at Brownlee Elementary. The characteristics

important to the role of the principal in building and maintaining community partnerships are

evident in Mr. Smith's actions and words. The second perspective drawn from the journal notes

provided a profound summary statement of purpose: fostering a partnership between the school

and the community requires a leader who cares deeply and believes in the vision and members of

the partnership. The principal believes that partnerships are actions of compassion and faith.

Research focused on the role of the elementary principal in high poverty rural schools is

nearly non-existent in literature, especially concerning the impact this role has on community

partnerships. This aspect of the study adds to the body of literature and has the potential to

inspire further research on the impact the role of the principal has on inspiring community

partnerships in high poverty, rural schools.

Research question two. One of the biggest surprises on the rural, elementary principal

online Likert scale survey focused on how frequently principals met with school-community

partners. Of interest, 58% stated they met on a monthly basis, while an additional 17% met on a

weekly basis, which equates to a total of 75% of the principals meeting on a weekly or monthly

basis. This high percentage appears in conflict with question four of the survey, in which 53% of

the principals took a neutral stance to the importance of meeting with business partners on a

regular basis as important. This also seems to be in conflict with research and the importance of

sustaining partnerships through consistently connecting with parents and community and

engaging all stakeholders in purposeful activities (Blank & Hanson Langford, 2000; Witten,

2010; Woody, 2010). As stated earlier in Chapter V, the researcher holds firm in what the

current body of literature affirms about the sustainability of partnerships: successful partnerships

are sustainable when principals meet on a regular basis and place importance on the relationship.

The qualitative component of the online Likert scale survey asked the principals to share

or comment on any area not covered in the survey regarding partnerships. Three major themes

emerged as a result of the data collection and analysis: 1) limited number of businesses to partner

with, 2) lack of funding and resources, and 3) ideas for fostering partnerships. Each emerging

theme from this qualitative component of the survey has elements which are prevalent in

O'Hare's (2009) research on rural schools. His research pointed out the rural challenges of

limited resources, inadequate availability of qualified personnel, and communities unable to

support and participate in engaging, student activities (O'Hare, 2009). This study, therefore,

adds to the body of literature in the area of rural challenges.

The community focus group provided three additional themes related to the ways the

principal can make a difference with community partnerships. The three themes included: 1) the

importance of the principal supporting new ideas and projects; 2) a collaborative character

which is welcoming and builds relationships; and 3) the principal has core leadership

characteristics, which are committed to a vision that the school community members are all "our

family.". When the leader offers a vision and commitment to working in collaborative

partnership with all members, the result is a working partnership model of engagement between

schools and community (Hogue, 2012; Mutch & Collins, 2012).

The belief that a collaborative relationship between community members and school leadership encourages a welcoming environment and builds relationships, ultimately becomes the supportive framework for the focused goal of partnerships: increased student achievement. The findings in this study continue to build on the present body of literature and add, specifically, to the research on ways the rural principal makes a difference with partnerships through supporting new ideas and projects, a collaborative character, and core leadership characteristics grounded in a committed vision.

Research question three. Numerous findings from the rural, elementary principal online Likert survey corroborated with the current body of literature on the impact of community partnerships on student achievement. Specifically, 86% of the principals agreed or strongly agreed that school-community partnerships can raise achievement in reading. This high percentage of agreement by principals aligns with what research evidenced about the positive impact of parental involvement and community partnerships on student achievement (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Jeynes, 2005; Marzano, 2003; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Sanders, 2008; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; WestEd, 2007).

Ex-post facto literacy levels from a standardized, state assessment of 350 randomized, third-grade student records were studied to determine any relationships between reading proficiency, gender, ethnicity, and economically disadvantaged. With a focus on reading proficiency and how this dependent variable correlates with the three variables, there was a strong correlation with reading proficiency and the demographic, economically-disadvantaged (.663). With this strong correlation in mind, the findings support the numerous research studies which describe poverty as negatively impacting student achievement (Austin et al., 2005; Cairney & Ruge, 1999; Children's Defense Fund, 2014; Nadel & Sagawa, 2002; Pianta et al., 2002; Provasnik et al., 2007, Tavernise, 2012).

Ex-post facto demographic data provided a comparative look at the reading proficiency levels of rural, economically-disadvantaged students to those not categorized in that area. When compared to the proficiency for all rural, economically-disadvantaged students in the state (54%), the proficiency for the random sample of economically disadvantaged students *(n*=235) was 78%. This equates to a proficiency level of 24% higher than the proficiency level for all rural, economically-disadvantaged students in the state. Although lower than the proficiency of 89% for all third-grade students, and 85% for all rural, third graders, the proficiency level of 78% for the random sampling of rural, economically-disadvantaged student was a pleasant surprise. There still exists an achievement gap between the groups, and as previously discussed in Chapter V, however, the proficiency of the random sampling group supports the notion that a connection between school, family, and community increases test scores (Jeynes, 2005; Sheldon, 2003). The impact of partnerships on reading literacy, although weakly associated with the random sampling of students is still considered noteworthy.

The community focus group discussion provided a bonus three themes to support the impact of community partnership on reading. Members shared personal reflections from their partnership activities to produce these themes: (a) promote reading projects that get kids to love reading, (b) empower parents with skills to help their child read and complete homework, and (c) communicate with partners about the specific needs for students living in poverty. Keeping the partnership student-centered and supported by the community are essential elements for a successful partnership. This includes partnerships willing to provide training and tools for families to support their children, which in turn encourages mutually-respectful relationships and higher student achievement (Dorfman & Fisher, 2002). Finally, of importance are open lines of communication, which must include the expression of expectations, needs, and appreciation.

Epstein's (2010) research advocates for involvement of parents, communication, and collaborating with community partners. The three focus group themes promote and add to the rich body of literature based on Epstein's (1995, 2010) theoretical framework. In addition, the potential for impacting reading literacy in third graders becomes evident with successful implementation of these themes.

A welcomed discovery in the findings revealed that the state reading literacy proficiency scores for the third graders, who were designated as economically disadvantaged at Brownlee Elementary, were actually higher than the state reading proficiency for all third graders by two percentage points. With a reading proficiency score of 91%, as compared to an 89% reading proficiency for all third graders in the state, the proficiency level at Brownlee Elementary supports research question number three that partnerships do make a difference. This evidence overwhelmingly supports a connection between school and community partnerships, which leads to higher test scores for students living in poverty.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this mixed-methods case study lead to recommendations for future research that adds to the body of literature on the topic of the role of the rural, elementary principal and community partnerships. The research in a rural setting is inadequate, particularly concerning the role of the principal, community partnerships, and any correlations with student academics and elementary-age students living in high poverty (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Gordon & Seashore Louis, 2009; Lindahl, 2010; Sheldon et al., 2010; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2001). Although this research study investigated these correlations, more studies are needed to enrich this body of literature. Replicated studies should also be conducted in rural areas across the United States with similar poverty numbers, and not limited to a specific state or region.

An additional research area of need is that of the teacher and student perspective on community partnerships in rural, high poverty elementary schools. An in-depth, qualitative study would provide valuable insights and "voices" from these members and add to this body of literature.

 Sheldon et al. (2010) echo the need for studies, which confirm the connectedness of partnership practices, climate, student achievement, and theory. Larger samples are also needed in these studies. In addition to laying the foundation for the development of models and conceptual frameworks, connectedness to theory through research provides clearer definitions and ways of measuring outcomes (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2001).

Finally, with our Nation facing the enormous cost of child poverty at an estimated $500 billion per year (CDF, 2014) and dwindling budgets in education, a study centered on the advantages and cost-savings of community partnerships in high poverty schools is warranted. This research would provide credible information to federal, state, and local entities, and specifically, to schools and districts in financial crisis. Schools need to investigate alternatives to the corporate push for high-cost, instructional items in the classroom before being pressured to ask tax payers for additional bonds and levies for financial survival.

Implications for Professional Practice

Implications for educational policy can be made as a result of this study. Given the numerous research studies that support the positive impact of parental involvement and community partnerships on student achievement (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Jeynes, 2005; Marzano, 2003; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Sanders, 2008; Sheldon, 2003; Taylor & Pearson, 2004; WestEd, 2007), one might expect education policy would focus on ways to overcome the effects of poverty and improve educational outcomes. Instead, federal and state policymakers

are focusing on politically-charged items, such as Common Core Standards and merit pay, which are likely to contribute little to closing achievement gaps and promoting student success (Coley & Baker, 2013). Policy needs to support student-centered partnerships which are based on the premise that schools, families, and communities must assist one another in raising healthy, successful children (Sanders, 1996). Preceding this endeavor, however, the culture surrounding the school must change. Before understanding the need, the community must first understand the issues, and accept the need for change (Vollmer, 2010). Policy can start this change.

This study adds to current literature and fills in gaps that existed in research specific to the role of the rural, elementary principal and community partnerships in high poverty schools. The study also adds to the literature on the impact of community partnerships on student achievement. The online Likert scale survey and the focus group discussion highlighted themes about the characteristics and actions of the principal which nurture and support community partnerships in rural, elementary schools. This information had been lacking from the literature.

The focus group meeting brought to light the importance of business partnerships and how communication is key to informing partners of the needs in the school. Obtaining their viewpoint provided a deeper understanding of the depth of their investment in the school, and their willingness to extend resources. Of course, without the partners having knowledge of the needs, they [the partners] are unsure of how to best support the students, and sense their services are not required. The importance of two-way communication is paramount to the success of the relationship. The information gleaned from the meeting can be used for schools desiring to start, or improve upon community partnership activities.

The significance of the numerous findings in this study adds to the body of literature and provides the foundation for promoting the importance of community partnerships in rural, elementary high poverty schools.

Final Reflection

As the last page of the reflective journal was written, this researcher took time to reflect upon the past two years. This journey has been one of long hours, sacrifices, and frustrations. This journey has also been one of surprises, triumphs, and discoveries. The researcher role as *instrument* became more than perusing a large body of literature, meticulous hours of data collection, and long hours invested in typing this dissertation. This role provided opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations with adults who genuinely care about students and their [the students] success at school and in life. The journal served as a useful tool for self-reflection and often inspired critical thoughts, questions, and wonderment.

As this researcher now prepares to close the cover on the reflective journal, there resides a critical thought, inspired by the words of Ruby Payne, an expert on poverty in America. She stated, "The key to achievement for students from poverty is in creating relationships with them. Because poverty is about relationships…the most significant motivator for these students is relationships" (Payne, 2005, p. 109). If *relationships* are key to student achievement, then why is the educational system in America not focusing its efforts in this area? Community partnerships certainly are an appropriate and effective place to start, as nurturing, collaborative relationships are necessary for sustainability. Furthermore, the research work of Epstein (1995, 2010) and numerous other researchers, overwhelmingly support the integral role community partnerships play in student success. On a small scale, partnership activities are occurring in urban and rural communities across America; however, only with reliance upon local support. Just imagine what could happen for students living in poverty across America, if community partnership policies were federally and financially supported, and achievement scores were recorded and longitudinally followed. What if this policy were to replace the current Common Core mandate? Then, and only then, the words of Ruby Payne could truly be tested.

This researcher's journey of discovery and enlightenment does not end with the closing of the cover of the reflective journal. Instead, this journey continues.

References

Addy, S., & Wight, V. R. (2012). *Basic facts about low-income children, 2010 children under age 18*. National Center for Children in Poverty. Retrieved from http://www.nccp.org

Andrews, J. O., Newman, S. D., Meadows, O., Cox, M. J., & Bunting, S. (2012). Partnership readiness for community-based participatory research. *Health Education Research*, *27*(4), 555-571. Retrieved from http://her.oxfordjournals.org

ASPE. (2012). *Information on poverty and income statistics: A summary of 2012 current population survey data* [Issue brief]. Retrieved from http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/12/povertyandincomeest/ib.shtml

Auerbach, S. (2011). *School leadership for authentic family and community partnerships: Research perspectives for transforming practice*. Retrieved from http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415893961

Austin, M. J., Lemon, K., & Leer, E. (2005). Promising practices for meeting the multiple needs of low-income families in poverty neighborhoods. *Journal of Health & Social Policy*, *21*(1), 95-117. doi:10.1300/J045v21n01_04

Barley, Z. A., & Beesley, A. D. (2007). Rural school success: What can we learn? *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *22*(1), 1-16. Retrieved from http://www.jrre.psu.edu/articles/22-1.pdf

Bennett, J. V., & Thompson, H. C. (2011). Changing district priorities for school-business collaboration: Superintendent agency and capacity for institutionalization. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *47*(5). 826-868. doi:10.1177/0013161X11417125

Blank, M. J., & Hanson Langford, B. (2000). *Strengthening community partnerships: Community school assessment checklist*. Retrieved from http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/csassessment.pdf

Bosma, L. M., Sieving, R. E., Ericson, A., Russ, P., Cavender, L., & Bonine, M. (2010). Elements for successful collaboration between K-8 school, community agency, and university partners: The Lead Peace partnership. *The Journal of School Health*, *80*(10), 501-507. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com

Cairney, T. H., & Ruge, J. (1999). Developing partnerships: The home, school and community interface. *Queensland Journal of Educational Research*, *15*(1), 17-24.

Calabrese, R., Hester, M., Friesen, S., & Burkhalter, K. (2010). Using appreciative inquiry to create a sustainable rural school district and community. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *24*(3), 250-265. doi:10.1108/09513541011031592

CDF. (2014). *The state of America's children® 2014 report*. Retrieved from http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/state-of-americas-children/

Cole, A. G. (2010). School-community partnerships and community-based education: A case study of a novice program. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, *7*(1), 15-26. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ894464)

Coley, R. J., & Baker, B. (2013). *Poverty and education: Finding the way forward*. Retrieved from Educational Testing Service website: www.ets.org/research

Cook, C., Heath, F., & Thompson, R. L. (2000). A meta-analysis of response rates in web- or internet-based surveys. *Educational and Psychological Measures*, *60*(6), 821-836.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J.W., & Garrett, A. L. (2008). The "movement" of mixed methods research and the role of educators. *South African Journal of Education*, *28*, 321-333.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Croasmun, J. T., & Ostrom, L. (2011). Using Likert-type scales in the social sciences. *Journal of Adult Education*, *40*(1), 19-22. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ961998)

Curtis, H. (2013). *A mixed methods study investigating parent involvement and student success in online high school education* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, ID.

De Loo, I., & Lowe, A. (2011). Mixed methods research: Don't - "just do it." *Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management*, *8*(1), 22-38. doi:10.1108/11766091111124685

Dorfman, D., & Fisher, A. (2002). *Building relationships for student success: School-family-community partnerships and student achievement in the Northwest* (Evaluative Report ED-01-C0-0013). Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED474379)

Dotson-Blake, K. P. (2010). Learning from each other: A portrait of family-school-community partnerships in the United States and Mexico. *Professional School Counseling*, *14*(1), 101-114. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/

Elish-Piper, L., & Lelko, M. C. (2012-2013, Winter). Parent involvement in reading. *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, *41*(1), 55-62. Retrieved from http://www.fatih.edu.tr/~hugur/love_to_read/Parent%20Involvement%20in%20Reading.pdf

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *76*(1). Retrieved

    from www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst?docid=5000295700

Epstein, J. (2001). Building bridges of home, school, and community: The importance of design. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, *6*(1/2), 161-168.

Epstein, J. L. (2005). A case study of the partnership schools Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) model. *Elementary School Journal*, *106*(2), 151-170. doi:10.1086/499196

Epstein, J. L. (2010). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2006). Moving forward: Ideas for research on school, family, and community partnerships. In C. F. Conrad & R. Serlin (Eds.), *Sage handbook for research in education: Engaging ideas and enriching inquiry* (pp. 117-138). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Epstein, J. L. (2012, November 14). *Develop effective programs of school, family, and community partnerships: Six advances in theory, research, and practice* [Video file]. Retrieved from http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm

Galindo, C., & Sheldon, S. B. (2012). School and home connections and children's kindergarten achievement gains: The mediating role of family involvement. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *27*(1), 90-103. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2011.05.004

George, D., & Mallery, P. (2003). *SPPS for Windows step by step: A simple guide and reference* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Gliem, J., & Gliem, R. (2003). Calculating, interpreting, and reporting Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for likert-type scales. Presented at Midwest Research to Practice

Conference in Adult, Continuing, and Community Education. Retrieved
from https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/

Goos, M., Lowrie, T., & Jolly, L. (2007). Home, school and community partnerships in
numeracy education: An Australian perspective. *The Montana Mathematics Enthusiast*,
1, 7-24.

Gordon, M., & Seashore Louis, K. (2009). Linking parent community involvement with student
achievement: Comparing principal and teacher perceptions of stakeholder influence.
American Journal of Education, *116*(1), 1-31. doi:10.1086/605098

Greeno, C. (2003). Measurement, or how do we know what we know? Topic one: Validity.
Family Process, *42*(3), 433-435. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/

Grissom, R. J., & Kim, J. J. (2012). *Effect sizes for research: Univariate and multivariate
applications* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Groves, R. (2011, August 2). *Rural and suburban America: When one definition is not enough*
[Blog post]. Retrieved from http://directorsblog.blogs.census.gov/2011/08/02/rural-and-
suburban-america-when-one-definition-is-not-enough/

Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries.
Educational Communication and Technology, *29*(2), 75-91.

Hargreaves, A., & Shirley, D. (2009). *The fourth way: The inspiring future for educational
change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale: The
essential guide to family-school partnerships*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Hogue, M. L. (2012). *A case study of perspectives on building school and community
partnerships* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (1012288922)

IBM SPSS. (2013). *SPSS statistical software*. Retrieved from

 http://www-01.ibm.com/software/analytics/spss/

Jacobson, S. L., Brooks, S., Giles, C., Johnson, L., & Ylimaki, R. (2007). Successful leadership

in three high-poverty urban elementary schools. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *6*(4),

291-317. doi:10.1080/15700760701431553

Janesick, V. J. (2004). *Stretching exercises for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA:

Sage.

Jeynes, W. H. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban

elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education*, *40*(3), 237-269.

doi:10.1177/0042085905274540

Kearney, W. S., Herrington, D. E., & Aguilar, D. V. (2012). Beating the odds: Exploring the

90/90/90 phenomenon. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *45*(2), 239-249.

doi:10.1080/10665684.2012.661248

Lewis, D. S. (2010). *Global educational ecosystem: Case study of a partnership with K-12*

schools, community organizations, and business (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from

ProQuest. (ED514455)

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lindahl, R. (2010). Differences in principals' leadership behavior in high- and low-performing

schools. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, *3*(4), 34-44. doi:10.1002/jls.20137

Lynn, M. R. (1986). Determination and quantification of content validation. *Nursing Research*,

35(6), 382-385.

Malina, M. A., Norreklit, H., & Selto, F. H. (2011). Lessons learned: Advantages and disadvantages of mixed methods research. *Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management*, *8*(1), 59-71. doi:10.1108/11766091111124702

Manz, P. H., Power, T. J., Ginsburg-Block, M., & Dowrick, P. W. (2010). Community paraeducators: A partnership-directed approach for preparing and sustaining the involvement of community members in inner-city schools. *School Community Journal*, *20*(1), 55-80. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ891832)

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (2011). *Designing qualitative research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: Translating research into action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Masumoto, M., & Brown-Welty, S. (2009). Case study of leadership practices and school-community interrelationship in high-performing, high-poverty, rural California high schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/

McBride, B. (2003). Family-school-community partnerships in rural pre-k at-risk programs. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, *1*(1), 49-72. doi:10.1177/1476718X030011003

McMahon, B., Browning, S., & Rose-Colley, M. (2001). A school-community partnership for at-risk students in Pennsylvania. *Journal of School Health*, *71*(2), 53-55. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ624107)

McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2006). *Research in Education: Evidence-based inquiry* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Miedel, W. T., & Reynolds, A. J. (1999). Parent involvement in early intervention for

    disadvantaged children: Does it matter? *Journal of School Psychology*, *37*(4), 379-399.

Mills, G. E. (2007). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle

    River, NJ: Pearson.

Mulford, B., Kendall, D., Ewington, J., Edmunds, B., Kendall, L., & Silins, H. (2008).

    Successful principalship of high-performing schools in high-poverty communities.

    Journal of Educational Administration, *46*(4), 461-480.

    doi:10.1108/09578230810882009

Mutch, C., & Collins, S. (2012). Partners in learning: Schools' engagement with parents,

    families, and communities in New Zealand. *School Community Journal*, *22*(1), 167-187.

    Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ974691)

Nadel, W., & Sagawa, S. (2002). *America's forgotten children: Child poverty in rural America*.

    Retrieved from http://www.savethechildren.org/afc/afc_pdf_02.shtml

National Council of Jewish Women. (1996). *Parents as school partners: Research report*. ERIC

    Clearinghouse on Urban Education/Columbia Teachers College. Retrieved from

    http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/families/NCJW_child/index.html

O'Hare, W. (2009). *Poverty is a persistent reality for many rural children in U.S.*. Retrieved

    from Population Reference Bureau

    website: www.prb.org/Articles/2009/ruralchildrenpoverty.aspx?p=1

Parker, D. C., & Flessa, J. (2009). Poverty and education: New research in Ontario schools.

    Alberta Journal of Educational Research, *55*(2), 249-252. Retrieved from

    http://search.proquest.com/

Parker, D. C., Grenville, H., & Flessa, J. (2011). Case studies of school community and climate: Success narratives of schools in challenging circumstances. *School Community Journal*, *21*(1), 129-150. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ932204)

Payne, R. K. (2005). *A framework for understanding poverty* (4th ed.). Highlands, TX: aha! Process.

Phelps, K. H. (2010). *Inviting and sustaining partnerships with Navajo and Ute Mountain Ute families of early elementary children* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (ED522887)

Pianta, R. C., La Paro, K. M., Payne, C., Cox, M. J., & Bradley, R. (2002). The relation of kindergarten classroom environment to teacher, family, and school characteristics and child outcomes. *The Elementary School Journal*, *102*(3), 225-238.

Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2006). The content validity index: Are you sure you know what's being reported? Critique and recommendations. *Research in Nursing and Health*, *29*, 489-497.

Powell-Smith, K. A., Stoner, G., Shinn, M. R., & Good, III, R. H. (2000). Parent tutoring in reading using literature and curriculum materials: Impact on student reading achievement. *School Psychology Review*, *29*(1), 5-27. Retrieved from http://www.nasponline.org

Provasnik, S., Ramani, A., Coleman, M., Gilbertson, L., Herring, W., & Xie, Q. (2007). *Status of education in rural America* (NCES2007040). National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2007040

Qualtrics. (2013). *Research suite*. Retrieved from http://www.qualtrics.com/research-suite/#enterprise

Salkind, N. J. (2011). Ice cream and crime: Computing correlation coefficients. In *Statistics for people who think they hate statistics* (pp. 113-136). Los Angeles: Sage.

Sanders, M. G. (1996). *School-family-community partnerships and the academic achievement of African-American, urban adolescents* [Technical report]. Retrieved from John Hopkins University, Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk: http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/techReports/Report7.pdf

Sanders, M. G. (2008). *Parent liaisons on action teams help bridge home and school* (Research Brief No. 24). National Network of Partnership Schools John Hopkins University. Retrieved from www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/type2/issue24/researchbrief-24htm.

Sanders, M. G. (2012). Achieving scale at the district level: A longitudinal multiple case study of a partnership reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *48*(1), 154-186. doi:10.1177/0013161X11417432

Sebring, P. B., & Bryk, A. S. (2000). School leadership and the bottom line in Chicago. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *81*(6), 440-443. Retrieved from http://www.pdkintl.org/ publications/index.htm

Sheldon, S. B. (2003). Linking school-family-community partnerships in urban elementary schools to student achievement on state tests. *The Urban Review*, *35*(2), 149-165. doi:10.1023/A: 1023713829693

Sheldon, S. B. (2008). *Evaluations improve partnership programs and more involvement produces results*. John Hopkins University, National Network of Partnership Schools. Retrieved from www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/type2/issue25/researchbrief-25.htm

Sheldon, S. B., & Epstein, J. L. (2001). *Partnership activities help improve schools' math proficiency test scores*. John Hopkins University, National Network of Partnership

Schools. Retrieved from

www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/Research/type_2research_briefs/type2k4a.htm

Sheldon, S. B., Epstein, J. L., & Galindo, C. L. (2010). Not just numbers: Creating a partnership

climate to improve math proficiency in schools. *Leadership & Policy in Schools*, *9*(1),

27-48. doi:10.1080/15700760802702548

Smith, J. G. (2006). Parent involvement in education among low-income families: A case study.

The School Community Journal, *16*(1), 43-56.

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. (2001). *Issue 3: Advancing the research base

for family and community connections with schools*. Retrieved from

http://www.sedl.org/pubs/fam32/welcome.html

Tanner, D. (2012). *Using statistics to make educational decisions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tavernise, S. (2012, February 9). Education gap grows between rich and poor, studies say. *The

New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com

Taylor, B., & Pearson, P. D. (2004). Research on learning to read-at school, at home, and in the

community. *The Elementary School Journal*, *105*(2), 167-181.

Touchton, D., & Acker-Hocevar, M. (2001). *Using a lens of social justice to reframe principals'

interviews from high poverty, love performing schools* (ED465219). Retrieved from

ERIC database. (ED465219)

US Department of Education. (2011). Improving basic programs operated by local educational

agencies (Title I, Part A). Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/

titleiparta/index.html

Vollmer, J. (2010). *Schools cannot do it alone*. Fairfield, IA: Enlightenment Press.

Warren, M. R., Hong, S., Rubin, C. H., & Uy, P. S. (2009). *Beyond the bake sale: A community-based relational approach to parent engagement in schools*. Retrieved from www.tcrecord.org/PrintContent.asp?ContentID=15390

Waters, T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. (2003). Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement. Retrieved from http://www.mcrel.org/~/media/Files/McREL/Homepage/Products/01_99/prod82_Balance dLeadership.ashx

WestEd. (2007). *Engaging parents in education: Lessons from five parental information and resource centers*. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/parentinvolve/index.html

Wiesner, V., Eckstein, D., Li, C., & Zepp, R. (2008). A statistical decision tree for the helping professions. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, *2*(2), 1-8. Retrieved from http://www.scientificjournals.org

Wihbey, J. (2014). *U.S. poverty and inequality: 2014 overview and research trends*. Retrieved from http://journalistsresource.org/studies/economics/inequality/poverty-2014-overview-research-trends

Witten, A. M. (2010). *Building the community school: How school principals can lead in addressing educational and social challenges in South Africa* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (ED525517)

Woody, A. M. (2010). *Educational leaders as catalyst for connecting school and community: Uncovering leadership strategies for forging school, family, and community partnerships* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (366023854)

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

The Researcher

My name is Wendy French and I am a doctoral student at Northwest Nazarene University

(NNU), Nampa, Idaho. I am conducting a qualitative research study on community partnerships.

The Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of the rural, elementary school principal as a

catalyst for encouraging community partnerships with local businesses and parents and will

examine the affect of the partnerships on the reading literacy of third grade students who are

living in rural poverty. The primary research questions that will guide this study are:

1. What is the role of the elementary principal concerning the involvement of local

businesses, civic groups, and parents in community partnerships?

2. In what ways do parents believe the elementary principal and the community

partnerships are making a difference?

3. What impact will partnerships have on the reading literacy of third grade students?

The Methods to Meet the Purpose

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose include:

- Focus groups or mini discussion groups of up to 10 participants

- Surveys (hard copy and/or Qualtrics)

- Researcher reflective journal

Participant's Understanding

- I understand this study will be submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the

  researcher's degree of Doctor of Education at NNU.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary.

- I understand that I will not be identified by name in this study.

- I understand that all records will be kept confidential, in the secure possession of the researcher.

- I understand that all data collected will be limited to the use of this study.

- I understand that if I am a teacher, this data will not be used to evaluate my performance in any way.

- I understand that I may withdraw from the study, at any time, without consequences. In the event I withdraw from the study, all information I provided will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper.

By signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information.
I give my consent to participate in this study:

_____

Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be audio taped in this study:

_____

Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

_____

Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   **Date**
THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH REVIEW COMMITTE HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.

Appendix B
Focus Group Interview Questions for Parents and Community Partners

1.   Please introduce yourself, including your partnership connection with the school

   (parent/volunteer, civic partner-group name, business partner-company name)

2.   To what extent are you involved in the school-community partnership? Describe some activities

   you participate in. Examples include: donations of products, services, labor, volunteer in the

   classroom, etc.

3.   How often do you participate in partnership activities? Examples: weekly, monthly, a set number

   of hours each week, when needed, etc.

4.   Who are the people in your organization and/or in the elementary school who you believe are

   instrumental in maintaining this partnership relationship with the school? (Names are not

   necessary. Please reference the title of the person/people).

5.   Specific to the research question in this study, in what ways do you believe the elementary

   principal is making a difference for students with partnerships in a rural, poverty school? (Please

   provide an example to support your belief)

6.   In light of the fact that this school is considered a rural, high poverty school, in what ways do you

   believe you make a difference for students living in poverty? In other words, what types of

   outcomes are you hoping to achieve through the partnership relationship? In other words, do you

   have specific long term and/or short term goal(s) in mind? What are they?

7.   What recommendations do you have for improving your partnership relationship with the school?

   Do you have a "wish list" for this relationship?

8.   Would you like to share a partnership success story you've had with the elementary school?

9.   Do you have any questions for me?

   Note. Questions were adapted from Hogue (2012).

Appendix C

Qualtrics Likert Scale Survey for the Elementary Principal

The following survey should only take 15-20 minutes of your time. Your responses are anonymous. If you do not feel comfortable answering one or more of the questions, please leave the response blank. Your completion of this survey and returning it is your permission to use the data for this research project.   Thank you for participating!

The following are demographic questions that will assist the researcher in the data analysis phase of the study:

Part I: Demographic Information:

1. My gender is: ①male   ② female

2. My age is: ①18-25 ②26-35 ③36-45 ④46-55 ⑤56-65 ©66+ years

3. Highest education level: ①Bachelor's ②Master's ③Ed Specialist ④Doctorate

4. Number of years as an elementary principal: ①Under 5 years ②5-10 years ③over 10 years

5. The percentage of students on Free-reduced Lunch Program (FRLP) at my school:_____%

Part II. Partnership Questions

①Strongly agree ②Agree ③Undecided ④Disagree ⑤Strongly Disagree

1. Community partnerships are important to the district (Epstein, 2010).

2. Our school-community partnership is based on a clearly, stated vision (Blank & Hanson Langford, 2000).

3. Community partnerships, in a rural setting, are important to the success of a school.

4. Meeting with community business partners on a regular basis (weekly, monthly, or quarterly) is important to me (Bosma et al., 2010).

5. Nurturing community partnerships with local businesses is a top priority for the elementary principal (Lindahl, 2010).

6. One role of the rural elementary principal is to encourage partnerships with parents through offering volunteer opportunities in the classroom (Henderson et al., 2007).

7. As a rural elementary principal, one of the most difficult aspects of my job is getting parents involved in their child's education.

8. Our school-community partnership identifies financial and community resources to support our efforts (Blank & Langford, 2000; Epstein, 2010).

9. Community partnerships are too much work for me.

10. Community partnerships can raise student achievement in reading (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Jeynes, 2005; Marzano, 2003).

11. I believe I can make a difference in a child's life.

12. One role of the rural elementary principal is to communicate with community businesses (Epstein, 2001).

13. It is my belief that taking time to nurture community partnerships is unwise, especially in light of the present state of our budgets.

14. If a parent moved to our community tomorrow, he/she would see evidence of community partnerships within the school (Epstein, 1995; Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010).

15. I am a strong advocate for community partnerships (Epstein, 2010).

16. Please use the space below to type in any thoughts or suggestions that you have which may clarify your responses or help us better understand your responses. If you believe that we have left any important items out, feel free to let us know this, also.

Appendix D

Field Notes Form

<u>Location</u>
<u>Time</u>
<u>Field Notes (Excerpt)</u>

Length of Activity:	
Descriptive Notes	*Reflective Notes*
General:	

Appendix E

Permission to use Poverty Graphics in Dissertation (Figure 1 & Figure 2)

On Mar 12, 2013, at 1:54 PM, "Swenson, Kendall (HHS/ASPE)"
<Kendall.Swenson@HHS.GOV> wrote:

Hi Wendy. Please feel free to reproduce the tables in the poverty report. Good luck with your dissertation.

From: W French [mailto:wfrench@nnu.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, March 06, 2013 10:40 PM
To: OS ASPE, Webmaster (HHS/OS)
Subject: Request to use graphics from ASPE Issue Brief

 Dear Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation,

The intent of this letter is to request permission to use two graphics from the ASPE issue brief (2012, September 12), "*Information on Poverty and Income Statistics: A Summary of 2012 Current Population Survey Data.*" The two graphics are titled, "Poverty Rate of Children under 18, 2000-2011" and "Child Poverty by Race and Ethnicity, 2000-2011."

My plan is to use the two graphics in my doctoral dissertation. The dissertation study will investigate the importance of rural, high poverty schools working with community partnerships in order to impact student learning. I will use the graphics with appropriate acknowledgement to ASPE.

At your earliest convenience, please inform me of your decision to approve/disapprove this request.

Best regards,

Wendy French
EdD Candidate
Educational Leadership
Northwest Nazarene University
Nampa, Idaho

Appendix F

Online Survey

Dear Community Partner:

My name is Wendy French and I am a Doctoral Student at Northwest Nazarene University, studying the role of the elementary principal and community partnerships. You are receiving this survey because you currently have a child enrolled in the Lakeland School District, or you have been actively involved in partnering with the school.

I am looking for a sample of community partners to participate in two focus group meetings with me this fall. The questions will focus on the school, community partnerships, and the role of the principal. Each focus group meeting will be around 45-60 minutes.

If you are willing to allow me to contact you by phone for a short follow-up interview, please put your name and phone number in the blanks below.

I believe that your responses will provide valuable information for policy makers, school administrators, and others in the field of education, as we endeavor to better understand how community partnerships help students to succeed.

Please consider being a part of my study. Thank you!

First Name

Last Name

Phone Number

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me via email at wfrench@nnu.edu or

████████████

Appendix G

Telephone Call Script (Parent)

Hello! My name is Wendy French and I am a doctoral student at Northwest Nazarene University. Do you remember recently filling out a short survey about a study I will be conducting on community partnerships? On that survey, you indicated that you would be willing to do a short follow up telephone interview. Is this a good time to chat for a few minutes?

If yes, proceed

If no, is there a time that would be better that I can call again? Thank you for your time. I will call back at our appointed time.

Questions to ask, if proceeding:

How many students do you have at the elementary school?

What year did your child (children) start attending the school?

What grade is your child in?

Are you involved in volunteering in the schools? If so, how often?

Are you a member of the Parent-Teacher organization (PTO)?

Either choice below:

Thank you for being willing to consent to a follow up call. I appreciate your time.

or

Would you be willing to consider being a part of my doctoral study? I would like to do some interviews with parents who have a student or students at the elementary school, especially those who are in third grade. I would like to meet for one or two focus group meetings to explore the role of community partnerships and the part that you play in the academic journey of your student.

Verify contact information

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. Do you have questions for me? I will contact you soon to schedule the focus group meetings.

Appendix H

Member Checking Email

February 23, 2014

Dear Focus Group Participant:

Thank you for your participation in the study on the role of the elementary principal and the impact of community partnerships in rural schools. The intention of this letter is to let you know the numerous themes that resulted from the focus group meeting on November 25, 2013. Please let me know if these accurately depicted our conversation, by responding to this email with a short statement. This could be as simple as, "Yes, I agree." If you have any suggestions or modifications, please let me know as well.

Themes:

Ways the principal is making a difference with partnerships

Supportive of new ideas and projects – onboard with implementing something that works

Supportive of staff and everybody that comes into the school

Open to community and outside resources coming into the school - welcoming

Has a vision that school, community, and parents are all "our family"

Sets the tone for the school and for the partnerships

Strong, core leadership has strengthened the partnership

The Role of the Rural, Elementary Principal

Has virtues of compassion, good mannerisms, non-judgemental demeanor, and respectfulness

Sets the tone for the school and partnerships

Possesses a vision for the partnership

Openness to new ideas

Involves business partners

Provides a physical space for partnership activities

Impact Partnerships have on Third Grader's Literacy

Partnerships need to promote reading projects that get kids to love reading, starting in pre-3rd grade.

Empowering parents through partnerships provides ways parents can help their child to read, or help their child with homework.

Increasing communication with partners about the needs of students living in poverty provides supports for learning, which may otherwise go unmet.

Thank you again for your help and we look forward to hearing from you.

Wendy French
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University
wfrench@nnu.edu
HRRC Approval# 1033833

Appendix I

Participant Debrief

Thank you for your participation in this study.

After we have an opportunity to analyze the data, we will email you the results and ask for feedback. Mainly we want to ensure that we captured the essence of our focus meetings, and accurately portrayed our discussions. This study will conclude by March 1, 2014.

Questions
In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, I can be contacted via email at wfrench@nnu.edu , via telephone at █████████, or by writing:
Wendy French, ████████████████████.

Thank you for your participation!

Wendy French
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University
HRRC Application# TBA

Appendix J

District Approval Letter

Approval Letter from   **School District**

Phone: *Fax:*   *Web:*

May 10, 2013

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is notice that _____ gives our approval for Wendy L. French to conduct her doctoral research within our district. The scope of her research has been reviewed by me and I am satisfied that this research could be beneficial for our school district.

Sincerely,

Superintendent

committed to academic excellence … dedicated to student success

Appendix K

Permission to Use Interview Protocol Questions

Dear Dr. Hogue,

I am presently working on my EdD dissertation on the topic area of community partnerships. I have read through your outstanding dissertation and would like to request your permission to use or adapt some the interview protocol questions you have in Appendix C, titled, "Interview Protocols." If you approve this request, kindly send a response email stating so.

Thank you and congratulations on your doctorate.

Sincerely yours,

Wendy French, EdS
Northwest Nazarene University

Reply Forward

Myrna Hogue <Myrna.Hogue@sdhc.k12.fl.us>
6:06 AM (3 hours ago) 5/22/2013

To me

Wendy,

I am excited to hear that somebody has read my dissertation. Thank you for the compliment. **I give you my permission to use or adapt some of the interview questions from my interview protocols.** I would appreciate you acknowledging where you took them from if you end up using a lot of the same questions. Good luck with the process. It can be overwhelming, but it does feel really good when you're done.

Thank you,

Myrna Hogue, Ed.D., LCSW
Coordinator, School Social Work Services
Department of Student Support Services
Hillsborough County Public Schools

Appendix L

Community Focus Group Meeting Agenda – November 25, 2013

11:30-11:50   Lunch and time to visit
11:50-12:05   Welcome and introductions of group members
12:05-1:00   PowerPoint presentation and discussion with members
1:00   End of meeting

<u>Reflections from the meeting - Feedback:</u>
Please feel free to comment anything about the meeting today. Did you learn something new about partnerships? Any "ah-ha" moments? Please share…

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you for taking time, today, from your busy schedules to share your insights. You are a valued member of the "Brownlee Family."
Wishing you all a very blessed holiday season!

Appendix M

Ex-Post Facto Data Request

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STATE SUPERINTENDENT
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

November 19, 2013

Wendy French
Northwest Nazarene University
wfrench@nnu.edu

Re: Public Records Request originally dated August 16, 2013

Dear Ms. French:

Please consider this letter to be the response of the ████ State Department of Education ("SDE") to your email public records request originally received on August 16, 2013. The SDE's response is made pursuant to the ████ Public Records Law, ████ Code ████████████. In your email you requested the following information:

> *I would greatly appreciate your assistance with attaining the following* ████ *data. Please send in a data spreadsheet (Excel would be great!):*
> ***Spring 2013*** ████ ***READING Data ONLY***
> *Demographics needed for this data:*
> *Grade level: 3rd Grade ONLY*
> *Rural schools ONLY*
> *Economically Disadvantaged schools ONLY (**Title I Schools**)*
> *Include Gender*
> *Include Ethnicity*

The records responsive to your request are enclosed. All personally identifiable information has been redacted from the enclosed documents, per ████ Public Records law. As a policy, the ████ State Department of Education redacts data if there are fewer than 10 students in a grouping to avoid a student being identified. All redacted data is marked with an asterisk (*).

If you have any questions about this response, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Communications Director
████ Department of Education

Office Location	Telephone	Speech/Hearing Impaired	Fax

Appendix N

Email Request for Content Validity of Online Survey

Dear Experts:

I have prepared a content validation instrument for my school-community partnership survey. Thank you for your willingness to be an "expert" in this process.

The content validation instrument is based on research by Polit and Beck (2006). There are only 21-questions, including the five demographic questions. Instructions for completing this validation activity are located at the top of the attached instrument. As the instructions explain, <u>you will be rating the survey on the strength of each question</u>, and not on actually responding to each question. You should be able to complete the validation in 10-15 minutes.

After completing the validation activity, please save, reattach, and send the file back to me, at your earliest convenience.

Again, thank you for your time and your expertise.

Appendix O

Rural, Elementary Principal Online Survey CVI Results

Rating Scale	Very Relevant	Quite Relevant	Somewhat Relevant	Not Relevant	Comments: Content Validity Index (CVI)
	4	3	2	1	
Question					Number of experts in agreement
1	7				7/7 100%
2	7				7/7 100%
3	6	1			7/7 100%
4	7				7/7 100%
5	7				7/7 100%
6	7				7/7 100%
7	5	2			7/7 100%
8	7				7/7 100%
9	5	2			7/7 100%
10	5	1	1		6/7 86%
11	5	2			7/7 100%
12	5	2			7/7 100%
13	4	3			7/7 100%
14	6				6/7 86%
15	6				6/7 86%
16	5	2			7/7 100%
17	6	1			7/7 100%
18	3	3	1		6/7 86%
19	7				7/7 100%
20	7				7/7 100%
21	7				7/7 100%
					Mean CVI = 98%

Appendix P

Focus Group Questions CVI Results

Rating Scale	Very Relevant	Quite Relevant	Somewhat Relevant	Not Relevant	Comments: Content Validity Index (CVI)
	4	3	2	1	
Question					Number of experts in agreement
1	7				7/7 100%
2	7				7/7 100%
3	7				7/7 100%
4	7				7/7 100%
5	7				7/7 100%
6	7				7/7 100%
7	7				7/7 100%
8	7				7/7 100%
9	7				7/7 100%
					Mean CVI = 100%