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The Experiences of Stakeholders in District-University Administrator Preparation Partnerships

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Abstract

Collaborative partnerships between school districts and universities focused on school leadership development are a part of a recent effort to provide the field of public education with leadership for the 21st century. The research clearly indicates that the demand for educational administrators far outweighs the number of available qualified candidates. This qualitative research proposal, influenced by the research tradition of phenomenology, was designed to examine an important but often overlooked component of the school district–university partnership process. The stakeholders, representatives from both the school district and the university involved in the partnership, are key to the successful development and implementation of these joint leadership development efforts. Their backgrounds, experiences, and support are important for the potential success and key relationships needed to create and sustain effective school district–university partnerships. It is their experience that this research proposal is designed to capture.

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Chapter One

Statement of the Problem

Educational leadership is currently at the forefront of many discussions regarding how to effectively stimulate progress in the American education system. Recently the results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) were released. The PISA was first administered in 2000 and has been given every 3 years to 15 year-olds in 65 countries in the subject areas of reading, math, and science, emphasizing functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling. Coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization of industrialized countries (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), PISA results have revealed that American student performance has plateaued for the past decade, whereas student performance in other countries has continued to improve. Nineteen countries and education systems scored higher than the United States in reading in 2012, 29 nations outperformed the United States in math and 22 in science. Jack Buckley, the commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics reported, "While we're standing still, other countries are making progress" (as cited in Heitin, 2013, p. 1).

This news followed reports of the countless struggles of the United States Department of Education, the various state departments of education, and local education agencies (LEAs) to meet the demands of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), align curriculum and practices with the Common Core, and educate students to be college, career, and citizenship ready for success in the 21st century. Additionally, during the past decade, the importance of clearly defining the characteristics of successful learning or performance has become the tireless work of those who

lead public education at all levels. In 2011, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration reported that "the better one understands what excellence looks like, the greater one's chances are for achieving—or surpassing the standard" (Storey & Asadoorian III, 2014, p. 2). The struggles involved in helping students in all subgroups meet defined standards continue to plague public education in the United States.

Recent literature has reflected the depth of the debate surrounding the increase in accountability for the success of schools. This increase in accountability has been paired with an acute examination of all facets of the education process: from curriculum and instructional strategies to class size, staff qualifications, and educational leadership practices. Every aspect of administrator, teacher, and student activity occurring in schools across the country continues to be under daily scrutiny. This research articulates the notion that leadership is a key factor in the ability of schools to provide quality educational services to meet the varied needs of their students. The ability of education leaders to stay focused on the key factors that make the most difference in school success and to make all the other dimensions of schooling work in the service of improved student learning is what gives the role of school leader its power (Walker & Downey, 2012).

The demand for effective leadership has been tied to research that often portrays principals as the linchpins for school improvement (Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011). This knowledge base provides ample theoretical and empirical evidence that effective principal leadership can and does have important effects on student learning. Blasé and Blasé (2004) continued that

> Effective principals are charged with developing positive relationships based on mutual trust, respect, openness, support, and understanding (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, 2001); developing a learning community of professionals and constituents able to openly communicate, make decisions, solve problems, and resolve conflicts (Wald & Castleberry, 2000); maintain[ing] a collaborative focus on teaching and learning (Fullan, 1997); and encourag[ing] teacher reflection, peer coaching, and shared critique and inquiry (Calhoun, 1994), (p. 246).

The job of the principal is constantly evolving, with legions of applicants needed to meet the growing demand. Myung et al. (2011), in their study of the principal pipeline, reported that "Although the need for effective school leaders has intensified based on the current performance of schools, many school districts across America struggle to find qualified candidates to fill vacant school leadership positions" (p. 696). Retirements, career options, and the constantly publicized ills of the nation's educational system are among the factors that exacerbate this phenomenon. Furthermore, this problem has been found to be even more pronounced in communities serving large proportions of students attending secondary schools, students of low socioeconomic status, large populations of minority students, or students who do not speak English as their first language (Myung et al., 2011).

A close examination of the literature on principal school leadership shortages revealed that the problem is much more complex than just an inadequate supply to meet the growing demand. Delving deeper into the literature clarified the notion that districts are not facing a labor shortage inasmuch as they are facing a shortage of laborers with the right skills (Myung et al., 2011). This unparalleled demand for effective leadership in education provided the stimulus for

the work that is reported in this qualitative, phenomenologically informed research study. Meeting the expressed need for quality educational leaders, both now and in the future, has led this researcher to examine structures and practices that stand to enhance opportunities for the development of candidates ready to engage in the challenges of leading education in the 21st century.

Historically, school districts and universities have partnered for a variety of reasons, with many different levels of school district and university employees involved in the partnerships. In each instance, school districts have brought a great history and understanding of practice, whereas universities have brought their expertise in the realm of research and theory (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, & Cook, 2003). The need for the development of educational leaders equipped to tackle the challenges so evident in American education has spawned a plethora of school district–university partnerships focused on educational leadership, thereby emphasizing the potential benefits of utilizing this type of collaborative practice.

The development of effective partnerships has been a significant part of recent efforts to provide public education with the leadership needed in the 21st century. As early as 1987, education reformers asserted that as difficult as community partnerships can be to create and sustain, quality reform requires community collaboration (Comer, 1987). Spurred by higher expectations and shrinking resources, educators ripe for change, were motivated to give every consideration to the benefits of utilizing the power of inter-organizational collaborations (Goldring & Sims, 2005), such as district–university partnerships.

The process of developing effective district–university partnerships focused on administrator preparation must include the selection of representatives from each organization to

design, build, and facilitate the partnership activities. These representatives, or stakeholders, are key to the successful development and implementation of the strategies and activities of these joint educational leadership development ventures. The selected stakeholders are presented with a unique opportunity to create, define, and shape these partnerships; bringing with them to this collaborative effort their varied ideals and values. An investigation of education partnership stakeholders' unique relationships and experiences in this meaningful type of work forms the foundation of this research effort.

Background of the Problem

Lashway, in his 2003 article, "Transforming Principal Preparation," noted that as standards-based school reform neared its 20th anniversary, policymakers continued to assert the need for strong principal leadership. It appears that the federal government and every state have placed much of the accountability for school performance results directly at the school level, or on the principal. Today's principals are facing new roles bringing heightened expectations. Meeting these needs requires a measure of preparation that has not always been in place, and if in place occurs, in only a small number of locations. Unfortunately, by reputation, principal preparation programs historically have not been effective. Supporting Lashway's perspective, Barnett described the literature as replete with examples of how the role of today's school administrator has changed from that of a manager to an instructional leader: "Today's principals must be able to lead professional development activities, help school committees make decisions by consensus, prepare and facilitate analyses of standardized testing results, and lead schools in ways that require a comprehensive understanding of effective instructional practices" (Barnett, 2010, p. 121).

For more than a decade, learning to lead and its implications for those who prepare school leaders has been gaining increased attention. Today's systemic K-12 educational renewal now requires intensive high-level training. Many have been critical of school leadership preparation efforts over the years, while others have sought to articulate an agenda for improving leadership preparation at all levels (Frick & Riley, 2010). Evidence from the work of Hess and Kelly (2007), raises questions about whether preparation is well matched to the contemporary world of schooling, and whether graduates of principal preparation programs are being equipped for the challenges and opportunities posed by an era of great accountability.

In characterizing the criticisms of typical educational leadership programs, Whitaker, King, and Vogel (2004) indicated that many of them have limited recruitment to help identify leadership potential, few significant selection criteria for entry into programs, ineffective pedagogical techniques, low performance expectations, a lack of meaningful experiential opportunities, and few programmatic linkages with local school districts. It is this last criticism that will be given attention during this research effort. Effective connections with school districts can help to make university educational administration preparation programs more effective in terms of candidate selection, curriculum alignment, program delivery, internships, mentoring, and quality advising.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study was to examine the professional lived experiences of school district stakeholders involved in creating and implementing school district–university collaborative partnerships focused on administrator preparation. Browne-Ferrigno and Barber (2010) noted that although educational partnerships between university professors and educational

practitioners had been around for decades as a strategy to contextualize learning and enhance professional practice, many had fizzled, emerging and shining for only a brief period of time, before fading away. Studies have exposed challenges that must be faced, if universities and school districts are to work together successfully. Most often, impediments to successful collaboration are caused by differing "purposes, functions, structures, clientele, reward systems, rules and regulations" (Goodlad, 1988, p.14).

Through the Wallace Foundation sponsored school leadership study, entitled, "Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World," the power of district-university partnerships to facilitate consistent, coherent professional development, and provide a more embedded intervention for developing administrative practice is illustrated (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson & Orr, 2007). It appears that now more than ever before public school–university partnerships hold significant promise for renewal and improvement in education (Peel, Peel, & Baker, 2002), although their success hinges on vigorous support by those at the top of the decision-making pyramid in both schools and colleges.

Not only do these collaborative partnerships have the potential to lead instructional change, but they also have great potential in leading leadership development changes. Much of the literature about public school–university partnerships derives from the creation of professional development schools designed to support the preparation of new teachers and other educators (Kamler et al., 2009). Organizations such as the Wallace Foundation, an independent, national private foundation whose mission is to enable institutions to expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people, have become involved in this reformation effort, especially in the area of educational administration preparation (New York Times, 2007). These

funded partnerships, pairing school districts and universities, all examine core quality features, including the selective admission of candidates, closed cohort grouping, relevant course content, differentiated learning activities and field experiences, ongoing performance assessment, mentoring, internships, and qualified faculty (Browne-Ferrigno & Barber, 2010). It is the examination of these core features and how they are implemented that becomes the work of those selected to represent both school districts and universities in district–university partnerships. Nevertheless, it is an examination of the experience of these representatives, or stakeholders, as they do this work that forms the major purpose of this effort.

Research Questions

This phenomenologically informed, qualitative study seeks to examine the professional lived experiences of school district stakeholders in developing and sustaining school–university partnerships focused on administrator preparation. The primary research question asks the following: What is the experience of primary stakeholders (school district) in the development and implementation of school–university partnerships focused on administrator preparation? Corollary research questions include the following:

1. How does a primary stakeholder describe the experience of establishing and participating in a district–university partnership?
2. Is developing trust among the stakeholders vital to the success of the partnership? What other feelings are associated with doing this work?
3. How do the prior experiences (pre-partnership) of the stakeholders impact the experience of participating in a district–university partnership?

Operationalized Key Terms

Operationalizing the key terms associated with this phenomenological research design demands that there be a clear, working definition for each term. A consistent understanding of the following terms is paramount to a consistent understanding of the focus and scope of this research:

1. *Stakeholder* is a person selected by either a PreK-12 school district or university to help develop the framework and implementation plan for a district–university partnership, focused on school leadership while representing the interests of the school district or university. Stakeholders possess three attributes. The first is power, or the extent to which a stakeholder has or can gain access to coercive, utilitarian, or normative means to impose his or her will in the relationship. The second attribute is legitimacy, the degree to which a stakeholder relationship is seen as appropriate, proper, and desirable in the social context. The third attribute is urgency, when the work to be done is of a time-sensitive nature and when the work is important or critical to the stakeholder (Oates, 2013).
2. *Primary stakeholders* are the people or groups that stand to be directly affected, either positively or negatively, by an effort or the actions of an agency, institution, or organization. In some cases, there are primary stakeholders on both sides of the equation: A regulation that benefits one group may have a negative effect on another (Community Toolbox, University of Kansas, 2014). For the purpose of this research effort, primary stakeholders are stakeholders who represent their organizations at the

same level in the employee hierarchy and have similar levels of decision-making ability and influence.

3. *School district* is the primary unit of structure for education in the United States. Typically, in school districts, the major layers of responsibility within the organization are school board, superintendent, central office administration, school administration, and instructional staff. The school district is set apart from other government bodies in that it has its own board and governance. It operates all of the public schools within it and serves as the unit through which the community influences local education. School districts are either fiscally independent or must gain approval on fiscal matters from some other governing body (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2013).
4. *School leadership program (SLP)* provides competitive, discretionary grants to assist high-need LEAs with the focus of recruiting, training, and retaining principals and assistant principals. A high-need LEA is defined as one that (a) either serves at least 10,000 children from low-income families or serves a community in which at least 20% of children are from low-income families; and (b) has a high percentage of teachers teaching either outside their certification or with emergency, provisional, or temporary certification ("School Leadership Program," n.d.). These programs, funded in part by the United States Department of Education, illustrate how more focused and targeted partnership arrangements are helping to change the nature of principal professional development (Hale & Moorman, 2003).

5. *Partnership* is a dynamic relationship among diverse actors, based on mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the most rational division of labor based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner. Partnership encompasses mutual influence, with a careful balance between synergy and respective autonomy, which incorporates mutual respect, equal participation in decision making, mutual accountability, and transparency (Brinkerhoff, 2002).
6. *Trust* is defined in business literature as:

   the reliance by one person or group upon a voluntarily accepted duty on the part of another person or group, to act in a manner that is ethically justifiable; that is, undertake morally correct decisions and actions based upon ethical principles of analysis towards all others engaged in a joint endeavor. (Greenwood & Van Buren, 2010, p. 426)
7. *Collaboration* is the act or process of "shared creation" or discovery; it involves the creation of new value by doing something differently because of the process. Driven by devolution, rapid technological change, scarce resources, and rising organizational interdependence, collaboration has transient qualities and places demands on participating actors (Thomson & Perry, 2006).
8. *University* is an institution of higher education and research that grants academic degrees in a variety of subjects and provides both undergraduate and postgraduate education ("University," n.d.).
9. *Educational leadership* is "the process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task" (Hoy

& Miskel, 2008, p. 419). Its definition draws upon interdisciplinary literature, generally, but ideally is distinguished through its focus on pedagogy, epistemology, and human development. In contemporary practice, the term borrows from political science and business, defining specially certified educators whose main job is to plan, direct, and manage the instruction and daily operations of all programs in PreK-12 schools ("Educational Leadership," n.d.).

Delimitations of the Study

Simon and Goes (2013) defined delimitations of a study as those characteristics that arise from limitations in the scope of the study and by the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions made during the development of the study. Delimitations of this study of the professional lived experiences of stakeholders representing school districts engaged in the work of defining and implementing school district–university partnerships focused on school administrator preparation, include the following:

1. The effort was limited to examining only school district–university partnership stakeholders from partnerships funded through federal SLP grants. This decision was made because the work funded by these grant programs adequately represents the types of collaborative partnerships defined by the literature that are exclusively focused on school administrator preparation and maintaining the school administrator pipeline.
2. Another limitation in this research effort relates to the researcher's examination of the experiences of primary stakeholders only in these SLP partnerships. Primary

stakeholders represent their organizations at the same level in the employee hierarchy and have similar levels of decision-making ability and influence.

3. Additionally, SLP programs were selected that had a documented history of having consistent stakeholders engaged in the partnership effort, stakeholders that had successfully implemented grant programming as defined by the SLP Hub at Old Dominion University.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

A focused in-depth review of relevant business and education literature formed the foundation to support this research. The selected literature consisted of books, peer-reviewed journals, articles, and scholarly reports presenting the past and present status of collaborative partnerships, district–university partnerships, stakeholders, and the role of stakeholders in collaborative partnerships. As information defining and supporting the stakeholder concept was most clearly highlighted in the business literature, business journals were used to form the research basis for examining the role of stakeholders. Nevertheless, education literature was used to highlight the development of school district–university partnerships and their role in the evolution of education in the United States. The reviewed literature chronicled the relevant topics over the past 2 decades. The majority of the literature, however, reflected research from the past 14 years and is presented in support of the need to examine education administration preparation, district–university partnerships and their potential, the stakeholder in collaborative partnerships, and the issue of trust in effective partnerships.

This comprehensive review commenced with identification of the need to redesign the structure of education administration preparation to meet the demands and scope of public education in the 21st century. The literature was clear in representing a strong need for both universities and school districts to focus their efforts on the identification and preparation of future educational leaders. In 1997, Bradshaw, Bell, McDowelle, and Perreault, in research submitted to the Southern Regional Education Board, clearly noted that universities and school districts do reflect a level of shared understanding of the prerequisite skills and collaborative

leadership development that must be in place to increase the skill level of candidates seeking to enter administrative positions. They asserted that schools need leaders who can shape cultures and climates in organizations to enable the teachers and students to effectively do their work with one another.

The next sections of the review focus on the need for and development of district–university partnerships and their potentially powerful role in leveraging the resources of school districts and universities to improve the quality of public education. The reviewed literature indicated that despite the development of meaningful partnerships becoming a common interest of many higher education institutions and communities (Strier, 2010), the complexity of the tasks involved in making these partnership work often makes their realization difficult.

The literature review then shifts to an examination of the concept of the stakeholder, both as an actor in the business community and in the role of education partnership collaborator. Business literature predominates in this section of the review, presenting the stakeholder concept through the constructs of stakeholder theory and stakeholder analysis. The information extends, clarifying that the management of a project's stakeholders means that the project is explicitly described in terms of the individuals and institutions that have a stake or an interest in the project. Supporting the need to examine relationships as a part of the study of stakeholders, Missionier and Loufrani-Fedida interjected that "whatever the nature of the project, various researchers have acknowledged that project failure is generally not the result of lacking in ineffective management practices, but of inappropriate social interactions between the projects' stakeholders" (Missionier & Loufrani-Fedida, 2014, p. 1). These constructs formed the research basis for the evolution of stakeholders as problem-solving agents.

Last, trust was reviewed as an important component of the development and success of effective partnerships, both in business and education. As the lubricant and glue of collaborative partnerships, trust helps define the reliance that must develop between the entities of a partnership for it to sustain and help organizations reach their collaborative goals (Sloan & Oliver, 2013). Each of these areas of focus serves to undergird the structure and examination of the role of the district–university partnership as a tool to successfully provide much needed support to the present and future of education administrator preparation.

Introduction

A national debate in the arena of education continues to raise fundamental questions about schools and the role and effectiveness of the individuals who lead them. An integral part of this debate is the dual challenge of improving the quality of school administrators while attracting more qualified applicants for positions in school leadership. Murphy and Vriesenga supported this assertion in their research on school leadership preparation in the United States. Their findings confirmed that

> Over the last half century, leading figures in the profession have turned their analytic lenses on the inquiry about principal preparation programs either directly or indirectly. More pointedly, for much of the last 15 years the academic arm of the school administration profession in the United States has been in a period of considerable turmoil. (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006, p. 1)

Scholars and practitioners that advocated for this movement voiced a deep-rooted belief that effective leadership is a critical element to improving schools and enhancing student achievement. Thus, a call has been issued for the design and implementation of principal

preparation programs that prepare highly effective administrators to lead in a manner that addresses the needs of all students, regardless of their personal characteristics or social backgrounds (Green, 2013). This call helped focus the work of educational leaders to clarify the standards, competencies, and accountability measures needed to equip principals with the tools to be not only certified but also highly qualified.

In 2005, Pounder and Crow noted that the education community was focusing a great deal of attention on the need to attract and retain highly qualified educators to serve in school administrative roles. Extending this commentary, they reported that "solving the problem was often exacerbated as educators across the board increasingly saw the role of the school administrator as being more challenging and less desirable than the job was worth" (Pounder & Crow, 2005, p. 56). Nevertheless, systematically addressing a number of key issues was considered a way to contribute to a much stronger pipeline of potentially effective school administrators. Such an effort required a network of supporting structures in which school districts, professional organizations, principal academies, and university educational leadership programs collaborated to establish a comprehensive approach to administrator development. It is now clear that to lead today's schools, principals must have the capacity to lead, and that capacity must consist of competence in everything from accountability to instructional leadership and teacher effectiveness (Green, 2013).

The continued search for an effective mechanism to assist with the preparation of school administrators led educational leaders to critically examine the concepts of collaboration and partnerships. The development of meaningful collaborative partnerships has now become a common interest of many universities and community entities (Strier, 2011). History confirmed

that past efforts to adequately prepare education leaders had not been adequate in delivering candidates with the qualities and skills necessary to meet the challenges of schools in the 21st century. To help meet this challenge, organizations such as the Wallace Foundation funded research projects to explore different approaches to urban-based leadership preparation initiatives, looking especially at the extent to which school districts influenced the critical work of their university collaborators (Browne-Ferrigno & Barber, 2010). This focus on universities seeking to work in tandem with school districts has continued to stimulate much research interest in the history and possibilities for collaboration, as well as the potential power of collaboration should it prove to be an effective mechanism for stimulating change in education leadership preparation practices.

The Need for Partnerships

In the business community, developing sustainable partnerships has always been an important strategy utilized by companies seeking to effectively meet their goals. This strategy is quickly becoming a trend in the education community as well. In an article in the *International Journal of Higher Education*, Barnes and Phillips wrote,

> Most public sector organizations, including higher education institutions, now operate within a framework reliant on partnerships for the successful delivery of service and projects. In a complex and diverse world, in which power is diffused, it has been argued that effective governance may only be achieved by building on formal inter-sectoral partnerships. (Barnes & Phillips, 2000, p. 184)

Partnerships provide a means of achieving objectives that often cannot be accomplished as efficiently alone, thereby leveraging the resources, expertise, and human capital of the participating entities.

Billy Brittingham, Director of Executive Education at the Center for Corporate Citizenship, identified five questions to consider when organizations are examining partnerships as the most productive tactic to achieve a desired goal:

- Does my team have the capabilities and resources to achieve our goals?
- Is there a logical partner who shares the same or related goals?
- Does the prospective partner have complimentary assets and capabilities?
- Are the cultures of the entities compatible?
- Can the entity envision how it would work with a partner to amplify its existing resources and capabilities?

These questions should be considered before a potential partnership is initiated. It is important to be sure that connecting to a partner will enhance the ability to meet organizational goals (Brittingham, 2013).

Giesecke, in "The Value of Partnerships: Building New Partnerships for Success," dealt with the issue of when organizations should seek to form partnerships. She reported,

> When an activity involves uncertainty and requires frequent investments of time or money that cannot be easily transferred to other functions, it may be best to leave the activity with the organization. However, when the activity is reasonably straightforward and cost-effective, the organization may do well to contract with others to provide the service or activity. (Giesecke, 2012, p. 38)

In conclusion, Giesecke cited Davies and Hentschke: "Organizations must always keep in mind that partnerships are more complex relationships formed around often difficult, but solvable problems that require creative thinking, sharing of expertise, and shared resources" (Davies & Hentschke, as cited in Giesecke, 2012, p. 38). Additionally, if a partnership is to be successful, the partnering entities must dedicate themselves to sustaining and scaling up the partnership effort as the demand requires.

In 1993, the concept of partnerships was presented as one strategy for meeting the new challenges that were emerging in education. Espousing the notion that interdependence, collaboration, team building, and shared decision making were some of the concepts being explored from the White House to the schoolhouse, the Pacific Region Educational Laboratory noted that these concepts represented a shift from isolation and individualism to the development of collaborative partnerships (Aka, 1993). Even then, partnerships were a serious consideration, because it was evident to all involved that the task of reforming educational leadership was enormous and complex. Schools were described as multifunctional corporations in which traditional support systems had broken down. As schools and their many partners have connected clients (students and families), the leveraging of resources in effective partnerships and external mandates often require partnership development as a strategy to reach needed goals (Aka, 1993).

Formal collaborations and partnerships between community organizations and their local institutions of higher learning increased substantially during the 1990s. These efforts promised to give voice to people in communities, while enhancing effectiveness and efficiency in achieving challenging objectives (Lasker & Weiss, 2003). Supporting this claim, the number of

colleges and universities that were members of Campus Compact, an organization of college and university presidents seeking to advance their institutions' community engagement, grew from as few as 400 members in 1995 to almost 1000 members in 2004. At that time, emerging research supported the effectiveness of partnerships with institutions of higher learning as a strategy for a community wanting to improve the quality of life for its citizens (Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2004).

The active components of this strategy identified by the Council of Independent Colleges in their monograph by Leiderman et al. (2004), are necessary for the effective institutionalization of community engagement issues in higher education: (a) institutional infrastructure (leadership, structure, practices, organization, connections, and services); and (b) academic culture (access, status, funding, support, mission, incentives, and connections. This marriage of community–municipal organizations and universities allowed both entities to bring their knowledge, experience, and resources to the problem-solving arena. The ability of a partnership to understand and address complex problems, however, is related to who is involved in the partnership, how community stakeholders are involved, and the leadership and management of the partnership (Lasker & Weiss, 2003).

Colleges and universities generally have access to the most current research on issues affecting community wellbeing. In turn, the community allows students, faculty, staff, and administrators of higher education institutions opportunities to apply their research to real-world situations. Leiderman et al. (2004) summarized their findings, indicating that collaboration between community organizations and institutions of higher learning has historically yielded

effective help in solving community needs and building communities that are better places to live.

Many of the approaches to meeting the documented challenge of finding qualified applicants for administrative positions led educators and researchers to look at ways to systematically address the key issues that continued to plague the development of a stronger administrative pipeline. There was hope that a systems approach to this problem would cultivate over time a wellspring of qualified leadership in schools, as it supported both novice and experienced administrators. Many school districts are looking to build systems and relationships with outside organizations within their communities to help them bridge this leadership gap. Essential to participation in this search for "excellence partners" is looking to colleges and universities to join with school divisions to collaboratively meet these administrative challenges (Basom & Yerkes, 2004).

Successful partnerships between universities and other entities have specific core elements, characterized by careful preparation, excellent implementation, and meticulous follow-through. The work of the Council of Independent Colleges (Leiderman et al., 2004) recognized these important core elements: (a) a set of mutually determined goals and processes; (b) shared vision, resources, rewards, and risks; (c) strategies based on deep understanding of a community's needs, assets, and opportunities; (d) defined roles and responsibilities based on each partner's particular capacities and resources; (e) positive peer relationships between faculty members and the staff members of partner organizations; (f) benefits to each partner sufficient to justify the costs, level of effort, and potential risks of participation; and (g) a system of accountability that covers responsibility for carrying out jointly determined plans. Throughout

the process of developing and implementing these worthwhile structures, the core elements of effective partnerships must be in place, if success is to be reached, and must also be examined as both entities weigh all of the benefits and costs of the developing partnership.

The Council (Leiderman et al., 2004) also identified mediating factors important to a community agency's decision about whether or not to engage in a partnership with a university: (a) the presence of sufficient invested staff to handle the scope and scale of the partnership work, (b) the level of sustained administrative interest and visible leadership supporting the effort, (c) an assessment of prior experiences with partnerships, (d) working through issues of trust and accountability, and (e) clear expectations about who will prepare those involved for the engagement activities. When all of these factors are strategically considered, the chances for the development of a potentially successful collaborative partnership are significantly enhanced.

Supporting the need for school districts to consider the power of district–university partnerships in helping prepare future school leaders is the concern about leadership succession planning. According to Harchar and Campbell (2010), because university–district partnerships in the succession planning process were in very early stages, it remained to be seen if the circumstances were right to create the "perfect storm" that could motivate universities and school districts to form solid partnerships to prepare the future leadership of PreK-12 schools. Succession planning must be an integral part of standard practices and policies, with the approval and blessing of both superintendents and school district boards. These practices must include release time for aspiring leaders, mentors to guide authentic leadership actions, and diverse opportunities for leadership in a variety of age and socioeconomic levels. Further, enabling conditions from both the university and the school district, as noted by Harchar and Campbell

(DATE) from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), must be in place for these partnerships to flourish:

- The faculty of the leadership preparation program shares a belief that field-based experiences offer significant learning opportunities to support the application of theory to practice.
- School and district leaders share a belief that school-based experiences offer significant opportunities for aspiring principals to apply theory to practice.

Myung et al. (2011) continued discussion of the issue of principal shortages and succession leadership struggles, noting that although the need for effective leaders has intensified, many school districts still struggle to find qualified candidates to fill vacant school leadership positions. Principal shortage problems are particularly acute in certain types of schools—namely schools serving high proportions of students who are poor, are non-White, or do not speak English as their first language. Also, principal shortages are more common in high schools and middle schools than in elementary schools. The time demands of the job and job stress associated with greater accountability are often cited as deterrents to potential applicants. It is not simply that candidates are not pursuing educational administration as a career choice, but more importantly, the pool of candidates choosing the field is often a group without the skill set necessary to be successful. The issue does not appear to be a labor shortage but, instead, a deficit in necessary skills. The current demand is for a new type of principal, one with attributes and abilities far beyond the needed certification requirements.

In summary, it is clear from the literature that the need does exist for a revolution in how school administrators are prepared. It is also clear that the literature supports the construct of

university–school district partnerships as a real possibility in helping educators meet this defined vital need. Effectiveness in school administrator preparation must begin with a quality preparation program that gives participants not only an opportunity to understand theory but also experience in the practical aspects of leading a school (Green, 2013). The development of university–school district partnerships is a positive step in helping meet the theory-to-practice demands of preparing future school leaders. Adopting this partnership approach maximizes the ability of institutions of higher learning, which are by definition centers of expertise and knowledge, to engage in planned, applied two-way flow activities with outcomes greater than the sum of the parts. Barnes and Phillips asserted, "Success in developing partnerships depends on careful consideration of the needs of the partnering organizations concerned, the problems to be solved, ideas to be explored, and synergies to be gained" (Barnes & Phillips, 2000, p. 188).

The Development of District–University Partnerships

Frick and Riley shared the work of others through the Southern Regional Education Board:

> Learning to lead, and its implications for those who prepare school leaders, has been gaining increased attention for more than a decade. High-level, rigorous training for educational leaders is now seen as the critical lynchpin in systemic PK-12 educational renewal under increasing public policy systems. (Frick & Riley, 1010, p. 310)

The effectiveness of university–district partnerships as a best practice in meeting the demands of effective school leadership preparation is increasingly being documented in the research. From the 1987 paper presented at the National Council of States on In-service Education, sharing the Davis County School District partnership with Utah State University (Ashbaker & Bench, 1987),

to the research examining the Principal Leadership Academy of Nashville, founded in 2000 by the Nashville Public Education Foundation in partnership with Vanderbilt University and Nashville Public Schools (Goldring & Sims, 2005), and the work of Margaret Grogan and Stewart Roberson (2002) at the University of Virginia with three superintendents in the greater Richmond, Virginia area (Henrico County, Chesterfield County, and Hanover County), the literature is replete with examples of district–university partnership efforts. This important work continues to be documented, highlighted by the fact that university professors can provide the leadership knowledge base and assist with disposition refinement toward effective school leadership; the application of that learning and socialization of candidates into the community of administrative practice, however, requires a great deal of coordinated support from school districts and practicing principals (Browne-Ferrigno & Sanzo, 2011).

Proponents of university–district partnerships profess that for redesigned leadership preparation programs to be maximally effective, development of the partnership of the school district with the university is one of the most important contributing factors (Harchar & Campbell, 2010). This joint effort, combining research-based theory with on-the-job practice, provides the best possible combination of experiences to promote job success. Also, this two-tiered approach provides participating individuals with meaningful, contextually, relevant and well-focused intent (Sanzo, Myran, & Clayton, 2011) as it effectively helps participants span the chasm between theory and practice. This new normal in school leadership must move toward effective university–district partnerships.

The development of these effective partnerships requires that the right circumstances, standards, and state policies be in place, so that the complexity of building effective partnerships

is understood by all who might question their use in helping to prepare tomorrow's leaders. Myran, Sanzo, and Clayton (2011) addressed the state of this need by defining a traditional leadership preparation program as one that is university based and university faculty led. They stated further that the traditional "on-campus" feature of some university–based programs is changing to include distance-learning technologies, off-site locales, and course-delivery formats designed to meet the needs of "working professionals." (Myran et al., 2011)

Additionally, the lack of quality control at the university level has enabled the proliferation of alternative preparation programs, including school division-based leadership preparation efforts. These changes do not deny the need for school leadership and university faculty to come together. Faculty members possess the research skills necessary to conduct rigorous research and connect their findings to PK-12 practice; but the active engagement of practicing principals to serve as mentors for prospective candidates and novice school leaders provides authenticity (Sanzo et al., 2011). The active involvement and collaboration of both school district and university personnel avoid the questions of authenticity and provide a vital connect to "real practice."

University–district partnerships provide opportunities for both colleges and school districts to bring their strengths to the problem of building an adequate cadre of school leaders. Several features of these partnerships or "grow-your-own" programs include cohort learning, district input on curriculum and instruction, on-site delivery of courses, formal mentoring, joint selection of participants, and the use of practitioners from participating districts as instructors. Prerequisite actions to create these types of partnerships include joint planning between the university and the school district, formation of a steering committee, and the selection of a

program coordinator (Whitaker, King, & Vogel 2004). These structures provide the framework necessary for the partnership to flourish and meet the needs of the schools. They also address the criticisms of typical education leadership programs, including limited recruitment to identify leadership potential, few significant selection criteria for entry into programs, ineffective pedagogical techniques, low performance expectations, lack of meaningful experiential opportunities, and few programmatic linkages with local school districts (King et al., 2004).

The reviewed work of other scholars on the topic of university–district partnerships focused on the composition of the group of stakeholders gathered to design and implement the programs. Goldring and Sims (2005) took a historical approach to the science of cooperative inter-organizational relationships. They noted that political scientists, organizational theorists, and sociologists had developed frameworks to analyze the origins, developments, and structures of organizations that collaborate with other organizations (Goldring & Sims, 2005). Again the issue of structure emerged, as the researchers reported that the structural nature of the relationships, as well as the functions of the relationships, often emphasize resource dependency and institutional theory. These relationships strategically evolve with time and consist of a repetitive sequence of stages that include negotiation, commitment, and execution.

Storms and Gonzalez (2006) noted that building relationships between school districts and universities that are perceived by both entities as effectively meeting their needs is central to the work of forming these partnerships. As the representative stakeholder groups are defined and invited to the table to do this valuable work, they bring with them their individual experiences and theories about how district–university partnerships should operate. Historically, cooperative,

inter-organizational partnerships emerge and strengthen when the stakeholders have congruent purposes, values and expectations.

Although the research on university–district partnerships is far from completely telling the story of this important trend in educational administration preparation, it gives a clear picture of the problem of too many needs and not enough qualified candidates. The research also outlines the need for identifying the stakeholders, defining goals and objectives, and building a collaborative relationship that is based on shared values, while always focusing on linking theory with practice. Walker and Downey (2012) espouse that the common theme of leadership is the key factor in schools' and students' educational success. It is also apparent that a leadership-for-learning approach is best served with a more expanded concept of leadership development, in which partnering entities such as schools, community colleges, and universities are guided in a structured partnership by a shared vision of teaching, leading, and learning that is collaboratively developed. The power of developing leaders through partnerships lies in the notion that the process of building the partnership helps to create the leaders (Walker & Downey, 2012) and that stakeholders are an integral part of developing and continuing the process.

The Partnership Stakeholder

In an article published in the *Interdisciplinary Description of Complex Systems* journal, Ivana Maric, a member of the faculty of Economics and Business in Zagreb, Croatia, wrote, "Individuals, organizations and entire economies are finding knowledge and investing in education as a unique opportunity for developing personal, organizational and economic capabilities in achieving a competitive advantage" (Maric, 2013, p. 218). The process of economic and social transformation in this expanding era of knowledge is tied to the entire

education system, specifically the ability of higher education to successfully manage its connections to other societal components, such as PreK-12 school districts. Maric's work supports the case for the appropriateness of utilizing the structure of school district–university partnerships as a tool to help meet the present and future needs of education administrator preparation programming.

The success of these partnerships is directly connected to the ability of selected representatives to collaboratively define needs, structure a plan of action, and implement the plan. The selected representatives, or stakeholders, are the actors charged by their parent organizations with the role of using their collective knowledge and skills to help improve the quality and effectiveness of administrator preparation. Twenty-first century stakeholder categories include government entities, administration, employees, clients, suppliers, competitors, donors, communicators, government regulators, nongovernment regulators, financial intermediaries, and—representing the type of partnerships forming the background for this research—joint ventures, alliances, and consortia (Maric, 2013).

Delving into the world of the stakeholder experience led to a review of literature from the world of business and management. It is in this realm that the essence of the role of a stakeholder is historically documented and most accurately defined. Mitchell, Agle, and Wood synthesized the work of those previous researchers to clarify the identification of stakeholders as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997, p. 854). This definition was extended by Robbins and Coulter and reported by Maric to include "any constituencies in the organization's external environment that are affected by the organization's decisions and actions" (Robbins & Coulter,

as cited in Maric, 2013, p. 222). Embedded in the definition is the identification of stakeholders as primary or secondary, as actors or those acted upon, and as risk takers or influencers (Mitchell et al., 1997). This amalgamated definition provides the backdrop for analyzing the roles and experiences of stakeholders and examining the stakeholder experience in school–university partnerships focused on education administrator preparation.

In recent years there has been an ever-increasing emphasis on the development of effective partnerships within the public sector. Building these effective and productive relationships requires a better understanding of what customers really need and want, enhancing the importance of strengthening relations between and among internal and external stakeholders (Social Research Institute, 2009). School districts and universities often work in very complex environments dealing with a wide range of players: teachers, students, parents, administrators, school boards, and community leaders. Nevertheless, the basic principles of meaningful stakeholder relationships, such as leadership and staff-involved and effective communication, are necessary to these organizations collaborating to achieve their cooperative goals.

School districts and universities must have leaders who clearly define success, as well as the specified roles of each entity. Also, school districts and universities must have clear communication that is responsive to everyone's needs and intimately linked to the collective agenda; as well, both organizations require staff who demonstrate consistency and credibility at all levels. These necessities breed and maintain stakeholder relationships that have the best chance at remaining true to the mission of the collaboration and support the growing opportunity to critically examine and discuss the complex factors and interconnections that contribute to or detract from quality leadership preparation (Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002).

Stakeholder Theory

The actions of stakeholders in collaborative partnerships are not random, having their basis in many years of stakeholder theory research. Since the advent of Freeman's seminal work on strategic management and stakeholders in 1984, a number of researchers have worked to develop stakeholder theory with a focus on classifying stakeholders into useful categories (Rowley, 1997). Drawing on the social sciences of sociology, economics, politics, and ethics, stakeholder theory provides the research background to support how stakeholders with similar interests form and operate as groups. This theory of stakeholder action is recognizable in the interactions between stakeholders selected to represent school districts and universities in their collaborative partnerships. According to the work of Mainardes, Alves, and Raposa (2012), the core assumptions of stakeholder theory include the following:

- Organizations engage in relationships with groups that influence or are influenced by them.
- The theory focuses on these relationships in terms of process and results.
- The interests of legitimate stakeholders are of intrinsic value and no single set of interests prevails over others.
- Ultimately, the theory focuses on managerial decision making.
- The theory identifies how stakeholders seek to influence organizational decision-making processes, so that they become consistent with their needs and priorities.
- Organizations must strive to understand, reconcile and balance the needs of all stakeholders.

Myllykangas, Kujala, and Lehtimaki (2011) stated that the core assumptions of this theory help create value for stakeholders. In the stakeholder literature, value creation is examined as a relational, rather than a transactional, exchange. In partnerships, such as those that exist between universities and school districts, this stakeholder value creation is challenged and extended to the development of relationships that are manifested through cooperation, collaboration, and network influences. The development and maintenance of favorable and productive stakeholder relationships is regarded as essential in creating real value in successful partnerships. Frooman brought forth the idea that "though stakeholder theory has traditionally emphasized the individuals in the relationships, and not the relationships themselves, the relationships developed between stakeholders may tell as much about how the actors will interact as the individual attributes of the actors." (Frooman, 1998, p. 192) It is vital that organizations involved in partnerships select the right representative stakeholders, as their role in making partnerships successful in meeting organizational needs is challenging.

Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder theory reflects two main approaches in analyzing the stakeholder concept: narrow and broad. The broad concept of the actor called a stakeholder is the one used most often by current researchers: one who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives. The growing popularity of stakeholder analysis reflects an increasing recognition of how the characteristics of various stakeholders—individuals, groups, and organizations—influence the decision-making process both within and between organizations. Stakeholder analysis has its foundation in policy, management, and development. It can be used to generate knowledge about those serving as stakeholders to better understand their behavior, intentions,

interrelations, agendas, and interests, as well as the influences they have on the decision-making process (Brugha & Varvasovszky, 2000).

The basis for analysis of the stakeholder concept was formed by Freeman's 1984 classical stakeholder theory. Freeman's (1984) work has been extended to examine the theory in terms of analyzing the growing interdependence of organizations fostering new hybrid stakeholder groups. This new twist on the classical work of Freeman (1984) incorporates a focus on several approaches, including stakeholder pressure, influence, and the effects of different issues and approaches to corporate governance. In both education and business, leadership often acknowledges the fact that organizations acquire their stakeholders through the dynamism and interdependence of relationships and that these stakeholders share a common risk, a possibility of gaining benefits or experiencing losses or harm (Susniene & Vanagas, 2007). This focus is always impacted by the human condition and the vital relationships that develop between and among stakeholders (Darskuviene & Bendoraitiene, 2013).

In education, an important key to the success of any effort to positively and substantially change the preparation of school and school-system leaders is a commitment among stakeholders to find common ground and work interdependently toward the realization of mutually agreed-on goals (Brooks, Havard, Tatum, & Patrick, 2010). Other considerations include the following: (a) stakeholders sometimes compete against each other and sometimes complement each other; (b) stakeholders may form strategic alliances, or cooperate, to increase the persuasive power of their combined claim; and (c) the ability of stakeholders to influence other stakeholders, as well as their parent organizations, is often determined by the particular nature of their roles (Neville & Mengue, 2006). The research is clear: No single organization or group can create and sustain the

kind of leadership preparation changes needed to provide quality leaders for this and the next generation. Thus, the collective work of partnerships and collaborations provides promise in addressing the many needs of leadership preparation in the field of education.

Stakeholder collaboration between organizations supports the concept that some problems are best managed with a collective effort. The idea of school districts' joining with universities to improve the quality of administrator preparation is representative of a social partnership. Social partnerships are collectivities of organizations that come together to solve problems that may be difficult for an organization to solve alone. These types of collaborations represent social problem-solving mechanisms that allow organizations to pool resources, capitalize on complementary capabilities, achieve economies of scale, and enhance innovativeness. Additionally, these types of inter-organizational collaborations and partnerships help facilitate the needed exchange of information and the development of common norms, which have long-term effects on problem solving and performance (Savage et al., 2010).

Organizations are motivated to seek cross-sectoral partnerships based on three general factors. First, collaborations allow organizations to achieve milestones that could not be accomplished in any other way. Second, these types of partnerships help organizations tackle social or macro-environmental problems that cannot be adequately addressed by any organization acting alone. Third, organizations gain an adaptive advantage through building effective collaborations, thereby preparing them to respond to environmental complexities, uncertainties, or turbulence. An examination of inter-organizational partnerships and collaborations provides an insight into the world of both descriptive and instrumental stakeholder theory (Savage et al., 2010).

Stakeholder Experience

The need for organized collaboration and focus on leadership preparation leads to examination of the stakeholder experience. Business scholars have recognized two fundamentally different views of the definition of a stakeholder. Fassin (2012) presented the *claimant* definition as any individual or group that maintains a stake in the organization, its work, or its products. He also offered the *influencer* definition: one who can be affected or who can affect the organization. These two visions of the stakeholder concept reflect different issues, both having their origins in the differences between managerial and legal interpretations. Oates (2013) connected Fassin's (2012) definitions through the explanation that stakeholders include any group or individual who can affect or be affected by the achievements of an organization's objectives. In the context of stakeholders' being charged with improving education leadership preparation through district–university partnerships, both the claimant and the influencer definitions have merit.

The competing interests that stakeholders bring to a partnership can make it difficult for them to balance their responsibilities with their assigned tasks. Organizational performance is related to organizational objectives, and such objectives are partly determined by the organization's response to conflicting stakeholder demands (Oates, 2013). It is imperative that both sets of stakeholders, school district and university, clearly identify and prioritize the requirements of their parent organizations and that they bring this information to the collaboration effort. It is also important that all involved stakeholders come to the partnership experience with similar levels of decision-making ability within their respective organizations.

This similarity places the stakeholders on equal ground as they tackle the challenges of the partnership objectives.

Stakeholders not only are judged by organizations and partners based on the social constructs of their legitimacy, but they are also classified in the literature by their respective levels of importance, or stakeholder salience. This classification structure takes into account some very important aspects of the stakeholder's role as it relates to effectiveness in partnerships. According to the research of Mainardes et al. (2012), stakeholder salience includes the stakeholders' powers of negotiation, relational legitimacy within the organization and with partner organizations, and the urgency with which they attend to stakeholder requirements. Stakeholder salience is dynamic, taking into account the uniqueness of each individual situation, as the attributes of power, urgency, and legitimacy are variables that are socially constructed and not always clear to the stakeholders. As stakeholders representing school districts and universities, respectively, work collaboratively to improve leadership preparation, there is guided by the somewhat binary nature of their attributes and the dynamic nature of their salience. See Figure 1.

To extend the discussion about stakeholder salience, it is important to examine the associated attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency. First, stakeholders possessing power have the ability to exercise their own will despite their allegiance to the parent organization. When considering stakeholder multiplicity within a network of

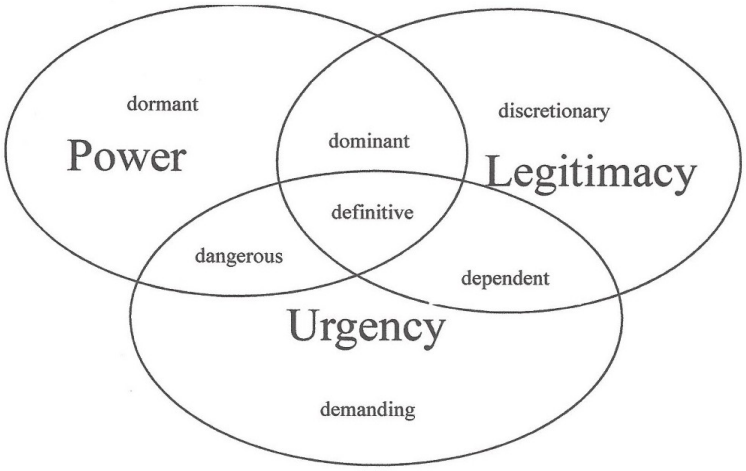

Figure 1. Typology of stakeholder salience attributes of power, urgency and legitimacy, and their impact on the ability of a stakeholder to impact the decisions of the sponsoring organization (Neville, Bell, & Whitwell, 2011).

interconnected stakeholder relationships, stakeholder power may be explained using social network theory. This relational network of stakeholders representing districts and universities, is maximized by the power obtained through the structure it creates, as opposed to power gained through individual stakeholder attributes (Neville & Mengue, 2006).

Next, the ability of a stakeholder to make decisions within the partnership on behalf of the organization leads to an investigation of stakeholder legitimacy. Santana (2012) noted that stakeholder legitimacy is represented as a composite perception by the focal organizations' management of the legitimacy of (a) the stakeholders as an entity, (b) the stakeholders' claims, and (c) the stakeholders' behavior throughout the partnership effort. Stakeholder legitimacy is socially constructed, involving the core themes of the nature of the individual and his or her knowledge. The assessment of a stakeholder's legitimacy is a social construction of reality, in which individual interpretations are assembled and negotiated through sense-making and sense-giving processes.

Stakeholder urgency is the third attribute of the salience model set forth by Mitchell et al. (1977). Urgency refers to the degree to which a stakeholder claims call for immediate attention. Sensitivity to time and criticality form the basis of urgency (Myllykangas et al., 2011). Urgent stakeholders demand the attention of those they represent and are motivated to take action when a claim is time sensitive or critical. Mitchell et al. asserted that each of the three attributes of stakeholder salience was either present or absent; however, it has been determined that each attribute operates on a continuum and that salience is actually defined through the cumulative number of the attributes (Neville, Bell, & Whitwell, 2004). It also has been asserted by Neville, Bell, and Whitwell (2011), as they revisited stakeholder salience, that power and legitimacy help to define and identify stakeholders, but that possessing urgency alone is irrelevant in the identification of stakeholders.

Trust in Stakeholder Relationships

As previously noted, the emergence of partnerships illustrates the inadequacy of traditional structures and techniques in meeting shared goals and addressing common needs. New approaches to problem solving are required for partnering arrangements, such as district–university partnerships, to be effective. Problem solving in the context of partnerships rests not on traditional authority structures and systems, however, but on the foundation of relationships and trust (Getha-Taylor, 2012). Trust, a morally desirable characteristic of relationships (Jones & Wicks, 1999), is a key feature impacting the success of stakeholders in working collaboratively as partners and is a foundational aspect of cross-sector partnerships that must be preserved to maintain them. Countless efforts by companies and organizations to work together to tackle some of the most complex challenges of the day have failed because of competitive

self-interest, a lack of a fully shared purpose, and, most importantly, a shortage of trust (Nidumolu, Ellison, Whalen, & Billman, 2014)

Leaders of organizations engaged in developing collaborative partnerships should strive to create and maintain mutually trusting and cooperative relationships with their collaborative partners. Ossola, in describing trust as a mechanism to increase docility as a factor in making collaboration more effective in problem solving, stated,

> Although trust is, according to Augier and Sarasvathy (2004), not a universal bedrock on which to build theories about human interaction, it is considered one of the elements that may facilitate human interaction and, as a consequence it may also facilitate human docility. (Ossola, 2013, p. 496)

Ossola contended that trust makes individuals more willing to be docile and less willing to behave in self-interest. As an instrument to cope with opportunism, trust increases confidence in the interdependence of the collaborative effort, making the formation and success of collaborative partnerships more effective.

Stakeholders' trust is essential to providing quality work on project development teams, such as those involved in improving education administrator preparation. Trust infuses confidence in the abilities and character of collaborating partners, while extending independence in decision making vital to controlling the process of getting things done. Greenwood (2006) added that trust also entails an expectation of morally correct performance, guiding the trusting parties to place themselves in positions of dependence and vulnerability because they believe the trusted party will act for the greater good. Greenwood and Van Buren (2010), in their review of trustworthiness in organizations and its connection to stakeholder theory, noted that there had

been considerable academic work within the business literature focusing on trust and fairness in stakeholder–organization relations. Although organizational trustworthiness does not create an ethical obligation for stakeholders to hold fast to the objectives and interests of their parent organization, it does provide a means by which ethical obligations are more likely to be positively discharged. This idea of stakeholder management has long been recognized as a central part of any organization's effectiveness, especially in building partnerships. Stakeholders play important roles as advocates and agents of change and take these roles into multi-organizational, partnership-building experiences (Social Research Institute, 2009).

The full impact of trust on the establishment and implementation of partnerships focused on administrator preparation has not been fully realized. In business literature, Greenwood and Van Buren (2010) defined trust from Hosmer's perspective:

> the reliance by one person or group upon a voluntarily accepted duty on the part of another person or group, to act in a manner that is ethically justifiable; that is, undertake morally correct decisions and actions based upon ethical principles of analysis towards all others engaged in a joint endeavor. (Hosmer, 1995, p. 393)

In building partnerships focused on improving the quality of education administrator preparation, it is imperative that trusting relationships be established and maintained throughout the partnership effort. When school district personnel and university staff members trust each other, they rely on each other to take care of the things that each side cares about, making themselves and their organizations vulnerable and creating risk. In working together, however, both organizations may achieve improved cooperation or benefits from the exchange.

Alexander, Miesing, and Parsons (2005) supported this notion in suggesting that organizations pursue relationships with other organizations to obtain benefits through reducing their costs and increasing their revenues, as they look to improve the quality of their products. Trust improves stakeholder satisfaction, which further helps to make partnerships yield more positive results for all organizations involved. Nevertheless, any complete account of trust should encompass two types of elements: calculative and non-calculative. The calculative component reflects an organization's confidence in its partner's reliability and predictability, whereas the non-calculative component values learning about the partner organization and its motives, while identifying with the partner's interests. Trust even may substitute for formal partnership governance when the behavior that trust generates offers a more effective safeguard than complex contracts or vertical integration (Zhang & Jia, 2009).

The process of building and sustaining collaborative trust in developing and maintaining partnerships can be complicated by a host of issues. Some of these potential challenges include prior conflicts, hidden or different agendas, personality clashes, competition among partners, lack of accountability, lack of information sharing, and power differentials (Getha-Taylor, 2012). These challenges to developing trust can be overcome as leaders of organizations share information, work on building relationships, model openness, offer assistance, make good on commitments, and earn others' support by sharing credit, keeping confidences, and being trustworthy (Getha-Taylor, 2012).

Chapter Three

Methodology

Purpose

Investigating the experiences of stakeholder groups in developing district–university partnerships focused on school leadership presents a daunting task. Though the literature shares many examples of these types of partnerships, like those highlighted in the executive summary of the Wallace Foundation sponsored school leadership study (San Diego Unified School District and the University of San Diego, New York City Public Schools Region 1 and Bank Street College and Jefferson County Public Schools and the University of Louisville); the documentation tends to focus on the mechanics of the process or the outcomes in terms of the number and quality of educational leaders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). The personal experiences of those responsible for engaging in the development and actualization of district–university partnerships have not been fervently investigated. From the selection of stakeholders chosen to represent both school districts and universities to the induction of these professionals into the work they have been selected to pursue, this investigation is designed to provide a thick description of the thoughts, feelings, images, sensations, and memories of this often diverse body of educators as they go about their assigned work.

Appropriateness of the Research Design

Each selected member of the teams representing these partnerships comes to the task with a historical perspective driven by past experiences, which is bound to help bring personal meaning to their work. The qualitative research tradition of phenomenology comes to terms with the true motivation and significance of inquiries only by engaging in an examination of

experiences through this historical reflexive practice (Ferencz-Flatz, 2011). As phenomenology is rooted in examining the essence of direct lived experience, this qualitative research study is informed by this research tradition; its tenets meld easily with the investigation and its research questions. Converse (2012) added that phenomenology guides the researcher to explore and understand the everyday experiences of others without presupposing knowledge of those experiences. This idea of philosophical reduction, or epoche, leaves the researcher completely open to whatever presents itself during the investigated phenomenon.

The research tradition of phenomenology began in 1913 with the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, who used it to describe the experience of a phenomenon in consciousness. Husserl's (1913) work was expanded by Hans-Georg Gadamer, who emphasized text and conversation as media of interpretation (Converse, 2012). Groenewald (2004) summarized Husserl's focus on this research tradition: To arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness. Realities are treated as pure phenomena and the only absolute data from which to begin. It is through this phenomenological research lens that the experiences of school district stakeholders in district–university collaborative partnerships focused on education leadership preparation are examined.

The ultimate goal of this phenomenologically informed research design is to describe, as accurately as possible, the experiences of selected stakeholders, as they engage in the development and implementation of partnerships focused on education administrator preparation. This goal must be realized while refraining from any predetermined framework and remaining true to the uncovered facts (Groenewald, 2012). In extending the influence of this research

tradition, a review of how the philosophies of science undergird this phenomenologically informed design led the researcher to the following conclusions:

- Ontologically, this research design focuses on the phenomenon of the stakeholder experience as subjective, without a universal truth.
- Epistemologically, the knowledge to be gained from this research study is limited only by the quality of the interactions of those involved in the process.

One of the powerful components of the influence of phenomenology is that the values and feeling of the participants are intimately involved in the knowledge to be gained from the study. This axiological perspective was paramount to the development of this research design, leading to the presentation of data in which the participants' voices are strongly represented. Methodologically, this phenomenologically informed qualitative research design is supported by the social constructivist paradigm, in which multiple contextual perspectives and subjective voices can define truth. Through the belief system illustrated by this paradigm, the phenomenon of school-leadership focused, district–university partnership stakeholder experiences were carefully examined (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Research Questions

The literature reviewed for this research effort addressed the use of school–university partnerships as a tool to help improve the quality of many aspects of public education. The literature also highlighted the potential impact of these collaborative partnerships as a vehicle for improving the preparation and job success of school-based administrators. This phenomenologically informed, qualitative study seeks to examine the experiences of school district stakeholders in developing and sustaining school–university partnerships focused on

administrator preparation. The primary research question asks: What is the experience of primary school district stakeholders in the development and implementation of school–university partnerships focused on administrator preparation?

Corollary research questions include the following:

1. How does a primary stakeholder describe the experience of establishing and participating in a district–university partnership?
2. Is developing trust among the stakeholders vital to the success of the partnership? What other feelings are associated with doing this work?
3. How do the prior experiences (pre-partnership) of the stakeholders impact the experience of participating in a district–university partnership?

Method

Research team.

This phenomenologically informed study was managed by a research team that included the researcher, two research team members, and one professor. The primary researcher was responsible for designing the semistructured interview questions, selecting the participants, interviewing the participants, transcribing the interview data, sharing the transcribed interviews with the respondents, and working collaboratively with the research team to analyze the data and complete all levels of coding. The two research team members supported the researcher by reviewing the transcriptions, participating in levels of coding, and participating in consensus coding with theme emersion. The professor served as an advisor and supportive mentor throughout the research process.

Researcher bias.

One potential threat to validity, researcher bias, was presented by Johnson (1997) as resulting from selective observation and selective recording of information, and also allowing one's personal views and perspectives to affect how data are interpreted and how the research is conducted. This researcher–participant relationship was further explained in the 1994 work of Miles and Huberman, also cited in Hayes and Singh's (2012) research. They argued that the development and characteristics of the research relationship are influenced by the effects of the researcher on the participants and the effects of the participants on the researcher. In this qualitative phenomenologically informed research design, bias is rooted in the researcher's past experiences with school leadership preparation programs, as well as the challenges faced during a long career in public education.

The researcher's professional experiences in education, universities attended, and recent research on the development and success of School Leadership Program (SLP) federal grant-funded programs, could have impacted the development of the research question(s), methods selected, and reflexivity used as a part of the research design and implementation process. As a doctoral graduate student assistant assigned to work with a professor who was responsible for the formation and maintenance of a research hub for School Leadership Program (SLP) grant funded district and university partnerships; the researcher came to this effort with authentic experiences surrounding the history and challenges of successfully designing and implementing these collaborative partnerships. Additionally, the researcher spent almost 32 years in public education, serving as a teacher, principal and central office administrator. Much of the work experienced by the researcher as a central office administrator, centered on writing state grants,

while serving as the district stakeholder responsible for building grant sponsored partnerships with city government agencies, private businesses, universities and non-profits.

With regard to the impact of researcher bias, Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy and Sixmith (2013), in their work on interpretive phenomenology as a research methodology, concluded that a core aspect of phenomenology and phenomenology-informed research is that the researcher is often considered inseparable from assumptions and preconceptions about the phenomenon under investigation, and they noted that this possibility must be acknowledged and integrated into the research findings. It seems that researchers cannot rid themselves completely of what they know or think and must acknowledge to themselves and others their preunderstandings as a part of the context of the study. This acknowledgment will be indicated in the scope and results of this research.

Sampling method and recruitment.

Based upon the purpose of this research study, the participants were selected by homogeneous purposeful sampling, with specific criteria developed for the sample prior to entering the field of research. As this study is focused on gaining comprehensive information about one specific subgroup, it is important to the trustworthiness of the research effort that all selected cases share the experience of currently, or having recently served as district stakeholder involved in the process of developing and helping to sustain a district–university partnership focused on school leadership. This sampling method improved the possibility of producing thick, rich explanations from the interviews (Tilford, 2010).

The directors of district-university partnership programs funded through the United States Department of Education's School Leadership Program (SLP) grants, were contacted to get

information about district stakeholders currently or recently working with their partnerships. Once confirmed as district stakeholders by the partnership directors, these dedicated professionals were invited by email to participate in this qualitative research study through a scheduled semistructured interview. They were given a range of possible dates and asked to please respond with a day and time that was personally convenient. Many district stakeholders from around the United States were contacted, with 13 confirmed responses scheduling and completing interviews. These 13 respondents served as the participants or cases in this effort.

Context.

Contextually, the district–university collaborative partnership environment will shape the focus of the interactions and understandings of the primary stakeholder participants in this research study. This environment will help define the social experiences of the participants as they go through the partnership development process and serve as research participants. The impact of context on the experiences of these participants cannot be overlooked, as it provides the foundation for how these participants will interact with the researcher in reference to their common experience as selected or self-selected stakeholders. Their experiences are best understood holistically, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture with more accurate interpretations of who the participants are in this research effort (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Instrumentation and data collection.

Phenomenology is the research tradition that informed this research. In support of this tradition, the researcher considered carefully all of the ways that information can be received from other people, ultimately selecting the semistructured interview as the data collection method. The semistructured interview protocol allows for a valid collection of meaningful data

when only one chance will be available to complete the interview (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006); therefore, it is very appropriate in this research design.

In using the semistructured interview process, the researcher developed an interview protocol to serve as a framework for the interviews, allowing participants to share information from their viewpoint and experience. Remaining true to the selected data collection process, the researcher encouraged the participants to get involved in the structure and process of the interviews, which potentially gave rise to a more robust representation of their voices, thereby providing more reliable, comparable qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

According to the developed protocol, prior to the start of the interviews, the participants were asked to complete a demographic profile document. It was made clear to participants that all identifying information will be removed from the data collection during coding and that they can choose not to answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable. During the recorded interviews, each participant was prompted by questions designed to gain information about the historical perspective of the stakeholder, the stakeholder experience, the stakeholder role in starting partnerships, the stakeholder role in sustaining partnerships, interactions between stakeholders, trust between stakeholders, and challenges for stakeholders. In accordance with phenomenology, after a review of the initial interviews, an attempt was made as needed to engage participants in continued discussion about their stakeholder experiences. This helped the researcher gain more information to support a collaborative and recursive research process.

Data analysis.

Data collected through 13 semistructured interviews were reduced to patterns and themes through the process of coding. Interviews were verbatim transcribed and then shared with the

participants for confirmation that they adequately represented the interview sessions. The researcher met with the research team to discuss the protocols for the data analysis process, and then shared the participant-reviewed transcriptions. The transcriptions were initially reviewed by the researcher and research team for content and then reviewed again for the selection of key words and phrases representing the experiences of the participants. This process of horizonalization served to provide initial Level 1 or open codes, which were discussed in the context of both the individual interview questions and the interview questions categories (background, behavior, opinion, knowledge, feeling, closing question). The level 1 codes were critically reviewed by the research team for focused or consensus coding and interrater reliability. Through the process of consensus coding the research team merged codes based on interpreting the transcripts and research team discussions, leading to the emergence of themes and subthemes. The coding process concluded when the researcher, with the support of the research team, reached the point that no additional themes emerge and saturation was reached. The resulting themes and subthemes lead to answers to the research questions. Information from follow-up discussions with participants also was used to enhance the development of themes and research question conclusions.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, or the degree to which readers have confidence in the findings, was defined in this research study through the following criteria and strategies. Credibility was evidenced by the use of document notes, triangulation, and a well-defined audit trail. Transferability was supported by triangulation of data methods. Themes were illustrated in data collected through semistructured interviews and data analysis. Confirmability and authenticity

were evidenced by document notes, triangulation, and member checking, with the participants' being asked to review the transcripts of their interviews for accuracy. Sampling adequacy was supported in this research study by member checking and triangulation. Ethical validation was evidenced by the use of researcher notes, member checking, and peer debriefing with the research team members. Substantive validation was assessed through the use of notes, member checking, triangulation, and an audit trail. The final criteria for trustworthiness, creativity, was evidenced in this research study through triangulation (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Pilot Study

The pilot study that preceded this research design provided a preliminary look at the viability of pursuing a research study focused on the experiences of stakeholders in developing and implementing district–university partnerships focused on administrative preparation. The pilot study represented an attempt to gain valuable insight into the structure and format of phenomenology as a research tradition in seeking answers to research questions surrounding this topic. Findings gleaned from the pilot study informed the researcher in areas of participant selection, methodology, and data analysis, as this research study cycled into another round of data collection, coding, theme development, and conclusions. Also, the pilot study led the researcher to focus this effort only on the experiences of the district stakeholders as they partnered with university leadership to impact the future of administrator preparation.

Participants and setting.

The two participants selected for the pilot study represented, respectively, a school district and a university involved in a School Leadership Program (SLP) grant-funded partnership. The school district participant, a middle-aged, White female with a 30-year career

in public education, became involved in the preparation of school leaders as a part of her role as a professional development coordinator. The university participant, a middle-aged, White male with both public school and university experience, spent many years as a researcher examining the process of effective school leadership preparation practices. Although there was some variability in the past experiences of the participants, they both had the common experience of serving in the role of stakeholder, and both had been involved in many aspects of the development and implementation of district–university partnerships.

Description of data collection process.

The participants were interviewed, using a semi-structured interview format, with questions focused on the historical perspective of the stakeholder, defining the stakeholder experience, the formation of partnerships, and the sustainability of partnerships, stakeholder interactions, and stakeholder challenges. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and sent to the participants for review to facilitate member checking. To support this data collection and to include an unobtrusive data collection method, documents from both participants were collected and reviewed. Detailed notes were taken from the review of the documents; the notes were used to help support and theme the data, based, first, on open coding of individual participant responses, then on reexamination of the coded data to create focused coding, and, finally, on axial coding for theme refining.

Description of themes and codes.

Throughout the coding process, several themes emerged representing the stakeholder experience in developing and implementing district–university partnerships. Each level of coding, including the analysis of selected partnership documents, further supported these themes

as relevant to the stakeholder experience. The theme of *history*, defined in the pilot study as the past experiences of stakeholders prior to involvement in partnership efforts, was found to be important in helping to shape the context that the participants brought to their role as stakeholders. History was also connected to the second theme of *motivation,* or the impetus for the stakeholders to get involved in the partnership efforts. As history defined past work experiences and expectations brought to the setting, motivation defined the reasons they chose to engage in the role of stakeholder representing either a school district or a university. In both cases, the motivating factor was a combination of job expectation and personal interest.

Another theme to emerge from the coded data in the pilot study was *experiences*. Experiences represented events or occurrences that stakeholders considered to be important in building effective partnerships. Both participant responses and the document review supported the move from theory to practice as a dominant factor in building district–university partnerships that make a difference. Repeatedly shared were the notions that universities can be somewhat removed from the actual world of K-12 public education and that school districts are interested in programming that actually works with staff and students. The theme of *origins* was defined as how stakeholders perceive that partnerships are created. Whether to meet a need identified by either or both of the partners or in response to a grant opportunity, stakeholders agreed that the origins of a district–university partnership impact the experience of the stakeholders throughout the process. Partnerships driven by grant expectations were found to be limiting, as they can address only the agenda defined by the grant. Grants of a more organic nature were found more often to better meet the needs of both school districts and universities.

Sustainability also emerged as a theme from the pilot study data. Defined as the factors stakeholders viewed as important in maintaining partnerships, sustainability historically has represented many challenges for partnerships. With time, leadership changes, and reduced funding, priorities shift and many partnerships dissipate due to a lack of loyalty to the cause that instigated them and the willingness to build the relationships necessary to keep them actively moving forward.

Interaction was another important emerging theme at the heart of the stakeholder experience in district–university partnerships. Defined in the pilot study as how stakeholders connect with each other, this theme reflected the relationships that developed or did not develop between stakeholders. Both participants in the pilot study reported that serving as a stakeholder was a positive experience. It was presented as collaborative and satisfying, with relationship building as a key factor connected to successful interaction. The last theme to emerge from the pilot study data coding was *challenges*, or the limiting factors stakeholders face in building these partnerships. The data clearly addressed the great divide between the theoretical world of academia and the practical world of K-12 education, reflecting the need for clear common concerns, finding sync, and bridging two worlds.

Potential results.

The pilot study provided a glimpse into the experiences of stakeholders in district–university partnerships focused on school leadership. The data analysis, including both participants' semistructured interview coded data and information gleaned through document review, provided synthesis information that began to produce answers to the research question. In examining the experiences of stakeholders (K-12 district and university) in developing and

sustaining a district–university partnership, the researcher was able to report that the codes and themes extracted from the data provided a clear window into the often challenging role of the stakeholder. From the data emerged several themes representing the experience of the stakeholder: history, motivation, experiences, origins, sustainability, interactions, and challenges. Both participants were eager to report that they were most motivated by helping to bridge the historical gap between university theory and K-12 practice and that these partnerships provided a great hope for improving education by improving the school-based leadership.

The pilot data from this effort supported the need for and power of district–university partnerships to make a difference in the quality and success of K-12 education by contributing to improved leadership. By reputation, many current school leadership preparation programs are not highly effective. Lashway noted in 2003 that a recent public agenda survey found that 69% of principals and 80% of superintendents believed that the typical educational leadership programs were out of touch with the realities regarding the qualities needed to run a school district. This pilot study supports the conclusions in Lashway's (2003) report.

There has been much criticism about the current status of administrator preparation. Much of the literature about leadership development programs describes program features believed to be productive, but evidence about what these graduates can actually do is lacking (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Traditional approaches have been characterized as bankrupt. Change at the university level had been very slow and many faculty members appear not well connected with the actual field, often exhibiting complacency about adopting real standards. Although the issues have been discussed for years, the call to action has been very slow. Real improvements in educational leadership preparation require interconnected work among

universities, practicing administrators, professional organizations, and state-level policymakers (Breault & Breault, 2010). Although the issues have been discussed for years, the call to action has been very slow. Real improvements in educational leadership preparation require interconnected work among universities, practicing administrators, professional organizations, and state-level policymakers (Breault & Breault, 2010).

The role of the stakeholder in manipulating the variables surrounding the development and implementation of effective district–university leadership preparation programs is an important one. This pilot research study illuminated the vital contribution of stakeholders, revealing that their passion for the work that they have either been called to do or volunteered to do greatly impacts their success. Also, the pilot study clarified the dynamic role of relationships in the success of these partnerships. Both participants, when questioned, reflected on the power of the relationships that they forged with other stakeholders as key to their success in meeting the demands of the work they had to do.

The results of this pilot study provided support for the continued investigation into the experience of stakeholders as agents of change in building and implementing collaborative school–university partnerships focused on administrator preparation. This current research effort and the research questions that drive it represent an effort to provide an even more comprehensive look into the world of school district–university partnerships and the experiences of the stakeholders selected by each entity to create, implement, and refine the work of improving the pipeline of administrators in America's public schools.

Chapter Four

Results

Introduction

Collaborative partnerships between school districts and universities focused on school leadership development are a major part of a recent effort to provide the field of education with leaders who are able to effectively meet the demands of educating students in the 21st century. The purpose of this research effort was to examine the experiences of selected school district leaders, or stakeholders, as they collaborated with their university colleagues to transform public school leadership preparation. The following primary research question served to guide the process: What is the experience of district stakeholders in the development and implementation of school district-university partnerships focused on administrator preparation? Their professional backgrounds, work experiences and untiring support are essential for the potential success and development of the key relationships needed to design, implement, and sustain effective school district-university partnerships.

In this chapter the researcher initially shares demographic and personal information about the participants in this research study. Also presented is a summary of the data collected and gleaned through the analysis of interviews, providing a thick description of the lived experiences of the district stakeholders as they worked in collaboration with their university counterparts. Through layers of analysis and conceptualization by both the researcher and the research team, the conclusions of coded responses, emerging themes, and subthemes are illuminated.

Data Collection

The data to support this qualitative research were gathered through the use of digitally recorded, semistructured, 12-question interviews of 13 participants selected by homogeneous purposive sampling. An audit trail was maintained to keep a comprehensive record of research activities, including: transcription communications, demographic information forms, participant invitation messages, interview scheduling messages, coding sheets, coding summary sheets, and email communications with participants. The collected demographic profile and personal information of these educators includes the state in which they served as district stakeholder, the age of the participants, the ethnicity of the participants, the gender of the participants, and their total number of years of experience in education.

Location of Partnership and Role of District Stakeholder

The sample reflects the district-university partnership effort in school districts from across the United States, including locations in Virginia, North Carolina, Illinois, Oklahoma and California. Represented are four rural school districts with 1,000 to 2,300 students, six suburban school districts with 5,500 to 20,000 students, and three urban school districts with 39,000-640,000 students. Of the 13 participants in the sample, four currently participate or recently participated in school district-university partnerships in rural settings, seven currently participate or recently participated in partnerships in suburban settings, and two currently participate or recently participated in partnerships in urban settings. In the rural school districts, the role of district stakeholder was usually assumed by the superintendent due to limited central office staff. However, in the suburban school districts and urban school districts, the stakeholder role was

assigned or assumed by human resources, or a principal leadership program representative (coach, coordinator, director).

Important to the integrity of this research was the need for all members of the sample to share similar responsibility in their district stakeholder roles as they worked in partnership with universities. Current or last school district office positions for the sample, reflect one principal coach, two coordinators, three human resources personnel, four directors, and three superintendents. This factor is important to the research, as it represents the level of the stakeholders' ability to make and influence decisions on behalf of the school district. From demographic information and interview responses, it was evident that all participants were granted the ability to make either recommendations or decisions at a level adequate to effectively impact the design and implementation of the district-university partnerships of which they were a part.

In 10 of 13 school districts in the sample where the district-university stakeholder representative was not the superintendent, the responsibility for the oversight and implementation of this work, was either assigned to a position already in place in human resources (two members of the sample) or a position was added (eight members of the sample). These positions were added based on an assessed need for having a specific person or office manage all facets of the district-university partnership process for the school district. Since all school districts in the sample were participants in SLP grants, funding was usually available through grant funds to provide or partially support the development and hiring of these full-time-equivalent (FTE) positions.

Age, ethnicity, gender and years in education.

As reported in Table 1, the 13 participants in the sample were given pseudonyms to insure anonymity throughout this research effort. Additionally, 61.5% of the group identified gender as female and 38.5% of the group identified gender as male. Also, 76.9% of the group reports ethnicity as White, with 15.4% of the group reporting Black, and 7.7% of the group reporting Latino. The participants range in age from 32 to 64, with the average age of the group at 52 years. In terms of years of experience in education, the sample reflected a low of 10 years of service and a high of 41 years of service, with an average career length of 26.3 years. Though there is diversity in the demographics of the participants, they all report having had the career experiences necessary to bring competence and credibility to their role as district stakeholder.

Table 1. *Participant Characteristics and Demographic Information*

Participant	Pseudonym	State	Age	Ethnicity	Sex	Experience
P1	Ava Turner	Illinois	54	White	F	34 years
P2	Karolina Sacher	Illinois	58	White	F	36 years
P3	Eliza Baugher	Oklahoma	63	White	F	41years
P4	Candi Cybulski	Illinois	48	White	F	20 years
P5	Ivonne Blanke	Illinois	41	White	F	12 years
P6	Mortie Kieran	North Carolina	59	White	M	30 years
P7	Annmarie Lakey	Illinois	32	White	F	10 years
P8	Mandel Strieff	Virginia	57	White	M	34 years
P9	Miller Duggan	North Carolina	64	White	M	34 years
P10	Cristin Barraza	California	48	Latina	F	25 years
P11	Willie Sauer	California	42	White	M	18 years
P12	Erin Winther	North Carolina	47	Black	F	21 years
P13	Elihu Lynch	Illinois	64	Black	M	27 years

The Interpretive Analysis Process

The main goal of utilizing interpretive qualitative phenomenological analysis is to explore in detail how the participants in the sample are making sense of their personal and social world. This research study's focus, to examine the lived experiences of school district stakeholders in developing and implementing administrator preparation partnerships with colleges and universities, is best served through the steps of this process. Interpretive phenomenological analysis has a theoretical commitment to the person as a cognitive, linguistic, affective, and physical being, assuming a direct chain of connection between what people say and their thinking and emotional state (Smith & Osborn, 2004). The connection that this process asserts makes it a good fit for the kind of experience descriptions intended as the outcome of this effort. It is through interpretive phenomenological analysis that this research can most effectively explore the lived personal experiences and personal perceptions of the district stakeholders.

Inherent in implementing this analysis is a two-stage interpretation, with the participants trying to make sense of their world while the researcher is simultaneously trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith & Osborne, 2004). This presentation of a double hermeneutic, or text interpretation, is critical to the researcher moving through the analysis from a level of specificity to a level of generality leading to the emergence of themes representing the lived experiences of the school district stakeholders. The experiences of the selected stakeholders were meshed together in order to create one grand experience, emphasizing the strengths and highlighting themes they all found evident in their work.

The semistructured interviews initiating this research were transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were read by the researcher and shared with the respondents to make sure the transcribed data adequately represented the interview experience, and then read by two additional members of the research team for content understanding. Additionally, the transcriptions were re-read by the researcher and the research team members, critically re-examined to capture key words and short phrases that detailed the essence of what the participants were sharing in the interviews. This process of horizonalization, defined by Moustakas (as cited in Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell, 2004) as the identification of specific information from the interview transcripts that provide a glimpse into the experiences of the participants, is key to beginning to understand the lived experiences of the participants in developing and implementing district-university partnerships focused on administrator preparation. Next in the analysis process, the research team met and discussed in detail the key words and phrases or codes that were compiled and organized first for each interview question, and then for each interview question category. The codes were then merged based on evidence presented in the transcripts, and based on consensus by the research team members. Themes induced from the texts emerged from the consensus coding, representing key aspects of the lived experiences of the district stakeholders as they engaged in the work of building and implementing partnerships with university representatives.

Responses and Emerging Themes

At the conclusion of the coding and analysis phases of this qualitative phenomenologically influenced research effort, several themes emerged from the data. These emerging themes, defined by Ely, Friedman and Steinmetz (as cited in Piercy, 2015) as

statements of meaning that run through all or most of the pertinent data, or carry heavy emotional impact; provide for the researcher a glimpse into the lived professional experiences of school district stakeholders. The participants in this qualitative research effort, represent SLP grant programs and district stakeholders from across the United States. Their experiences in doing this important work loudly resonate in the honest and insightful answers that they shared in response to the semistructured interview questions, forming the data collection tool for this research.

Through the process of interpretive qualitative phenomenological analysis, transcripts were analyzed and multiple levels of coding were completed, leading to the emergence of themes and subthemes. This extracted information was strategically reviewed by the research team in an attempt to provide a thick, rich description of the lived experiences of these district stakeholders in designing and implementing the framework and activities of their district-university partnerships. From this research experience, the themes of the value of prior experiences, trust as a lever to building positive partnerships, battling issues of time and funding, and building bridges emerged from the research as prominent impacts in defining the experiences of school district stakeholders.

To provide a comprehensive illustration of the intricacies of the themes, for three of the themes subthemes were identified. Clarifying the value of prior experiences are the subthemes of the rural experience, having university friends and other vital connections. Bringing clarity to the theme of trust as a lever to building partnerships, are the subthemes of historical connections, the absence of historical connections, internal trust, and trust revealed. Helping to clearly define the theme of time and funding are the subthemes of scheduling for success and sustainability.

Although each theme emerged from the data analysis on its own, concepts associated with each theme connected the themes as the participants described their experiences. The connections between the themes were also clearly noticed and discussed by the research team, and are reflected in the emerging theme diagram. See Figure 2.

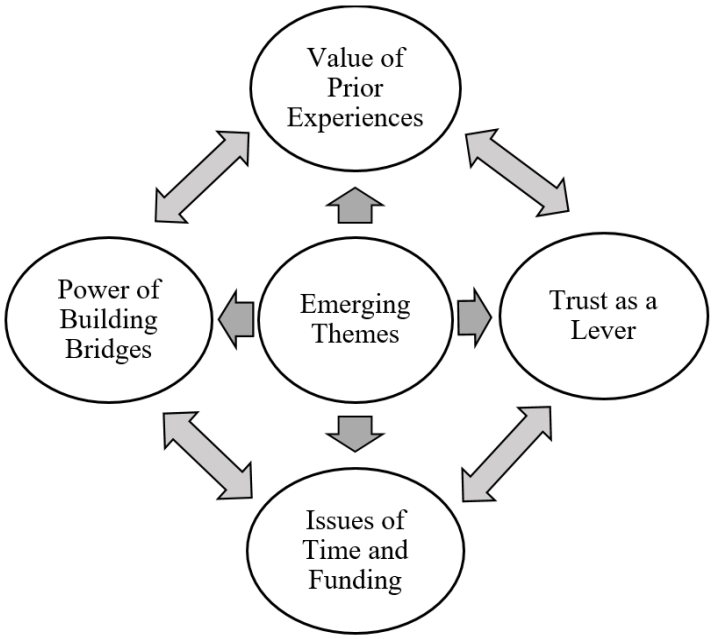

Figure 2. Emerging themes from the process of interpretive qualitative phenomenological analysis.

The value of prior experiences.

The participants, forming the sample for this research, each provided information giving the researcher an in-depth look at their professional world as it pertains to school district-university partnerships. These well-educated, diverse professionals each arrived at their partnership stakeholder roles having experienced an expansive range of professional opportunities, providing for them critical linkages to successfully collaborating with university faculty and staff. The commonalities in their experiences were evident through the passion that

they all shared to do something more, to go beyond the roles expected of them. Participants willingly focused on sharing some of the employment and interest experiences leading them towards their current or recent efforts at building partnerships. Shaped by past experiences in the field and opportunities provided through both job embedded activities and personal pursuits, stakeholders described their individual interest in this phenomenon with such phrases as:

- "Mutually beneficial."
- "A passion of mine throughout my career,"
- "A best way to maximize resources," and finally as
- "Providing greater opportunities for alignment of goals between K-12 and higher education when it comes to growing a pipeline for future administrators."

These past experiences were reported as serving to prepare district stakeholders for the rigors of developing and implementing partnership activities with university stakeholders historically known to often be more interested in theory than in practice.

Responses from the interviews highlight the impact of career experiences to each stakeholder's role in district-university partnerships. Comments were shared such as, "This came into my lap because of other work that I had been doing in the field," and "Because I was already working as a director supervising those principals, I believe I was asked to be a part of the initiative." The career pathways indicated were varied but all shared common opportunities to develop as education professionals, while gaining valuable knowledge and skills critical to working collaboratively with universities. Dr. Eliza Baugher, a retired administrator from a Midwest urban district, was working with administrator preparation in other localities across the United States. When the position to work with her home district and the local university around

the concept of creating an administrative pipeline was posted, application was eminent, with Dr. Baugher coming into the position with a thorough knowledge of the infrastructure of the school district, and with a past relationship with the university. She shared,

> So there are lots of different pieces and parts that fit together. It's been an evolving process. This work has been a passion of mine throughout my career; to help others, to be able to mentor and coach people to help them be successful. It's hugely rewarding.

This passion fueled the experiences of stakeholders and motivated them to reach their full potential, to go beyond the conundrum of the everyday school building or university, and to find a way to bridge their knowledge with that of others to improve the preparation of administrators.

The rural experience.

With a collective 85 years of professional experiences in education, three district stakeholders from rural school districts, Dr. Mortie Kieran; Dr. Miller Duggan; and Mrs. Erin Winther, entered the arena of district-university partnerships following a similar pathway. They all expressed that the small size of their districts and limited resources for professional development created a connection to the university that was pertinent to the growth and success of their school districts. When the opportunity to get involved with a school leadership program grant was presented, these rural districts eagerly consented to be involved, citing opportunities for improving the quality of administrators as the key factor. Dr. Duggan added,

> You can imagine that trying to recruit school principals or school leaders to rural regions is not the easiest process to make happen. In needing to grow our own leaders, this partnership gave us an opportunity as a school system to encourage those individuals we felt had leadership potential into a training program that was provided, of course, at no

> cost to them. Hopefully, at the end, we were able to pull those individuals into specific leadership positions.

Dr. Kieran also lauded the potential of the district-university partnership effort, sharing, "The area superintendents bought into it because we saw the benefits of what a partnership could bring to our school district, with the leaders being groomed from within."

Rural districts were reported to effectively utilize the power of the partnership process to help them build a cadre of effective leaders, knowing the limitations imposed by their often remote locations in recruiting new leaders. Erin Winther, an urban district stakeholder, also weighed in on the impact of distance on partnering with the university, sharing,

> Well, for us it was the distance and how we were going to actually make this happen. With us being in a northeast rural area, we're not in close proximity to the university. So having to do things online, having to provide release time for teachers is a challenge. So that was one of the things, trying to pull it all together to make it happen.

Despite the distance challenges, the partnership process also gave regional rural districts opportunities to effectively collaborate with each other around issues of professional learning and leadership development.

Due to the size of her school district's central administrative staff, Mrs. Winther was involved in the partnership process on several different levels, serving as a professional development coordinator, the director of testing and accountability, the curriculum director, and finally as the director of human resources. These positions provided opportunities to for her to forge meaningful relationships with university staff, while sharing in experiences that would prove vital to the role of representing the school district in a meaningful partnership. "I helped to

work to pull things together," she shared, "and facilitate meetings between the school district and the university. So when they started this program, I was assigned to be the contact person." Rural district stakeholders were given many unique routes to the district stakeholder role with opportunities to serve in different capacities. One assistant superintendent said he "just kind of morphed into the role" and continued that, "It is important to have ties and connections to the community, as you grow into different positions." Connecting to these comments and sharing the importance of rural districts connecting to universities, a fellow rural district stakeholder added,

> I tell people all the time, especially in rural school systems, you have to have a partnership with a university because I think if you don't, you're missing out on opportunities that will be able to enhance your instructional leadership. Public schools and even private schools cannot work in isolation. If they are, they're not meeting with success.

All of the professional opportunities and positions held by these rural educators served as preparation for the complex role of school district partnership stakeholder. These education professionals had no idea that they were headed towards a district-university partnership focused on administrator preparation, but all are certain that history played an active role in providing for them the knowledge and skills needed to appreciate, support, and utilize the power of the partnership.

Having university friends.

For most rural, suburban and urban participants, some level of prior experience with universities was woven throughout their responses. Whether having served as adjunct or part-

time teaching staff, or in some other capacity, there was an established vital connection that supported the willingness of university staff to partner with the school districts. One southwest stakeholder, Dr. Willie Sauer, boasted strong connections with universities,

> I've had personal relationships with the universities because I've taught at them, so I've had partnerships. I've done other things with universities through my affiliations as a part-time faculty member. I had connections, so when we had this need then I called people I knew at the university who might be able to help us!

Dr. Cristin Barraza, another urban district stakeholder from the southwest, was serving as a lecturer at the university, and co-teaching in a principal institute program, forging a strong connection to the university that could only support the development of a district-university partnership. She stated, "These relationships start in working with universities to design curriculum for improving leadership development, leadership skills, and then the relationships extend to other projects." Because these professionals were already involved with their partnering universities in many different ways, they were easily and purposefully drawn into the district stakeholder role, maximizing the power of their prior connections.

One stakeholder whose district is already looking beyond the SLP grant to continue connections with the university stated,

> Our district believes that we want to continue in partnership with the university to enhance our teaching and learning, past the grant period. We want to get help with the research piece, so we can be explicit about what we want when we hire principals,

From the responses of the group, school districts with university friends have a head start in the race to develop and maintain effective partnerships.

Other vital connections.

Additionally, several of the respondents were involved in administrative leadership organizations or district leadership development initiatives prior to their roles as district stakeholders. One midwestern district stakeholder, Dr. Ivonne Blanke, was involved with a center for school effectiveness and education policy organization, when the district-university partnership opportunity surfaced, citing,

> I have been involved for the last 10 years in principal prep design in my state, and so this grant gave me a chance to work with three universities and three district partners and really go deeper into the implementation. Our changes were pretty transformational. Well, I have not been a principal, but I was hired to manage a Wallace Foundation grant on the topic of school leadership. So, I was interested from the outset in just trying to work with these mutually beneficial partnerships.

Dr. Elihu Lynch, another midwestern district stakeholder served on a district level principal redesign committee in the role of assistant superintendent representing the district's interests. In both instances, these professionals were intensely connected to the work of administrator preparation, but through alternative organizations. Their routes to the district stakeholder role were presented as direct and intentional, as they reported being already immersed in much of the work of the partnerships.

Dr. Lynch, currently in the role of assistant superintendent, had a particularly interesting story to share. This seasoned education professional, used the word "extensive" to describe the wealth of prior experiences brought to the role of district stakeholder. These extensive experiences helped to equip him with the knowledge and skills needed to successfully implement

the work of district-university partnerships. Initially shadowing the superintendent in the early stages of the partnership development process, Dr. Lynch was the beneficiary of what was described as a "seamless hand-off," with full responsibility for representing the district in the partnership, and for making sure that the school district fully supports the "reciprocal communication flow," that goes back and forth benefitting each entity. This flow of communication is vital to obtaining and sustaining trust between these entities in order for them to work together towards a common goal, which is a successful partnership.

Lastly, the participants who were serving as superintendents during the development and initial implementation of their partnerships shared yet another view of experiences leading to and supporting their role as district stakeholder. Supporting the notion that prior experiences were important, these leaders acknowledged that they were already invested in relationships with universities due in part to their positions as superintendents in their school districts. Dr. Miller Duggan, a southeastern superintendent stressed that, "Since I've been engaged in several partnerships both here and in another state, I was able to have input into how this partnership would be developed and, more importantly, how it would be rolled out."

Entrenched in a similar situation, a former southeastern superintendent, Dr. Mandel Streiff, was involved in the development of a leadership board with a university prior to the role of serving as a partnership district stakeholder. When the SLP grant opportunity was presented by the university, the school district quickly accepted the challenge, led by a superintendent who was already invested in working collaboratively with higher education. He recalled,

> I worked with them to identify some goals we needed as a rural school system. One need was to have an in-house group of cohorts who we could train, and that we would be able

> to pull from for future administrative needs. The second was to really provide the school system a partnership with the university to help ensure that not only were we training future administrators, but that we were also working with current administrators on strengthening their leadership skills, especially around instructional leadership.

The university is seen by this seasoned education professional as key to helping provide a prepared administrative future workforce for the school district. Dr. Strieff also felt that it was important that the university have the opportunity to continue to conduct some research, as well as help provide professional development to support identified leadership needs.

As the researcher and the members of the research team delved into the data, the theme of the value of past experiences emerged. All of the participants in this research study brought with them to their district stakeholder role, all of their past job experiences and knowledge. Repeatedly, they shared the value of their past positions and experiences with the development of the relationships necessary for the success of their SLP partnerships. "I love working with people involved in research because it enhances me as a school district leader," was one comment shared in the discussion about past experiences and their impact on relationships and partnerships. The participant continued: "This all makes me more self-aware, and demonstrates how important it is to stay connected to timely research and continue connecting researchers to practitioners." Whether participants applied for their current positions, or were "gifted" their positions and/or duties by virtue of the position they held, vital connections were important to their success as district stakeholders, and helped them understand that the world of higher education approaches both the mission and challenges of K-12 education through a somewhat different lens.

Dr. Ava Turner, a career principal was approached by her superintendent and asked to take a new district stakeholder for leadership preparation partnership position. Worried that the position was so different from the position of principal, the decision caused a real internal struggle. She also wondered why she had been selected by the superintendent. Was he just trying to get her out of the building? She worried about this job description that was written hastily by people who are not practitioners. As she sat in her new office sadly missing the students in her old school, Dr. Turner, in a discussion with her daughter, was led to see that through this new position she would be able to impact so many more students by impacting the quality of school leadership. Dr. Turner shared,

> So, I was leaving the known for the unknown. But the concept of helping other principals improve the quality of their service and the potential for helping aspiring principals become solid principals to serve in our schools, was enough for me to say yes.

Motivated to give back, there was an open and honest sharing of the value of the work with the universities the district stakeholders felt called to do, with honest comments like:

- "We really need to partner with the universities so that we can home grow our own or develop what we have and then retain them." and
- "The partnerships are necessary to help develop professional relationships with others that you can pull on or draw from when needed."

Once again, the provocative passion that these educators possess propels them to strive for excellence beyond the walls of school districts and universities. Without passion, these stakeholders would not have gotten involved in their partnerships, and would not have given

their time and talents to effectively step outside of the box to defy the norms of school district administration preparation.

Trust as a lever to building partnerships.

The literature suggests that the full impact of trust on the establishment and implementation of partnerships focused on administrator preparation has not been fully realized. Earlier presented as the reliance by one person or group upon a voluntarily accepted duty, on the part of another group or person, to act in a manner that is ethically justifiable; undertaking morally correct decisions and actions based upon ethical principles of analysis towards all others engaged in a joint endeavor (Hosmer, 1995), trust emerged as a major theme impacting the ability of stakeholders from school districts and universities to work effectively in collaborative settings.

When prompted to examine the role of trust in their ability to work effectively as school district stakeholders in partnership with university stakeholders, the participants in this research study emphatically confirmed that trust matters. With comments like the following peppering the landscape of the interview responses, it is evident that trust is an impactful construct in the collaborative partnership process:

- "Valued relationships are based on trust."
- "Trust matters for sure."
- "Trust is huge." and
- "Trust is definitely a factor."

From making decisions about taking new positions associated with the partnerships, to working effectively with both, other district staff members and university staff members noted that trust

was a key factor. Consequently, the analysis of the data produced trust as an emerging theme with two distinct perspectives: trust as critical, but in place for those participants whose school districts had a historical relationship with the partnering university; and trust as critical, but with the need to develop over time for school districts in partnerships with universities where there has not been a historical relationship.

Trust in these collaborative partnerships was presented as being built on the foundation of these stakeholders effectively and openly sharing with each other aspects of their professional lived experiences. Without clear communication and the openness to share needs and experiences with one another, trust would not have been possible. "Being really honest about what your needs and what your challenges and opportunities are, that kind of communication builds trust," a midwestern district stakeholder shared. Every relationship involved in district-university partnerships evolved and was nurtured through trust. The trust of one partner in these collaborative relationships increased the probability of the trust of the other, creating a chain of trust that will hopefully lead to the commitment of both sets of stakeholders to the work of the partnership.

Historical connections to trust.

Many of the school districts represented in this research study have been actively involved in collaborative relationships with universities for years. Clearly articulating this idea, Dr. Ava Turner, a veteran district stakeholder contributed,

> I think that the university and our school district have been engaged for over 100 years, so we don't even think about it being a trusting relationship anymore. It's just always been; you know what I mean? Like peanut butter and jelly, we go together. But if I ever

> had to think about why it seems right and comfortable and appropriate to do things with them, then the word trust would probably be what comes out, but it's just because it's historic that you don't think about it. It just exists.

Because of the historical relationship that is already in existence, the partnerships serve to deepen the trust between the school districts and universities. One of the Midwest district stakeholders in thinking critically about the significance of history between school districts and universities, shares,

> Well, it seems like one of the very positive parts about the work that we are doing is that the relationship between the school district and the university is historical. This is the power of the relationship and its ability to broker the kind of collaboration needed to make a real difference.

In these situations, key relationships have been established across both organizations, making new initiatives and projects easier to establish and implement. In the rural southeast school districts, very few trust issues were mentioned. It was clearly noted by Dr. Mortie Kieran that

> Most of us know our stakeholders at the university level, and also in the surrounding districts. So, I don't remember trust being an issue just because we've worked together on so many other things. We have to, and when you're a small, rural school districts like we are, you have to work together.

Another district stakeholder, Dr. Miller Duggan, also had a historical relationship with the cooperating university. The school district was involved in a leadership board facilitated by the university, including regional administrators, with Dr. Duggan serving as his district's representative. This vital prior connection facilitated the continuation of trust in the developing

partnership. He expressed, "I think because the school district previously had a working relationship prior to the grant with the university, we had trust from the beginning. So, trust was never an issue."

As the district stakeholders shared the specifics of their prior relationships with the universities serving as partners in their SLP grant programs, it was evident that these experiences were key to establishing an environment of trust. Whether bound by a prior consortium linked to leadership or as a group of rural school districts connected to a university for professional learning, having a professional relationship with the partnering university was paramount to building the trusting relationships necessary for the development of a successful partnership. Encapsulating the impact of having trust from the beginning, Dr. Duggan shared, "Trust was visible in our commitment to the work…we were clear about what the outcomes were going to be."

Trust in the absence of historical connections.

Viewing trust from another perspective were school district stakeholders participating in partnerships in which there was not a longstanding relationship in place between the district and the university. These stakeholders also viewed trust as imperative, but realized the additional responsibility of helping to build positive working relationship between the two participating entities. In the words of southwest district stakeholder, Dr. Cristen Barraza,

> Trust is definitely a factor. I think a lot of it is unspoken. It has to do with building relationships through meetings, through face time. You need a venue that is pleasing and welcoming, with food provided. These are the kinds of things that, on a human level, on an interpersonal level, become very important for building trust.

Dr. Lynch, an assistant superintendent serving as a district stakeholder from a suburban midwestern district added,

> It is the quality of the interactions, and the way we worked with each other that helped to pull people to the other side of the street, to begin to pull them over to say, let me get on board.

In these partnerships, the school district stakeholders clearly understand the value of building trust to effectively getting the work done. Their responses echoed their understanding of the importance of developing relationships with university counterparts as an integral part of establishing an environment of collaboration and trust. This concept was clearly illustrated in the experience of university staff willingly participating in instructional rounds at schools. Dr. Ivonne Blanke commented,

> That's really letting faculty in to see the good, the bad, and the ugly. That's not part of the grant that they had to do that. That was kind of an extra that the school district received. So that, I think it showed that trust and that valuing of the relationship. What we're finding is that they're going above and beyond what the grant requirements are, and so I think that shows that they really value the relationship, and I think that's based on trust.

From the responses of the participating district stakeholders, trust helps form the backbone of the relationships that must be in place between school districts and universities for effective partnerships to develop and continue. Actions such as university staff's visiting school classrooms evidenced the strong connections that were in place between education professionals who traditionally focused their efforts of different aspects of the panorama of education. As

district-university partnerships continue to flourish, the richness of the intersection between theory and practice will be encouraged and realized.

Internal trust.

Included in the emergence of the theme of trust as an integral facet in the success of district-university partnerships, was the notion that trust is not just important between district and university stakeholders, but also between district stakeholders and the administrative candidates utilizing the opportunities provided by the partnerships. It was noted that program candidates must trust that district staff leading the programs and assigned mentors will be open and honest about their leadership potential. That sentiment was eloquently captured in the words of Dr. Karolina Sacher, one of the midwestern district stakeholders, sharing,

> When candidates can't speak the language of a leader. When you don't hear data analysis come out of their mouths, you don't hear student achievement and student centeredness at the center of what they are worried about, then you know they might not be ready. Sometimes you have to face them and say you are not going to get the 16-week internship, you are going to need a year.

These critical conversations must be built on trusting relationships, as district stakeholders are often making decisions that impact the career pathways of aspiring administrators. Other district stakeholders also shared key thoughts on the theme of internal trust. Dr. Willie Sauer spoke fervently about the trust that was evident with the aspiring principals and principals participating in partnership programs. He added,

> Everything that we asked for the participants were able to deliver. They definitely trusted that we were all there to help them, and not to report back. It was a coaching

> relationship. Some private things were shared between the coaches and the participants that we never found out about. Confidence was never violated, and the process was very trustworthy.

Dr. Miller Duggan also floated his ideas about the impact of trust between candidates and their programs, sharing,

> Again, I think it was the end product once the candidates completed their program, and we were able to get them engaged in leadership opportunities either within their school district, or sometimes they may have had to move to another school district. So it gave us an opportunity as a school system to encourage those individuals we felt had leadership potential. Then of course at the end we were able to pull those individuals into specific leadership positions. It's an opportunity to encourage individuals with potential. They were able to secure their training and their credentials, trusting in the work of the partnership.

The tasks involved in developing quality administrator preparation programming, selecting quality participants, and selecting effective mentors and internship locations are key to the future success of the candidates. The success of these tasks paves the way for the development of trusting professional relationships. These relationships are needed to propel the participants through the coursework, seminars and authentic internships supporting the continued implementation of effective administrator preparation programming.

Trust revealed.

As the 13 district stakeholders in the research sample explored their lived experiences through the lens of trust in building and implementing district-university partnerships, ways in which trust was actually realized were revealed. Some of the most impactful responses included:

- trust as visible in the commitment,
- the power of transparency,
- the sharing of perspective goals, and
- the importance of quality personal interactions.

Through the interview responses, it was clearly expressed that there are indicators that provide a barometer as to the level of trust in place in the collaborative partnerships. The visibility of trust in the commitments was evidenced through all parties meeting deadlines, having agendas for meetings to focus the work, and always having clarity about expected outcomes.

Transparency was presented as an important indicator of trust in action in district-university partnerships. "A component of having trust is transparency. When I referenced that session where we were co-constructing goals, I think that was crucial as an example of how transparency was enacted," said Dr. Barraza. The sentiment of the district stakeholders was that all stakeholders must make a conscious effort to always be clear and upfront about their expectations and determine shared goals so that the work remains focused on program development and implementation. Dr. Candi Cybulski, a midwestern district stakeholder, confronted this issue saying,

> I think you realize a level of trust when people are comfortable coming to the table and laying their agendas there, instead of hiding them and trying to manipulate the system

into what they need. You have to be really honest about what your needs and what your challenges are, and what your opportunities are if you want to be really transparent.

The quality of personal interactions is another strong indicator of trust suggested by the respondents in reference to connections between stakeholders in district-university partnerships. "Everybody has to be face to face at the conference table, to share what our respective goals are, and try to come to terms with how we're going to align all of that," Dr. Cristen Barraza contributed. Time together, sharing ideas, and working toward common goals is a large part of what was shared as critical to building the kind of trusting relationships that will yield high performing district–university partnerships. The reality of building trust and its role as a lever was presented by the participants as each entity openly expressed needs and wants, with decision making occurring in a spirit of collaboration.

Issues of time and funding.

The **i**ssue of time and funding was one of the themes that emerged from the semistructured interviews of the 13 district stakeholders in the sample. As the stakeholders from both the school districts and the universities met, planned, and implemented the critical events and activities that were so much a part of the effort to establish pipelines of future administrators, they were often confronted with solving problems around competing schedules and sustainable programming. Successful district-university partnerships require creative scheduling to provide aspiring administrators with professional learning, mentorships, and internship placements. Additionally, staff must be defined by both the school districts and universities to manage the logistics and administration necessary for the programming to be maximally successful in facilitating the development of effective administrators.

Scheduling for success.

As the district and university stakeholders met to begin designing the aspiring principal programs defined by the infrastructure of the SLP grant process, they produced timelines and schedules of events and activities focused on shaping the practices of the next generation of administrators. When these well-defined plans were initiated into action with the selection of participants and the start of initial activities, the leadership of many of the districts found themselves struggling with understanding how it was all going to unfold. The selected aspiring administrators were already full-time employees serving in a variety of roles. In one of the midwestern partnerships, the district stakeholder informs that participants in their program are offered a 16-week immersion in a school, and a substitute takes their classroom. Of course, the concern is that in order for this to work out,

> The substitute must be highly functioning and highly engaging to make sure that the children are reached and that they have a chance of doing well! That's the only drawback to this. The positive is that the aspiring administrator gets a really authentic experience being with the principal day to day, and they love it.

Dr. Ava Turner, representing a suburban school district, also addressed this issue of time, sharing,

> Even though we want authenticity, having interns complete their program requirements while missing time with their students will not work. We must always meet our responsibility to the students in the classrooms. I am absolutely supportive of redesign and the internship, but there has to be another version, another iteration.

It is important for the candidates to have really meaningful experiences, but district leaders express that this must happen without jeopardizing the education of the very clients the programs are meant to effectively serve.

The southeastern district stakeholders were challenged by district leadership's inquiries into the amount of time that the partnership activities would take. District stakeholders expressed their leaderships' concerns, with one stakeholder stating, "There were several times when events were scheduled during the regular school day, and we had recommended they try not to pull teachers from the classroom." Superintendent Dr. Mandel Strieff remembers being asked by the school board, "How much time was it going to require for teachers? How much time is it going to require of them outside of the classroom and affect their instructional day-to-day job?" The school board also wanted to know how involved the superintendent was going to be in the process: "How much of your time was this going to take?" Dr. Strieff responded,

> I had to explain the benefits that this brings back. If you have a superintendent who is also enhancing his or her instructional performance levels, they are constantly bringing the research back to the schools to help build teachers' and principals' abilities, and hopefully this will result in better student achievement.

The school board accepted the superintendent's explanation, but this issue of real organizational commitment in terms of time continues to sometimes be a challenge for district stakeholders. Though leadership in these rural districts clearly understands and supports the need for leadership development, when faced with all of the challenges of the effective administration of a school district in these days of high accountability, decisions do not always favor a time commitment to the continuous support of leadership development.

This issue of time was not limited to the smaller school districts in the southeast. Dr. Barazza, representing a very large urban southwest school district, was challenged with related concerns. Due to the size of the metropolitan area in which the school district resides, effectively scheduling activities that can be accessible to all participants was difficult. "On a simpler, logistical level, the ability to meet face to face is a challenge. In our district in K-12 education, our days are very structured, very limited – kind of inflexible time," the urban district stakeholder, shared. Dr. Eliza Baugher, also from a large urban district, has faced the same challenges. Issues of time continue to be mentioned by district leadership. Concerns about staffing the programs and pulling staff away from their "primary duties" are issues that have to be addressed if the partnerships are going to continue and be successful.

Both in rural and urban settings, district stakeholders have to deal with the issue of time. District leaders want the benefits of the partnerships and the wonderful leadership development that they yield. However, in this time of high stakes testing and great accountability, there is concern about teachers being out of their classrooms for professional development, and for mentor principals and district staff to have to add partnership activities to their already full agendas. One of the cornerstones of successful district-university partnerships is that both entities must be committed to the process and its outcomes. Dr. Candi Cybulski, a midwestern district stakeholder noted,

> Even though the time it takes is a concern, you cannot just bolt on the responsibility. You have to be very intentional about what this partnership means. If the district or the university is not willing to put in the time, it is not going to work.

District-university partnerships focused on administrator preparation cannot meet their goals if they become partnerships in the moment, rather than goal oriented partnerships with a long-term focused commitment to success from all participating entities.

Sustainability.

Amid doing all of the important work of creating and implementing district university partnerships is the concern about continuing the work after SLP grant funding has ended. The hope is that, over the term of the SLP funding cycle, districts and universities will build capacity to absorb the costs of continuing this most important work in administrator preparation. Dr. Baugher from a large urban midwestern district, hopes that "All of this will be picked-up and sustained by the district once the SLP funds are depleted. I know there are real concerns about the program costs bleeding into other budgets." There are many considerations that must be discussed in order for sustainable programming to continue. The FTE positions created through SLP funding have to be included in the budgets of both the school districts and the universities. Assigned duties have to be arranged such that program administrators have the time and organizational support to continue to do this work.

District stakeholders were forthright in sharing their thoughts about the continuation of currently successful administrator preparation partnerships. Dr. Elihu Lynch, an assistant superintendent serving as a district stakeholder from a Midwest suburban district, honestly described the concern about sustainability: "How is this going to be sustained over time? Will we have the dollars to continue to pour into not only what we do with interns, but pouring into our own administrators?" Dr. Eliza Baugher, representing her state's partnership included in the sample shared similar concerns: "We have the same concerns that probably everybody involved

in working in education have—that would be time and money. This work is now totally supported by SLP. There's hands-on and support like office space—that kind of thing."

It was inferred from conversations with all of the interviewees that resources are a concern. Not only is the continuation of funding needed to extend the partnership activities and integrated coursework a concern, but also of concern is the human resources component, including administrators; mentors; and college professors, which is necessary to facilitate the programs' implementation. Dr. Lynch, from the Midwest, clearly expressed the staffing concern that looms around the continued success of collaborative district–university partnerships: "But the other prevalent concern, probably even beyond funding was, how is this going to be overseen or supervised or monitored or taken care of in our own district? Somebody will always have to take responsibility for it!" Commitment by participating school districts and universities has to equate to budgeting for these administrator preparation programs, and to providing the infrastructure to support the effort. "Hopefully, the formal, legal memoranda of understandings signed by both the districts and university partners outlining roles and responsibilities will provide guidance to district and university leadership," shared partnership stakeholder, Dr. Annmaria Lakey, as they look at the future of the great work of district-university partnerships in supporting the professional learning of aspiring administrators.

Power of building bridges.

Whether initiated by the school district or by the university, the district-university partnerships sampled in this research effort were all funded and structured by the guidelines of the SLP grant process. Responses from the interviews clarify that some partnerships were defined strictly by state guidelines and SLP grant expectations. Other partnerships, using the SLP

guidelines as a framework, were more organic in development. The ability of school districts and universities to build bridges of sharing knowledge and effective practices had a great impact on the successful implementation of partnership activities in meeting the many needs of aspiring K-12 administrators.

In partnership situations where the SLP grant was seen as the ultimate guide, stakeholders presented the grant documents as the source of explicit direction, with the roles and responsibilities of the district and university clearly outlined. Some of the southeastern district stakeholders defined the process as "directed and required" beyond the control of either the university or the school districts. It was promoted that certain standards had to be met, and within those parameters both sides had ample input into the developing programs. Sharing a similar experience with the initiation of their grant, Dr. Ava Turner, one of the Midwest partnership district stakeholders informed that

> Our grant was written by a policy center responding to the request for proposals from the federal government. The grant criteria from the federal government was very specific about how you could set-up your partnerships and elect the qualifying school districts. The grant kind of defined our work, allowing us to use our internal structures to set-up the pieces of the programming.

Another group of district stakeholders had a different experience with the initiation of their partnership. Dr. Ivonne Blanke, representing the midwestern district stakeholders, described the development of their partnership as more "organic" and "open minded" stating that

> Due to the natural intersection of some of the pathways of leaders in our consortium of administrators, there were relationships that were already in place that made it easier to talk about partnership responsibilities and what the grant might look like.

Dr. Candi Cybulski, another midwestern district stakeholder, also described the process of starting the SLP grant programming as "starting organically" and then becoming more formal, continuing,

> It was the goal of the group to create levers to improve principal preparation, and as a statewide initiative, create new legislation and rules and regulations to help guide the process. This was evolutionary in nature, with many ongoing decisions to remain engaged. It was not a single phenomenon and it is constantly morphing and developing and adjusting and changing.

This idea of growing and changing, with the grant requirements establishing the framework for the programming, allows the partnerships the flexibility to best meet the needs of preparing administrators for the reality of leadership in the 21st century in a wide variety of school settings.

District–university partnerships were reported as good experiences by all of the district stakeholders interviewed. The essence of the positive experiences and positive feelings presented by the participants in the study comes from a deep belief in the power and common sense of relationships to enhance the work of the stakeholders. Dr. Mortie Kieran brought home this concept of power in relationships, sharing that

> When you start looking at that it makes all the sense in the world that if you get an opportunity to work that closely with somebody from higher learning, then you take it. There was no reason not to take it in my opinion. We went forward with it as we always

> look for opportunities to partner with them or any university. We all benefit from joint efforts between LEAs and universities to develop and provide opportunities for folks.

This idea of building bridges between organizations defines the intent of the district stakeholders as they entered into collaboration with their partnering universities. Southeast stakeholder, Mrs. Erin Walker shared,

> We were able to build relationships with the people at the university. So it seemed really smooth. It was really seamless as far as how we implemented the process. There was no stress in trying to meet the requirements that they had, because of the regular interactions we shared. It was professionally satisfying, continuing …We had a lot of latitude in helping to shape the partnership. As far as developing and providing opportunities for folks and then helping to monitor the process, helping the placement process; all of that was definitely a joint effort between the LEAs and the university. We all benefitted from that.

The perspective on building bridges from one of the southwestern urban districts was different, but connected to the southeastern experience, as shared by Dr. Barraza:,

> What I love is seeing a different pair of eyes. When I come to work with university professors, what I find is a lot of openness. I like the dialogue that we have with the university professors. I like their ability to question what our practices are, what we're doing, and for what purpose. I think it brings a greater level or richness to the work that we are doing. Sometimes we become a little bit insular, and this is a way for us to open up and expand our thinking and our own learning. I really enjoy it.

Defining and implementing district-university partnerships focused on administrator preparation require, from both entities, a commitment to creating connections or expanding prior connections. These "bridges" provide the framework on which the collaboration and programming can be constructed. Dr. Annmaria Lakey gave another perspective to the concept of building bridges between organizations in district-university partnerships. She credits the stakeholders as the connection that makes the partnerships work:

> I think one piece that we found out through this partnership and myself getting to play the middleman, that there has to be a bridge between the university and the school district, and both have to learn and grow together if we want to produce highly effective school leaders to impact student growth and achievement, and shape what we are going to have in the future of education.

With SLP grants providing the initial funding to support the efforts, district and university leadership continue to look at building the capacity needed for the partnerships to impact school leadership preparation for some time to come.

Conclusion

It is perhaps fitting to highlight the word "partnership" as it relates to this research, for it is impossible to gain one's trust without first being their collaborative partner. Through sharing professional lived experiences with one another and learning from the opportunities to share, these stakeholders were led to become partners with one another naturally, or by default, as the position demands. Without the ability to communicate reciprocally and trust each other in the exchange of ideas and values, these partnerships would not be successful. Former superintendent, Dr. Mandel Strieff, encapsulates the concept of partnership saying,

> I think the mission was being able to have a long-term partnership where everyone would be able to see the flow. It would help us and it would help the university. Universities are research centers. They cannot do their research without the schools and the districts. Whether the university or the district, we must come together to do this work, and this work must help grow our instructional abilities to serve students.

Sharing their lived professional experiences through their interview responses and stories, the district stakeholders provided this researcher with a greater understanding about the work and the challenges inherent in the process of creating and implementing collaborative partnerships focused on administrator preparation. As the participants worked to communicate the sense that they had made of their world, the researcher worked to make sense of the participants trying to makes sense of their world. This double hermeneutic provided an extra richness to the experience of the researcher learning about the lived experiences of the participants.

The story of the experience of district stakeholders is the story of building connections. Much of the essence of the interview responses in this research effort focused on professionals building purposeful and unexpected connections with other education professionals. Connecting her current work with aspiring principals with her own past experiences, Dr. Lakey shared,

> I was once a novice principal thrown into a principal position who had completed a traditional internship that was, I could say not rigorous. The internship did not prepare me for what I would be expected to do as a principal. So for me, the most rewarding piece is that these aspiring principals are getting an experience that all school leaders should have. I feel proud that they will walk into a building and have not had the traditional, but the immersed experience within principal preparation.

She concluded by saying that "It makes me feel confident that they'll be able to lead and proud that we've been able to work together with the university in a sense from a practitioner's and researcher's standpoint to move forward together."

The findings in this phenomenologically influenced qualitative research effort were supported by the research. The district stakeholders focused their interview responses on the importance of having prior experiences with universities as a precursor to building an effective partnership. They also shared the importance of trust as a lever to building the positive relationships necessary for the effective development and implementation of district-university collaboration.

Another theme that emerged through the analysis of the interview data was battling issues around time and funding. District-university partnerships examined in this research were all funded through federal School Leadership Program or SLP grants. Nevertheless, building capacity must be a major focus of both school districts and universities if the great work of the partnerships is to continue beyond the scope of the grant funding. School district and university budgets must be adjusted to contain the funding needed to continue this mighty effort on behalf of education leadership preparation. Additionally, time must be provided for those involved in the implementation of the partnership activities to be able to add these duties to their workloads.

The literature is conclusive that building and implementing district-university partnerships focused on administrator preparation have become a common interest of many school district and universities. Barnes and Phillips (2000), reminded readers that most public sector organizations, including higher education, now operate within a framework reliant on partnerships for the successful delivery of services and projects. For some of the district

stakeholders, their foray into this work was connected to past job responsibilities and positions, but for others like Dr. Karolina Sacher, it was more than that; this was the dream job. She shared,

> My goal has always been to raise up outstanding and really impactful leadership for the future. I take it very, very seriously. Even though I was a teacher for 26 years, then an assistant principal, and then a curriculum director; I'm pretty sure this position was a God thing!

The participants in this phenomenologically influenced qualitative research effort represent School Leadership Partnerships (SLP) grant programs and district stakeholders from across the United States. Their experiences in doing this important work loudly resonate in the honest and insightful answers that they shared. When asked to express their feelings about the role of helping to shape and maintain district-university partnerships, many positive comments were given. Dr. Barraza was very positive, commenting,

> I feel very positive about it. I thought that our contribution and our feedback about how we thought the university could help us was seriously taken into consideration. I thought that listening to what the university stakeholders had to say about how we could improve was also taken into consideration. I think…I love having this partnership. I love having the additional eyes, the additional intellectual perspectives that bring a lot more to the actual work than we do as practitioners. That's so positive. I think that it was overall a very good thing.

Sharing a very similar sentiment, Dr. Sauer hailing from a suburban experience, shared "It was a positive experience, and they were very willing to help us out – they were willing to tailor their program to what we needed. It was very positive and collaborative too."

Through the process of interpretive qualitative phenomenological analysis, transcripts of their thoughts were analyzed and multiple levels of coding were completed, leading to the emersion of themes. This effort included the participants attempting to make sense of the world of their partnerships, while the researcher was also working to make sense of the participants making sense of their world. The extracted information was reviewed by the research team in an attempt to provide a thick, rich description of the lived experiences of these district stakeholders in designing and implementing the framework and activities of their district–university partnerships.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Summary of Results

The focus of this phenomenologically informed qualitative research study was to examine the lived professional experiences of K-12 school district stakeholders involved in SLP grant funded collaborative partnerships with their university counterparts. These partnerships represent efforts by school districts and universities to improve the quality of the K-12 administrative pipeline in an attempt to meaningfully impact teaching and learning through quality leadership in America's schools. In this chapter the researcher will provide an interpretation of the findings gleaned from the interpretive analysis of 13 semi-structured interviews of a diverse group of district stakeholders from across the United States. The chapter will also review the methodology, discuss why the findings are relevant to the research, suggest generalizations that can be made from the findings, and share limitations of the study and implications for future research.

The district stakeholders interviewed in this research effort were fiercely dedicated to the partnership that they had either selected or been selected to represent. Their pathways to the job of district stakeholder were varied; however, they all participated in roles and had relationships with other professionals that helped to prepare them for the sometimes challenging duty of effectively collaborating with university colleagues. Some district stakeholders had experiences that were more impactful in establishing and implementing collaborative partnerships in rural settings, while the experiences of others were more impactful for success in suburban and urban settings. However, whether representing rural, suburban, or urban district settings, the

participants were able to share common concerns and experiences that were consistently integral in helping prepare them for the district stakeholder role.

Summary of Methodology

Investigating the professional lived experiences of district stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of district-university partnerships focused on administrator preparation required the use of qualitative methods informed by the research tradition of phenomenology. Since phenomenology is rooted in examining the essence of direct lived experiences, it was the preferential research tradition impacting this investigation. As previously stated, the aim of interpretive phenomenological analysis is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world (Smith & Osborne, 2008). Additionally, in this research effort, as the participants were making sense of their world, the researcher was also making sense of the participants making sense of their world, in a "double hermeneutic" text interpretation (Smith & Osbourne, 2004).

Thirteen participants were interviewed representing school districts from across the United States. Using a semistructured interview protocol, interviews were conducted by phone with verbatim transcriptions shared with the participants for authenticity. The interview transcriptions were then taken through multiple levels of coding by both the researcher and two members of the research team. From the levels of coding, themes emerged representing aspects of the professional lived experiences of the district stakeholders serving as participants in the study.

The Research Questions

This research study was initiated with a focus on answering the primary and secondary research questions. The primary research questions asked: What is the experience of school district stakeholders in the development and implementation of school-university partnerships focused on administrator preparation? Corollary research questions included:

1. How does the primary stakeholder describe the experience of establishing and participating in a district-university partnership?
2. Is developing trust among the stakeholders vital to the success of the partnership? What other feelings are associated with doing this work?
3. How do prior experiences (pre-partnership) of the stakeholders impact the experience of participating in a district-university partnership?

The results gleaned and analyzed from the interviews of the 13 participants in this study provide direct responses to the research questions. From the data, a thick description of the stakeholders' experience includes themes that express the value of prior experiences, promote trust as a lever to building partnerships, expose the issues of time and funding to partnership sustainability, and share the impact of building bridges to promoting successful collaboration.

From the themes and the coded data that supported their emergence came the essence of the description of the district stakeholders' experience. Interview responses consistently hailed trust as imperative in building the positive relationships needed for successful partnerships with university stakeholders to develop and thrive. Trust, as a morally desirable characteristic of relationships, was presented as a key feature impacting the success of stakeholders in working collaboratively as partners and as a foundational aspect of cross-sector partnerships (Jones &

Wicks, 1999). While supporting trust as important, respondents used words such as passion, pride, and richness to express the essence of their feelings about participating in this challenging, but necessary and rewarding work.

Additionally, data analysis supports the positive impact of prior professional experiences on the ability of the district stakeholders to effectively interact with other stakeholders. When relationships between school districts and universities are perceived by both entities as effectively meeting their needs, then as the stakeholder groups gather to do their work, they bring with them their experiences and theories about how the work should be done (Storms & Gonzalez, 2006). It was also suggested that the prior experiences of rural district stakeholders were more varied than those of suburban or urban district stakeholders, and that lessons learned during prior experiences were key to helping stakeholders work effectively in building positive relationships with their university colleagues.

Guided by the research questions, the interview questions were designed to hopefully guide an interactive discourse between the researcher and the participants around their experience as district stakeholders. Entering the field, positive interactions were established that extended throughout the interviews and follow-up communications. The participants presented as eager to share their ideas and perspectives and, in many cases, exceeded the researcher's expectation in the thought provoking thoroughness of their responses. An analysis of the retrieved data yielded themes that were supported by prior research and the pilot study, providing rich detail in supporting answers to the research questions.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study provide insight into decisions that were made by the researcher in structuring components of the methodology. One limitation presented is that the participants were all stakeholders representing only school districts. The voice of the university stakeholder was not heard in this qualitative study, presenting a one-sided look at the partnership relationships. Another limitation of this study is that the participants only had one opportunity to respond to the semistructured interview questions. In some cases, the respondents could have used more prompting in order to extract responses that were even more representative of their lived professional experiences. And finally, the last limitation is that the participants did not equally represent rural, suburban, and urban school districts. The physical location of the school district might have had an impact on the parameters of the relationship that was developed with the university and the logistics (concerns) of implementing the partnership activities.

The Role of the Stakeholder Uncovered

Of great importance to the discussion of the results of this research study is revisiting a common understanding of the role of the district stakeholder. These education professionals were presented, through their interviews, as agents of change in collaboration with their university counterparts. The business literature documents the significance of the stakeholder role to the ultimate success of partnerships like joint ventures, alliances, and consortia within the public sector. Officially synthesized in the literature as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the organizations objectives, stakeholders are often the risk takers or influencers in situations where decisions are being made by collaborative partnerships (Mitchell et al, 997).

Supporting the concept that some problems are best managed through a collective effort (Savage et al., 2010), the district stakeholders participating in this research proved to be living representatives of this concept in action. Their efforts resulted in school districts and universities coming together through structured collaboration to serve as a problem solving mechanism, focusing on issues like the effective use of resources, uniting theory and practice, and enhancing work in the field through innovation. The stakeholders involved in district-university partnerships also epitomize the literature's presentation of the stakeholder experience. While always serving in the role of a claimant, maintaining a stake in the organization, these stakeholders also effectively serve as influencers, reinforcing the assertion that in district-university partnerships both the role of the claimant and influencer have merit.

According to Neville et al. (2011), stakeholders are classified in the literature by their respective levels of importance, or salience. Defined as the stakeholders' powers of negotiation, legitimacy within the organization and with partner organizations, and urgency to represent the parent organization; salience is dynamic and takes into account the uniqueness of every situation. The district stakeholders participating in this qualitative research study exercised all three of the attributes of stakeholder salience in the duty of collaborating with higher education around the topic of administrator preparation.

From the information shared, it is clear that the district stakeholders have power - the ability to exercise their own will in the face of making decisions that will support the goals of the school districts (Neville & Mengue, 2006). It was also shown that the stakeholders have legitimacy – from observations of their behavior throughout the partnership efforts and the nature of the individual and his or her knowledge (Santana, 2012). Lastly the stakeholders

exhibited urgency – demanding the attention of those they represent with motivation to take action as warranted (Myllykangas et al., 2011). Gaining insights into the professional lived experiences of district stakeholders revealed direct connections to the concept of stakeholder salience. In all of their collaborative efforts with the universities, these attributes are at work on a continuum, taking into account the specific nature and circumstances of the needed decision, and the willingness of all involved to focus on determining collaborative solutions.

Significance of Themes

The literature supporting this research effort presents district-university partnerships as a structure that has great potential to impact the quality of K-12 administrator preparation in the 21st century. Modeled in the business community, where partnerships have historically been a useful strategy by companies trying to meet their goals, there is a strong need for school districts and universities to collaborate on the common ground of effective administrator preparation, with each entity sharing their historical areas of expertise. Research presented to SREB touted universities and school districts as the institutions with a shared understanding of what is needed to increase the skill level of administrative candidates (Bradshaw, Bell, McDowell & Perreault, 1997). Research organizations like the Wallace Foundation, an independent, national private foundation established to enable institutions to expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people ("Wallace Foundation," 2015), provided funding for projects aimed at exploring various possibilities for improving the quality of leadership preparation and school district interactions with universities (Browne-Ferrigno, 2010). These activities provided impetus for continued work in developing district-university partnerships, utilizing the business construct of the stakeholder as the agent of change.

The themes emerging from this qualitative research study provide a glimpse into the often complex issues that surround successful administrator preparation efforts, and support the prediction of district-university collaborative partnerships as viable in helping to meet these challenges. From the analysis of the interview data, four themes emerged, including:

- the value of prior experiences,
- trust as a lever,
- issues of time and funding,
- and the power of building bridges.

Each of these themes served to represent an important aspect of the professional lived experiences of the district stakeholders in their efforts to develop and implement district-university partnerships focused on administrator preparation. This diverse group of education professionals works tirelessly to impact the quality and outcomes of their respective partnerships. Through their efforts, school districts and universities are coming together where theory and practice intersect, in an effort to improve the preparation and future success potential of K-12 school administrators.

The value of prior experiences.

An analysis of interview responses led this researcher and the research team to the emergent theme surrounding the impact of prior job and professional opportunities to the district stakeholder experience. This examination of the professional world of the participants revealed that they all arrived at their district stakeholder partnership role following an array of professional opportunities. Despite the diversity in their past experiences, there were common

threads that were evident based on the location of their school districts (rural, suburban, or urban), prior connections to universities, and other vital connections to their communities.

The experience of the four stakeholders from rural school districts was shown to be linked to the need to bring positive leadership professional learning and opportunities to areas that are often considered remote, as well as limited in what they can offer developing professionals. SLP collaborative partnership experiences help provide, for this group of educators vital links to the outside world of education presented with the support of the resources of universities. In these rural environments, a high premium is placed on partnering with universities as pertinent to the growth and success of the school districts. Rural school districts also utilized partnerships as a structure for intra-district collaboration, with teachers and administrators often moving between school districts for leadership opportunities. These collaborative partnerships are finding success due both to the utilization of effective management practices and appropriate interactions between the district and university stakeholders (Missionier & Loufrani-Fedida, 2014).

District stakeholders having pre-partnership relationships and experiences with university colleagues were able to come into the district-university partnership effort with a direct connection to the culture and protocols of the university already in place. This impact was in place across all represented school districts, rural; suburban; or urban. Pre-partnership relationships discussed included serving as adjunct faculty, working with teacher education programs, or serving as a superintendent invested in a prior relationship with the university. Participants shared that they were either assigned to or applied for their district stakeholder positions because of prior job experiences, both serving as preparation and providing great

opportunities for professional growth and advancement. Most importantly, prior experiences were most impactful in helping to develop the skills needed to construct positive working relationships with colleagues. These skills were found to be maximally transferable to the role of building collaborative working relationships with university stakeholders.

Trust as a lever to building partnerships.

Building collaborative partnerships between school districts and universities presents as a multi-dimensional task, as each entity historically focuses on what it knows best: school districts focus on practice and universities focus on theory. The history of designing, implementing, and maintaining successful partnerships has been steeped in examining effective structures to support the building of positive relationships. The literature is clear that solving problems in the context of partnerships is not grounded on the utilization of traditional authority structures and systems, but grounded on the foundation of relationships and trust (Getha-Taylor, 2012).

Trust as presented in the literature increases confidence in the interdependence of collaboration, increasing the opportunity that collaborative partnerships will be more effective. In the world of K-12 administrator preparation, the impact of trust on the success of district-university partnerships was presented by the stakeholders as "huge." In all aspects of the partnership effort, trust was evident as an integral part of the fabric of the collaboration. For district stakeholders who presented as having historical ties to universities through other projects and activities, trust was a key component of the ability of the school district to successfully work in collaboration with the university. When trusting relationships were already present, the developing partnership around administrator preparation served to deepen the trust making it

easier for partnerships to extend to solving new problems. Similarly, for stakeholders whose school districts presented as having limited to no prior connections to universities, trust was offered as important for the development and implementation of partnerships, with the stakeholders giving special attention to creating the conditions that foster trust.

In situations where trust was not initially in place, both the school districts and the universities made concerted efforts to develop positive working relationships and build trust. Evident as integral to success in all of the SLP partnerships in this research study, trust was noted by the district stakeholders to encourage the development of positive relationships, while encouraging all parties to be transparent with goals and expectations. The spirit of cooperation, that trust supports, facilitates human interaction and makes collaborative partners much less willing to act in ways that express self-interest. This was evident through the comments and shared anecdotes presented by the district stakeholders, supporting the contention that trust matters (Ossola, 2012).

The data leading to the emergence of the theme of trust led this researcher to examine trust as an unanticipated perspective. Trust was not just an important part of building relationships between school districts and universities; it was also presented as important to leadership development within school districts. In this instance the definition of trust did not change. Nevertheless, the joint endeavors that connect the trusting parties are represented through building relationships associated with mentoring and internships, rather than designing and implementing administrator preparation programs.

Issues of time and funding.

The work of district–university partnerships in revolutionizing K-12 administrator preparation has been seen by many as an answer to the call by leading figures in the profession who have directly or indirectly turned their analytic lenses on the inquiry about principal preparation programs (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006). The development of collaborative partnerships has become a vital tool, first, in the effort to help define administrator preparation, and then, to also help develop a pipeline of administrators for the future. Commitment to the resources that it takes to provide quality administrator preparation programming is something that both school districts and universities will have to contend with, if the SLP grant funded quality programming is to continue.

The literature providing the foundation for this research effort clearly defines the core elements of successful collaborative partnerships as mutually determined goals, a shared vision, defined roles and responsibilities, positive relationships, joint benefits, and accountability (Leiderman et al., 2004). Realization of these core elements in an active district-university partnership require that both entities plan long-range to support a quality effort to avoid having a "partnership in the moment." District stakeholders involved in this research shared that issues of time and funding emerged as concerns and possible impediments to the future of collaborative partnerships and the implementation of the core elements necessary for the partnerships to be successful.

The district stakeholders represented in this research, provided through their interviews, evidence of their commitment to the work of improving K-12 administrator preparation. They also provided evidence of reasons to be concerned about the total organizational commitment of

their school districts to this work. Issues of time reference providing aspiring principals adequate release time for professional learning sessions, without them having to worry about classroom coverage. Also, program activities have to be scheduled keeping in mind the fact that program administrators and aspiring administrators already have full-time jobs with full-time job responsibilities.

The power of building bridges.

To a civil engineer, a bridge is a structure built to span obstacles without closing the way. However, to district stakeholders working to build relationships and programs with universities, the concept of bridge takes on another meaning. In this case, a bridge becomes a time, place, or means of connections or transition (Bridge, 1999, p. 142). One of the themes that emerged through the analysis of the semistructured interviews in this qualitative research effort is the power of building bridges. Even though all of the partnerships represented in this research were anchored in SLP grant funding and subject to the protocols and reporting of the US Department of Education, the success of these administration preparation programs is directly connected to the ability of the participating stakeholders to serve as ambassadors building bridges between their organizations.

Partnerships have their best chance to be successful when stakeholders focus their efforts on the common elements that connect their work. Stakeholder theory asserts that the actions of stakeholders in collaborative partnerships is not random, with the theory identifying how they seek to influence organizational decision making connected to needs and priorities (Mainardes, Alva & Raposa, 2012). Critically examining these needs and aligning organizational priorities is much of the work of building bridges between school districts and universities. From this

research, how this transpires has proven to be dependent on the specific partners. In some collaborative partnerships, the stakeholders reported holding fast to the grant document's requirements, using the grant as an outline to guide the work of the group. However, in other partnerships, the grant document was used as a framework, with the development of the programming reported as taking on a more organic feel.

Building bridges between school districts and universities does require from both organizations a commitment to creating connections and maximizing the opportunities provided by expanding former associations. Each organization is challenged to put in place and maintain the structures needed to insure that collaboration is a part of its culture. Through the development of meaningful, trusting relationships, the conditions for building the bridges needed for district-university partnerships to thrive are stimulated.

Implications

The pilot study associated with this qualitative research design provided an initial glimpse into the world of the stakeholders involved in district-university partnerships. In the original study, only two stakeholders were interviewed, one representing a school district and the other a university. As with the 13 stakeholders in this expanded research study, all selected as K-12 district stakeholders, both sets of participants had been involved in many aspects of the development and implementation of district-university partnerships. Information was gleaned from the participants in the pilot study using both a semistructured interview protocol and document review.

The pilot study provided a springboard for the research that was done in this current study; however, it was not consulted until after all of the data collection and analysis were

completed. Here the research questions were adjusted to probe for information about the professional lived experiences of only school district stakeholders involved in district-university partnerships focused on administrator preparation, and the document collection and review was removed as a part of the data collection process. As indicated in Table 2, there was a great connection and consistency between the themes of the pilot study and this research effort. For the researcher, the current study substantiated the results of the pilot study, with the themes of the two studies supporting each other both at the theme and subtheme levels. Figure 2 clearly illustrates the connections between the themes of the studies.

- history (past experiences of the stakeholders),
- motivation (impetus for the stakeholders to get involved),
- experiences (important events in building partnerships),
- origins (creation of the partnerships),
- sustainability (maintaining the partnerships);
- and interaction (how stakeholders connect with each other).

Table 2. *Connection of Pilot Study Themes to Research Study Themes*

Research study theme	Pilot study theme
Value of prior experiences	History Experiences
Trust as a lever	Motivation Interaction
Issues of time and funding	Sustainability
Power of building bridges	History Experiences Origins Interaction

The themes generated from this research provide insights into the professional lived experiences of district stakeholders as they work in collaboration with their university counterparts. As themes emerged, the researcher was led to examine the value of district stakeholders having prior experiences with universities as a factor in their ability to effectively collaborate with university stakeholders. Through additional data analysis the researcher encountered trust as a lever in building the relationships needed for effective collaboration between school districts and higher education. Continued analysis of the data uncovered issues of time and funding as factors impacting the ability of stakeholders to implement effective partnerships, and the power of building bridges between organizations as pertinent to collaborative partnerships meeting their goals.

All of these themes are embedded with implications for school district and university stakeholders as they seek to continue to partner in the name of K-12 administrator preparation. The implications are rooted in the value of organizations intentionally creating opportunities for

their stakeholders to build relationships with each other. For this to happen, prior connections have to be maximized as occasions for school districts and universities to further engage with each other. In situations where adequate connections do not exist, school districts and universities have to actively seek out opportunities to connect and share their expertise.

The value of prior experiences was one of the themes that emerged from the data analysis. District stakeholders clearly articulated through their interview responses that the development of collaborative partnerships was much more efficient and effective when school districts and universities have a historical relationship. Implications from this theme are clear. School districts and universities must use the power of their combined areas of expertise to collaborate on topics that touch all areas of the panorama of public education.

Trust has proven through this research to have a tremendous impact on the ability of stakeholders to work collaboratively in partnership to problem solve and overcome obstacles. Throughout the interviews, the respondents hailed the importance of trust to successfully implementing district–university partnerships and lauded its role in constructing opportunities for effective collaboration. In situations where there has been a historical relationship between school districts and universities, trust presents as easier to foster. When the institutions do not have a historical relationship, however, the stakeholders of both entities must actively work to build a trusting working relationship. From the research, implications for school districts in motivating trust with other partnering organizations include: a focus on transparency in all aspects of developing and implementing partnerships, working to have quality personal interactions with the other stakeholders, and developing common goals with shared decision making. For university leaders, the implications are similar, as their willingness and ability to

build trusting relationships with school district leadership will help define the quality and success of partnership efforts.

The issue of time and funding is another theme that emerged from the analysis of district stakeholder interview data. The discussion surrounding this theme was really focused on two dimensions of sustainability with district-university partnerships scheduling partnership activities so that they do not interfere with the primary job responsibilities of the participants, and planning for program funding at the end of the SLP grant cycle. Implications for school districts involved in these partnerships include effective scheduling of program activities so that a school's instructional program and organizational commitment to leadership development in terms of funding and school board/superintendent support is not hindered.

The power of building bridges is the final theme that emerged from this qualitative research. The discussion with the participants reflected in the data that led to this theme was centered on the importance of school districts and universities connecting in relation to important topics like administrator preparation. Bridges, or connections between organizations, provide a framework for building collaboration and partnerships. Implications inherent from this theme include school districts and universities actively looking for reasons to work as a team, through grants, community development needs, and internal program improvement efforts. Building bridges can help organizations build capacity, leading to increased opportunities for building collaborative partnerships.

Recommendations for Future Study

Recommendations for conducting continued qualitative research on examining the professional lived experiences of stakeholders were derived from a review of the outcomes of

this effort's data analysis. In this study, the data delivered through layers of coding the themes of the value of prior experiences, trust as a lever, issues of time and funding, and the power of building bridges. Future research should focus on extending some aspect of this research and look to extend the findings to include an even richer focus on the stakeholder experience.

In terms of methodology, additional steps could include managing the sample so that there are an equal number of rural, suburban, and urban partnerships represented. Future research could also support extending the data collection sample to include not only school district stakeholders, but also the university stakeholders serving as collaborative partners. Interviewing stakeholder pairs would provide, for the researcher, both perspectives on the stakeholder experience as the culture of each partnering organization impacts the lens of the stakeholders as they answer the interview questions. This approach would ensure a more comprehensive examination of district-university partnerships. It would also hopefully provide rich data about partnership sustainability, the university perspective on the impact of prior experiences, trust as a lever to building collaboration, and the power of building bridges or connections between organizations.

Future research could focus more specifically on selected aspects of the stakeholder experience. Suggestions include investigating the experience of stakeholders during the initiation and development phase of a district-university collaborative partnership, or focusing on the features that demonstrate organizational commitment to the process. Additional possibilities include a focus on sustainability, including both funding and human capital; a study of the impact of trust on the collaboration needed for successful district-university partnerships; and a critical examination of a specific partnership seeking success factors. The research traditions of

phenomenology or even a case study could be used to extend the themes and ideas associated with this work.

Conclusion

Investigating the lived professional experiences of school district stakeholders participating in partnerships focused on administrator preparation presented as a unique adventure. The gracious sharing of information from the participants was only matched by their enthusiasm and belief in the work that they felt led to do. The respondents shared their joys, their fears, and their struggles in pursuit of designing and implementing administrator preparation programming to support the ongoing needs of leadership development in their school districts.

The data shared were representative of the stakeholders' experiences. It reflected past professional opportunities, professional learning with colleagues, the development of protocols for program components, challenges with district and university stakeholders, and the mentoring of aspiring administrators. Despite the work and uncertainty that often engulfs the world of district-university partnerships, the district stakeholders reported that they felt highly valued and appreciated for all of the work that they were doing to further the cause of administrator preparation. They also expressed that the work provided, for them, opportunities for continuous learning and that the relationships that they developed with other stakeholders and program participants were vitally important to the success of the partnerships.

Across the nation, leaders in education are looking for ways to improve both the quality of the administrator pipeline and the skills of current principals. The U.S. Department of Education and organizations such as the Wallace Foundation have pledged financial support for

projects focused on making principals more effective instructional leaders. One of the structures that has shown to have promise for improving the future of administrator preparation is the district-university partnership. These partnerships provide structured opportunities for school districts and universities to come together, and collaboratively work to enhance leadership development. This research effort, focused on the experience of the district stakeholder working in collaboration with university colleagues, supports the intersection of theory and practice, and provides for educators a promising glance into the future of leadership development.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Spend some time introducing yourself to the educator, and ask the educator to do the same.

Have the participant complete the demographic information sheet.

Proceed to the following script:

- I am glad you have agreed to be interviewed. I want to explain how this will work. We'll do a 30-45-minute interview that will be recorded, transcribed, and coded.
- In the interview, I would l like to focus on your work as a participant or stakeholder in the process of developing and maintaining a district–university partnership focused on administrator preparation.
- You will remain anonymous throughout the transcription and coding process.
- Remember, the informed consent document is in force throughout this process. Do you have any questions or concerns?

Complete the interview using the prepared questions as a guide.

Thank the participant for his or her time and for participating in the process.

Appendix B

Participant Demographic Form

Participant ID Number: _____

Age: _____ Race/Ethnicity: _____ Sex: _____

Current Position: _____

Years in Education: _____

Can you be contacted for follow-up? _____Yes _____ No

If yes, how would you prefer to be contacted?

_____ Phone (Best Phone Number _____)

_____ E-Mail (_____)

Please provide any additional information that you may want the researcher to know about you that could have any impact at all on this process.

Appendix C

Invitation Document for Research Participants

Date: _____

I would like to invite you to serve as a participant in research supporting the completion of my dissertation for a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Foundations from Old Dominion University. Below you will find information that will clarify this request.

Title of study: The experience of stakeholder groups in developing and sustaining district–university partnerships focused on administrator preparation

Principal investigator: Jacob M. Wilson, III

University: Old Dominion University – Darden School of Education – Norfolk, VA

Introduction: The researcher is Jacob M. Wilson, III, a doctoral student in the Old Dominion University School of Education's education leadership program. This phenomenology informed qualitative research study is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Background information: The development of effective public school district–university school leadership partnerships has been instrumental in helping to provide adequately prepared candidates for the many public school administrative positions that will be available in the near future. Only through the development of programs that connect the best in educational leadership theory with adequate practical experiences can leaders who are prepared for the accountability and rigor of public education in the 21st century come forth.

Purpose of this research study: The purpose of the qualitative research study is to critically examine the experience of school district stakeholders assembled to develop school district–university partnerships (e.g., SLP – School Leadership Program) and to present best stakeholder options for the effective development of future partnerships.

Procedures: In this study, school district representatives from current school district–university partnership stakeholder groups will be interviewed. Follow-up interviews will be conducted as needed for clarification of content, ideas and themes presented. Responses will be coded and

assessed to begin to refine a determination of the experience of the stakeholders in developing district-university partnerships. The semistructured interviews should take about 30-45 minutes to complete. Please let me know of your willingness to assist in this effort. I can best be contacted by email (jmwwmodu@gmail.com), and will schedule the interview session at your convenience. Once I receive your response (and phone number), we can schedule the interview.

Appendix D

Interview Questions

A semistructured interview protocol will be used in this phenomenology informed data collection effort. This interview process will serve as a guide for the collection of data, but it will not remove participant voice from the data collection process, providing a more information-rich experience for the researcher. The researcher will be seeking opportunities to extend the connection of the interview into defining the structure and process of the interview.

Background or Demographic Questions

Q1 - What is your experience level as a participant involved in developing a school district–university partnership focused on administration preparation?

Q2 - How were you selected to serve in the capacity as a stakeholder representing your school district in this partnership effort?

Behavior or Experience Questions

Q3 - What is it about the school district–university partnership concept that interests you?

Q4 - Describe your experience as a selected stakeholder for the school district in the development of this partnership's focus on school administrator preparation and development?

Opinion or Value Questions

Q5 - What common concerns did the school district stakeholders share about the process of developing this partnership?

Q6 - What common concerns did all of the stakeholders share about the process of developing this specific partnership?

Knowledge Questions

Q7 - How was this school district–university partnerships started? Were the stakeholder groups assembled and given explicit direction? Was the process open ended?

Q8 - What defines the mission and objective(s) of this partnership?

Q9 - Describe the connection between the stakeholder group and the school district and university in terms of progress monitoring the work of the group. How is this handled?

Feeling Questions

Q10 - As a school district partnership stakeholder, how did you feel about your role in helping to shape the developing collaborative partnership?

Q11 - Was trust a factor in the development and success of this partnership? How was trust realized in this partnership?

Closing Questions

Q12 - Do you have any closing thoughts about school district–university partnerships and stakeholder groups?

Appendix E

Coding Sheet for Research Team

Participant Number: _____ (Please bullet emerging key words leading to themes for each semistructured interview question.)

Background or Demographic Questions

Q1 - What is your experience level as a participant involved in developing a school district–university partnership focused on administration preparation.

Q2 - How were you selected to serve in the capacity as a stakeholder representing your school district in this partnership effort?

Behavior or Experience Questions

Q3 - What is it about the school district–university partnership concept that interests you?

Q4 - Describe your experience as a selected stakeholder for the (school district) in the development of this partnerships focused on school administrator preparation and development?

Opinion or Value Questions

Q5 - What common concerns did the (school district) stakeholders share about the process of developing this partnership?

Q6 - What common concerns did all of the stakeholders share about the process of developing this specific partnership?

Knowledge Questions

Q7 - How was this school district–university partnerships started? Were the stakeholder groups assembled and given explicit direction? Was the process open ended?

Q8 - What defines the mission and objective(s) of this partnership?

Q9 - Describe the connection between the stakeholder group and the school district and university in terms of progress monitoring the work of the group. How is this handled

Feeling Questions

Q10 - As a (school district) partnership stakeholder, how did you feel about your role in helping to shape the developing collaborative partnership?

Q11 - Was trust a factor in the development and success of this partnership? How was trust realized in this partnership?

Closing Question

Q12 - Do you have any closing thoughts about school district–university partnerships and stakeholder groups?