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A Case Study of Perspectives on Building School and Community Partnerships

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A Case Study of Perspectives on
Building School and Community Partnerships

by

Myrna L. Hogue

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
College of Education
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Keywords: school, community, business, partnership, social constructivism

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, George Whitley, who is no longer here physically to see me finish my graduate school journey, but who has been with me spiritually each step of the way. Thank you Dad for teaching me how to navigate the waters of the Chesapeake Bay as soon as I could see over the steering wheel of the boat, bait my own fishing line, drive a manual car up a hill, and so much more. You taught me that there is nothing that I can’t do if I want it bad enough. Your appreciation of education and commitment to hard work has guided me to be the individual I am today. I couldn’t have done this without you! I love you Popa!
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Abstract

A strong partnership between a school and the surrounding community leads to school success. Schools can be more successful with community involvement and engagement than if functioning in isolation. Community engagement leads to greater academic achievement of students.

Utilizing qualitative case study methods, this study focused on the perspective of school and community partners on building relationships. The purpose of this study was to describe and explain selected participants’ perspectives on how a school builds partnerships with the community. I studied the relationship between an elementary school and community partners that have been in existence for at least three years to better understand each participant’s view of the partnership. The social constructivism theoretical framework was used to better understand how effective partnerships are built and maintained.

As the researcher, my goal was to study the diverse significance the participants had established for their contribution in school and community partnerships based on their subjective experiences. Specifically, with this study I attempted to answer these questions:

1) What are the characteristics of a collaborative relationship between a school and the surrounding community that are essential in order to build partnerships that meet the goals of each participant involved?
2) What are the roles of the school leader, support staff, and community members in building relationships between the school and the community?

I also aimed at determining how the school’s leadership directly relates to and affects the partnership building process between the school and the community partners.

Three major themes emerged as a result of the data gathered. Building a solid infrastructure emerged as the foundation of strong partnership between the school and the community. Adhering to mandated policy, focusing on student centered goals, and working within systems were vital elements of building a solid infrastructure. Defining clear roles also emerged as instrumental. The roles of the principal, school staff, and community were clearly defined. Demonstrating collaborative character traits emerged as a third theme that was necessary to build a positive relationship. The meaning that the community partners and school staff have put on building relationships became apparent. Fostering authentic community engagement in communities that leads to expected outcomes for all stakeholders involved is most productive when schools and community members work together.
Chapter One

Introduction

A strong partnership between the school and the surrounding community leads to school success. Building capacity between a school and the community requires strong principal leadership and belief in community engagement. Teacher openness and understanding of the surrounding community is important in order for partnerships to be successful. The literature supports the proposition that community engagement leads to greater academic achievement of students. Schools can be more successful with community involvement and engagement than if functioning in isolation.

The community has historically been involved in the operations of schools. Community involvement can be traced back to the 19\textsuperscript{th} century when neighborhood schools were influenced by the public including churches (Epstein, 2010; Ward, 2001; Spring, 2008). Government authority over education grew as a result of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which focused money on poverty and low performing schools. Each reauthorization since the original act in 1965 outlined the importance of community involvement.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is the most recent reauthorization of ESEA and mandates schools to build family and community partnerships. The belief is that students benefit by receiving extra support that leads to improved academic achievement. The government thus encourages schools to expand the functions of businesses and
community based organizations in activities that benefit families (Public Education Network & National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, 2004). Schools and community members must work together to promote a positive relationship that leads to improved student achievement.

Strong school leadership is vital in order for school and community partnerships to be effective (Ferguson, 2005b; Johnson, 2007; Marzano, 2003; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Wang & Boyd, 2000). Transformational school leaders who create a culture of collaboration in which the value of stakeholder input is appreciated are more successful in obtaining desired outcomes (Northouse, 2010). Teachers and other key participants are equally important in supporting the collaborative vision of the school (Bryan, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Pohan & Adams, 2007; Sanders, 2008). Principal leadership, in combination with support from teachers and faculty, can work together to build and maintain strong partnerships with community members that lead to a shared vision of student success.

The concept that academic accomplishment is greatest when children’s health, social, and educational needs are all met is the theory that supports the full service and community school model. Characteristics of successful community schools include strong leadership, the existence of action teams, a student centered focus, and a warm school environment (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Dryfos, 2000; Epstein, 2005; Sanders, 2006). All schools can learn from the community school model and structure their community involvement efforts accordingly to ensure successful outcomes.

Universities share the ultimate goal of academic achievement with public schools and are often a source of community support. Both institutions aim at educating students
to become positively contributing members of society (Benson, Harkavy & Puckett, 2008). School and university partnerships appear to be most successful when both institutions have comparable goals as well as strong leadership (Glow & Sperhac, 2003; Harkavy, 2005; Langer, 2003; Pohan & Adams, 2007). Other potential community partners can follow the examples of thriving school and university partnerships in order to achieve similar results.

Throughout history community partnerships have always included business partnerships which took a more visible role in school achievement in the 1980’s. Schools turned to business to make up for the shortcomings in funding that was necessary to improve America’s educational system (Hoff, 2002). Business partnerships can lead to improved academic achievement, a stronger work force, and investment in human capital (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2007). There is a looming question about the expense at which these partnerships are successful. Business partnerships run the risk of turning the school setting into one based on commercialism where students are influenced by marketing (Boyles, 2005; Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2007; Spring, 2008). Critics believe that the private sector should not influence public schools. The goals of financial profit and educating students to be critical thinkers in society are often at odds (Boyles, 2005). Conflicting views of the business community’s relationship with public schools continue to exist and deserve to be further investigated.

Overall, there is strong evidence that strong partnerships between a school and the surrounding community can lead to improved academic achievement of students as well as other positive outcomes for the family. A variety of partnership types and models exist that are formed between schools and the community. The school leaders as well as
other key participants have a critical influence on the success of school and community partnerships. A principal who believes and practices transformational leadership theory will best support a positive partnership between a school and the community. There is a gap in understanding how exactly these processes work. My research provides an enhanced understanding of how partnerships are built and maintained between schools and the surrounding community.

**Statement of the Problem**

As the desire to remain competitive in the global world increases and the challenge to develop a competitive workforce rises, a sense of urgency has emerged for schools and communities to collaborate regarding educational issues (Wang & Boyd, 2000). Authentic relationships and connections should be fostered between schools and the surrounding community in order to build partnerships that are effective and meet the goals of all the partners involved. I believe it is imperative to thoroughly understand the relationship between the school and the community especially from the viewpoint of the community partner.

The literature is especially lacking in qualitative studies that examine the relationship between the community and public schools. There is an ongoing need to further study the relationship between schools and the community. I believe it is important to develop a comprehensive understanding of how partnerships can be built that are beneficial for all stakeholders involved. This is especially true for business partnerships which are often spotlighted as being self serving and influential in leading students towards making decisions based on marketing strategies. Studying school and community partnerships from a social constructivist perspective has led to greater
knowledge on school and community partnerships from the perspective of school staff as well as community members.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to describe and explain selected participants’ perspectives on how a school builds partnerships with the community. I studied the relationship between an elementary school and community partners that have been in existence for at least three years to better understand each participant’s view of the partnership. The exploratory questions that guided the study were:

1. What are the components of the participants’ perspectives?
2. What variables influence their perspectives?

In my research, I described and explained the relationship between the school and the community partners based on how each individual participant has socially constructed her knowledge of the partnership.

**Theoretical Framework**

I utilized a social constructivism theoretical framework to examine the literature. Social constructivism is based on Vygotsky’s socio cultural theory. I have in particular explained Vygotsky’s theory as it relates to community partnerships. Viewing partnerships from a social constructivist perspective gives a better understanding of why community members invest their time and resources into schools.

**Research Questions**

Certain characteristics exist in order for a partnership to be effective and lead to desired outcomes. Schools work to foster these relationships. The roles of the leader, school staff, and community members are influential in building and sustaining
successful partnerships. Specifically, with this study I attempted to answer these questions:

1) What are the characteristics of a collaborative relationship between a school and the surrounding community that are essential in order to build partnerships that meet the goals of each participant involved?

2) What are the roles of the school leader, support staff, and community members in building relationships between the school and the community?

My focus was on community partnerships with a particular interest in the perspective of the partner. Existing research is lacking in studies on the perspective of the community partner and how schools facilitate relationships with various sectors of the community. Answering these two questions led to an enhanced understanding of the relationships built between schools and the community.

**Importance of the Study**

Successful school and community partnerships positively influence student outcomes. Research supports the postulation that strong community support leads to greater academic achievement and overall school success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Wang & Boyd, 2000). Schools that make an effort to sustain a relationship with the community and nurture their partnerships tend to have a higher number of students who are performing on level (Sheldon, 2003). Some of the consequences of a successful partnership are extra support for students, an increase in cultural capital for families, and overall improved functioning in society (Bryan, 2005). These are significant outcomes that help to support students in making academic progress.
Students can personally benefit from strong partnerships in other areas that lead to school success. Influential partnerships have been linked with improved attendance rates and lowered dropout rates (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Language minority students can benefit from community involvement through quicker acculturation into society, more flexibility in receiving of services, and the development of a stronger support network (Adger, 2001). These benefits can give students skills that will promote success in other areas of their lives.

Financial contributions from the community can assist with maintenance and upgrade of the facilities, curricular resources for the classroom, student and family program improvements, as well as after-school programs (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Volunteer hours are another benefit that schools receive from community supporters. Additional human capacity gives schools the ability to implement special programs and provide assistance to teachers and students in the classroom (Sanders, 2003). Overall school improvements and the support of volunteers can result in a higher quality learning environment for students.

The community also benefits when they build strong partnerships with schools. High achieving schools produce students that become more active contributors in society (Sanders, 2003). The workforce becomes more viable and there is a growth in social capital that ultimately leads to a healthier community with more productive citizens. The country prospers when its citizens are successful in school and contribute to the good of society.

It is important to reach a deeper understanding of how successful partnerships are developed and maintained in order to reap the benefits of flourishing relationships.
between schools and the community. Student success leads to school success which ultimately results in community success. A thorough examination of how relationships are built and maintained addresses a gap in the existing literature and makes a significant impact in the field of research on school and community partnerships. Looking at partnerships through the eyes of the community members provides valuable information that has been missing from the literature thus far. I conducted a case study which adds to what is currently known about school and community partnerships by filling in some of the gaps in the existing body of research.

**Methods Used in this Study**

I conducted a case study in order to understand the complex social happenings within its real life context (Yin, 2003). I relied on four major techniques in this case study. The first is interviews with community partners, school personnel, and school administrators. “Interviewing is a meeting of two persons to exchange information and ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic” (Janesick, 2004, p. 72). Interviews are conducted as part of qualitative research in order to get a deeper understanding of a topic. In addition, interviews are important as they provide researcher with information that cannot be gathered through observation or looking at existing documents (Merriam, 1998). My interviews produced a greater depth of understanding of the relationship between the school and the community. I did do so by forming a strong relationship between myself and the interviewee that led to a wealth of valuable information.

The second technique utilized was collecting documents related to the study. In order to understand the relationship between the school and some of its community
partners in more detail, I decided to collect documents at monthly School Advisory Council (SAC) meetings. These meetings are comprised of school employees and community partners, with the majority of participants being from the community. The purpose of this committee is to implement and monitor the School Improvement Plan (SIP). I collected meeting agendas and minutes, as well as documents distributed during the meeting. I also examined documents kept in the Title I “Tool Box” which relate to the school and community partnerships. Examples of these documents included event flyers, parent newsletters, community compacts, and documentation of volunteer hours and denotations.

I utilized field notes while interviewing participants as well as while collecting data from the School Advisory Council (SAC) meetings and examining the Title I Tool Box. Fields notes usually contain descriptions of the setting and actions in the social environment (Hatch, 2002). Field notes written during the participant interviews allowed me to keep track of any follow up questions I wished to ask as well as describing my preliminary impressions. I also utilized field notes during the SAC meetings to record an explanation of the documents collected and the topics of conversation related to the agenda. Field notes were utilized while examining the Title I Tool Box to assure an accurate representation of the data and an understanding of the meaning of each document.

Lastly, I utilized a researcher reflective journal as another form of data collection. Being the research instrument it was important for me to reflect on the process of the research as it unfolded. Reflective journaling allowed me to explore my research on a deeper level. Janesick (2004) supports reflective journaling and views it as “a tangible
way to evaluate our experience, improve and clarify our thinking, and become a better
writer and scholar” (p. 148-149). I used the reflective journal to document my research
journey and thought about each step of the process in order to make improvements as I
proceeded.

**Delimitations**

My research consisted of a case study and focused on one Title I elementary
school in a school district in the southern region of the United States. I chose a school
that employs a parent liaison in a full time position where working with parents and
community is the central focus of the job function. All Title I schools in the district are
required to identify a parent liaison that is responsible for assuring all No Child Left
Behind mandates are followed. Often this responsibility is put on a teacher or student
services staff member. However, I decided to study a school where working as a parent
liaison is that employee’s main responsibility at the school. I also chose a school where
the principal has been assigned to the particular school for at least three full school years.

I interviewed community partners who have maintained a relationship with the
school for at least a minimum of three full school years. This included official members
of the School Advisory Council (SAC) as well community partners that have a
relationship with a school, but chose not to serve on the SAC for a variety of reasons. I
also interviewed teachers with at least three full school years of employment at that
school.

**Definitions of Terms**

The following terms are defined theoretically and operationally based on the
culmination of the review of literature in chapter two.
Community: In relationship to schools, community is those individuals and institutions that have a stake in the success of students and schools.

Community members: Community members can include families, neighborhoods, clubs, associations, businesses, libraries, state and county government departments, faith based organizations, social service agencies, health institutions, and any other establishment that serves families or has a potential interest in the accomplishments of the educational system.

Community involvement: Community involvement is the participation by members of the community in supporting the mission of the school through a variety of means which can include but are not limited to financial contribution, distribution of resources, and volunteering of time.

Partnership: Partnerships between the school and community are formal or informal relationships where each party contributes to the common vision of student success.

Authentic relationships: Authentic relationships between a school and community partner are defined as genuine connections supported by evidence and past experience as being successful.

Summary

My research focused on gaining a better understanding of how partnerships can be built between a school and its surrounding community. Chapter two includes a thorough review of the literature. I incorporate a discussion of the importance of school and community partnerships, types of partnerships and examples of successful partnerships, and transformational leadership and individual roles in partnerships. Chapter three describes the methodology of the study. I explain the design of the study and give a
rationale for choosing to do qualitative research in particular a case study. I further discuss the theoretical framework for this study which is social constructivism. Chapter four includes an analysis of the data as well as my findings. Lastly, chapter five consists of conclusions, recommendations, and implications.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

In this section, I explore the literature to examine the importance of school and community partnerships, descriptions of various types of partnerships, as well as the role of leadership in building and sustaining successful school and community partnerships. Figure 1 illustrates the categories of literature that were reviewed. At the end of each section, I give a summary of the studies including the type of research as well as suggestions for future studies. The last section pertains to the literature selection, critics in the literature, and gaps in the literature. The literature review suggests that schools are more successful when there is a strong partnership between the school and the surrounding community.

I begin the literature review by describing school and community partnerships which entails utilizing the literature to define the term community as well as what constitutes a community partnership. In addition, I include characteristics of successful partnerships in the description. Understanding partnerships requires a detailed analysis of the historical relationship that has developed between schools and the community since the inception of the concept. Another element in describing partnerships is examining the literature on the outcomes and benefits that transpire when schools and their communities work together to support education.
Figure 1. Categories of Literature Reviewed
The second category of literature that I identified is types of school and community partnerships. Numerous variations of types of partnerships exist and can be unique to each individual school. For the purpose of this research I focused on three types of partnerships which delineate various ways in which schools can work in conjunction with the community to meet the needs of students. Depictions of full service schools and other model schools can serve as a representation of how schools and the community can form a successful partnership. University and business partnerships were also examined to further understand the relationship between schools and the community in which they exist. Examining existing partnerships in the literature provides a framework from which I can later compare to the findings of my research.

Forming a partnership between a school and the community requires individuals to serve a role in the process and to be involved in the maintenance of the relationship. The third category of literature that I reviewed was individual roles in partnerships. The roles of leaders and teachers at the school are important in understanding the intricacy involved in relationships with community partners. According to the literature, other key participants at the school and within the community organization also play significant roles in building successful partnerships. It is imperative to comprehend the roles that individuals play in making the partnership between the school and the community one that thrives.

**Importance of School and Community Partnerships**

Community partnerships can mean different things for different individuals. In order to understand the relationship between schools and the surrounding community it is essential to define the term community. Various researchers define community in similar
ways. Through the literature review I will discuss the assorted definitions of community in order to develop a working definition for my research. It is also necessary to understand the historical development of partnerships between schools and the community. A historical perspective gives a better understanding of how schools and the community have worked together throughout history to assure academic achievement for students. It lays the foundation from which current partnerships can be built in the best interest of children. Investigating the outcomes and benefits of partnerships helps to support the importance of working to build and sustain meaningful relationships between schools and community members. The literature supports the concept that successful partnerships lead to prosperous outcomes for students (Bryan, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon, 2003).

**Definitions and characteristics of school and community partnerships.** The term community acquires its origin from sociology. Community in relationship to schools can be described as those individuals and institutions that have a stake in the education of children (Epstein, 2010). The community of a school has a stake in the success of students which can include families, neighborhoods, clubs, associations, businesses, libraries, state and county government departments, faith based organizations, social service agencies, health institutions, and any other establishment that serves families or has a potential interest in the accomplishments of the educational system. Community involvement can be defined as the connection between schools and members of the community such as individuals, businesses, as well as other formal and informal institutions (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sanders, 2003). Bauch (2001) defines school and community partnerships as “the development of a set of social relationships within and
between the school and its local community that promote action” (p. 208). Recognizing who encompasses the community of a school, how involvement is defined, and the meaning of partnerships is important in order to develop a connection with community stakeholders that focuses on student success.

Epstein (2010) integrates various theories on parent involvement which results in her theory of overlapping family and school spheres. Experiences, philosophy, and practices of the family, school, and the community overlap and ultimately affect children’s learning. Epstein (2010) proposes the following six types of involvement that can be used as a framework to evaluate partnerships between school, family, and the community.

Type 1 — PARENTING: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

TYPE 2 — COMMUNICATING: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

TYPE 3 — VOLUNTEERING: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

TYPE 4 — LEARNING AT HOME: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.

TYPE 5 — DECISION MAKING: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.

TYPE 6 — COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community. (p. 43-44)

Type 6 – Collaborating with the Community is of interest to me for my research. Based on her theory of overlapping spheres of influence, community is one sphere that
influences student learning. Building positive relationships between the school and the community can lead to improved student achievement. This also supports the premise that community partnerships are part of the various systems that affect students and their families.

It is imperative to examine the role of the community in school-community partnerships. Community partnerships are known to be beneficial to students and schools. Community partnerships often target parent involvement, but other community support is also vital to school success (Sanders, 2001). In a study conducted by Sanders survey data were utilized to examine 443 schools that joined the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS). Community partnerships were found to take on a variety of forms. These included business partnerships as well as service organizations in the community such as churches and libraries. The goal of these partnerships was to provide services to children that would increase their chances of success in school. Effective implementation is important for the success of partnerships. Barriers often exist that limit the effectiveness of school-community partnerships. Leadership was identified as one obstacle to successful partnerships.

School-community partnerships are often broken down into four different categories: business partnerships, school-university partnerships, service learning partnerships, and school-linked service integration (Sanders, 2003). Based on the results of a survey of the National Network of Partnership Schools, Sanders (2006) further delineated types of partnerships and grouped them into the following categories: large corporations and small businesses, universities and educational institutions, government and military agencies, health care organizations, faith-based organizations, national
service and volunteer organizations, senior citizen organizations, cultural and recreational institutions, media organizations, sports franchises and associations, other groups such as fraternities and sororities, and community volunteers. The survey data also led to the categorization of the focus of the partnership into student, family, school, or community centered. Most of the schools reported student centered activities with few examining the possibility of community centered partnerships that could benefit the greater community as well as the school.

As the needs of students increase in the United States today, it is important for schools to respond in a way that will increase student achievement. Collaborating efforts between the school and the community is important to help deal with some of the challenges students face on a daily basis. Research suggested some common characteristics that effective partnerships share. These include a formalized structure, a consistent source of funding, time and resources for planning, staff incentives, quality data collection and evaluation methods, effective use of technology to support data collection, and available technical assistance (WestEd Policy Brief, 2007).

Community involvement is a factor that leads to improved student success (Marzano, 2003). Marzano proposes that the three features, communication, participation, and governance, are what lead to effective parental and community involvement and ultimately student success. Parents have no legal obligation to communicate with their child’s school. Therefore schools must ensure that the atmosphere of the school is that in which parents desire to communicate. At the same time it must be welcoming to members of the community. Communication should be initiated by the school while assuring that parents and community members have a means
in which to respond. Communication is not just giving out information, but also listening for responses. Participation in the day-to-day running of the school is the second feature of effective community involvement. Encouraging parents and community members to volunteer at the school, apply for jobs when there are openings, and come to school sponsored events shows stakeholders that their skills and knowledge are valued independent of their educational level. Volunteering can be made most effective when schools use proper recruiting and training practices, orientation workshops, and teacher training on how to best utilize volunteers. The third feature, governance, entails establishing specific ways in which parents and community members can be involved and have a say in decisions made at the school. Serving as a member of a board or parental association may be intimidating to some, but participants need to know that their voice can make a difference. Parents and community members involved in these types of formal structures are often helpful in encouraging others to participate that would not ordinarily feel like their contribution matters.

When a school and its partners agree on characteristics of a thriving partnership a more successful partnership arises. Steiger (2007) revealed several characteristics of partnerships that were significant to school and community leaders. The researcher surveyed business partners and principals in fifty-four schools (38 elementary schools, 9 middle schools, 5 high schools, and 2 alternative schools) in a Midwestern city. Survey data were analyzed to look at correlations among characteristics of successful partnerships. Two of the characteristics that resonated as leading to success were participation from all involved and collaborative evaluation by both parties. This study
suggested that collaboration was an important characteristic of successful partnerships and that evaluating the partnership on a regular basis was also important.

Johnson (2007) examined the characteristics of sustainable partnerships, the role of social capital, as well as the leadership role involved. Interview data with school leaders, teachers, and other school personnel from a case study of three rural, middle class, schools in the Mid West revealed several characteristics of sustainable partnerships: a) Continuity of philosophy, b) shared vision, c) informal and formal communication, d) attainable goals, and e) flexibility. In addition, the leaders also had a viable understanding of the culture of the organization as well as its history and philosophy. This study supported the existing literature on successful partnerships.

Connections within the community are important in order for authentic partnerships to flourish. This is particularly important for rural schools whose families often possess a strong generational tie to the community which have a propensity to build a deep sense of norms, values, and attitudes. Bauch (2001) identified six family-school-community connections that are instrumental in developing school success. Building upon social capital that is likely to be strong in rural communities, acknowledging a strong sense of place for urban residence, fostering increased parent involvement, utilizing the often strong influence of the secular community, examining the connections between schools and the business community, and developing the community as a curricular resource can have extraordinary benefits for the success of schools.

The school and community should work together as one affects the other. Changing interactions between the two systems in a way that leads to positive outcomes for both can result in improved social functioning for the members that make up each
Chairney (2000) examined the relationship between the home and school in an effort to view the partnership through various lenses. He discussed the Family Deficit model which states that family’s lack of skills leads to the inability to support a successful school experience and the Educational Inadequacy model which states that lack of student success can be attributed to the school’s failure to develop student’s strengths. Chairney stressed the need for alternative viewpoints on school and family partnerships. The socio-cultural theory supports the need to further understand the relationship between a child’s home environment and school environment. It is important to understand the culture of the families that live in the surrounding community of the school in order to build a meaningful partnership. The goal of building influential community partnerships is ultimately to benefit the families at the school in order to improve student achievement.

Leistyna (2002) examined one school district that was attempting to create a multicultural education program in order to bridge that gap between the school and the community due to socio-cultural tensions that have historically existed within the city. This three year qualitative study’s purpose was to examine the committee’s intentions to create a meaningful partnership between the school and the community. The results showed that looking at the culture of the school and community when trying to create successful partnership programs was imperative. The study showed that the committee failed to engage the community due to its lack of understanding of the school’s greater sociopolitical context. There was very little association between the school and the public. The theoretical framework from which the committee based its interventions was not in line with that of the community. These findings have implications for looking at
the culture of the school and community when trying to create successful partnership programs. It also emphasizes the importance of looking at the bigger picture which includes examining the culture of the community when developing community and school partnerships.

The literature supports the connotation that school and community partnerships are social relationships that are constructed by the parties involved in order to meet the needs of the students. A shared philosophy and communication are important factors in building authentic partnerships. Agreement in construction of the relationship leads to a fruitful partnership with benefits for both participants. The realization that schools and communities are systems that have an effect on each other is also supported in the literature reviewed thus far.

**Historical view of schools in the community.** It is important to comprehend the association between the school and the community from a historical perspective in order to appreciate the partnerships that develop today. Several changes have occurred over time involving the school and the surrounding community (Spring, 2008). During the early part of the 19th century, the actions of the school were primarily managed by parents and the community. The focus of the school was to assimilate students successfully into the community as adults. During this time the community, including the church, had a great influence on the curriculum and management of the school. The relationship between the school and the community began to change in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As teachers became more skilled in curriculum and pedagogy the school slowly distanced itself from the community. School administration was viewed as
an expertise that required skills and training. However, the future would bring a paradigm shift in which the value of the community would again be recognized.

The 1930’s brought a growth in the idea of community education especially in low income neighborhoods (Ward, 2001). The Great Depression which followed the stock market crash of 1929 forced schools and the community to work together to meet the educational as well as social needs of the students and families. Community education involved opening up public schools before and after school and providing programs for young people in order to give them a safe place to gather. It also involved allowing community groups to hold programs that have an academic, cultural, or recreational basis. Linking schools with the community provided an opportunity for all community members to actively participate in programs that positively affected their lives. This same philosophy exists in many communities today.

The community control movement became strong in the 1960’s as efforts to end racism in schools and the community grew (Spring, 2008). Community leaders desired more power in the schools in order to increase control over hiring, spending, and curriculum. Movement organizers in New York and other inner city school districts felt that the actions of the school boards and administration were often in support of racist practices. The interest in educational accountability that soon followed changed the focus of the community control movement in that it called for experts in education to take charge in order to improve students’ academic achievement. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965 under the Johnson administration. Prior to this Act federal funding for education was limited to land for schools and special
programs but was cautious not to infringe on states’ rights to make decisions on curriculum and the general operations of schools.

The 1980’s and 1990’s brought the concept of public accountability to the forefront as the public demanded to know what was being taught in school as well as the ability to participate in the running of the educational system (Epstein, 2010). Not only did the community want access to students to improve social causes, they demanded to see academic results that would benefit the community in years to come. This was to a large extend a result of the 1983 report, A Nation at Risk, which blamed the country’s lag behind other world powers on the poor education provided to students by the public school system in America (Spring, 2008). The Task Force on Education for Economic Growth also released a report in 1983 titled, Action for Excellence, which called for big businesses to partner with schools in order to improve public education. Business influence on schools was believed to create a more competitive workforce which would also be able to compete in a global economy.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 is the latest reauthorization of ESEA. With NCLB, a new era began where accountability, local control, parental involvement, and finding what works became the cornerstones of the nation’s education system (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The law requires that when children are not performing on level, schools must figure out the reason. Federal funding is now directly tied to accountability expectations. Schools must ensure that all students learn the essential skills and knowledge defined by the state using grade-level standards and benchmarks. According to the Public Education Network and National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (2004), this is a prime opportunity for community
leaders to get involved in decision making processes at schools. Community representatives are needed in bridging the gap between the home and the school. They have valuable resources that can contribute to the academic achievement of students and success of families.

The Full Service Community Schools Act of 2009 is the latest bill introduced to Congress to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (U.S. Congress, 2010). The outcome would allow the Secretary of Education to provide grants to school districts to develop full service community school programs. This bill supports the provision of services to students, families, and the community as coordinated by partnerships between the educational system and community based organizations. The objective is to bring together key stakeholders in the community to provide services through partnership with public schools.

Outcomes and benefits of partnerships. Schools are more successful when there is a strong partnership between the school and the surrounding community. Strong partnerships between a school and the neighboring community can lead to improved academic achievement of students. As the age of accountability continues to grow it is important to link community partnerships with indicators of school success (Wang & Boyd, 2000). Research supports the idea that academic achievement can be positively influenced through strong partnerships with the community. Collaboration between schools and the community leads to students who are more successful in school, continue their education, and enjoy school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Sheldon (2003) conducted research that examined the relationship between quality school-family-community partnerships and student performance using state-
mandated assessments as indicators of student performance. Eighty-two elementary schools located in an urban area were examined. Schools that were deliberately trying to improve school-family-community relationships showed a higher number of students who were performing on level or above compared to those where partnerships were not being nurtured. The study showed that the effort a school makes to maintain partnerships is important. Obstacles often exist in the home and the community that can lead to students struggling in school. A school’s commitment to working with the community to improve student achievement is important in developing successful partnerships.

When schools work in partnership with the community, students benefit by receiving extra support that leads to improved academic achievement (Bryan, 2005). Strengthening school-community partnerships can lead to an increase in cultural capital for struggling families and lead to higher student success. Strong partnerships lead to relationships and networks of trust that are formed between families and community members. Partnerships help to empower students and parents through teaching new skills and raising self confidence. Increased knowledge obtained from community involvement helps students and their families’ better function in society and ultimately contribute as active citizens.

A partnership organized between the school and the community can lead to positive changes in the school. Specifically, five contributions that partnerships with the community make to schools include a) upgraded school facilities, b) improved school leadership and staffing, c) higher-quality learning programs for students, d) new resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum, and e) new funding for after-school programs and family supports (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Positive
changes in policy, practice, and resources are often the result when communities organize in support of schools and hold them accountable for student achievement.

School and community partnerships can have a positive effect on student attendance and dropout prevention. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) conducted a survey study of school administrators from eighteen schools that were part of the National Network of Partnership Schools (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Surveys were used to ascertain the school’s attendance goal, previous attendance percentages, and family and community partnership practices that related to attendance. The results showed that using a comprehensive approach to improving attendance that focused on involving the community led to increased attendance rates as well as a decrease in dropout rates. Specifically, giving students awards which are often funded by community partners was especially effective in achieving attendance goals.

The utilization of community partnerships also has a positive impact for language minority students. Language minority students can have a difficult time with acculturation into the community of the school (Adger, 2001). A national mixed methods study (survey as well as interviews on site) sought to examine how community based organizations (CBOs) partner with schools and their effect on language minority students. Examining partnerships from the perspective of the community members, Adger (2001) found that partnerships can be categorized into three types: ethnic organizations which served as culture brokers for the school, special-purpose CBOs which are one program with a specific desired outcome or goal, and multipurpose CBOs which provide several services focusing on various academic and social issues. Programs focused on academic achievement as well as student attitude toward school and academic goal setting.
Evidence of program success was also examined from the partner’s perspective. Successful programs tended to attribute their accomplishments to the availability of adequate resources, flexibility in services, meeting the needs of the students, families, and school personnel, and periodic evaluation of program outcomes. The value of community partnerships lies in the support that they provide to assure academic achievement. Language minority students often need the extra support that is frequently beyond the capacity of the school and that is commonly the mission of the community partnership program.

Alliances between the school and the community can also have benefits for families and educators that go beyond academics. Benefits can come in the form of material or human resources such as monetary donations or volunteer time. Community members mutually reap benefits from maintaining a strong relationship with surrounding schools, one of them is a future workforce that is more productive and actively contributes to society. Community involvement is vital for effective school functioning, the continued ability of the United States to compete in a global economy, individual student success, and the health and development of the community. Involvement by the community leads to a more productive workforce, growth in social capital, and continued community development (Sanders, 2003).

The literature supports the connotation that increasing the capacity of community involvement can lead to positive outcomes for students, educations, families, and the community. Increased student achievement, higher attendance rates, lower dropout rates, and increased knowledge and attainment of community resources for families were some of the positive outcomes of school and community partnerships seen in the
literature. A strong partnership between the school and the community is mutually beneficial. It is important to nurture relationships between schools and the community in order to have truly successful partnerships that benefit all stakeholders involved. The conclusions drawn in the literature were mainly based on survey research. Sheldon (2003), Epstein and Sheldon (2002), and Adger (2001) utilized survey research although Adger did combine it with some interviews. Sheldon correlated survey results with student achievement scores from a standardized test. Standardized tests do not give a full picture of a student success and can even be considered abusive (Janesick, 2007). Future research should examine other indicators of success as well as longitudinal data in order to reveal whether or not particular indicators such as attendance rates and language acquisition were maintained over time. Qualitative research would also provide further insight into the outcomes achieved through school and community partnerships.

Types of Partnerships and Examples of Successful Partnerships

School and community partnerships can take on many formats. Some partnerships have a greater influence on school success than others. Each partnership is unique to the school and community in which it originates. Several successful partnerships were discussed in the literature and can be used as guides for building relationships within the community. University partnerships with neighborhood schools have recently gained a lot of attention. Universities have the resources to form strong partnerships with schools while at the same time benefiting the college students at their institution. Businesses can also form powerful partnerships that not only provide financial resources to schools, but also benefit students and educators in multiple ways.
Full service schools and model schools. Community members must realize their role in supporting the goals of the school and be willing to become active participants in fostering a positive relationship that leads to improved student achievement. Authentic relationships and connections must be fostered between schools and the surrounding community in order to build partnerships that are effective and meet the goals of all the partners involved. Several models exist which suggest that positive connections between schools and the community must be present in order to build effective partnerships that lead to improved student achievement.

The Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement (OCCMSI) focuses on influencing students’ out-of-school time along with barriers to academic success. School-family-community partnerships are incorporated into the school improvement model and allow for greater success by students (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Bean, Flaspohler, Boone, & Kwiatkowski, 2008). The model introduces concepts beyond the notion of school taking place within the four walls of the building. The focus is on school-based and school-linked services that address barriers to learning, healthy development, and success in school. The five areas of concentration in the Ohio model include academic learning, youth development, parent/family engagement and support, health and social services, and community partnerships. Community partnership building included business investments in schools, neighborhood block watch, Ohio Reads volunteers, and other smaller partnerships. Sharing the responsibility for school improvement between educators and community partners leads to overall successful academic and well-being long-term outcomes. Leadership roles in these partnerships are particularly important. The model was piloted in twelve schools in diverse geographical
areas and student bodies. Survey data were gathered from school personnel and community stakeholders to evaluate the model. This model provides a foundation to look at programs that currently exist and evaluate their success. Additionally, it can be used as a tool for planning and supporting successful partnerships at other schools and communities.

Epstein (2005) studied the implementation of the Partnerships Schools Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) Model. The CSR program has “provided federal funds to states to encourage school-wide change to improve student outcomes” (p.151). One of the goals of the partnership program was to improve family and community involvement as part of school reform. Action teams were created to link school improvement goals to family and community involvement. This model is based on Epstein’s overlapping spheres of influence theory. The study looked at the implementation of the CSR model at a Title I school over a three year period. The results showed that implementation of this program led to increased family involvement and improved academic achievement. Parental and community involvement was one of the eleven components of evaluation that led to positive results. The link between improved family and community involvement and improved student achievement supports the importance of successful partnership programs.

Successful community partnerships have several factors in common that have been identified as necessary components in thriving relationships. Sanders (2006) identified principal leadership, a student centered environment, a high functioning school, an effective partnership team, and external support. This case study (Sanders, 1999) of a small all African American elementary school (total number of students 360) with 79%
on free or reduced meals highlighted the school’s efforts to involve the community’s help in raising academic achievement as less than 50% of the students were meeting state standards at the time. The partnerships helped improve the school’s library, increased technology, provided parent workshops, built incentive programs, and other financial resources to increase student achievement. Five factors surfaced as positive contributors to the success of the school as well as a successful community partnership: a) A commitment to student learning, b) principal leadership, c) an effective action team, d) a welcoming school climate, and e) positive communication.

Various models exist for community schools which are operated in public school buildings, but maintain partnership with other community agencies that run in coexistence with the public school on the same campus. Community schools open up new experiences for students through partnership with supporting agencies. Students come to school early and stay late in order to take advantage of the wrap around services. The goal is to support students academically and interpersonally. The Coalition for Community Schools (2007) examined nine different community schools and how their framework leads towards student success. The concept of community schools and how they partner with the surrounding community can serve as a model for public school leaders to aim for when developing partnerships within the community. Every school may not have the ability to become a community school, but the model can support the concept of positive school-community partnerships.

Community schools have a positive impact on student achievement as well as family and neighborhood success. Dryfoos (2000) examined forty nine evaluations of community school programs. These programs shared similar qualities such as being open
to the community before and after school, functioning as the result of a partnership between the school and community agencies, relying on school personnel and community members for program planning, and focusing on academic as well as social goals. Most of the evaluations utilized pre and post tests of student success as the source of measurement. The findings indicated that community schools have a positive effect on student achievement, social behavior and youth development, family well-being, and increased access to family support programs in the community. In an era of accountability and school reform, community schools can be a model of how to positively influence student achievement while reducing social barriers that often exist for families and frequently hamper learning.

Full-service schools attempt to integrate community participation into school design in order to provide services to students and families that will assist in the process of change aimed at success for all stakeholders. Success for full-service schools comes when schools and community members work collaboratively to meet the needs of students (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). Ultimate partnership occurs when schools consider community members as equals in decisions making. Abrams and Gibbs (2000) conducted qualitative interviews to examine the relationship between a school and the community as they worked towards developing a full-service school. Mutual goals consisted of high academic standards, inclusion of English and non-English speaking students, and a program of comprehensive services to meet the needs of the school and community. Themes of leadership and the sharing of decision making power emerged as difficult parts of the planning process. The community partners and school personnel agreed upon goals of implementing high academic standards and focusing on student
achievement. They also agreed about the importance of support services to sustain academic success. Time and patience were furthermore identified as important factors that would promote partnership success. Community members were especially concerned with communication and leadership with the principal identified as the key influence. Strategies to assure goal achievement included clear designation of partner roles and sharing of power, acknowledgement of school contribution to low academic achievement, specific and reasonable goals, and an awareness of possible challenges that may exist. Keeping these approaches in the forefront of designing and organizing full-service schools will assist in the endeavor of partnering for school and community achievement.

The literature supports the premise that successful model partnerships share characteristics in common with community and full service schools. A clear focus on partnership building as well as encouragement from strong leaders was necessary in the facilitation of a strong collaboration between schools and the community. Action teams made up of school and community members were instrumental in guiding partnerships towards success as evidenced by positive academic achievement and affirmative results for families. Partnerships were student centered and thrived in school climates that were welcoming to all stakeholders. Community members were treated as equals when serving to make decisions regarding school practice. Qualitative research was utilized by Epstein (2005), Sanders (2006), The Coalition for Community Schools (2007), Dryfoos (2000), and Abrams and Gibbs (2000) who are some of the leaders in examining school and community partnerships. An in depth analysis was important in ascertaining information from the leaders, partners, teachers, as well as families involved. This type
of research makes it possible to get a deep understanding of the level of collaboration that exists between partners. Anderson-Butcher et al. (2008) utilized survey data to evaluate the success of its model. Qualitative analysis would have lead to a deeper understanding of the model. Although each model was successful it is still difficult to be certain that the community involvement alone leads to student and family success. Other factors may coexist that influence outcomes. Populations studied were limited to minority and low income populations. Future research should study subgroups within the populations to see if each population was equally influenced by community partnerships.

**University partnerships.** Universities are becoming more active in their surrounding communities. Financial resources as well as large student bodies can provide valuable resources for schools. There can be positive outcomes for students at both establishments when universities partner with schools. Universities have an obligation to partner with their local school district because it is part of their civic duty (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2008). Success means meeting the goal of transmitting knowledge as well as assisting in the education of democratic citizens who contribute positively to society.

A unique collaborative partnership exists between the Chicago Public Schools and the Rush University College of Nursing with funding from a faith based organization (Glow & Sperhac, 2003). The shared efforts of the two institutions with the support from funders advanced the promotion of school health while giving adolescents access to health services that they would not normally seek out. At the same time it was a service learning project of the nursing students which gave them experience in the community while they learned medical skills. The seven schools involved in the partnership served
high risk adolescents that were unsuccessful in the typical educational setting. Approximately 93% of the students were students of color who lived in poverty. The pilot program met the objectives of the school system, the university teaching hospital, and the faith-based organization, and established a strong partnership between the school and the community. The objectives included a) fulfilling state mandates for immunizations and physical examinations, b) keeping children in school, c) linking students with health care services, d) responding to the need of the community, e) providing outreach to students through education and counseling, f) providing services learning opportunities for nurses, g) building relationships for future partnerships, and h) providing funding to support services for high-risk youth. The program analysis demonstrated that the collaboration between the three organizations started at the administrative level upon need identification in the community, the willingness the university showed to get involved, and the mission of the faith based organization to support community youth. This is one example of a successful partnership that focused on health issues as well as teacher preparation to be involved in community partnerships.

Pennsylvania’s Center for Community Partnerships (CCP) focuses on creating partnerships between universities and local schools that focus on education as well as providing services and resources to students, families, and community members (Harkavy, 2005). One partnership that has been in existence for over two decades and has proven to be very successful is that between the University of Pennsylvania and public schools in West Philadelphia. The West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC) is the school based program that delivers the services focused on academic resources. Over sixty faculty members and twenty three hundred students are involved in
the partnership. The theoretical basis for this program is that good schools require good neighborhoods. Schools are able to make a difference in the neighborhoods that they serve because schools belong to the community. This partnership utilizes the America Reads Program which is an elementary reading program designed to address the achievement gaps in reading (Harkavy). From 1997-2000 over 350 tutors provided services in order to raise the reading level of inner city students. Reading scores rose during that time period and proved to be higher than any other school in the area. Data analysis of interviews with principals showed that the success was linked to having a school leader open to collaboration, an understanding of the community culture, and the availability of the resources needed to implement the program.

Pohan and Adams (2007) studied the partnership between pre-service teachers from Texas A & M and Zevala Special Emphasis School. The university realized its role in preparing pre-service teachers to be better able to build meaningful partnerships as teachers. The focus of the partnership was to help pre-service teachers gain a better understanding of the importance of parent involvement and how to increase parent involvement in a high poverty community. The study focused on twenty pre-service teachers and the effects of the partnership with the school on helping them to bridge the gap between theory and practice. An analysis of reflective papers written by the pre-service teachers led to the conclusion that universities could serve as major beneficial partners to local school systems. Preparing pre-service teachers to better understand the community is one way that the partnership benefited both the University and the local schools.
The Elliot School Project incorporated a service learning component of a social work class to create an after-school program in a diverse elementary school in Lincoln, Nebraska (Langer, 2003). The project was successful because both partakers benefited from the relationship. The social work students learned program planning skills as well as had exposure to serving diverse clientele. The elementary students enhanced their study skills while increasing the amount of homework completed. The researcher used student observation, analysis of written reflections and class discussions, as well as personal reflection to evaluate the successfulness of the program. Although the sample size of fifteen elementary students was very small, the evaluation of the project revealed the importance of relationship building in forming a partnership between a university and an elementary school. Langer (2003) described the interaction between both partners as “a dialogue of discovery” (p. 68). Each contributor made sense of the situation as the partnership grew and from this they constructed their schema of how to build a thriving connection that benefited both sets of students.

The collaboration between universities and schools can be mutually beneficial for all stakeholders. The literature supports the assertion that students at both institutions benefit when schools and universities work in collaboration. The benefit on the part of the universities seemed to be clearly outlined in all of the partnerships analyzed. The question could be asked whether or not the universities would have partnered with the schools if they were not expecting to get their own predetermined benefits. Quality leadership was identified as a consistent key component to successful partnerships. University and school leaders seemed to have comparable goals of academic achievement for their students which may have led to the great success of the partnerships. The
studies conducted by Glow and Sperhac (2003) and Harkavy (2005) utilized principal
interviews along with data analysis. Both samples include hundreds of students, but the
number of interviews was not clear. Pohan and Adams (2007) and Langer (2003) utilized
the analysis of the college student’s reflective papers as the source of data. Student
interviews could have led to richer data. Langer was the professor of the social work
students and could have possibly had some bias on the success of the program due to his
personal investment in the success of the partnership. An independent study could have
led to more reliable results. Continued research on university and school partnerships
would provide more support for the current research that does maintain that positive
outcomes can result from effective partnerships.

**Business partnerships.** School and business partnerships have existed
throughout history, but took a vital role in school success during the 1980’s. According
to Hoff (2002), schools turned to business partnerships for many reasons and businesses
responded as evidenced by an increase in the number of partnerships built. The
consolidation of federal funding into block grants, higher cost of education, and the
public’s call for schools to fix many of America’s problems resulted in schools turning to
the business community for assistance. At the same time the business world was dealing
with an unstable labor market due to the drop in the number of employable workers as
well as a decline in the quality of workers. Education became the responsibility of the
community along with the schools. As business partnerships grew in the 1990’s the
accountability movement also grew. Questions arose on whether or not the growth in
school and business partnerships was leading to an increase in student achievement.
Business partnerships can benefit schools in many ways. According to Nelson, Palonsky, and McCarthy (2007), business partnerships can provide schools with financial contributions, internships and scholarships, guest speakers and teaching materials, advisors and consultants, fund-raising assistance, and employment for parents and students. Leaders in the business community serve as advocates for education. Businesses support schools in order to assist them in keeping up with global competition. As businesses invest in human capital they increase the competitiveness of the workforce. Business leaders are in the forefront of partnerships due to their interest in improving student achievement and assisting in school reform.

Hoff (2002) examined school and business partnerships from the business point of view in order to determine methods of strengthening the relationship and leading to the desired result of increased student achievement. He surveyed three hundred and twenty seven businesses to get a better understanding of their view of the partnership, motivation for partnering, expected outcomes, and their role in school reform. The results indicated that business partners desired a) a stronger role in the development of goals for the partnership, b) a stronger link between their services and improved academic achievement, c) improved feedback on outcomes, d) a clear plan of action with identified leaders to carry out the goals, and e) a school’s guidance of the partnership based on clear objectives and accountability measures.

The recent literature on business partnerships and schools is very limited. Hoff studied these partnerships from the business perspective using survey research to reach his conclusions. More research is needed on why some businesses choose to partner with schools and why some do not. Several business magazines address this topic, but there is
a dearth of exploration of this topic by the educational scholarly community. Qualitative research in this area would add to the literature and provide a deeper understanding into the perspective of the business owners and why they choose to partner. This could help schools build stronger partnerships that would support their educational goals.

**Transformational Leadership and Individual Roles in Partnerships**

Strong partnerships between schools and the community rely on individuals to work together for a common goal that has advantages for all affiliates involved. Transformational leadership is ideal for supporting school and community partnerships. Transformational leaders focus on school improvement through teamwork and collaboration by all stakeholders. There are individuals that have a function in the establishment of school and community partnerships at various levels of the system. Leadership roles at the district and local level are influential in the accomplishments ascertained by the affiliation between the school and the community. Teachers also have a powerful role in working with the community as it is often the classroom level that sees the involvement of the specific partners. There are many other key participants such as counselors and social workers at schools and within the community that work to preserve the integrity of a meaningful partnership as well as to build new partnerships.

Transformational leadership focuses on the importance of working collaboratively on school improvement through the use of collective teams (Northouse, 2010). Downton first conceived the term in 1973, but it was Burns who first studied the concept in 1978 through research of business executives, army officers, and political leaders. According to Northouse (2010), Kenneth Leithwood later developed the model in reference to school leadership. Transformational leaders are focused on instilling change. School
leaders achieve systemic change through the utilization of four mechanisms which include individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Additionally, school leaders collaborate with stakeholders and empower them to focus on school improvement goals. They create a connection with their followers that raises motivational levels to focus on change (Northouse, 2010). School norms revolve around working together to create improved achievement for students. Transformational leaders share power so that all stakeholders have a responsibility to affect change. They are also creative in finding resources to support the school’s goals for student achievement. Transformational leaders realize the importance of building partnerships within the community in order to successfully implement change that will lead to student success.

A transformational leadership style supported by the social constructivist perspective can facilitate the development of successful school improvement teams and encourage the sharing of power. Its implementation is ideal for effective partnering between a school and the community. Partnerships are built on relationships which develop as a result of individuals working together to construct meaning and knowledge of an experience (Bauch, 2001). Collaboration requires communication at a professional level with a focus on goals and objectives. As relationships are built, new ideas form through constructing new meaning from existing conditions. Leadership must be flexible in order to allow the process to flow. Schools and communities can flourish when guided by transformational leaders in a way that leads to greater accomplishments for students and families.
Leadership roles. Leadership at the district and local level can have a powerful impact on partnerships between the school and the community. The district and school philosophy can act as a guiding force on how much emphasis is put on building partnerships. School leaders must be supportive of working with the community in order to bring in members to work with the school and facilitate a positive relationship (Wang & Boyd, 2000).

School leaders face an enormous task in implementing the No Child Left Behind legislation. Public accountability focuses on every child being successful. Ferguson (2005a) calls for the development of a team approach for connecting the community to schools in an effort to improve academic achievement. School leaders are responsible for creating a culture that cultivates strong partnerships among the various stakeholders at their school. School leaders are also responsible for implementing research based policies that promote community involvement (Ferguson, 2005a). A study of twenty three sites over a five year period found that utilizing collaborative action teams (CAT) was successful in increasing school involvement of community members. These teams focused on the specific needs of their student population in order to enhance student achievement through increasing school resources with the help of the community. This philosophy supports a collaborative leadership style in which leaders share key responsibilities with other members of the school and the community.

Principal leadership and belief in community engagement is essential in order to build capacity between a school and the community. Fostering strong relationships with community partners is important especially in an age of accountability where stakeholders want to see positive results from schools (Ferguson, 2005b). Schools’
leadership should promote activities that create an environment where community partners feel welcome and their expertise is desired. Lawson, Claiborne, Hardiman, Austin, and Surko (2007) focus on the importance of school leadership in maintaining strong partnerships that make a difference in the achievement of students. Successful school improvement programs that have an emphasis on community partnerships concentrate on developing a bridge between the school and the community. The role of the leader is important in maintaining successful partnerships. Lawson et al. dissect a variety of partnerships and concentrate on the differences and commonalities. A case study was completed focusing on five partnerships in various settings from urban sites to large cities. It looked at both the characteristics of the partnerships and the role of the leader in maintaining successful partnerships. The research found that leaders are important in identifying gaps in programs and completing a needs assessment. They are supportive in sharing resources and coordinating efforts that will benefit all participants involved.

Sanders and Harvey (2002) identified four factors that lead to successful partnerships. These include the school’s commitment to learning, the principal’s support and vision for community involvement, the school’s receptivity and openness to community involvement, and the school’s willingness to engage in two-way communication with potential community partners about their level and kind of involvement. All four of these factors require a principal that is a strong leader and believes in community engagement. They used a qualitative methodology over seven months to examine one elementary school and how it has been successful in developing and maintaining meaningful partnerships with community stakeholders. Principal
leadership that valued community involvement stood out as a vital instrument in sustaining strong partnerships. District support for partnerships and professional development for faculty and staff were also important in maintaining successful partnerships. This included providing necessary resources in order for schools to be able to build partnerships and work within the community to assure their success.

This research supports the premise that effective leadership is important to develop and sustain partnerships that are valuable in supporting school efforts. Successful partnerships are maintained by quality leaders that believe in community collaboration and understand the relationship between the various systems that exist in a student’s world. Transformational leaders collaborate in order to bring effective change into their schools. Qualitative methods were utilized by Ferguson (2005), Lawson et al. (2007), and Sanders and Harvey (2002) to examine the role of the leader in developing and sustaining community partnerships. One of the strengths in the research was the decision to focus on multiple perspectives including that of the community partners’. In the study by Lawson et al., the principal put together the focus group of community partners that was interviewed. Future research could improve reliability by randomly selecting study participants based on a list of community partners. In addition, focus group data collection has disadvantages in that it does not take place in a natural setting, participants may not feel comfortable speaking in a group setting, and the moderator may take too much control of the session (Hatch, 2002). Furthermore, transcribing focus group data can be cumbersome and result in misinterpretation of the results. A more in-depth analysis might also include more data on the community partner’s role in school
leadership and the structure of power that exists between school leaders and community partners.

**Teacher roles.** Teachers play an important role in the success of community and school partnerships. Teacher openness and understanding of the surrounding community is important in order for partnerships to be successful. Transformational leadership stimulates teachers to be involved in the change process as experts in their field (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). It is important for teachers to receive training and have a full understanding of how working with the community can benefit students as well as educators.

The partnership between pre-service teachers from Texas A & M and Zevala Special Emphasis School was aimed at preparing new teachers to understand the community in which they are working (Pohan & Adams, 2007). Affiliates of the partnership support the assumption that it is important for teachers to be able to put what they learn in theory into practice in the classroom. When teachers have a better understanding of the community they are more prepared to teach the students. Teachers who appreciate the community are more likely to be open to partnerships within the community that will benefit their students and families.

Payne (2001) discusses relationships as key to successful partnerships. The relationship between the teacher and the community is vital in building a meaningful partnership. Families living in poverty often lack access to certain resources. These may include financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden rules. This framework has implications for schools to build partnerships in the community that can help them assist
families in obtaining these resources. Schools and communities can work together to build resources in the community to help families living in poverty. Teachers play an important role because they are often the first person to become aware of the needs of the families and can link families to valuable partners in the community.

Epstein and Sanders (2006) focused on one of the major assumptions of Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence; Students’ academic achievement is higher when home, school, and community work together. This postulation supports the conception that schools achieve positive results by writing team action plans that link partnership activities to school improvement goals. The researchers examined the preparedness of teachers and administrators to understand the concepts of how students gain knowledge and how teacher collaboration within schools and among families and community members leads to productive partnerships that benefit students. The research questions were geared towards examining whether or not the theory of overlapping spheres of influences on student learning is incorporated in the preparation of new teachers and administrators. Surveys were randomly sent to 500 deans of colleges and universities in the United States that support education programs. The findings indicated that higher education institutions do not offer enough teacher preparation courses related to community collaboration, but that there is a growing awareness of the need to prepare teachers to work collaboratively within the school and the community. Teachers need to be prepared to work in schools with new government mandates and ever changing communities.

The literature on teachers’ role in the implementation and maintenance of school and community partnerships is minimal. The literature mainly focuses on preparing new
teachers to work in the community, but fails to describe the relationship between teachers and community partners. More qualitative research could provide a better understanding of a teacher’s role in community partnership development. Both teachers and community partners are important in the lives of students that can have an impact on student success. Understanding how these two groups affect each other is an important part of comprehending the importance of school and community partnerships.

Role of other key participants. Other professionals within the school can serve as leaders in facilitating strong partnerships within the community that benefit the school. The principal must still support the effort and believe in community engagement, but when they put the responsibility on willing staff members’ partnerships can thrive and flourish. Transformational leaders utilize the expertise of the entire school community to facilitate change. Quality coordination of partnerships is vital in order to reach desired outcomes. Nearly two thirds of all schools with community initiatives have a coordinator in charge of partnerships (Wang & Boyd, 2000). All school personnel can have a role in working with the community, but having key human resources in place can serve to facilitate a stronger partnership and obtainment of mutual goals.

Bryan (2005) supports the concept that school counselors play an important role in facilitating strong partnerships in the community that benefit the school. They often act as facilitators and collaborators between the school and the community. These roles often serve to help relieve some of the stress that families experience and result in improved academic achievement for the students at the school. Educators are held accountable for the achievement of all students including children of color living in poverty. School-family-community partnerships help to build social capital for families
that have difficulty navigating the educational system to which their children belong. School counselors can serve as school leaders who emphasize the importance of facilitating strong partnerships in the community that benefit the school. School counselors are an added support for teachers and school leaders that can take on roles to support school and community relationships and benefit all stakeholders involved.

Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2007) conducted a study that examined school counselor involvement in school-family-community partnerships. Research has shown that school counselor involvement in these types of partnerships can lead to improved student success and they play an important role in supporting partnerships between the school, the family, and the community. They have the skills necessary to build positive relationships between the community and the school. The types of roles counselors play in supporting school partnerships vary from school to school. In this particular study, 235 participants who were members of the American School Counselor Association were surveyed to determine the factors associated with the role of the counselor in the partnership process. The results of the study showed that having a collaborative school climate, positive school counselor role perceptions, school counselor confidence in the ability to build partnerships, and school counselor attitudes about partnerships were related to the counselor’s involvement in school-family-community partnerships.

Implications exist for training counselors in preparations programs in understanding community partnerships, building collaborative relationships with other school professionals, and providing direct practice opportunities to build partnerships. Leadership of the school is vital however it does not mean that the principal needs to be engaged in every activity as responsibilities can be distributed among other professional
of the school, and the principal’s leadership role may often be that of supporting other professionals to take the lead in partnership development.

Sanders (2008) focused on how parent liaisons facilitate and maintain partnerships in some schools. Findings showed that district as well as school leaders had to support the partnerships in order for it to be successful. Epstein’s six types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community) were the focus of the study. Data collection included a variety of interviews, focus groups, and surveys. The premise that leadership is important in order for partnerships to be successful was maintained. How districts provide leadership and support for partnership program development and how schools’ partnership teams and programs are influenced by district leadership activities were addressed in this study. The results support the proposition that partnerships have to be backed up by school leaders in order to be successful.

Ward (2001) conducted a longitudinal research study in an inner-city neighborhood of Hyde Park, St. Louis on community education programs. Realizing that the field of social work and community education share common ground on how they view the community as an integrated system that affects its members on multiple levels, the Hyde Park project decided to utilize social workers to help implement their project. Social Workers from the public schools and from two local universities worked with educators to develop programs that would help the diverse population in the community. Combining the philosophies of community education and social work allowed for greater reform and a positive effect on the community and its residents. Often the principal is looked at as the leader of successful partnerships. This research supports the concept that
other professionals can be utilized to build strong partnerships, but that principal support would still be important for success.

The claim that other key school personnel can be affective in facilitating and maintaining school and community partnerships is supported by the literature. Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2007) utilized survey research to ascertain the counselor’s role in partnerships, but did not gain the perspective from the community partners. One suggestion for future research is to broaden the sample to include counselors who were not a member of the particular association studied as well as the viewpoint of the community partners. Sanders (2008) and Ward (2001) studied more specific partnerships through the use of case studies and longitudinal research. They included the viewpoint of the community as well as school staff. These studies support the suggestion that meaningful partnerships are constructed through the experiences of the individuals involved. The background and experiences of the professionals lead them to create meaning regarding community involvement in schools. This leads to the ability to support positive partnerships. The literature also revealed that the school leader must be in favor of building partnerships in order for the school staff to be successful. The leaders’ construction of the meaning of partnerships must be in alignment with that of the staff’s so that they support their efforts in building thriving school and community partnerships.

**Framing the Literature**

In this section I illustrate the criteria for the literature I selected to review. I also discuss various critics in the literature in regards to school and community partnerships.
I conclude this section by describing the gaps in the literature as well as how these gaps lead me to my research proposal.

**Literature selection.** My literature search was completed by using several databases. These included Academic Search Premier, Education Full Text, Eric (Cambridge Scientific Abstracts), JSTOR Education, and Web of Science. My review of the literature was completed with criteria for inclusion of the selected literature. I gave particular consideration to research that was peer reviewed and advanced the subject of school and community partnerships. I searched for studies that advanced the field of community and school partnerships through the use of theory. Furthermore, I focused on research studies of elementary schools as this is the school level that is of interest to me. The literature I chose provided knowledge that assisted in answering the questions that guided my research. The literature is saturated with studies that defined community as parents. However, my focus was geared towards community partnerships that defined community as organizations, businesses, and institutions rather than referring to parents in the community. The literature I chose to review was empirically based in scientifically accepted methodologies. In addition, I examined literature that resulted in strong evidence that would be useful in educational practice.

**Critics in the literature.** Some researchers are critical of the value school and community partnerships produce. The majority of critiques (Boyles, 2005; Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2007; Spring, 2008) emphasize the negative outcomes that result from the relationship between schools and the business community. These researchers speculate whether or not public schools should be influenced by the private sector. Partnerships between schools and businesses can bring much needed resources into
schools, but they can also turn education into commercialism. Students are trained to be consumers and encouraged to purchase products through advertisement inside the school (Spring, 2008).

Businesses and schools often have incompatible goals (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2007). The goal of business owners is to make a profit which is incongruent with the goal of educating students. Schools are charged with the duty of developing students who are critical thinkers which is in opposition to the objectives of corporations. Business partnerships are often developed for self serving reasons on the part of the business. Students are used as pawns as businesses turn them into mindless consumers instead of democratic citizens who critically examine their environment. Not only can business partnerships hinder critical thinking, these relationships can undermine curricular messages and take time away from learning (Molnar, Boninger, & Fogarty, 2011). Furthermore, Boyles (2005) proposed a critical analysis of business involvement in the operation of public schools. Boyle claimed that school-business partnerships exploit students by making unethical use of their vulnerability to being influenced, and that businesses use schools as avenues of advertisement in order to boost their sales. He challenged schools to focus on genuine civic partnerships that do not exploit students, and encouraged teachers to guide students in critical inquiry into the involvement of business in schools.

Consideration in the literature is also given to the benefits versus disadvantages of university and school partnerships that involve internship programs. University and school partnerships that involve teacher internships may suffer from several drawbacks. Some of the difficulties were addressed by Ledoux and McHenry (2008) who pointed out
the differences in partner expectations that could result when schools desire interns because they are low on staff or when universities expect teacher preparation beyond what the school is capable of providing which could result in unequal benefits to the school or teacher candidate. Another pitfall could be due to uneven time dedicated to the partnership as teacher interns spend more time in the classroom assisting than they do learning theory or content. In addition, other drawbacks include unprofessional behavior by the teacher intern and negative modeling of behavior by school personnel. These pitfalls may result in a negative experience for both parties involved in the partnership.

**Gaps in the literature.** One area that seems to be sparse in the literature is a focus on partnerships that center on curricular resources. Bauch (2001) addressed this concern and identifies the need to further study how connections within the community can serve as an academic resource as well as how they can be used inside and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, there is limited research on school and business partnerships that focus on the perspective of the business partner and how successful partnerships are sustained between schools and the business community. Schools seem to benefit from partnering with community members and organizations, but the literature has not addressed the advantages for the partners. In order to fully understand the relationship between schools and the community it is essential to get a better understanding of why community members choose to partner with schools. What are the benefits to the community and why do they continue to make partnering with schools a priority?

The majority of the studies conducted were quantitative and what appears to be missing from the literature is the use of qualitative studies to get an immersed understanding of the relationship that forms between a school and its community partner.
Qualitative research allows for a deeper examination of the participant’s perspective and the phenomena being studied. Interviewing permits for a thorough investigation of an experience with richer data in order to get a better understanding of a concept. I believe that in order to get a profound understanding of the relationship that emerges between schools and their community it is important to get a personal perspective from all the participants involved (Creswell, 2007).

**Summary**

The literature shows that community partnerships serve to improve academic achievement for students as well as family functioning. Partnerships allow for greater support of students and families by the school and the surrounding community. Viewing partnerships through a historical lens allows for greater understanding of the relationship between the school and the surrounding community. Community and school partnerships can take on many forms; however university and business partnerships are two types of partnerships that according to the literature have a great impact on schools. School leadership is important in facilitating positive partnerships.

Transformational leaders support collaboration by all stakeholders in order to facilitate change that leads to academic achievement and success for all students. Additionally, teachers as well as other key players are vital participants in building and maintaining these partnerships. Professional preparation, partnership selection, and partnership reflection are important concepts when developing successful partnerships. Furthermore, several existing partnerships serve as models of successful relationships between schools and the community.
My research will address the characteristics of successful partnerships that play an important role in promoting student achievement. In doing so, I will also address the roles within the school and the community that function to create thriving partnerships. Moreover, I will address the gaps in the literature in examining the characteristics of successful partnerships as well as what each party can do to maintain these thriving partnerships. I will focus not only on the benefits for the school, but also the benefits for the community partner as it seems to be an area that has attracted less attention in the literature.
Chapter Three

Methods

In this chapter I describe in detail the methods I used to collect data on the perspective of school and community partnerships. I reiterate the research questions and describe the design of my study. I also make clear the theoretical framework which is the basis of this study. I give details about the role of the researcher and discuss the ethical considerations of the study. The techniques used to analyze the data collected are clarified in detail. All names of the participants and of the school are changed to protect anonymity and to keep in tradition of educational research.

Purpose and Research Questions

I decided to conduct a case study and investigate the relationship between a specific elementary school and the community that supports it. I wanted to look at a school in a high poverty neighborhood and study what the school does to foster relationships within the community and vice versa. I chose this type of school because the federal Title I program requires schools that predominantly serve children from low socio economic backgrounds to build partnerships within the community. Little was known however on how exactly partnerships are built and maintained between a school and the community.

I wanted to understand how community partnerships are facilitated and maintained specifically at a school which I will refer to as Shell Elementary. I also
wanted to comprehend why the community partners became involved with the school, and if and how they benefited from the relationship. Specifically, with this study I attempted to answer these questions:

1) What are the characteristics of a collaborative relationship between a school and the surrounding community that are essential in order to build partnerships that meet the goals of each participant involved?

2) What are the roles of the school leader, support staff, and community members in building relationships between the school and the community?

Methodology

I utilized qualitative research in order to gather an in-depth understanding of the perspective of the participants on school and community partnerships. In particular, I chose to conduct a case study of one elementary school in order to answer the guiding questions I had proposed. I remained cognizant of my role as the researcher and reflected on the influence I had on the participants. I opted to concentrate on four sets of data collection: 1) interviews, 2) documents related to the study, 3) field notes, and 4) a researcher reflective journal. I utilized these tools in order to come up with common themes on the perspective of building effective school and community partnerships.

Qualitative research occurs in a natural setting where the researcher gathers an understanding of the participants’ experiences from the realities that surround them (Hatch, 2002). The goal is to understand the social setting that is being studied in order to get a holistic view of the relationships within the system (Janesick, 2004). I utilized multiple sources of data to discover themes that emerged as I conducted the research. As the researcher, I served as the instrument of inquiry as I made interpretations of the data
throughout the process. I believe that qualitative research led me to a better understanding of the interactions between the school and members of the community. In particular, the case study methodology is one form of qualitative research which allowed me to study a single case and perform in-depth analysis.

Utilizing case study methods, I examined Shell Elementary in depth. Case studies are used to understand complex social happenings within a real life context (Yin, 2003). In case study research, the investigator explores a specific case over time, utilizes multiple sources of data, and reports a case description based on themes (Creswell, 2007). This type of research allows the investigator to preserve the most meaningful characteristics of real life events. One advantage of case study research is that it allows the researcher to examine both the uniqueness and commonality of a single case (Stake, 1995). It also has an extensive, well-known history across multiple disciplines. The interest lies in the process and context of an event instead of the outcomes (Merriam, 1998). One of the challenges of case study methodology is choosing which specific case to study that will answer the researcher’s questions. Another challenge is gathering enough information to assure the presentation of an in-depth picture of the case (Creswell, 2007). Studying Shell Elementary through the use of case study research shed light on how this school functions in their ordinary environment in regards to building and maintaining community partnerships. It allowed for a descriptive presentation of the data and a thorough understanding of the case.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) use the term *conversational partner* to describe the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. A conversational partner has an active role in leading the discussion and is valued as an expert in the interview. A
relationship develops between the interviewer and conversational partner based on congeniality and respect. This fits in with the social constructivism perspective in that my interaction with the interviewee influences the experience which is socially constructed. I developed a relationship with those that I interviewed as they were active participants in shaping the interview.

**Theoretical Framework – Social Constructivism**

I selected social constructivism as my theoretical framework as exemplified in the work of Vygotsky, specifically his socio-cultural theory. According to Vygotsky humans exist in a sociocultural world. In order to understand children it is important to understand the world in which they live from a social and cultural perspective. Often students who are living in poverty have not been exposed to the cultural context that is needed in order to be successful in school. Their social and cultural capital is different from the middle class philosophy on which school is often based. Community partners can help to expose children to information and experiences that will help them be more successful academically.

Vygotsky believed learning to be a developmental process that children construct when they are interacting with their peers and their environment (Miller, 2002). Social interactions are important to help children learn. Language and cultural knowledge are important tools that children posses and utilize in developing new skills. Community partners can make those tools richer through giving students a greater depth of knowledge. Many schools have community partners who visit the school and provide information on topics that many students from low income backgrounds would otherwise
not ever learn about. Businesses who speak about their industry or job skills are just one example of how a community partner can enrich the knowledge base of a student.

Vygotsky’s notion of socially shared cognition supports the premise that adults as a collective are responsible for sharing their knowledge with children (Miller, 2002). Adults within a community have the responsibility to share what they know with students at a school. Their knowledge could help a child be more successful in school because it will expand the child’s awareness of concepts that they previously would not have understood. Children learn from their environment so it is the responsibility of those around them to provide them with the tools that are necessary to be successful. Community members need to work collaboratively to give students an education that builds their knowledge and understanding so that they can be successful in the world.

How do community partners make the decision to partner with schools? Vygotsky’s theory would support the proposition that their own social experiences lead them to this decision.

Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory was an antecedent to social constructivism and influenced its development. Similar to how children learn in their environment, community members learn about the importance of their roles in schools through their interactions within the school environment. I believe that successful partnerships are built when social experiences influence potential partners to interpret the school environment as an institution that would benefit and be equally beneficial from an established partnership. Vygotsky’s social-cultural theory supports the assumption that partners learn about schools and whether or not they want to partner based on their experiences with schools. Vygotsky supports the idea that learning occurs in social
situations and that interpretation of events results from these social occurrences (Jaramillo, 1996). Committed involvement in schools occurs as a result of experiences that have led to a knowledge base that supports continued partnership activities. School partners do not partner because they were told it is the right thing to do, but because they construct their own interpretation and knowledge of partnering based on their social experiences in the school setting. This study will examine the social world of a school to understand more about the partner’s decision to support the school based on a social constructivist’s lens.

**Social constructivism and building partnerships.** Each individual’s view on school and community partnerships influences how partnerships are formed and the extent of the individual involvement of the partner. According to Creswell (2007), “individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (p. 20). The experiences that occur during the partnership will influence the existence of the partnership in the future due to the meaning that the individual has placed on the partnership. To better understand how effective partnerships are built and maintained, using the social constructivism theoretical framework, it is important to comprehend the meaning that the individual has placed on the partnership based on his or her social and historical context (Crotty, 2003). Janesick (2004) defines interviewing as “a meeting of two persons to exchange information and ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic” (p. 72). Studying these partnerships through case study methods has allowed me to discover the meaning that community partners have put on building partnerships with schools.
The individuals involved from the school as well as from the surrounding community have formed ideas about their role in the education of children. These ideas have evolved from social and historical events in their lives. My goal as a researcher was to examine the various meanings the participants have established for their involvement in school and community partnerships based on their subjective experiences. My focus was on the individuals and their cognitive processes that lead them to form their view on school and community partnerships. I also studied how the school’s leadership directly relates to and affects the relationship building process between the school and community partners.

**Role of the Researcher**

I was the research instrument as I conducted the interviews, reviewed the documents, and kept a researcher reflective journal in order to ensure a reflective stance. According to Janesick (2004), I was the active agent that created the space for the development of my research skills. Knowing my thoughts and beliefs allowed for a greater trust between me and the participants. “Qualitative interviews are conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 4). I used my own individual style based on my experiences as a social worker and a therapist while assuring that the research was at a level of quality that added to the body of research on my specific topic. The key to a good interview is quality questions (Merriam, 1998). My skills as a researcher were important as I was the developer of the questions as well as the tool for analysis.
It was important to have a certain level of self awareness. I had to be aware of my own feelings as the study progressed. I have a strong commitment to education and was raised to value education. I believe that everybody has a role in supporting education and therefore I am aware that I bring a certain level of bias to my research. I embraced this subjectivity and remained aware of my feelings during the study (Janesick, 2004).

It was equally important for me to be aware of how my role as a district administrator could have created tension for the school participants and prevented them from sharing freely. I addressed this issue by building a positive rapport with the participants and reiterating that confidentiality would be maintained. I also explained how my role in the district as an administrator in the Social Work Department has no authority over their position. My previous role as a school social worker at Shell Elementary was also instrumental in creating a non threatening environment where participants felt comfortable in sharing their experiences. As the interviews proceeded I particularly had to be cognizant of my feelings towards the participants. Rubin and Rubin (2005) postulate that self awareness is important in order to assure that the interviewer does not get too involved in the study and become overwhelmed. As the researcher I had to be prepared for anything to happen during each interview. No parts of the interviews had to be omitted because of fears or hesitance of the participants during the interviews. I used my skills in order to conduct a meaningful interview that results in a deeper understanding of the perspectives of building effective school and community partnerships. Furthermore, the importance of the researcher reflective journal was instrumental in that it will allowed me to reflect on the information I gathered as I built a deeper understanding of the themes that arose.
Field Test

A field test of interview questions was conducted in the Spring of 2009 as part of assignments in two classes, Qualitative Case Methods and City and Community. One school employee and two community partners were interviewed at a Title I school using similar questions to the interview protocol for this proposed study. The information obtained was valuable and led to a depth of information from the participants. It also solidified my desire to further pursue this topic as the focus of my dissertation.

This experience increased my skills on knowing when to use various types of interview questions. I learned to begin my interview with grand tour questions which allowed the interviewee to set the direction of the interview. I also learned to rely on a balance of a variety of types of questions such as basic descriptive questions, probing questions, clarifying questions, and follow up questions in order to acquire meaningful information from the participants. I gained experience in being prepared for surprises during the interview as participants may answer questions in an unexpected manner.

The questions for this study were slightly modified from the previous set of question to ensure clarity and to remove any perceived bias. Specifically, I added questions regarding the roles of the various participants as well as factors in developing and maintaining relationships. This experience gave me insight into school and community partnerships and allowed for the development of a more narrowed focus in which to conduct this research study.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection for this case study included: 10 semi-structured interviews (one in depth interview with each of the ten participants with member checks including a review
of transcripts), documents related to the study (Title I Tool Box documents and School Advisory Council Meeting documents), field notes, and the researcher reflective journal. The activities for data collection are presented below in Table 1.

Shell Elementary is a Title I elementary school in a large school district in southern region of the United States. The school serves a multi-ethnic population of approximately 700 students from a predominantly economically disadvantaged community. Ninety eight percent of the student population receives free lunch based on the federal poverty guidelines. The ethnic makeup of the school for the 2010-2011 school years was as follows: 29% Hispanic, 58% Black, 8% Caucasian, 1% Asian, and 4% multi racial. Additionally, 22% of students were identified to have disabilities and 24% were classified as English Language Learners (ELL).

I chose Shell Elementary as the site for my research based on its demographics as well as its reputation of strong partnerships and positive relationships that it is known to have with the community. I spent seven months as a school social worker at Shell Elementary during which time I was made aware of several partnerships that Shell Elementary had with the community. I also conducted a field test of interview questions in the Spring of 2009 which lead to a desire to further understand the school. After leaving the school I spoke to a former colleague at the school about the development of long lasting partnerships that had continued to evolve between Shell Elementary and the community. I decided that I would like to conduct my research at this school in order to gain a better understanding of these partnerships.
Table 1

*Study Activities*

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<td>Step 1:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Interviewees</td>
<td>• Interviewees were selected based on years of experience and knowledge of community partnerships at Shell Elementary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher interviewees were presented with the study information at a faculty meeting and received a letter explaining the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community partners were presented with the study information at a School Advisory Council Meeting and received a letter explaining the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Those who agreed to participate received a phone call to set up interview dates and times and were given a consent letter to sign at the time of the interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewing</td>
<td>• One one-on-one interview occurred with each participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Predetermined questions were used as a guide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• All interviews were digitally recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing Transcripts</td>
<td>• All interviews were transcribed using a transcription service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transcribed interviews were reviewed with each interviewee for member check.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• An outside reviewer reviewed randomly selected transcripts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing Documents</td>
<td>• School Advisory Council Meetings were attended monthly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Title I Tool Box was reviewed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>• Field notes were taken during interviews, at School Advisory Council Meetings, and while reviewing documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journaling</td>
<td>• Journal entries were completed after each interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Journal entries were reviewed regularly throughout the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 7:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>• Data were coded using a window based computer program, Atlas-ti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Data were organized in a way that allows for the development of themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• An outside reviewer reviewed the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Triangulations of data were used to build themes based on multiple contributions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shell Elementary has been a recipient of the Five Star School Award which was created by the Commissioner’s Community Involvement Council. The award is presented annually to those schools that have shown evidence of exemplary community involvement. In order to earn FIVE STAR school recognition, a school must show documentation that it has achieved 100% of the established criteria in the categories of business partnerships, family involvement, volunteerism, student community service, and School Advisory Councils. I met with Ms. Beach, the principal of Shell Elementary, on July 8, 2010 to present my research ideas. She gave me written permission on district forms to proceed with the study. The study time frame is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Study Activity and Time Frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proposal Defended</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB Approval Obtained</td>
<td>October 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewees Identified</td>
<td>October 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews Conducted with Transcription, Member Checks, and Analysis</td>
<td>November 2010 – April 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Student Advisory Council Meetings Attended</td>
<td>November 2010 – May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 Presentation of the Data</td>
<td>January 2011 – May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 Analysis and Summary</td>
<td>May 2011 – December 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Draft of Dissertation</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Defense</td>
<td>April 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Participant Selection.** I used purposeful sampling to select the participants in this study. Purposefully selecting individuals to participate in case studies ensures a greater understanding of the research problem. I purposely selected individuals based on the following criteria: 1) knowledge of the subject matter, 2) years of experience at Shell Elementary, and 3) willingness to participate in the study. Knowledge of the subject matter is defined as having an integral role in the partnership. Participants who have knowledge of the subject matter will have been involved or affected by the partnership in some way that allows them to speak on the subject. Years of experience at Shell Elementary assures that the participants have been at the school long enough to be knowledgeable about the partnerships.

I interviewed three teachers, the Title I parent liaison, the school principal, and five community partners. This gave me five different perspectives from the school and five from the community. A small sample size allowed me to focus on the participants in order to gather extensive detail regarding their individual experience. In case study research the number of participants chosen needs to be sufficient to answer the questions posed and allow a point of saturation to be reached (Merriam, 1998). Five school representatives and five community representatives met these criteria. I presented my study at a faculty meeting in October as a requirement of my district since I was going to be visible on campus. At this time I asked for teacher participants based on the purposeful sampling criteria. I gave interested parties a prewritten letter explaining the study (See Appendix A). Follow up phone calls were made to potential participants to assure they meet the criteria. Five teachers volunteered to participate. One teacher was
eliminated due to her potential move out of state and another due to her upcoming maternity leave. I decided not to select these two participants due to the great possibility of each not being available for the entire process. Three teachers who were employed at this particular school for at least three years, had knowledge about community partnerships, and were willing to participate in this study were selected.

The school principal and Title I parent liaison verbally agreed to participate in this study after receiving a brief description of the proposal in September of 2010. Their willingness to be interviewed was an important factor in choosing a school. The Title I Parent Liaison at Shell Elementary is responsible for building relationships with parents and larger community. She assures that the Title I parent involvement activities are implemented as required by the No Child Left Behind Act. Her position is unique to approximately four schools in the district whereas the majority of schools add this responsibility to a classroom teacher. The principal and Title I parent liaison have both been employees at Shell Elementary for three years.

In order to select community partners, I presented the study at a School Advisory Council meeting on November 3, 2010. I gave interested parties a prewritten letter explaining the study (See Appendix A). Follow up phone calls were made to assure participation in the study and set up interviews. This resulted in the first four participants. The fifth participant was identified from a list of business partners. I called this participant and set up a meeting at which time he was given the prewritten letter explaining the study and agreed to be interviewed. I interviewed community partners that have been involved with this school for at least three years.
In total, five community partners were identified and agreed to participate in the research study. The first participant was a local car dealership that has been in partnership with the school for over ten years. The level of involvement includes large financial contributions and a high number of volunteer hours. I interviewed the manager that is responsible for coordinating activities with the school. The second was a student from a State University that is located in the same community as the school. The level of involvement does not include direct financial contributions, but donation of collected school supplies as well as a large number of volunteer hours. The third was a charitable foundation whose focus is education. This foundation has been a part of the larger county community for approximately twenty three years and involved with Shell Elementary for over five years. I interviewed the Program Manager who works directly with the school in implementing a volunteer tutoring program. The fourth community partner that I interviewed was a large chain restaurant that has partnered with community schools including Shell Elementary for over twenty years. Partnership activities primarily include financial donations. I interviewed the Vice President of Community Relations who is responsible for working with local schools as well as the district as a whole. Lastly, the fifth community partner who participated in the study was a small individually owned restaurant who has been in the community for fifteen years, but became a partner with the school three years ago. Partnership activities are primarily financial. I interviewed the owner of the restaurant who is the main contributor in the partnership.

**Interviewing.** After participants were selected, I began interviewing in November of 2010. Participants were asked to sign the consent form (See Appendix B)
prior to scheduling the interview. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately one hour. I conducted interviews that remained flexible in order to gather information that was meaningful. I utilized predetermined questions as a guide for the interviews (See Appendix C), but also allowed for the development of clarifying questions and additional questions based on the direction of the interview. As the interviews progressed I used field notes to help determine follow up questions that I asked during the interview. I also reflected about the content of the interview during the process in order to determine the direction the interview would head and to make decisions on where to continue to lead the interview. According to Janesick (2004), interviewers learn how to read their participants and increase their interviewing skills by learning how to rearrange questions so that the interview flows seamlessly. The questions that I developed during the interview process served the purpose of gathering meaningful data. The follow up questions helped to fill in the gaps where information may have been omitted. My role as the researcher was to develop quality questions and guide the interview in a way that would lead to valuable information.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed in full. A professional transcription service, Conejo Loco transcription, was utilized to transcribe the interviews. After listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts I used field notes to document any follow up questions I might need to ask the participants in order to get further clarification on a subject or to expound on a developing theme. Merriam (1998) suggests scrutinizing transcripts after interviews to look for places where follow up questioning could have occurred. This was a technique that I used as necessary as the research instrument. In addition, transcripts were sent to all ten participants along with the
member check form (See Appendix D). Member checking gives the participants a chance to express their reaction to the information gathered and assure that their input is portrayed correctly (Hatch, 2002). I met with each participant for approximately twenty minutes after they had at least two weeks to review the transcripts and assured they perceived their depiction of the information as accurate. I worked with the participants to give surety that the data gathered accurately represent the interviewee’s intent.

I also used a peer to work with me throughout the study in two capacities: 1) reviewing transcripts, and 2) assisting in identifying emerging issues (See Appendix E). The peer reviewer that I chose was another doctorate student who was also in the process of completing a dissertation and had taken classes on qualitative research. Her work was also qualitative which assured me that she had experience coding transcripts and identifying themes. She was given the research proposal to read so that she would understand the focus of this study. She was also given a list of preliminary codes that appeared to be emerging from the data. This individual reviewed transcripts as well as the data analysis in order to assure the integrity of the data.

I randomly selected three interview transcripts for the peer reviewer to read and analyze by having her pick three printed copies from the pile of transcripts. I asked her to look for themes based on the research questions. She divided her findings into two categories; characteristics of a successful partnership and roles of participants. Her findings were consistent with that of this researcher in that there was an eighty two percent agreement. Additional details are provided in Chapter Four.

**Documents related to the study.** Furthermore, in order to understand the relationship between the school and some of its community partners in more detail, I
attended monthly School Advisory Council (SAC) meetings from November 2010 through May 2011. The monthly SAC meeting is comprised of school employees and community partners, with the majority of participants being from the community. The purpose of this committee is to implement and monitor the School Improvement Plan (SIP) which includes a section about school partnerships. Decisions are made at these meetings that effect the implementation of programs at the school. I gathered informational documents from these meetings such as the agenda, attendance log, and presentation materials.

I also examined available archival data. Each Title I school is required to maintain a “Tool Box” which contains records documenting the involvement the school has with the community. I examined these documents and used field notes to record my findings. I was specifically looking for information regarding the number and type of partnerships the school maintains, the number of volunteer hours completed by community partners, as well as the amount of financial contribution donated to the school. Archival data can be considered unobtrusive data as they do not require participant interaction (Hatch, 2002). These additional sources of data gave a multi-layered look at the systems and structures in place that influence the ideas and actions of the participants. Archival data served to provide a better understanding of the school’s relationship with the community. The “Tool Box” did not contain any student information therefore confidentiality was not an issue. The school documents and the field notes were part of the data analyzed and served to provide additional information in order to answer the proposed research questions.
Field Notes. As the interviews progressed I used field notes to help determine follow up questions that I asked during the interview. After listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts, I also used field notes to document any follow up questions I might need to ask the participants in order to get further clarification on a subject or to expound on a developing theme. During the School Advisory Council meetings, I took field notes to assure that I had a clear understanding of the meaning of the documents collected and the participants who attended the meetings. Field notes can also be considered a map of the social setting (Hatch, 2002). They help to frame the study by describing the relationship between the participants and their natural environment. I examined the Title I Tool Box documents and used field notes to record my findings. I was specifically looking for information regarding the number and type of partnerships the school maintains, the number of volunteer hours completed by community partners, as well as the amount of financial contribution donated to the school.

Researcher reflective journal. Reflective journaling is critical in qualitative research as it gives the researcher a tool in which to reflect and gain a deeper understanding of the data collected during the study (Janesick, 1999). I maintained a researcher reflective journal in order to develop self awareness of my role as the researcher. Reflective journaling serves to improve writing skills and the ability to process the information gathered in order to reflect on the meaning of the data (Janesick, 2004). Utilizing the researcher reflective journal strengthened my role as the researcher and provided a tool to synthesize the information gathered from the interviews and field notes. It also served as “a check and balance in the entire course of a qualitative research project” (Janesick, 1999, p. 521), and assisted in refining ideas, beliefs, and my own
responses to this research study (Janesick, 2004). Journal writing serves as an additional
data set that gives the researcher the opportunity to triangulate the data. Furthermore,
Janesick (2004) describes how the research reflective journal can help the researcher with
the following:

1. Helps to focus the study
2. Helps to set the groundwork for analysis and interpretation
3. Serves as a tool for revisiting notes and transcripts
4. Serves as a tool to awaken the imagination
5. Helps to keep the written record of thoughts, feelings, and facts (p. 149)

I wrote in my journal immediately after each of the interviews in order provide a
thorough description of my experience as well as to document where I may have gaps in
my research which need to be filled in by follow up questions. I also read through my
journal prior to each remaining interview to review any information that might enhance
the quality of my next interview. My researcher reflective journal also allowed me to
reflect on my experience as a researcher and how I feel about the process and information
being collected (Hatch, 2002). It assured that I addressed my biases and that I monitored
my personal feelings as the research instrument.

**Data analysis**

Analyzing the data from the 1) interviews, 2) documents related to the study, 3)
field notes, and 4) a researcher reflective journal occurred throughout the process.
Collecting data and analyzing it for meaning occurs simultaneously when conducting
qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). A researcher has to make sense out of the data in
order to analyze it and understand its meaning. “Making sense out of the data involves
consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). The data were organized to allow for the development of themes. Interpretations were made based on the findings which allowed for conclusions to be drawn about its meaning (Creswell, 2003). As the researcher I interpreted the data through my personal lens and made meaning of what I found.

I used Merriam’s (1998) constant comparative model to compare the participant’s comments after each interview and develop categories of answers. This allowed for a deeper, more thorough look at what was important in maintaining school and community partnerships and the construction of themes. I noticed that several themes began to emerge while I analyzed the data from the interviews, documents, field notes, and my researcher reflective journal. Dominant themes and central concepts are utilized in qualitative research to answer the researcher’s question. The researcher has to decide which themes to further explore depending on the goal of the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

I began the analysis with a provisional list of codes based on the literature reviewed. These a priori codes were determined before the study began based on what the literature claims to be characteristics of effective partnerships. Figure 2 depicts the codes determined before analyzing the data. As the data were analyzed new codes emerged specifically related to the research questions. The a priori codes from the literature review were used as a framework from which to compare emerging codes. The use of both a priori and open coding allowed for unforeseen findings beyond what the literature claimed.
Figure 2. A Priori Codes

I used the constant comparative model during the data analysis to compare the participant’s comments after each question and develop categories of answers. I also compared developing categories to the documents I reviewed and my researcher reflective journal. This method is a creative process where decisions are carefully made about what information is truly significant and meaningful in the data. After each
interview was completed the data were analyzed to identify the many themes that had arisen from the conversations.

Furthermore, I used descriptive codes to summarize in a word the fundamental meaning of the qualitative data. Categories emerged out of the data and as the analysis progressed the criteria for inclusion became more precise. This allowed for a more thorough look at the information collected and for the construction of themes. As core concepts began to emerge after the analysis of the data from the interviews, themes were identified. The themes were then categorized into researcher developed thematic categories (Saldana, 2010). The process remained flexible as new themes emerged throughout the process and decisions were made as to what information best answered the research questions.

Specifically, the data were coded using a window based computer program, Atlas-ti. I organized all of the information gathered using this program. Two hundred and fifty nine pages of typed transcripts, forty six typed journal pages, and thirty five documents were analyzed. Initially on the printed documents, I highlighted any information that answered the first research question in yellow and any information that addressed the second research question in pink. This allowed for a better grasp of the multitude of information collected. All of the interview transcriptions, journal entries, and documents gathered were then uploaded into the computer program. Codes were assigned to meaningful sections of text and possible quotations highlighted. I discretely coded line by line of each transcript and entered a descriptive word that summarized the intent of the participant. The descriptive words were grouped into categories based on similarity or relationship to each other. Code families were developed that included the codes that
answered each of the research questions. I then collapsed codes based on common characteristics. Simultaneously, the field notes and the researcher’s reflective journal were analyzed to look for categories that may or may not support the findings from the interviews. The emergent codes were compared to the a priori codes that resulted from the literature review. The compounded codes were then categorized into the major themes that emerged from the data.

Triangulation of the data occurred throughout the process. This ensures that various sources of data were used to build themes based on multiple contributions (Creswell, 2007). Dominant themes and central concepts are utilized in qualitative research to develop and support the researcher’s theory. The researcher has to decide which themes to further explore depending on the goal of the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I looked for common themes to develop and from which to draw some conclusions. Using the literature as a guide, I expected to see themes in the areas of school leadership, collaboration, communication, and the importance of student centered partnerships. This led me to an in-depth representation of the case utilizing a rich narrative as well as tables and figures in which to display the results.

**Trustworthiness of the Data**

It is important for the researcher to build trust with the participants through total commitment to the study (Janesick, 2004). By building trust the participant’s voice is heard and the data are portrayed in a way that is accurate and meaningful. Utilizing member checks, a peer reviewer, field notes, and the researcher reflective journal insures that the data are trustworthy.
I built a trusting relationship with my participants as I believed them to be a partner in the conversation. I had them review interview transcripts to assure the accurate representation of their contributions. I also had an outside reader review the transcripts to assure that my analysis was correct. The outside reviewer served as a second pair of eyes to see if anything was being missed, forgotten, or over emphasized. This independent person also assisted in determining if there was an agreement on themes. A consensus of findings leads to more trustworthy data. Interviews, documents related to the study, and reflective journaling were all used as data sources when looking for themes to answer my research questions. Triangulation of the data sources leads to believable conclusions (Bartlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). I was aware of my personal biases and as the research instrument I used journaling to reflect on my position as I analyzed the data. Furthermore, I used rich descriptions when portraying the data in order to present an accurate picture of the participant’s perspectives on building partnerships between Shell Elementary and the Community.

Ethical Considerations

Documentation for The University of South Florida Internal Review Board (IRB) was presented immediately after my proposal defense. The IRB assured that the study was carried out in an ethical manner. The school district in which I conducted my research also has an approval process which was completed simultaneously with the IRB. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), a researcher’s ethical obligations stretch beyond that of any internal review board. It was my responsibility as an ethical researcher to assure that participants were treated with respect and dignity.
Researchers have ethical obligations when enlisting the services of another individual to assist in conducting one’s research. The relationship between the interviewer and the conversational partner can be reciprocal, but the researcher is ultimately in control of the study. It is the researcher’s duty to assure that the research is carried out in an ethical manner (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Reciprocity can be an ethical concern when participants open themselves up during the interview with little return from the process. According to Hatch (2002), “we ask a lot, take a lot and it we’re not careful, give very little” (p. 66). My role as the researcher is to make sure that I at least give the participants a positive experience and portray their thoughts and feelings correctly.

Utilizing the letter to participants as well as the informed consent form assured that participants understood their role in the study and that their participation was by their own free will. In order to maintain confidentiality all names and any identifying information was changed. All data received are being stored in a safe location in my house. I remained available to address any ethical problems that arose in this study on a case by case basis. There were no ethical concerns communicated by the participants during the study.

Summary

In this chapter I described the research design used for this study. A social constructivist perspective was used to collect data on the perspectives on building effective partnerships between a school and the community. Data collection included participant interviews, documents related to the study, and the researcher’s reflective journal. Issues relating to trustworthiness of the data as well as ethical considerations were also addressed in this chapter.
Chapter Four

Presentation of the Data

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain selected participants’ perspectives on how a school builds partnerships with the community. I studied the relationship between an elementary school and community partners that have been in existence for at least three years to better understand each participant’s view of the partnership. The exploratory questions that guided the study were:

1) What are the components of the participants’ perspectives?

2) What variables influence their perspectives?

In my research, I described and explained the relationship between the school and the community partners based on how each individual participant has socially constructed his or her knowledge of the partnership.

Certain characteristics must exist in order for a partnership to be effective and lead to desired outcomes. Schools must work to foster these relationships. The roles of the leader, school staff, and community members are influential in building and sustaining successful partnerships. Specifically, with this study I attempted to answer these questions:

1) What are the characteristics of a collaborative relationship between a school and the surrounding community that are essential in order to build partnerships that meet the goals of each participant involved?
2) What are the roles of the school leader, support staff, and community members in building relationships between the school and the community?

As discussed in chapter three, the methods of data collection for this case study were semi-structured interviews (transcribed) conducted with school personnel and community partners, my researcher reflective journal, and documents related to the study.

This chapter includes a description of the setting, Shell Elementary, along with details about its partnership activities for the 2010-2011 school year. A depiction of the participants is also included that consists of details that are significant to this study but that are not revealing enough to breach confidentiality. All school participants were given fictitious names representing places surrounding my childhood home. All community businesses or organizations were given fictitious names representing either places or mementos from my childhood. Finally, themes that emerged during the study are portrayed that address the specific research questions proposed, drawing on the various data sources.

**Conventions of Interview Transcript Presentations**

It is important to assist the reader to gain a better understanding of the interview data that I present from the transcriptions. The interviews were conversations in which the participant’s spoken word is important to understand when put into writing. I want the reader to have a clear picture of what they are reading. The following explanations will help the reader gain a deeper understanding of the meaning the participants intended in their spoken words. In regards to quotations, shorter quotes will be contained in quotation marks while longer quotes will be in block format, indented from the left margin. Spoken words that were emphasized based on listening to the recorded
conversations will be italicized. Brackets will be used to identify any obvious emotions, body language, gestures, or other key indications of expression that can not be captured with written transcription alone. For example any [laughter] that adds to the understanding of the transcription will be in brackets. Any clarifying words or phrases that will lead to a better understanding of the participants desired meaning in a quotation will also be contained in brackets. For example if a participant refers to students as “they”, the word [students] will be put in brackets so that the reader understands the reference. In addition, there will be some deletions of words that participants use as fillers that may be distracting to the reader and take away from the meaning of the sentence. Some deletions will include words such as, *um, like, well,* and *so.* In choosing quotations that will give the reader the best understanding of the perspectives of the participants it was also necessary to delete words or phrases that distract from the intended meaning. These will include words that were excessively repeated or phrases that take away from the meaning of the passage. Ellipses will be used to indicate the deletion of words or phrases. Three ellipses will indicate the deletion of a word or phrase within a sentence and four ellipses for words or phrases between sentences. It was my intent to preserve the perspectives of the participants as they discussed their experiences and give the reader a through understanding of the meaning of their spoken voice.

The Setting

Shell Elementary is a Title I school located in large school district in the southern region of the United States. I refer to this district using the pseudonym “Ocean County School District (OCSD)” and only provide basic information about the district in order to maintain confidentiality. Nearly 200,000 students attend more than 200 elementary,
middle, and high schools in OCSD making it one of the nation’s top twenty largest districts. OCSD employs over 20,000 faculty and staff members. During the 2010-2011 school year, 135 schools were designated as Title I schools based on at least 75% of the students qualifying for free or reduced price meals.

As discussed in Chapter 3 under Method of Data Collection, ninety eight percent of the students who attend Shell Elementary receive free and reduced lunch as determined by the federal poverty guidelines. Shell Elementary received a state grade of an “A” for the accomplishments of the 2010-2011 school year. Florida’s A-F School Grading System is used to keep schools accountable for student achievement. State officials grade schools using an objective and transparent A through F grading scale based upon the proficiency and learning gains of students. The Florida Department of Education bases half of the school’s grade on students’ achievement levels which is the percentage of students scoring proficient in reading, writing, math, and science. The remaining half of the school’s grade is based upon individual student learning gains which are the percentage of students who made progress in reading and math from his or her previous achievement level the prior year. When Florida started grading schools, only 21 percent of schools earned an A or B. Currently 74 percent of schools earn an A or B, and the bar for good grades has been raised four times (Lip, 2011).

School grades and demographics of Shell Elementary for the past ten years are represented in Table 3. The goal of the principal has been to assure that teachers have high expectations for student performance and believe in the abilities of the students. The gains in test scores for the 2010-2011 school year is an indication of the increased academic achievement of the students at Shell Elementary.
Table 3. School Grades and Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percent Tested</th>
<th>Free and Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>Minority Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants consistently described Shell Elementary based on its demographics as well as the perceived culture of the school. Ms. Smith described the school based on its demographic and the needs of the students, in particular, how the population tends to be transient.

Shell is in [pause] somewhat of the inner city….In my time here, it’s changed a great deal in some ways and other ways it’s stayed the same. Ninety-seven percent of our children are on free and reduced lunch, so that means their lunch is paid for….We have had a lower number of parent involvement, but as the years have progressed, it seems that our parents are trying to get more involved, and we’re trying to educate them more so that they can become more involved in their child’s education…It’s a very transient school, so the children come and they go and it’s very hard in that sense, because we can’t…continuously educate them. There’s always these blocks in their learning….So far this year, let’s see, I started with sixteen children and by December, I’m already losing three or four. And I
just got two new ones this week….The thing is, when they come in the middle of the year, they usually come in very low academically, so it’s almost like a catch-up game where you have to do double-time, because you want them to be where they need to be by the end of the year, and so it makes it difficult. So, in that aspect that is very difficult for our school.

Ms. Stratford, the parent liaison, describes the school based on the feel and look of the neighborhood.

Our community is often referred to as “Suitcase City” and it is a very transient community [pause]…well our school is a neighborhood school with busing within the neighborhood because it spans a big area. Our community is primarily of African American descent and Hispanic descent. It is a low-income community, working class. It does not look like a bad community. The community is…its pretty well kept…for a working class community, so it’s not a totally impoverished area. It made up of houses, apartments…A little bit of both. Primarily there are homes, houses. We do have a lot of duplexes scattered in the community and some apartment complexes.

Ms. Reed also describes the school in terms of its socioeconomic status, but also by how the teachers care about the students.

We are a low socioeconomic status school, so that means we have low-income, high-needs, so there’s a lot of demands that are placed on the teachers…. I think our community here is very caring. I see a lot of teachers give up a lot of their personal time to be able to stay and work longer hours to be able to make sure to
meet the needs of the students….I think that’s one of the main things that we see with the culture of the school here, is that teachers really care about the students.

Shell Elementary is indeed a school that serves low income students and families and tends to have a transient population. The principal and teachers work extra hours in order to meet the academic needs of the students. There seems to be a belief in the needs of the students based on the look of the community.

**Reflections from my journal dated October 2, 2010.** I am very excited to begin my interviews at Shell Elementary. There is such a high level of vigor and determination to improve student achievement. The principal seems to be a true instructional leader and keeps the focus on assuring that students are learning. Shell Elementary is a Title I school with 98% of the students qualifying for free lunch. The staff seems to have constructed meaning from this on the expectations of the students. The community doesn’t look so bad, so is that an indication of how the students are going to perform? I am anxious to see how the support of the community makes a difference in fulfilling the needs of the students and families. Based on the awards that the school has won for parent and community involvement, it would appear that there are successful partnerships established with the community. Although working in a Title I school can be stressful because of the added pressures and mandates, it seems to be equally as rewarding to know that the possibilities of changing lives are endless.

**Community Involvement Activities**

Community involvement activities center on the academic needs of the students with the focus on improving student achievement. The School Advisory Council is instrumental in planning, implementing, and reviewing school activities and assuring
their connections with student achievement. The development of a School Advisory Council is a requirement for all Title I schools and considered best practice. Title I documents are stored in a Title I Tool Box and serve as proof that schools are instituting the federal mandates required by law.

**School Advisory Council (SAC).** The purpose of monthly SAC meetings is for stakeholders to come together to assure that the school is implementing the objectives described in the school improvement plan. I attended seven SAC meetings and collected documents that depicted the function and role of the SAC including agendas, Title I documents, school data, and school flyers. Monthly agendas described the topics proposed for discussion with a clear focus on student data and activities that supported student achievement. Figure 3 is an example of a SAC meeting agenda. It was clear that an academic focus is kept throughout the meetings based on examining the collected documents. Title I documents were disseminated for community approval and described how the school would perform certain functions that would lead to improved student achievement. For example, the Parent-Teacher-Student Compact was circulated which describes how stakeholders will share the responsibility of improved student academic achievement. The SAC members are responsible for reviewing these types of documents to ensure the activities described are occurring and changing them as needed for the following school year.
School data were disseminated at each meeting by the resource teacher considered as the content expert. For example the reading coaches presented reading assessment data for all grade levels and the writing resource teacher presented writing score data for all grade levels. Figure 4 is an example of a math update given by the math specialist with the focus on parent involvement.
December Math at SHELL

K: Students will begin to explore three dimensional shapes. A good way to review this concept at home is to play a game of I Spy and have students identify shapes in the real world that have three dimensions (length, width, & height.) Make sure to ask your child how many faces, vertices, and edges are in the shapes they find.

1st: Students will begin to compare and order numbers between 0-100. Make sure to practice putting numbers in order and making sure your child knows the difference between the terms less than and greater than.

2nd: Students are learning how to add and subtract three digit numbers. Taking the time to practice adding larger numbers with and without re-grouping will be very beneficial for your child.

3rd: The focus is changing to comparing and ordering fractions. Practice creating models of fractions or drawing pictures to represent parts of a whole.

4th: Students will be learning about place value with decimals. Make sure to review the tenths, hundredths, and thousandths places. Relating the place values to money can often be a beneficial way to learn about the tenths and hundredths place.

5th: Students have finished the unit on adding and subtracting fractions with like denominators and are now focusing on unlike denominators. Continue to practice working with fractions, mixed numbers, and renaming fractions. Challenge your child to al-ways put fractions in their simplest form!

Title I Tool Box. The Title I Tool Box contains copies of documents that meet federal mandates pertaining to parent and community involvement. All Title I documents are stored in a similar container at every Title I school which allows for efficiency in monitoring federal mandates by district staff. Documentation of activities which support parent and community involvement efforts is also required to be stored in the Title I Tool Box. In reviewing the Title I Tool Box at Shell Elementary, I developed a better understanding of the various activities that occurred at the school which were supported by the community and intended to strengthen parent and community involvement.
School activities were developed and planned by the School Advisory Council and are structured to support Epstein’s (2001) six components of parent involvement. Community partners have been instrumental at Shell in supporting school activities through providing monetary donations, food donations, tangible donations, sponsorships, and volunteer hours. Workshops in the areas of reading, writing, math, science, technology, testing, social studies, character education, and family relationship building were conducted at least one evening a month with community support. Figure 5 is an example of a flyer sent home regarding a parent night activity.

| 2 ANNUAL FALL FESTIVAL AND SMART NIGHT—THURSDAY NOVEMBER 10TH 4:00-6:30 P.M |
| Come join us in the Cafeteria and Multi-Purpose Room for a night of fun, games, math, science and art activities, specialty booths, and cheap food. |
| All games, activities, and special booths are FREE! Free booths include: face painting; fake tattoo parlor, sand art bracelets, spin a prize, Tic Tac Toss, Fishing games, and MANY MORE!! |
| So come learn and have lots of FUN together!!!! |

*Figure 5. Parent Night Activity Flyer*

Passport to Success parent workshops as well as English Language Learners (ELL) meetings were also conducted monthly during the day with themes such as reading skills, home environment, homework and learning, and preparing for testing. Figure 6 is an example of field notes taken while examining the Title I Tool Box. The focus of the various activities clearly related back to the school improvement plan which guides the school on how to improve student learning.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Nights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 15th = Passport to Success Workshop (Food and Volunteers: Drive Time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Parents Assuring Student Success)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLT = Concentration, listening &amp; time management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills building to effective learning &amp; homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 28th = Title I Annual Mtg. &amp; Presentation of SIP (Food and Volunteers: Drive Time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readers of the Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Family literacy workshop (k-5)-strategies for improving skills at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 12th = Reading Skills = how to facilitate at home (Teacher Volunteers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 6th = Bullying signs, symptoms and solutions (Food and Volunteers: Drive Time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 21st = Assisting your child w/ homework (Food and Volunteers: Drive Time and Community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 18th = FCAT night (Stanford) (Food: Crab Shack, Volunteers: Community)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.** Field Notes Taken While Examining the Title I Tool Box

Shell Elementary reported a total of one hundred and four (104) volunteers including mentors for the 2010-11 school year with three thousand four hundred and fifteen (3,415) total volunteer hours. The total amount of donations including monetary, goods, and volunteer hours at eighteen dollars ($18.00) an hour totaled one hundred and thirty thousand dollars ($130,000). There are fourteen (14) regular partners that actively participate in school activities and decision making processes. These partners include businesses such as restaurants and retail stores, law firms, a car dealership, insurance
companies, a local city park, a local University, and several nonprofit organizations such as a family social service agency, health clinic, and counseling center. There are approximately twenty (20) additional businesses in the community that donate money and goods to the school on occasion, but are not regular participants in school activities or decision making.

**Reflections from my journal dated April 23, 2011.** Shell Elementary has a plethora of community partners and a variety of school activities. Community partners play an essential part in supporting students, teachers, and families at Shell Elementary. The school utilizes the School Advisory Council (SAC) to implement the School Improvement Plan. Decisions are made based on data that are reviewed regularly. The system that is in place works well for the school and allows the community partners to provide services and make donations based on the identified needs of the school.

Shell Elementary consistently receives the Five Star Award for its parent and community involvement. The partners have won community awards and are often recognized at the school and district level. The recognitions come as a result of the data driven hard work that goes into creating an environment where students achieve academically and families grow as a result of their participation with the school. The school staff works hard to impact students and as a result they earn recognition.

**The Participants**

In order to illustrate a clear picture of the participants, I begin with basic information for each participant. A summary of the school participants can be found in Table 4. This information was gathered during the interviews as well as while reviewing documents related to the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of Years at Shell Elementary</th>
<th>Number of Years in Education</th>
<th>Current Position in Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Beach</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Principal (Administrator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Stratford</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Parent Liaison (Para Professional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Tangier</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Exceptional Student Education (Instructional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Smith</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1st Grade (Instructional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Reed</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3rd Grade (Instructional)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A summary of information related to the community partners can be found in Table 5. This information was also gathered during the interviews as well as while reviewing documents related to the study.
Next, I present a deeper look at each school personnel participant and community partner. The greater part of the data presented in this section comes from the transcribed interviews as well as the documents collected related to the study. The description of each participant will include an excerpt from my researcher reflective journal. This will reveal my thoughts about each participant. In particular, I will be disclosing information related to why each participant is either involved with community partners as a school employee or choosing to be involved with the school as a community partner.

Throughout the interview process, I consistently reminded myself of the exploratory question: “What variables influence their perspectives?”
Ms. Beach. Ms. Beach has been the principal of Shell Elementary since December of 2007. She was very successful in raising student achievement at her previous school therefore was asked by the Superintendent to move to Shell Elementary with the goal of moving the school forward. Ms. Beach began her educational career as a teacher, advanced to become a guidance counselor, and then quickly moved to administration. Her role as a guidance counselor and the concentrated involvement she had with students and families may influence her perspective as a leader. Her leadership style is that of a transformational leader with a clear focus on school improvement through teamwork and collaboration. When asked about her school she revealed her beliefs about the school and the community.

Right now we have a very diverse population, and we have over ninety percent of our children are on free and reduced lunch, and we have, not just students, but parents that are very needy and need a lot of support in many different areas. So, it’s helping teachers understand what families need, it’s trying to build a collaborative community so that we can help each other, and trying to get everybody to realize that we’re not just little franchises that stay within our rooms, but we’re a school and a community and they’re “our” children, so that we’re all invested in their futures.

Ms. Beach has a clear goal of building a community that supports the students, parents, and teachers at Shell Elementary.

Reflections from my journal dated February 2, 2011. Ms. Beach was the most nervous of all of the participants interviewed so far. She appeared more nervous than this interviewer has seen her in other conversations. I believe that this may have been due to
her strong commitment to improving student achievement and her fierce dedication to making sure that “things” go right at the school. It is interesting that in describing the school the first thing mentioned was the demographics of the students. There seems to be a belief that educating students living in poverty requires more than just a focus on academic achievement, but on the overall needs of the students, families, and community. This may have grown from her role as a guidance counselor. Her discussion about student achievement divulged her inner need to make sure that she does all she can do to assure academic success. It was clear that to Ms. Beach the success and failures at Shell Elementary are a reflection of her leadership and her as a person. She seems to take full responsibility for the happenings at the school and does not want to appear unsuccessful.

Even though Ms. Beach has a compelling focus on improved academic achievement, she has surrounded herself with leaders in the school that can take on some of the responsibilities that are necessary to achieve the desired outcomes. There is an obvious trust of the parent liaison to work with the community to bring additional needed resources to the school. The principal and the parent liaison have a long history of working together and Ms. Beach seems to have confidence in Ms. Stratford’s abilities to build and maintain a strong relationship with the community that serves to support the goals and mission of the school which is high academic achievement for all students.

**Ms. Stratford.** Ms. Stratford is the parent liaison for Shell Elementary. Every Title I school has a person responsible for assuring that the Title I mandates are implemented and documented correctly. Most schools put this responsibility on a teacher, guidance counselor, or social worker. Shell Elementary is one of four schools in
the district that have utilized Title I funds to hire a parent liaison to fulfill this role. Ms. Stratford describes her role.

I have a unique role at this school. My primary role is to be the Title I liaison and business partnership coordinator. As the Title I liaison, I handle all the parent involvement activities as outlined for District Title I Parent Involvement Policy Program. In my business partnership role, I go out into the community and seek out business partnerships to help support the school via either monetary or in-kind donations or volunteerism – many different aspects.

Dedicating a full time position to this role demonstrates the value the school has put on building relationships within the community.

Ms. Stratford has a passion for working on the behalf of students. Working in the educational field has been a dream of hers since she was a child. She often mentioned her own upbringing and the influence of her parents. This may have strongly inspired her perspective on building relationships. She describes her passion for education.

My work means everything to me. It’s my passion. I always wanted to either be a teacher or be a beautician…But my mother steered me clear of that and headed me down the business path and, actually, I have a degree in accounting…but I hated it. I did it for six months and, then, I found my way into the Ocean County School System. I love my job. I love being an advocate for children. I love being an advocate for education. I love making sure that in, in the public sector, when I hear misinformation or comments that I try to be an ambassador for the school district, just to stop misinformation or things like that, or try to head people in the right direction… My job is everything to me. I’m very passionate about it.
Ms. Stratford serves as a liaison between the school and the community. She works to make positive connections that support the students, teachers, and families of the Shell Elementary community. She believes in the mission of the school and the district and promotes it wherever she goes.

**Reflections from my journal dated January 17, 2011.** Ms. Stratford described the neighborhood based on its economic status. Even though the school is a renaissance school which means at least 90% of the students receives free or reduced priced lunch, Ms. Stratford does not feel that the community is as impoverished as it may appear on paper. She described the community as working class. This is an example where her perception may be a result of her experiences. She has socially constructed beliefs about what living in poverty should look like. The look of the neighborhood gives her the impression of the potential needs of the parents and a goal to improve parent involvement. She makes judgments based on her beliefs. Her level of involvement and relationship with the residents as well as businesses/organizations has also led her to a positive outlook on the community. She is able to see the strengths whereas others only know it by the official demographics. Ms. Stratford is also honest about the weaknesses in the community and where residents as well as businesses/organizations need to step up and make changes if the goal is for the children to be successful and have a better life than their parents.

**Ms. Tangier.** Ms. Tangier has taught at Shell Elementary for nine years. She is an exceptional student education teacher who teaches students in the primary grades with varying exceptionalities. She is also the chair person for the Student Advisory Council (SAC). She describes the stresses of being a teacher in a high needs school.
So, the culture of the school, really, I think is… I wouldn’t say our whole culture is stressful, but it is very stressful here, meaning paperwork, accountability issues, data collection, report card reviews, all the things, and the fact that the teachers here take also on the job of parents, because we don’t have a lot of parental involvement and, therefore, the teachers are the PTA. The teachers are on SAC, primarily. The teachers participate…and it’s mostly teachers. The teachers have to volunteer after school hours to do things that in most other schools you have parents doing those things, teachers are doing here. So, teachers are spread more thinly. It’s more stress as far as paperwork, so I think that adds to a culture of being – I don’t know – a little [pause] almost, not burned out, because I think the teachers enjoy what they’re doing, but it’s, it’s very taxing on you after awhile.

Ms. Tangier’s description of the stressors that the teachers face is testimony that the involvement of the community is vital. She seems to believe that if parents were more involved teachers would not be quite as stressed. Her years of experience in the classroom, specifically in Title I schools, seems to have persuaded her perspective. Although honest about the stressors of the job, Ms. Tangier has a joy about her that shows her zeal for working at Shell Elementary possibly because of the very things that are also stressful.

Ms Tangier has a passion for watching students grow. Her love of teaching is obvious. She discusses why she believes teachers keep coming back when the job can be stressful.

The students. They enjoy the kids. And what makes these students different than the students at affluent schools? These students need us. I think you have a
whole bunch of teachers that need to feel needed. [laughter] So, I think they see the benefit… They see the children growing, and so when they see that somebody started off in fifth grade, was reading at a third grade level, and came up to a fourth grade level or fifth grade, you get a very good feeling about what you’re doing with kids, and that is why you keep coming back. Because there’s a big part of having some self-gratification and feeling good about your job that makes you want to come back. And, not saying that the teachers at other schools don’t feel good about that. So, I mean, there’s a different kind of pressures that they have, but every teacher, I think, has some gratification about teaching kids and helping them learn and you see that even more when children come in behind where they’re supposed to be. So I think that’s what helps teachers keep coming back.

Ms. Tangier keeps coming back after twenty three years of teaching. She is realistic about the high demands of the school, but her enthusiasm for teaching was obvious throughout the interview.

**Reflections from my journal dated December 2, 2010.** Passion, Passion, Passion. Ms. Tangier has a strong passion for working with students and doing what it takes to help them be successful in the classroom and the community. She has dedicated her career to working with students and has a long history at this school. She appears to be a leader amongst the teachers. Officially she is the School Advisory Council chairperson, but her leadership is much deeper than that. This is a title she has worn for the past two years, but her leadership is something that is part of her personality. Her ability to be a recognized leader at the school supports the Transformational Leadership
Theory in that the principal has recognized her leadership qualities and has supported her in the role of a teacher leader.

Ms. Tangier recognizes the stress that state and federal regulations have put on the school as a whole including many of the teachers. School grades and corrective action status has put a cloud over the moral at the school. Teachers are feeling the pressure and often are not confident in their ability to rise above these stressors. Ms. Tangier is a leader in being resourceful and finding ways to not let the pressure get to her. There is a lot of focus on testing. Ms. Tangier feels that her identity as a teacher is defined by her student’s test scores. In many ways she is correct. High stakes testing is an educational trend of the times. Ms. Tangier feels that there is so much more than testing that defines her as a teacher, but that in order to be acknowledges as an effective teacher she has to focus on “The Test”.

**Ms. Smith.** Ms. Smith has taught at Shell Elementary for the past four years. She began her teaching career in New Jersey twelve years ago. She comes from a family of educators and can not imagine having any other career. Her personal tie to education and the influence of educators throughout her childhood appears to have impacted her perspective on meeting the needs of students. Ms. Smith is very active in working with the community on behalf of the school. She is also active as a volunteer with several groups within the community. She has also felt the recent stressors of high stakes accountability on teachers. She feels that it has affected the culture of the school.

When I first started here it was a much happier place. In the sense that the teachers were happy [pause] the kids were happy; *and the kids are still happy*; the teachers, not so much. There have been a lot of stressors that have come down on
teachers that has made their job a lot more difficult and a lot less fun. So when I first started here, it felt that it was a job, you know, normally people love going to their job and they love waking up every morning and they love doing what they do, and I still love what I do, but...I don’t love the stress that I have every day.

On the contrary, Ms. Smith sees how parent and community involvement has improved over the past few years. She sees a commitment to building a solid relationship with the community that surrounds the school.

When it comes to parents, the culture of the school – to be honest with you, it’s the complete opposite. When I first started, parents were not very involved at all, and now we’ve been pushing them and pushing them and trying to get them involved, that they’re really starting to come around and starting to take a role in their child’s education and help them at home, and come to events at school and, and, I think, part of that is that the teachers are taking the time out to help educate the parents. They’re taking time out to show the parents what to do and how to help their kids, and we’re educating the children, but, at the same time, we’re educating the parents. So, I think there’s definitely a much bigger community tie with our school and the parents, which is definitely a big bonus.

Even though Ms. Smith feels the pressures of teaching and believes her environment to be stressful, she seemed to stretch her responsibilities to include bringing in partners from the community to benefit the school. She has an extended knowledge of the multiple partnership activities that support the school and how they benefit the students.
Reflections from my journal dated December 8, 2010. Ms. Smith is very involved with going out into the community and bringing partnerships to the school. This may stem from her inner desire to contribute her time and energy to volunteering. She is active outside of school as well as within the school. She comes from a teaching family which may contribute to her strong feelings about the profession. She mentioned her mother as a teacher throughout the interview. Her mother seems to be a strong influence in her career. Building partnerships to Ms. Smith is not just about bringing the community into the school, but also about teaching the students and families to give back to the community. She has been involved in service learning projects where the students give back to the neighborhood by participating in clean up days as well as singing at a nursing home.

Ms. Reed. Ms. Reed is known for her structure in the classroom and her ability to work with students that can have challenging behaviors and struggle academically. She has been an educator for eleven years with the past seven of those teaching at Shell Elementary. Ms. Reed is from Ireland where she believes there is a higher respect for education. Her cultural identity may impact her perspective on education and parental involvement in schools. She has high expectations for her students and her parents. She sees one of the roles of the community as supporting and encouraging parent involvement. If it were her decision she would require parent involvement.

I don’t think they [parents] realize what’s done for their students by the teacher. I don’t think that they realize how much effort and time goes in by the community as a whole to raise their children [pause] because they are the first up here if something happens, like a mistake, or something, but I don’t think that they’re
aware of how much [pause] people are here to help them and really go above and beyond and go out of their way. Even the things that I see people coming in to do, like you have so many different partnerships that come into the school. Even small or big, whatever it is.

I think it would be helpful to be able to have some kind of system in place and I don’t know how this could be implemented so that the parents, in order to receive certain things, they would have to give so much. So, maybe volunteer hours… So I think if we had some kind of system in place that in order to be able to get “x,” you need to give this… You know, they need to volunteer so many hours in order to receive free lunch. I know they can’t do that. But, you know, some kind of thing that makes the parents accountable to the school.

Ms. Reed believes in community involvement, but she realizes the hard work that the community puts into the school and expects parents to do the same. Her structured philosophy goes beyond the classroom and into parent and community involvement.

Reflections from my journal dated February 3, 2011. Ms. Reed has a strong belief in making sure that the students and their parents show appreciation for what is given to them. She believes that people are not entitled and should appreciate what is given to them. She has a harsh judgment of parents and their role at the school. Perhaps she has had experiences that have influenced her belief about parent involvement and how she has constructed her expectations of parents. This is aligned with her theme of accountability. She seems to struggle with her perception of the lack of parent involvement at the school in support of teachers in the classroom and academics. She believes that parents should have a more grateful attitude about the work that the
community and the school does on their behalf. This seems to frustrate her as a teacher. She describes a cycle of community support and teacher support, but with the missing piece being the parent.

Ms. Reed seems dedicated to providing a quality education to students who seem to need it the most, but expects others involved to also do their part. She expects that partners that are connected to the school align their contribution to the academic goals of the school and specifically for each child that they affect. Students should always be the top priority of the school, the parents, and the community.

**Sea Ray Autos.** Sea Ray Autos has been in existence since 1992 under a different company name. It was re-branded in 2002 as it is now known. Dealerships operate in sixteen states and thirty four metropolitan areas. It employs over two thousand people, has sold over three hundred thousand cars, and issued over three billion dollars in loans. Sea Ray Autos operates a charitable foundation with a mission of building strong foundations for kids. The company promotes volunteerism of their employees as well as funds local school initiative through a sales drive program in the month of October. Sea Ray Auto employees also donate money that support teacher mini grants through payroll deductions. The company has won awards in several states for their service in the education community. The employee interviewed, Ms. Ram, is a leader in the community outreach program specifically with Shell Elementary. She describes the business and how it works with customers.

Sea Ray Autos is one of the nation’s largest integrated used car sales and finance companies….The majority of what we do is sell used cars and finance them. We
tend to be people’s number one choice that have had no credit, little credit, and bad credit…just because it’s really easy to get financed, everybody’s approved.

She also describes how the community outreach program works with the schools.

Sea Ray Autos has had their community outreach program since they’ve been in business, since two thousand it’s been a part of the integration of how they give back to the community. And one of those ways is through what we call Education Nation…in each area that we do business; we have an Education Nation coordinator, where we have a sum of money we’re able to potentially give back to a school. We focus on one school…making the biggest impact at that one school. A lot of what we do is through [employee] volunteers. So encouraging our employees to give back by volunteering their own time, in addition there’s an employee contribution that they can designate. They call them mini-grants to where they [the teachers] can do small projects within the classroom. We don’t mandate it [volunteering], but we strongly suggest it…We’ve been able to encourage it through our new hire orientation that within the first ninety days, they have to attend an Education Nation function….It’s best for team-building, even within because we have six different regions…It’s great for them [employees] to get to know other people outside of their current dealership, as part of that volunteer project.

The employees gain from their interface with the school by growing as a team and being personally rewarded for giving back to the community. They put in a lot of hard work, but there are also other benefits to them. They do get paid their normal rate while they are volunteering at the school if it is during their work hours, but they often volunteer
above and beyond the hours for which they get paid. Ms. Ram describes the general feeling about the program from the view of the employees.

People loved it. I mean sometimes it could be a difficult commitment… we’re in a retail world, so, to get them during specific hours, specific seasons…like right now is tax season, so it’s really hard to ask people to step away between January and April to volunteer… But outside of that, I mean once they did it, people loved it. They got paid for it, so even though they’re volunteering, they’re still getting paid by Sea Ray Autos to do it… It’s a nice break to enjoy, you know, kids!

She also describes how she became involved with the program.

And me, personally, I’ve been a part of Big Brothers and Big Sisters, so the mentorship with children has always been a passion of mine. When I started with Sea Ray Autos, they knew that and they asked me to be one of the leaders. So, that’s…been certainly something that I’ve enjoyed. Coming from an underprivileged environment myself and having great mentors in life that you do end up having a true appreciation for that mentor-type of relationship….When I was a kid, even if was just somebody that came in and dropped off food it was something that you recognized and you realized that, “If I could do that, I would do that, as well.” So that’s probably a very personal reason, but that’s the reason.

Sea Ray Autos gives back to the community as part of its company’s mission. There is a strong belief in supporting education and encouraging its employees to do the same. There seems to be a benefit to the company as well through building of employee teamwork and the potential for building business.
Through supporting education the dealership is supporting its customers and community. The company builds a strong community of potential customers that will ultimately contribute to the success of the company. Although Ms. Ram does not indicate that there is a financial benefit to Sea Ray Autos, there is an obvious advantage to a business existing in a community where students are well educated and parents are supported and can potentially patronize the establishment. Ms. Ram discusses her thoughts on why Sea Ray Autos supports Shell Elementary.

I think...they [corporate leaders] wanted to reach out to our customers so they wanted to make sure that the ones that we are supporting in the community are some of our customers. Not from a marketing standpoint, but more from the standpoint of giving back to our customers. It [Education Nation] was very specifically driven towards a region where the majority of your volume is coming from and then...giving back in that way to where it’s supporting that community that you’re doing business in….This year our program changed to where it was up to each region…to determine how they would like to give back to the community….Some regions opted not to do Education Nation. We opted to stay with it. We just feel like we haven’t done enough yet and there’s still a growing need to support Shell Elementary.

Sea Ray Autos has given over a hundred thousand dollars to Shell Elementary along with thousands of volunteer hours. They are by far the school’s largest business partner and remain committed to supporting academic achievement.

Reflections from my journal dated March 1, 2011. Sea Ray Autos is the longest standing partnership that the school has maintained. The company seems to have
grown with the school over the past 15 years. The partnership consists of large monetary donation as well as a well coordinated volunteer program. The partnership started with more than one school, but has been narrowed down to only Shell Elementary for the past 9 years. It is important to the leaders and the employees at Sea Ray Autos that their efforts be aligned with academic achievement and parent involvement. Shell Elementary seems to have a mission and philosophy that aligns with that of Sea Ray Autos.

The business’s philosophy is to give back to the community that is already supporting the company and this particular region has chosen education as its focus. There is no doubt that the business has the potential of being more successful due to its investment in the community. There is a realization that building up the community will benefit the business, but the collaboration efforts seem to be much more than that. New employees are oriented to the Education Nation program and asked to donate part of their paycheck to the school efforts. Due to its commitment to contributing to the community, Education Nation attracts and keeps employees that support its collaborative efforts with the community in particular Shell Elementary. Ms. Ram has a history of volunteering in other capacities. She enjoys working for a company that gives back to education. Her personal perspective on community activism may influence how she oversees the local program and her fit in the role at the company. She revealed that she had a time in her life when she was young that she needed a mentor and got one that made a difference in her life.

I presume that this partnership is equally important to the school as it is to the company. A lot of hard work and dedication goes into its success. It is not just an added responsibility to the company, but represented in part of their normal routine. This
partnership truly supports the goals of the school and impacts students, parents, teachers, and the community as a whole.

**Sundancer Society.** The Sundancer Society was established in 1988 with the mission of garnering private support and public engagement for Ocean County Public Schools (OCPS). It is a charitable organization that provides flexible spending opportunities for OCPS. The dollars allow the school district to obtain extra resources for students, teachers, and schools and to cover the gap between school budgets and needed resources that ensure academic success. One of the societies many programs, “Ocean County Reads”, provide one-on-one tutors for struggling readers in several schools in the county. Shell Elementary was one of the original schools in this specific program and has remained a partner ever since. The tutors are placed through a volunteer program that works closely with the Sundancer Society. The coordinator of the program, Ms. Ledger, described the program.

Sundancer Society is, in essence, a nonprofit, working with the entire community to bring extra resources, whether that be direct resources like school supplies, or whether that be tutors or scholarships, but to bring extra resources into the Ocean County Public Schools. That’s their sole mission. One of the two programs I oversee is called “Ocean County Reads.” It is a reading support tutor program where volunteer members are placed in schools that need extra reading support and are interested in some volunteer tutors…They [the tutors] want a rewarding role. They don’t want to spend their year doing something that they don’t feel is significant. They want to be really making a difference….Even though they’re not making any money their relationships with the students and their dedication to
seeing their progress through helps me maintain the volunteers and keep it all
together.

She also described the culture of the company and why the employees work there.

It’s a nonprofit, so I would say…It is very much a group of people who are
making a choice to work for an organization that, you know, maybe pays a little
less and [laugh] wants long hours, but I think almost everyone’s here because of
the work that they’re doing, because they know that what they’re doing is helping
children…I think they’re there because they have made a conscious choice to
work in a nonprofit [organization] working with children.

The Sundancer Society provides the school with valuable resources that otherwise may
not be possible. They are perfectly aligned with the school’s goal of improving student
achievement.

**Reflections from my journal dated March 11, 2011.** The Sundancer Society is
not a business partner, but one that has a long history at the school and directly supports
academic achievement. It is also one that is visible at the school on a daily basis. The
Sundancer Society places tutors at the school through a program entitled Ocean County
Reads. The tutors are part of a volunteer organization and though paid a minimal yearly
stipend, are basically giving their services as a volunteer to better the institution in which
they are serving. It is the goal of the program administrator to ensure that the partnership
is successful. This is a partnership where they are equally vested in assuring the success
of the partnership as the school. Without successful partnerships the Ocean County
Reads program would not continue to function. They work hard to meet the needs of the
students and teachers with the focus on improving reading.
The partnership has existed for many years. The current program administrator of this particular program is new to Hillsborough, but has been working for organizations that partner with schools for many years. Her history of working for nonprofit organizations appears to influence her perspective on partnering with schools and providing services to students in need. By mere nature of being a volunteer it can be inferred that the tutors are dedicated to helping individuals and making a difference in the community in which they work.

**Mr. Landing.** Mr. Landing was not your typical college student when he became involved with Shell Elementary. At twenty one years old he was studying to become an accountant at the local University. He comes from a typical upper middle class Caucasian family, but what are not typical are his accomplishments in regards to helping those that are less fortunate. He is a one-on-one mentor for a student, volunteers actively through his church, has traveled to Costa Rica to teach children English, and is an active partner at Shell Elementary. Mr. Landing became involved with Shell Elementary through a mentoring program in the community. He started off mentoring one student and decided that he needed to do more. Mr. Landing organized a school supply drive based on his commitment to run with a group of college students from his university on the west side of the state to another state university on the east side of the state. He collected over five thousand dollars in donations and school supplies; so much that he did it again the following year. Mr. Landing not only ran to bring attention to the needs of the school, but he became an active partner with the school serving on the School Advisory Council (SAC) and participating in school activities. Mr. Landing describes his relationship with the school and why he decided to get involved.
It actually started with my mentee in two thousand seven. Our match was completed in January and I started interacting just as a mentor at Shell. Slowly I started getting more and more comfortable with the kids in the class. I started building a relationship with the teacher and as that kind of relationship kind of progressed, I started noticing a lot of the inadequacies of the school and how the, the school wasn’t given as much financing as other schools that I grew up in. I noticed a lot of the kids didn’t have as much as when I grew up and went to school. So, it kind of got me more interested and I wanted to be more involved with the school.

Mr. Landing’s desire to help grew as he became more involved at the school. He describes his idea to run for school supplies.

I was constantly trying to think of something that I could do to impact the school in a positive way….I was looking for something that was going to make people take notice of Shell and kind of give them that “wow” moment also, but, at the same time, do something that was going to be challenging to myself and then at the same time challenge others to act….I didn’t want to do anything that’s been done before because it wouldn’t have represented how much I cared for the school and what I wanted to do, and I wanted to make a big impact….I was going to run from one side of the state to the other and in response, I wanted people to donate school supplies so that the kids could go to school with the proper school supplies, backpacks and crayons, stuff like that….About a month and a half later…I set out. And it took about three days….It was tough. It was one of the worst things I’ve ever done to myself, but great for the kids.
Mr. Landing is known at the school by teachers and students as a reliable community partner. As a member of the SAC he participates in decision making processes at the school and continues to look for ways to enhance the resources at Shell Elementary.

**Reflections from my journal dated March 30, 2011.** Mr. Landing has an amazing personality and such a strong desire to better the educational experience of students who may not have sufficient resources to be prepared for school. He desires for his contributions to be “out of the box” and something that will really draw attention to the needs of the school in order to encourage others in the community to also provide support. He has a sort of “pay it forward” attitude. He has a strong sense of determination to set a goal and finish it no matter what the circumstances. This is how strongly Mr. Landing felt about helping out the students at Shell Elementary. He wanted to help, but also to inspire others to do some soul searching and look for ways they can help out that is meaningful to them. Mr. Landing seems to have felt supported in his life as a youth and wants less fortunate children to feel the same way. His personal experiences as a child and beliefs of his parents and church family seem to have stimulated his desire to become involved in altruistic actions and his perspective on providing support to those in need. He seems to have developed a view that those with less money are less likely to succeed academically and need the support of others. His generosity and commitment has gone past Shell to other initiatives in the community as well as in to other countries.

Mr. Landing’s initial contact about the idea was with Ms. Stratford, the parent liaison at the school. He also met with the principal to inform her about his goal. He didn’t realize they were going to be so involved and that it got so big that it was covered
by the local news channels. The second year Mr. Landing was committed to doing even better than he did the first year. He raised more money and had more school supplies donated. His involvement grew to include membership on the SAC Council and a true active partnership with the school. He became a role model for the students in particular his “mentee” that is still at Shell. The support of the school in his mission was instrumental in his success. He felt their appreciation in how they treated him and respected him for his contribution to the success of the students.

**Superior Seafood.** Superior Seafood is a franchise company of a national fast food chain. They own and operate fifty restaurants within the Ocean County geographic area. They are a family run business who have been partnering with the Ocean County School District since the company began and specifically with Shell Elementary for over twenty years. I interviewed the community relations manager, Mr. River, who has been with the company since 1975. He discusses why the business partners with the school district.

I started with the company in 1975, almost thirty-six years ago, and we have always participated…I started at a management entry-level position back then, and we were always involved with the schools. In 1994, I took on this position in the company as the community relations manager, back then, and one of the first things [the owner] told me was that, “Your efforts of community involvement will primarily be with the school district, because they are the most important organization that we need to partner with, because we are the end user of their product. And we want them to produce a very good product, so we need to do all we can to support our school district.”
The company’s partnership activities stretch from sponsoring a district wide teacher recognition program to partnering with individual schools by providing student and teacher incentives as well as food for student and parent activities. Specifically with Shell Elementary, Superior Seafood provides student incentives that the school uses when students raise their levels on a standards based computer program. They also provide food for various parent activities and speak at student events. Speaking to students is meaningful to the community relations manager. Mr. River described what he says to students when he speaks.

One of my favorite things is speaking…I love speaking to the kids in the school. I represent a big…franchise, I don’t speak to them about, “Oh, Superior Seafood this and Superior Seafood that.” I speak to the importance of education and how we, as a prospective employer, look at you, the student, when you present yourselves to us in the business place. And some of the things besides your presentation, your appearance, your demeanor, how you shake hands, are all school-related. On an application, we’ll look at your penmanship, we’ll look at your spelling, and, most importantly, we look at your GPA, because history has told us that the better the student, the better the employee. And that’s not a hundred percent of the time – we realize that, but business managers are just like professional gamblers. We play the odds, and the odds are the better the student, the better the employee. So, they need to possibly reconsider their path in school, and how important that will really be to them if they want to have some money in their pocket…
Superior Seafood partners with Shell Elementary and Ocean County School District as a way to improve the education of the students which in turn leads to a more viable workforce and a stronger community.

Superior Seafood is also a very successful company that is strategic in building relationships in order to assure the success of the business. There appears to be a genuine devotion to the success of the community and a sincere respect for the educational system, but they also have a keen sense of strategy when it comes to the success of the business. Mr. River describes the company’s business model.

I teach the marketing class and let these new managers know what they have available to them through this department and what we do and their role. And we talk about those relationships in the community, how critically important they are to our success as a business, and how they are the ambassadors of the business and the millions of transactions that happen across our counters and through that little drive-through window every day, each one of them [pause] is important. Community relations aren’t just a feel-good thing. They’re part of an entire business model of success, and data-driven…as far as television markets, its number nineteen in the country. We’re not that huge of a market. Radio market, we’re number twelve in the country. Well, those are pretty good numbers, but we’re no New York, Chicago, L.A. you know… we’re no big markets like that. Superior Seafood, we’re number one in the country in sales and transactions. Well, our population density shouldn’t be giving us that, our radio and TV markets shouldn’t be rendering that, and I’m here to tell you, it’s these
relationships that we have built….One significant variable is your involvement in the community and how they view you.

Superior Seafood is a business with a well developed business plan that focuses on building their presence in the community which leads to continued success of the company. It is clear that the company belief is that building strong employees will lead to business success. The company has a strong presence in the community and is one of the school district’s biggest partners in terms of participation in events and donation of resources. The leaders of the company believe in education for the betterment of the citizens of the community. They understand that it helps build a successful business, but also a successful community which contributes to society as a whole.

**Reflections from my journal dated April 20, 2011.** Superior Seafood is a huge franchise with the feel of a local mom and pop restaurant. They have clear business goals that drive their actions. They realize that a thriving community would allow for the achievement of their business goals and believe that education is the key to community success. Support of education originated with the original owner and has continued with the third generation of owners. This view seems to be currently constructed based on the fact that it has been successful for three generations of owners.

The support extends to the district as a whole, but is also very personal with each individual school that it supports. They want to know the individual needs of the schools in which they support so they can make sure they are assisting that school in ascertaining their goals. Their interest does lie in the development of productive citizens that can someday join their workforce and be their customers. They have an interest in the success of the community that will support their business through the future.
Mr. River, who is in charge of community relations, personally goes out and speaks to students at schools through assemblies and on occasion speaks one to one. He stresses the importance of education in securing employment in the future. His perspectives seem to be heavily influenced by the founder of the company and his thirty-six years of history with the company. He often mentioned the philosophies of his former boss and appears to have adopted the same belief system. Education matters to this company and they want to support the school, the teacher, and the student for optimum success.

The Crab Shack. The Crab Shack is an individual owned and operated restaurant which was established in this community fifteen years ago. The owner, Mr. Chesapeake, is from Jamaica where his family owns and operates a restaurant in his hometown. He took what he had learned from his family and came to the United States to start his own restaurant. He takes pride in his community and has made an effort to learn more about the community in which he is a well known proprietor.

I came here at a good time when doing business was working out for people like me. It has been about fifteen years. Coming from somewhere else and starting something new. It was something different, the type of food; it was hard work, but started doing well pretty quickly. It is not only good food and good cooking; it is the atmosphere of having a good time and being able to have fun with friends. Being able to relax and unwind while eating is what it is all about.

Mr. Chesapeake discusses his discovery of the local neighborhood school down the street from his restaurant. At first it was a way to enhance his business.
When I moved here I heard that there was an elementary school not too far away. At first I was thinking about ways to get the word of my business out to the people who lived in the area. The neighborhood is a big mix of lots of types of people. I had to get the feel of the neighborhood to see how I could make the restaurant work.

Learning more about the community was necessary to build up his business. He discusses the feel of the neighborhood.

I went out and started to meet people. I went to other businesses to see what they were doing. I learned of the University, so I handed out posters there to get people to come to my place. I knew that once they would come, they would like it, and want to come back. There are a lot of young people from the University, wanting to have a place to go and to have fun. To learn something they have never seen before, to be away from home, but right in the neighborhood. There are also a lot of families, struggling to do right by their children: young babies, young moms and dads, people starting out, trying to find jobs and do good for themselves. Not too different from when I was young, trying to have a good life. That sounds so serious [laughter]. It is not all like that. There are people that just want a good time, to relax, eat good food, and listen to good music, Jamaican style [laughter].

Mr. Chesapeake describes the culture of his company and his desire to make people happy. It is important to him that his customers are happy.

I like to tell my people, the staff working at the restaurant to make sure that the people, the customers, are happy. No worries here at the Crab Shack; the
customers and the staff too. They work hard, very hard, that is what I like. They know I want them to work hard, but that they can have fun too. You should have fun at your job. [laughter]. Not too much fun [laughter], but fun so that you work hard, have fun, and make sure the customers are served well so that they come back again and again.

Mr. Chesapeake gives back to the community, but in doing so he expects that his business will benefit. He realizes the importance of education, but his ultimate goal is the success of the community which will promote his business. He describes his philosophy.

Well, honestly, I want people to come to my restaurant. I want them to know the Crab Shack and know it is a good place to come…I want them to know that the Crab Shack does good things for the people in this neighborhood. I also want the neighborhood to stay a good neighborhood where people want to live and go and have fun and eat and feel that it is a good place. You see…a good school can make a good place for the neighborhood, and well, a good place to live and feel safe out on the streets. You have to feel safe out on the streets so that you can go out and have a good time and go to businesses like a restaurant. If it is not a nice place then nobody will want to be on the streets…they won’t want to go out if it is not a good place.

Partnering with a school in the community evolves to definite benefits for the business. His business plan is clear. Mr. Chesapeake admits that a better community will help his business, but he stands by his proposition that education is important for the success of a community.
Mr. Chesapeake became a partner of Shell Elementary approximately four years ago. He donates food and incentive certificates as a way to give back to the community. The staff at the school has also used the restaurant for holiday parties and other gatherings. He believes in education to further one's status in life and feels that his partnership benefits the students, teachers, and families in the community.

**Reflections from my journal dated April 2, 2011.** Mr. Chesapeake seems like a true entrepreneur. He has a vested interest in making his business successful, both personally and for the community. He not only looks inward to see what he can do to make his business more successful, but he looks towards the community to help him meet his goal. In doing so he realizes that it is a reciprocal relationship in which both parties help to assure that mutual goals are met. Mr. Chesapeake looks to the community to support his restaurant, but also supports the community so that they have the means to better support his restaurant. He does this with the realization that helping the community means helping children and families, and that pulls at his heart strings. His views are strongly influenced by his upbringing in Jamaica. His cultural identity has shaped his views of education and work ethic that has led to his success in this country. When you break down the community into people that are in need, Mr. Chesapeake is willing to help out because it is the right thing to do.

Mr. Chesapeake frequently mentions fun and happiness in his interview. He likes to laugh and have fun. He equates having fun as an employee with desire to work harder. He seems to have the same feeling about students in school. Bringing students happiness will make them work harder and then they will be more willing to learn. It is important to him that his contribution to the relationship with the school leads to fun and happiness.
Food represents happiness to him. Offering food is a way to help the school have a positive environment that will potentially lead to the goal of a better education. He equally views offering the community a friendly atmosphere will lead to a better neighborhood which will in turn help the success of his restaurant. It is a cycle and Mr. Chesapeake seems to understand his role in the cycle and how important it is for himself, the school, and the community.

**Emergent Themes**

Analyzing the data from the interviews, documents, field notes, and the researcher reflective journal occurred throughout the process. According to Merriam (1998) collecting data and analyzing it for meaning occurs at the same time when conducting qualitative research. A researcher has to make sense out of the data in order to come up with themes that emerge from the data. “Making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). I detected several themes that seemed to be important in developing and maintaining a relationship between a school and the community and signified the roles of the various participants involved. Figure 7 represents the categories of codes that emerged into “Building a Solid Infrastructure.” Figure 8 represents the categories of codes that emerged into “Defining Clear Roles.” Figure 9 represents the categories of codes that emerged into “Demonstrating Collaborative Character.”
Figure 7. Codes that Emerged into Building a Solid Infrastructure
Figure 8. Codes that Emerged into Defining Clear Roles
Figure 9. Codes that Emerged into Demonstrating Collaborative Character
In reviewing the analysis from the peer reviewer it appeared that her basic analysis of the transcripts was consistent with my overall findings. She described the essential characteristics of the partnerships as building a strong relationship between the partners and the school staff, sharing or aligning of participant’s vision and mission, a reciprocal relationship, a clear structure for funded projects, and a welcoming school environment. She described the roles of the school leader as that of a communicator, organizer, and monitor of district policies. The role of the business partner was described as that of a mentor and financial supporter. The teacher was described as one that seeks out partnerships and shows appreciation through letters to partners. These descriptions support the overall findings of the analysis.

In examining the data, I realized that the several themes that emerged which are essential for a collaborative relationship to be successful could be categorized into three major thematic categories. These include “Building a Solid Infrastructure”, “Defining Clear Roles”, and “Demonstrating Collaborative Character Traits”. Under each theme key elements were defined that supported that particular theme. The key themes were consistent with what was found in the literature. The characteristics of successful and model partnerships and the leadership roles discussed in the literature coincided with the findings of this study. Figure 10 illustrates the three major themes that surfaced from the data and the elements that fall under each theme. Each theme can be considered a building block whereas each one is necessary in order for the other to be successful. They build on each other and together support collaborative school and community partnerships.
Each element is instrumental in building and maintaining collaborative relationships between a school and the community. Although they build on each other, they also overlap. Figure 11 depicts the relationship between the various elements and how each element overlaps and is important in order to achieve the goals of both the school and the community. I will describe each theme and the supporting elements using examples of rich text taken from the transcribed interviews as well as sharing my
thoughts and reflections about the identified theme by sharing excerpts from my researcher reflective journal.

Figure 11. Overlapping Characteristics of a Collaborative Relationship

**Building a Solid Infrastructure**

A solid infrastructure seems to be essential in maintaining a productive relationship with the community and building a strong platform for academic success. Shell Elementary appears to have built a strong framework for guaranteeing that the focus of the school’s efforts remains on student achievement and the overall success of children and families. Mandated policies are at the foundation of their decision making processes and what they continually refer to in assuring that their endeavors are meeting federal, state, and district guidelines. Ms. Ram from Sea Ray Autos discussed the importance of structure from a business point of view and how it has recently improved.
We always like to see structure….We come from a very structured world. Anything to do with the proposals that will prepare us for the planning process of budgeting appropriately and finding ways to…appropriately fund things that they need with the justifications behind it. So, you know, before it was, “This would be great,” but, you know, we didn’t understand the reasons why we would potentially be giving them six thousand dollars. I think the more structured around the financial aspect is a great improvement.

Ms. Ledger supported this sentiment with her thoughts about a solid foundation.

Shell really is such a strong school for us. It’s a pretty inexpensive program. It allows us to reach a lot of kids for a low cost and that’s key. But Shell is really an example of how strong a foundation and a program relationship can be. I think it’s, it’s an ideal school for us.

There are systems in place that assure the continued focal point is on academics, but at the same time remembering that in order to achieve academically the concentration must be on the whole student and the family. Student centered initiatives must be at the center of school and community partnerships with the goals of the school and community partner being addressed.

**Mandated policy.** Policies exist that dictate almost every aspect of how a school educates its students including how they interact with the community. Federal, state, and district policies encourage community involvement, but put measures in place to assure the safety of students and accountability for the school and community. Successful collaborative relationships between a school and the community are built by adhering to mandates and working within the constraints outlined by policies. School participants
mentioned policies and often thought of them as restrictive, but in the end seemed to understand that they are necessary in a system as large as the educational system. Community partners appeared to have guidelines of their own that determine how they partner with schools. They were not as concerned with the policies that governed the school and seemed to leave it up to the school to worry about policy issues.

Policies regarding student safety were at the forefront of importance to the principal. SERVE screens all volunteers to assure that they are legally permitted to be around children. Ms. Beach discussed the importance of the policy.

If people are coming in here that are volunteering, we have the SERVE policies that we have to make sure…we don’t just have someone come in. They have to go through SERVE [volunteers in education] depending on how much they’re helping us determines how much they have to be processed….Going through the FDLE [Florida Department of Law Enforcement]…to make sure that everything’s okay and that nobody has records because we don’t want to have someone that comes into the school that wouldn’t make it safe for our children.

Florida’s Jessica Lunsford Act has made volunteer policies stricter with a higher level of screening required for nonemployees to enter the school than in the past.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Title I policies and mandates often influence community partnerships. Schools are required to elicit support from the community and document all volunteer hours and monetary donations. Ms. Beach sees this as a way for the district to ascertain the extent of community support.

It’s something that’s a mandate and also a best practice. We do have to report at the end of every year what’s happening with our business partnerships and if we
did get financial assistance, how much did we get. I mean from…that’s one of those time things, again. Thankfully, Ms. Stratford can take the time. If we have ten pencils donated then she’s got to determine, “Well, how much money is that that somebody’s given us?” because even though it’s not financial, it did cost them something to get the pencils…and backpacks, “How much money would that cost?” So we do have to report it [pause]…The main thing is just reporting it so that the District can see how much everybody’s helping.

Ms. Stratford agrees that guidelines are a way to regulate donations and assure that money is handled correctly.

Well for instance, now something that is new…we used to be able to seek out grants and money. Now every single grant that we look at has to go through the district whereas, before, it was a certain monetary amount [previously]. I do agree about keeping guidelines in there, though, because we definitely need it…We make sure that everything is donated to the actual school, not to an individual. Even if we have teacher mini-grants the money is not donated to the teacher. The principal has to approve what the teacher’s asking for, then the money comes to the school into a donation account, then the teacher makes their purchases, then they can turn in their receipts for payment after the receipts are looked at. So we have many checks along the way and balances to insure that we are doing everything in our power to make sure that everything’s done appropriately.

Policies and mandates can often bring stress and affect the school culture. Based on Florida’s accountability system, a school that has had a history of a low school grade,
which is a C or below, has more levels of accountability than higher performing schools.

Ms. Stratford explains how this can affect the school culture.

The school’s culture right now is strained. Because of all of the mandates that are attached to a school that is in need of improvement, a school that is not making adequate yearly progress, we have extra mandates and things that are imposed on us. There’s a tremendous amount of pressure, therefore, that affects the school culture. Our teachers and our staff feel that they are doing all that they can do to help close the achievement gap, but it seems like every time we turn around, we’re very browbeaten and just, you know, we feel like we’re running against the wind.

Ms. Tangier is well aware of policies. Mandates can be cumbersome, but seem to serve as the supporting mechanism from which to build partnerships that focus on student achievement.

I know the county doesn’t arbitrarily just attach strings. I know there are state guidelines and I know the legislators have all got their little fingers in it, too, and everybody wants to attach little strings…and businesses have their own little procedures that they have to follow. So, it’s just all the strings. You get all tied up; it becomes a big web and you get stuck in it and you feel like the spider is coming….And is it worth it…the end result? Yes. At the end you get sort of entangled and you’re waiting for the spider to suck your blood out, but then you get a little reprieve and the web snaps and you get loose and…[laughter] Woo hoo!
Ms. Tangier gave an example of an initiative last year to beautify the campus by one of the community partners. The size of the project meant working closely with the district to assure guidelines were followed. Ms. Tangier discusses the project and how she believes Ms Stratford feels about it.

I think Ms. Stratford would say, “I’d jump through all those hoops again if …[they] will come out and do the same thing again to help our school to beautify.” Oh, the kids love the court. I mean, it’s much more practical now….The court went from just a concrete slab where kids jumped on balls…and did sidewalk chalk, to now learning. It’s got a huge clock in the middle. It’s got the United States…the fifth grade teacher was out there having her kids stand in Florida and count how many states you have to go through to get to California. I mean it becomes a learning tool now. So, yes, it was worth it in the end. At the time you get all entangled in the loops and the strings, and you think, “Why did I ever decide to do this?” but then in the end, yes, when you see the kids out there, Ms. Stratford would say, “I’d do it all over again, just because I know it’s more practical now. It’s worth it.” Yep.

Participants agreed that policies and mandates are a checks and balance that ensure the school and community is serving students in the most productive way possible. Although stressful, policies and mandates are needed to build a solid foundation on which students can flourish.

Community partners often have guidelines of their own that must be followed. Ms. Ledger discussed some of the requirements of the Sundancer Society.
There is a little bit of paperwork and logistics that are required. We have a data release and a parent consent form. The parent needs to know that an outside entity is looking at the DRA [reading] scores, so we rely on the school, the teacher, or the reading coach to assist us in getting those back, which can be a challenge.

The school is often involved in helping the partners meet their requirements. It seems to be well worth it in order to gain benefits for the students.

**Reflections from my journal dated December 8, 2010.** The climate of the school seems to be stressful with pressure from the district, the state, and federally to perform. Although on one level it is an understandable reaction to the times, it should encourage teachers to put forth their best effort instead of contributing to an already stressful situation. Again, I hope it is not another excuse to give up. It seems like a cycle: poor student performance, increased regulations, more stress, and excuse for poor student performance.

**Student Centered.** Successful partnerships keep the focus on the students while at the same time addressing the goals of the school and the community partner. Student centered includes purely academic focused partnerships as well as those partnership activities that focus on the student, but are not necessarily academic such as the citizenship activities, attendance initiatives, service learning, and parent involvement activities. The goal is for these partnerships to ultimately lead to improved achievement, but they focus on the whole student. The multidisciplinary services of the school district affect the whole student and not just academics although academic achievement is the
ultimate goal. There were many examples of partnerships that focused on student achievement. Ms. Beach discusses a few of them.

We have so many different partnerships…We have another elementary school that has helped by getting books. They’ll do a book drive for us that really helps [our students]. We have different churches in the area that will give us school supplies that we need…[A local restaurant] has partnered with us, especially through our technology, to give children rewards for success maker and their time on that program. We have quite a bit of people who come to partner with us and tutor our student.

Outcomes and school improvement are important in the eyes of the teachers interviewed. Ms Tangier discusses how partnerships have led to school pride and an increase in reading at home.

The outcomes are [that] you see an overall school improvement that occurs….It depends on what that partnership involved. [One partner] did beautification, so there’s more pride in your school, because your school looks nice. You know, you have nice buildings, you have a beautiful cafeteria, you know, those things that are pride-oriented…. Definitely, when a school donates all their books, even though they’re gently used books, our kids can benefit from those, and that means reading material at home and gives parents a chance to read every night to their kids and they can’t use the excuse, “I don’t have a book.” “Well, what if we sent five of ‘me home?” So, there should be no excuse about, “I don’t have a book,” ‘cause we’re sending books home, and we’re able to do that because a school in
another area of town, their parents went through their children’s books and said, “Here…we don’t need these anymore. Let’s give ‘em to kids who can use them.”

Ms. Reed gives an example of how a specific partnership helped her concentrate on reading skills.

They [Sea Ray Autos] wanted teachers to be more specific, and they wanted to approve the grants that they gave before, rather than just buying candy for the classroom, they wanted specific reasons….I saw a need of my students, they were low on phonemic awareness, so I wrote a grant that involved them getting magnetic letters and cookie cutter sheets and then certain books that I knew would be helpful for the students to build comprehension….I put the rationale behind the grant and then I put the specifics and they approved me…I think it was close to three hundred dollars for the grant, so it was a significant amount.

The school staff seems to rely on student centered partnerships to enhance what they do in the classroom.

Sea Ray Auto maintains its commitment to assuring that all of its activities with the school are focused on student achievement with the understanding that parent activities and teacher support also lead to improved academics. Ms. Ram reiterated the focus of the partnership with Shell Elementary.

The focus should always be students and their education, giving back to, or encouraging parent involvement and then, of course, the activities with the staff…encouraging some activities with the teachers and giving back to the teachers.
Another example of student centered partnerships is that between Shell Elementary and Superior Seafood. This company has the capacity to work with many schools in the district. Mr. River described how the focus of the various partnerships has to be on student achievement.

I let the teachers know I don’t give incentive items for just random requests. Achievement has to be associated with the request. We support attendance programs, behavioral programs, academic programs, sports programs, music, art…every category. If we are asked to support them either with an in-kind donation or guest speakers, we’re happy to do so. So there is really no limitation. We are very prolific in donating to the schools in every capacity.

He emphasizes the company’s commitment to help when asked.

Whoever’s reaching out and thinks that we can help them, in any capacity, to help achievement in any level, we’ll ninety. If achievement is not associated with it…if they have a birthday program, “Sorry,” We don’t want to be part of birthday program…But, if they’re graduating from fifth grade, and now they’re going into, into middle school, that’s a big deal. The kid should be commended for it.

Student centered partnerships are a requirement and part of why the partnership between Shell Elementary and Superior Seafood has been so successful. The emphasis on student achievement is aligned and the focus at all times. The belief in keeping the focus on the students’ academic performance was also very important to Mr. Chesapeake, the owner of The Crab Shack. He clearly believes that education leads to opportunities and that is why he supports school initiatives. He explained his thoughts on learning.
The school has a very important job. They have to do good for the children because that is what makes a good place to live. Children need to learn so that they can grow up and have a good life. You can’t do good if you don’t learn.

People here, in this county, don’t understand what it is to have opportunities. Not everybody in other countries have that. They don’t know how important it is to work hard and learn and do good so that they have a good life. A school is the center of having a good life. This is serious. I like to have fun and I think people need to laugh and enjoy, but learning is first. Learning is everything to a happy person. When you are smart, you can have a good life and then have fun because you know you have done good.

The Sundancer Society goes as far as tracking student data. Ms. Ledger describes the student centered goals of the partnership.

We have very specific goals and we measure them. We are looking for the students to improve at least two diagnostic reading levels over the course of our tutoring. Last year eighty-one percent of the students showed a significant improvement in their reading level. So that’s, that’s our goal. We’re looking for significant progress towards their reading level.

Using data assures that the partner is on track with its goals. This partnership has significantly impacted student achievement.

Student centered partnerships also mean that parent activities revolve around the needs of the parents in order for them to best support the academic achievements of their children. Ms. Stratford discussed how accommodating parents is important so that the parents can gain the greatest benefit from their participation. The flexibility of the
community partners that support such events is valuable in order to keep the focus on student learning.

We’ve adapted some of our parent programs to the morning, and I’ve definitely seen a trend of the demographic group. It happens to be all of our ELL [English Language Learners] that have been coming consistently to our morning workshops for parents. We’ve even had a Haitian group coming in, too. And, then our other minority, our African Americans have been solidly represented and consistently during the day. We offer them breakfast, for free, thanks to our business partners, and we have the translation service. We’re starting to see an upswing with that and, as a matter of fact, we’re writing our district family engagement plan…and we’re going to work with this group all year long.

Student centered partnerships focus on academics as well as citizenship. Ms. Smith discussed partnership activities that focused on the whole student.

The students and the families benefit tremendously. They get to see that other people outside of the school really do care about us….We did an event where we did Clean City Day, and we would go out and help them pick up garbage. Just knowing…becoming better citizens, not only with the children, but with the families, together, I think generates a positive feeling and a feeling of self-worth and just that they can become good citizens in their community.

Assuring that partnerships are student centered is part of building a solid foundation. If the school staff and community partners continually ask themselves, “How will this benefit the students?” and build partnerships based on the answer to this question they are sure to build successful partnerships that promote student achievement.
Reflections from my journal dated January 17, 2011. Building partnerships seems to be more difficult than maintaining them once they are established. The key to building long lasting partnerships is making sure that the goals of the community partner are addressed up front. Aligning the goals of the partner with the goals of the school seems to lead to partnerships that benefit both parties. The school seems to be grateful for potential partners that they can work to make the mission of the partner align with their own mission. Although they have a clear focus on academic achievement, they can be creative and incorporate what a partner has to offer into their school improvement plan.

Systems in place. There are clear systems in place that help to facilitate relationships between Shell Elementary and the community. The School Improvement Plan (SIP) outlines the goals and objectives of the school in academic areas as well as in improving student attendance and parent and community involvement. Partnerships are aligned with the goals of the SIP which is referred to at each School Advisory Council (SAC) meeting. The Title I Tool Box holds documentation that the events held at the school align with the goals of the School Improvement Plan. As the educational leader of the school, the principal expects that school activities will support the goals of the SIP and be discussed at the SAC meetings. It is a checks and balance system to make sure that activities align with the goals of the school.

The SAC brings school staff, parents, and community partners together to make decisions on how best to improve student achievement while serving the needs of students and families. Through examination of the SAC agendas it became clear that Shell Elementary truly used the SAC to address academics and how to improve student
achievement. Ms. Tangier serves as the SAC chair and discussed how the team represents the diversity of the school.

The SAC has to be representative of the school and it has to reflect the ethnic background of the school, so if fifty percent of the school is African American, then fifty percent of the SAC must be African American…There’s an ethnic diversity that has to occur on the SAC, which as the SAC chair, it’s hard to do…but I understand the rationale, making sure that the School Advisory Council that advises the school, represents the group of which it’s advising.

Mr. Landing was an active participant and a voting member of SAC. He describes his experience.

The second year, they asked me to be on the School Advisory, the SAC committee. So I did. It was a great experience….and I was a voting member that one particular year, so I was there making the votes and listening to what people were presenting and it was really interesting. It definitely was an experience that I enjoyed.

Community representation on SAC is vital in assuring that the goals of the school are constantly at the forefront of discussions.

The various systems in place at Shell Elementary that focus on community involvement keep the focus on academics and on improving student achievement. The School Improvement Plan and the School Advisory Council are the school’s infrastructure from which the activities of the school are built. The systems in place also help to define the roles of the various participants including the principal, school staff, and community members.
Reflections from my journal dated November 3, 2010. Although much of the focus was on completing the task of assuring 5-star requirements were met, there was emphasis on bringing school and community together in order to accomplish the task. There was a clear process for meeting goals or attempting to do so. The process seemed methodical without any deviation from the task at hand. Actions felt task driven. Many ideas were discussed regarding the initiation of a service learning project. The focus was on students learning to give back to the community, but the overall feeling was that it had to tie back to academics. There seems to be a strong realization that everything that occurs at the school, with the students has to have an educational value or more specifically a curricular focus. The community representatives were verbal in offering suggestions. They seemed to have a clear understanding of the perceived (my perception) cultural norm that discussions must center on academics. This understanding of cultural norms has a basis in how partners have constructed their views of the school’s priorities. Did the partners become involved with this school because their philosophies of intended focus are similar or did the partners learn the norms of the school and decide it meshed with their preconceived knowledge of school focus?

Reflections from my journal dated February 2, 2011. Ms. Beach’s role in working with the community is clearly outlined and structured so that she remains involved, but it does not distract from her daily routine of focusing on academic success. Her main task, when it comes to building and maintaining relationships within the community, is to assure that any community involvement is aligned with the goals of the school improvement plan. Everything that happens at that school, whether it is donations, volunteering, or direct student contact, has to be aligned with mission of
improving and enriching academic achievement. Nothing happens just for fun or just because it is offered by the community. Everything has a purpose. Although she trusts her staff to make the connections in the community and maintain the relationships, she is informed of all major projects and has final authority on whether or not a plan is going to come to fruition. She rarely has had to exert her power because Ms. Stratford and the teachers are working towards the same mission with the same parameters in mind. By the time ideas reach Ms. Beach, they are well thought out plans with a clear structure and desired outcomes in mind. The whole team seems to be “on the same page” so there is infrequently a need for Ms. Beach to exercise her ultimate power.

**Defining Clear Roles**

The roles of the Principal, the school staff, and the community are significant in order to understand the meaning of the partnerships for both the school and the community. The roles of the participants seem to be designed from the systems in place that dictate the focus of the activities at the school. The diverse roles seem to be clearly defined and based on what each participant has to offer to the partnership.

**The role of the principal.** The role of the principal is instrumental in maintaining collaborative partnerships. Ms. Beach realizes the importance of working with the community and welcomes partners into the school. She serves as the final authority on what happens at the school, but she allows the parent liaison and the teachers to do most of the work in finding and maintaining partnerships. She described some of what she considers her role.

I’d say it’s just being right there with the person that I have that goes out and actually helps get them, but then I also meet with the partners so that we can talk
about the things that we need. We also recognize them. When it comes to
different awards through the District, I make sure that that gets done so that we
have that positive feeling and we count them in as part of our community here.
We invite them to come in as a part of our SAC Team – the School Advisory
Council. So, I may not be the person that searches them out initially, but I’m
definitely very much involved with maintaining those relationships.

Ms. Beach communicates regularly with her parent liaison and always keeps the focus on
partnerships that are academically related to goals of the school. She likes to meet with
the community partners because she wants them to know she is committed to the
relationship. Ms. Stratford describes how she works with the principal.

Well, of course, I can’t do anything without my administration’s approval. When
I do have an idea of a business partner, I always talk to her first and say, “I’m
looking at this company.” I want to make sure that I pick companies that are
solid, good-standing companies that promote goodness in the community.
Obviously, I would love to get money from other sources, but if those sources are
not in the line with education or children or family-oriented; it wouldn’t be
appropriate for me to seek out that support. So my principal does approve
everything. My principal comes with me to most of the business partnership
meetings, oversees, and just wants to make sure that we’re in alignment with the
district guidelines and just kind of oversees the final word on things.

Ms. Beach is a figure head in the community. There seems to be a unanimous belief by
the community partners in the power of the role of the principal and a natural respect for
the position that has been constructed over time. They recognize her commitment to
improving student achievement. Ms. Ram shared her thoughts about the role of the principal in community partnerships and characteristics of a successful principal.

The principal…Of course she’s the most prevalent to me because she’s who I’ve worked with since I started in the program and from a high-level perspective, she’s been very involved….You have to be tenacious. I mean you have to be able to go out and ask for whatever you need in a way that’s diplomatic. I think patience is certainly one, and understanding of the relationship….We’ve changed some as far as our involvement, and she’s been very responsive to those changes.

She understands the business and the direction of the business….Business acumen, having the ability to understand…not necessarily do we relate to everything that they potentially are going through, but being able to find the relationship in what we do…it can motivate us a little bit more.

Ms. Beach is well known to the community partners, but she allows her staff to do most of the direct work with the partners. She trusts her instructional staff to work with partners on identifying student needs. Ms. Ledger describes how that has worked at Shell Elementary.

The administration identifies the students; the tutor doesn’t do that….I start with the principal, who will say, “We love your partnership, but this is the person you need to be working through.” At Shell, that’s [the reading coach]….She identifies and says, “Okay, well, how many students can this tutor carry?” And, you know, I’ll say, “Fifteen, twenty, depending on how often you want them to meet during the week.”….And so on.
Ms. Beach’s role in working with community partners resembles that of a transformational leader. She is comfortable delegating responsibilities to her staff, but remains visible and accessible to stakeholders.

Mr. Chesapeake’s support of the school is mainly monetarily so he does not participate in activities or meetings on school campus. Therefore he does not have as much contact with Ms. Beach. However, he still has a positive view of the principal. He describes his thoughts about her.

I don’t know the principal well. I think she is a nice lady because it seems like the school does a lot of different things. They always have stuff for families and times the families can come to the school. The children from the school look happy so, uh, well, I think she must be a nice lady. And oh, yes, well I did see her at the party for the holidays and she looked like a nice lady. She did say thank you for helping her school.

Ms. Beach is held accountable by stakeholders for the climate and activities that take place at Shell Elementary. Mr. Landing has developed a positive relationship with the principal. Part of her role is making community partners feel valued and welcome at the school. Mr. Landing expresses his thoughts on feeling welcome at the school and his relationship with the principal.

It was more like a home…like a neighborhood that you grow up in. When I initially was going there…everybody was nice….After the first run, it was a completely different experience, just because I think they realized how much I did care, and that I wasn’t there just to show up on Thursdays….I actually was invested, personally and physically and emotionally into the school…. I felt it was
my responsibility to do something for the school and for the kids there…. I saw Principal Beach at one time, and it wasn’t like meeting somebody you went to work with or something like that, it was more so like two friends meeting up, “Oh, how’s it going?” and things like. She makes me feel like a part of the school community.

Community partners seem to believe that the school leader is responsible for the school culture. Mr. River expressed his views on the parallel between a school principal and a company manager.

I see a lot of parallels and the importance of a principal is analogous to our store managers and what they do. They are running a site. Our managers run multimillion-dollar businesses, that’s what they do…same with school principals. Our end product is a satisfied customer with a really good hamburger and a fry….their product are our employees. So [pause] if they’re supplied well, supported and stroked….That’s why we do what we do. We’re a living model that works. It actually works. One of the greatest assets of this company….Being in the retail business, I’m supposed to speak the mantra, “The customer comes first,” you know? Retail, that’s what we do. I haven’t found that, necessarily, to be the case. The employees come first. And when you take really, really good care of them, they’ll fall all over themselves to make sure that customer is taken care of. We hope to do what we can to help the school district apply that same model, but that’s what we do. We want to be one of the tools in their tool kit to help them achieve.
The principal’s role in building and maintaining partnerships is assuring that the teacher and ultimately the student benefits in a way that leads to stronger student achievement. As a transformational leader, Ms. Beach keeps the focus student centered, delegates responsibilities to her teachers and staff, as well as serves as a figurehead in the community that is available to stakeholders.

**Reflections from my journal dated February 2, 2011.** Ms. Beach’s role in working with the community is clearly outlined and structured so that she remains involved, but it does not distract from her daily routine of focusing on academic success. Her main task, when it comes to building and maintaining relationships within the community, is to assure that any community involvement is aligned with the goals of the school improvement plan. Everything that happens at that school, whether it is donations, volunteering, or direct student contact, has to be aligned with mission of improving and enriching academic achievement. Nothing happens just for fun or just because it is offered by the community. Everything has a purpose. Although she trusts her staff to make the connections in the community and maintain the relationships, she is informed of all major projects and has final authority on whether or not a plan is going to come to fruition. She rarely has had to exert her power because Ms. Stratford and the teachers are working towards the same mission with the same parameters in mind. By the time ideas reach Ms. Beach they are well thought out plans with a clear structure and desired outcomes in mind. The whole team seems to be “on the same page” so there is infrequently a need for Ms. Beach to exercise her ultimate power.

The other role that stands out as a primary function of the principal is that of figure head in the community. It seems as if the community partners have socially
constructed their view of the role of the principal based on their learned experiences. By nature of being the principal there are certain expectations from the partners on her involvement in the school and the community. She is cognizant of forming a relationship with the community members that have contributed to the school whether it is monetarily or through the donation of their time. She understands that partners like to see the principal and have the opportunity to speak with the principal. She keeps an open door policy where she welcomes partners to come to the school and speak with her. She attends the SAC meetings regularly so that she interacts with the partners. She attends all school events and makes an intentional effort to thank the partners that are in attendance and make them feel welcome at the school. She recognizes the importance of the community partners and her role in making them feel appreciated and respected at the school.

**The role of the school staff.** The school staff is the support of the system. They are the achievers of the school that assure that there is movement towards the clearly defined goals. The school staff seemed committed to work on the behalf of students and families. They understand each other’s roles and depend on one another to carry out the mission of the school. The roles of the parent liaison and the teachers are noticeably defined, but are intertwined in that each relies on the other to get their job done.

**Parent Liaison.** The role of the parent liaison involves establishing and maintaining partnerships between the school and members of the community. It was evident that adding the parent liaison role four years ago increased the visibility of the school in the community and the strength of the relationship with its partners. Going out
into the community seems to have made the difference. Ms. Beach discusses how Ms. Stratford goes out into the community to find partnerships.

I have Ms. Stratford that can go out…to really get out into the community and get those partnerships. It’s important to have them….We don’t typically have people banging on our door who want to come in, but we’re going out there to try to find the partnerships with people, and helping people to understand…with the economy the way it is, a lot of people are fearful that it’s just about the money…and many times it is about helping support funds, but it’s mostly just getting people in [the school] to help us.

Ms. Beach discusses Ms. Stratford’s role and how not only is she in charge of building partnerships, but builds relationships with individual parents.

Ms. Stratford is a key person here that I hired through Title I money to be a liaison with the school so that she can focus on partnerships. She’s got partnerships with different churches that will donate supplies for students for school and, you know, she focuses her efforts with the businesses…. It’s also with the parents. We’ve established something through our School Improvement Team where she goes to the houses and she and an academic teacher or a behavior specialist will go to the house and they’ll help families set up learning centers. They just recently went to a family that’s having trouble with behavior issues….They talked to the parent; they set up a place for the child to do homework, and get things done, gave them the supplies they needed in the house. And just yesterday the parent was here and said how much she appreciated it.
Ms. Beach values the role of the parent liaison and realizes she could not build such strong partnerships alone.

Ms. Stratford is dedicated to the students and teachers at Shell Elementary and sees herself as the coordinator of the relationships between the school and the community including parents. Her role is intertwined with the teacher’s role in that she relies on them to work cooperatively with the community and support her in her role as much as she supports them in their role. She describes her teamwork with teachers.

I do address my peers and my colleagues first to see if they have anybody in the community that they know…it’s much easier when you have a point of contact immediately…and then I’ll do the legwork. I just need a contact. They do help me…if they hear of something, of a promotion or some kind of activity, they will let me know and then I’ll initiate that process on behalf of the school.

Ms. Stratford realizes that building a relationship has to be mutual. She realizes that the partners have to see a benefit to their involvement in order to sustain the partnership. She describes her persistence in building a specific relationship and how it was successful.

I try to keep good relations with the community. We try to go out into the community [pause] when we can, or try to encourage the teachers and staff to go in the community….This year we are doing our Christmas party for our staff at a community place that has never been [involved]…I’ve approached them several times for partnership, and they never have, but now I think with us giving back to the community that business now is sponsoring us…and providing. So, by us giving back to the community, now they’re more open to giving back to us.
Reciprocity in a relationship leads to a stronger partnership. Ms. Stratford is cognizant of the need to give back to the community as a sign of appreciation for their generosity to the school. The teachers rely on Ms. Stratford to build partnerships that they may initiate. They appreciate her ability to get out into the community while they are restricted to the classroom. Ms. Tangier described her thoughts about the role of the parent liaison.

We have a plethora of community partnerships. Since Miss Stratford, the parent liaison was hired...because of that position...she is able to dedicate more fulltime focus on finding community partnerships. Before Miss Stratford, I’d say it was a hit and miss kind of thing. Whatever teachers had a contact in the community and could get somebody, you know, it was hit and miss. There wasn’t one central person who organized everything or wrote grants for the school….Definitely with the parent liaison in that position, I think it’s been more coordinated, the feedback to the community has been better and I think that the school has benefitted more when she took over….There’s one central person who filters out to the community and who the community can filter in to. It makes it much more organized and much more efficient, I think.

The teachers recognized a change in the organization of the relationships with the community. The role of the parent liaison has contributed to the solid infrastructure that is the basis of school decision making.

The community partners also recognize the importance of having a key contact person at the school that can also make decisions. Ms. Ram describes her relationship with the parent liaison.
On a very immediate level…Ms. Stratford…I mean she’ll be the first one to call us up and let us know if she needs volunteers, she’ll send us emails about the progress of kids, she’ll send us thank you notes. I mean, she’s definitely actively involved in the aspect of keeping us involved on a regular basis…and she’s the one that writes the proposals. I think she has to itemize and go through everything that we do donate to make sure that it’s being justified.

A large part of Ms. Stratford’s role involves establishing and maintaining partnerships between the school and members of the community. Ms. Stratford takes pride in the partnerships that she has built and maintained at Shell Elementary.

Ms. Stratford has vision and foresight into the future needs of the students and works to build new partnerships that go beyond the typical donation of funds. She realizes that due to the economy businesses are struggling and she has to be sensitive to this fact when she tries to build new partnerships. Ms. Stratford does not let that get her down and she does not let it stop her from trying. She takes what businesses are willing to give and turns it into something that will benefit both the children and the partner that is giving.

Working with the community partners seems to be a part of Ms. Stratford’s job that she loves. Although there is paperwork involved, it is the benefit to the students that keeps her coming up with innovative ideas and not giving up in a time of financial instability for many businesses. The role of the Parent Liaison seems to be an important one in building and maintaining partnerships between the school and the community.

**Reflections from my journal dated January 17, 2011.** Once a partnership is established the focus is on building a positive relationship with both parties involved.
The business partners support education while building a stronger community and ultimately building their businesses. Ms. Stratford focuses on making sure the partner is happy and also on assuring that what the partner has to offer is tied to academic achievement for the students. Ms. Stratford builds partnerships so that all involved get a positive result. This takes time and a conscious effort on the part of the school. It seems that having a designated person to concentrate efforts on this large task is beneficial to the school. It is difficult to imagine schools that do not have a parent liaison being able to make such a concerted effort as is done at this school.

Ms. Stratford seems to be creative and open minded on what types of partners and activities will benefit the students. Her latest endeavor is working to partner with a local assisted living facility. The goal of the partnership is for the students to give back to the community. Although they will not be receiving any type of goods, donations, or volunteerism, she can see the benefit to the students of volunteering to help out the elderly.

**The Teacher.** The role of the teacher is important in building and maintaining community partnerships. Teachers do not have time to be out of the classroom and in the community, but they do meet potential partners during non school hours as they are part of the community in which the school is located. Some teachers live in the community, others frequent establishments in the community, while others make it a priority to know what is in the community in order to best serve their students. Teachers are also instrumental in identifying the needs of the students so that partnerships can be based on recognized needs and predetermined desired outcomes. Ms. Stratford describes teacher
commitment and how teachers can make connections in the community at places they patron.

We do have a core group of teachers that have been here a long time, you know, over the ten-year mark, and they've basically built very good relationships. We do have teachers that truly love the children. They love the community that they teach in and that's why they stay here….One teacher, particularly, who goes into a national chain, fast food type of place, all the time, and based on how I always tell the staff, “It doesn’t hurt to ask. Always ask,” and, so, she finally got up enough nerve and because she had already established her own patronage of this particular restaurant, the manager was very quick – and the manager has ended up supplying a lot of incentives for our children for our celebrations of learning and for perfect attendance and for character education….I really believe it’s because of her patronage of that restaurant that he gave so much to the school.

Partnerships often start with the teachers and are then further built upon and maintained by the parent liaison. Teachers also play a great part in making sure that the partners are recognized for their support. Ms. Tangier describes her role in thanking partners.

The other part that we do in developing the partnerships is that we help to sustain the partnerships by creating thank you cards, which again go through Ms. Stratford…She can make sure that, “Okay, Superior Seafood helped us out with this, first grade. Now we need to have some cards from your team, so that I can make sure that they get there.” You know, “Sea Ray Autos has done this for us, and I need thank you cards teachers, for the things that they’ve done.” So, our relationship with that is to show, express thanks in whatever ways that we can:
Volunteer dinners where the teachers help cook the dinner and the school serves and that kind of thing.

Teachers can be creative in organizing events that bring in community partners. On occasion teachers work with the community for a particular event in their classroom. Ms. Smith is personally involved with a volunteer group in the community and brings that passion into her classroom by working closely with community partners. She describes a specific event that she organized.

I, personally, have run events in the community with my volunteer group where, during the holidays I get people to...“adopt a child” and they buy them a new outfits and toys...whatever’s on their wish list...It’s really an amazing event...I bring my class together and we usually have some kind of icon sports player...one year it was a professional football player, last year it was the baseball Mascot, this year I’m trying to get the hockey team to come out....I may have a few college football players come....We get all the parents to come together and then we make gingerbread houses and the children get their gifts, so that’s a nice tie to the holidays.

Ms. Smith showed her enthusiasm for working with the community on behalf of the students and families of Shell Elementary. Her role extends past teaching in the classroom to finding ways to enhance her student’s education through collaboration with community partners.

Teachers also serve on formal committees such as the School Advisory Council and the parent involvement committee. Their role is to be an active member and support the school in these efforts. Ms. Smith serves on the school’s parent involvement
committee which organizes activities for parents at the school. She describes her role on that committee.

I’m on the parent-involvement committee…one of my roles, is to go out into the community and I ask them for their donations….I work hand-in-hand with Ms. Stratford and we try to do that…. I’m constantly assisting at the multicultural night…I’m actually the co-chair…and we’re going to try to get the community involved with a STEP program. We’re going to try to get people to teach Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. We’re going to do a lot of really cool things…my job is pretty much to go out…besides organizing the event…to go out into the community and get the companies to help us and provide us with goods and services.

Although this is an added function to her typical teaching responsibilities, Ms. Smith sees bringing in resources to the school as beneficial and continues to take on the challenge.

Ms. Reed describes the various roles that teachers play in working with the community.

The teachers serve on SAC….The SAC chair, the teachers, and Ms. Stratford are involved with the community as part of SAC…. Ms. Stratford is the main person that will go out and seek community partners….Teachers as individuals, too, can go out into the community and ask for donations or certain things that we need for our school. And our role definitely is that we are facilitators for it [community relation], too, within the classroom and the school.

Ms Reed feels that there are often restrictions that make it difficult for teachers to go out into the community, but that if the effort is put forth the resources are out there. She describes her view on bringing in community partners to the school.
I think that there are a lot of resources available outside the school. I think that I, personally, find maybe it’s more of a time limitation, because by the time you get everything done…it’s difficult. There are a lot of opportunities out there to get grants for the classroom and businesses that want to come in and help, but it’s difficult to be able to find the time to be able to write those kinds of things, so…that’s where Mr. Stratford comes in.

Teachers are busy and have a lot of responsibilities, but they do see that they have a role in helping the school build partnerships within the community. They know that they cannot take it on by themselves, but with the help of the parent liaison, their role is an important one in the process.

The community sees the teacher as having an important role in their partnership. The teacher’s role is to evaluate the needs of their classroom as well as individual students. They are the most qualified individual to make decisions regarding the needs of their classroom. This ensures that partnership activities are student centered and meet the goals of the school improvement plan. Ms. Ram describes how teachers write proposals to request funds to meet the needs of their students.

Each teacher can write a proposal up to a hundred dollars and then in that proposal they’ll decide what project they want to work on through the school year with their kids. And then we would just fund that [project]. Some of the things have been incredible that I’ve seen. One of them had a garden where she showed us at the end of the school year. It was so cute. So the kids grew vegetables and then at the end of the year with whatever they harvested they used it to make a pizza.
Teachers assess the needs of their individual students and their progress in order to guide tutors and mentors on how to effectively provide academic support. Ms. Ledger describes the role of the teacher in working with the tutors.

If the teacher says, “What this student really needs is letter recognition, letter recognition, letter recognition.” The tutors are given a manual and, as part of their training, where then they can go through and there are games organized by need…so they can go through a section of letter recognition games and they photocopy them and make little dice or whatever the game requires, and they can use that to play with the student to make letter recognition more fun. And so that’s what they do, and that’s what they do all day long.….They always get direct feedback from the teachers at least three times a year, and, often, daily. The teacher fills out a pre- and post-DRA form for us. It’s really important that we measure progress.

The teacher is significant in assuring that partnership activities align with the student centered goals of the school. Teacher input and feedback keeps the partnership focused on student achievement.

An important role of the teacher is to represent the school in a positive manner in the community. Teachers serve as public relations representatives when they are in the community. Once again, there are certain socially constructed beliefs that community partners have about how teachers should act in public. Teachers are held to a high standard in the community and are often reminded that they are role models. Mr. Chesapeake describes his view of one of the teachers that frequent the Crab Shack.
I have one teacher who comes here to eat and have fun. She would bring her friends. She is very nice and friendly. She likes to talk to the staff and she is a friend of the Crab Shack…A real nice young lady who spoke often about her work at the school. She is good at letting me know what is going on at the school. There are different nights where the school asks parents to come and see what their children are doing. The parents get to talk to the teachers about their child’s schooling and how it is going…I help with food and she tells me what is going on at the school.

Teachers represent their schools when they are out in the community. One of their most important roles seems to be interacting positively with community partners and simply talking about the school with community members. They bring the school to life for many outside community members that do not know what happens on a day to day basis in the world of education. Teachers are ambassadors of education and are the perfect people to build positive relationships in the community.

Reflections from my journal dated April 2, 2011. Mr. Chesapeake’s relationship with the school started with just one teacher who shared his views of helping the community. She is a passionate teacher that saw an opportunity to build a partnership that will be mutually beneficial to all parties involved. What started off as help in her classroom grew to include the entire school at times. Mr. Chesapeake related his desire to help with understanding the importance of education in the life of a child and community. His experience in his own country of appreciating education as a means to a better life transfers to his desire to help in this country and specifically in the neighborhood in which he has a personal interest in its success. His experiences have
lead to his beliefs which influence his actions in partnering with a school. He also understands that teachers are under a lot of pressure and he has a desire to make their job easier if possible.

Reflections from my journal dated March 3, 2011. The partnership relies on the support of an identified school contact which in this case is the reading coach. Again, the principal is the lead when establishing the partnership, but the day to day functions are completed by a teacher leader that she trusts. The role of the teacher is equally important in helping to identify the neediest students and also to communicate with the tutor for maximum efficiency that leads to student success. Direct communication as well as good record keeping makes the partnership successful. Reliability and an appreciation of the partnership are also important. This is the type of partnership the Foundation can count on year after year. Although it is work to make it happen, they can count on each other to continue as long as both are contributing their share to the partnership. The goals easily align and they are able to speak the same language, and that allows the tutors to become much more involved than another type of partner. There is measurement involved so there is built in accountability. It is easy to show if the partnership is making a difference because of the direct correlation in academics. This partnership does require that the school do a little more leg work on a continuous basis, such as identifying students, providing data, scheduling the tutors, but it seems to be worth the work because of the contribution to improved academic achievement. It is a high return on the investment.

The role of the community. The community partners are advocates for the students, families, and teachers. Whether it is because of the potential benefits to their own company or an internal desire to help people it is apparent that the community
partners are there to support the school. They realize that students, teachers, and parents can benefit from the support given to them. They also realize that there is a benefit to their own interests and that partnering is a way to achieve their own goals. Their efforts make a difference in the education of the students which ultimately impacts the overall success of the community. Mr. Chesapeake describes his role as a helper.

I like what I do to help the children and the neighborhood. I think the school does a good job and teaches children which is what is most important. As long as they do good for children I will help them out. I am helping them and they help me. We work together to make this area a better place for people, all of them, the children and the families, the young people that come for fun. It is a safe place and a place to gather for fun so everybody helping everybody and working together makes the job get done and good things for people in the neighborhood. It is good for everybody. That is what we do in Jamaica. We help the people in the community so that everybody gets the best of what is available for them. It is similar here. I help the school and they help me to make it a nice place to live and come and visit for relaxing and good fun. It works for everybody.

Partners understand that the people in this community struggle to make ends meet and that their support makes life a little bit easier for them.

One of the biggest roles of the community is to provide teachers with funding for projects that are not covered by the school budget. Through teacher grants and other donations the school can afford to complete projects such as assembling a flower garden and building a library of character education materials. Donations assist the teachers in providing a high quality education that is not funded by the state budget. Shell
Elementary relies on the community partnerships to supplement the school budget as well as support its programs through volunteerism. Community members are generous in their donations to the school. Ms. Beach describes a community initiative developed from the love of books and the desire to extend that feeling.

It’s called the “BB Book Fund,” and one of the teacher’s boyfriends…his mother had a fondness of reading and she had been…with ladies in her senior community…collecting books for several years, cleaning them up and repairing them and sending them to the school. And that’s how that started. Well Mrs. B. found out she had stage four cancer, she really thought about it and she wanted what she had started years ago to really go on. So she talked to her family and they agreed that in lieu of flowers that they wanted donations made on her behalf, to our school and we named it the “BB Book Fund,” so that was a donation where the donors donate for a specific reason, a specific purpose…we were able to have all the children pick out their own books from our book fair and then…and on the one-year anniversary of Mrs. B’s passing, some of her friends sent checks again in her memory… what we thought was going to be a one-time deal, has ended up being fruitful into this year…her children have had golf tournaments with their buddies and have decided to put the money towards the BB Book Fund.

Continual generosity is a major role of the community. Supporting the school is expected, but also appreciated by the teachers. Ms. Smith describes her view of the community’s role.

It’s really nice to know that there are companies and people out there that support education, support our schools, know that we’re working hard to bring bigger and
better things for our kids, and they want to be there to help us along the way. [pause]…Just knowing in a sense that we’re not alone, that we don’t have to always do it on our own…we could always reach out and we can get help from the community, ‘cause teachers spend a lot of money out of their own pocket, and it’s nice to know that people who really care about our kids know that when we ask for things, we’re not spending it for ourselves, it’s going directly to our students’ needs.

The role of the community is not only giving financially, but doing so in a way that makes a difference for teachers and ultimately students. Ms. Reed describes her view of why partners give to the school.

The Sea Ray Auto [employees] are individuals that are giving out of their paycheck. That’s like me, a middle-class person giving out of my paycheck to give back to a high-needs school. I don’t get a tax break on that, that’s just, it is what it is. So, I think people have good hearts. I think people want to make a difference. People see the need for this community to change and they try their best in their way, ‘cause they still have to go to work every day, so that they give these funds so that people like us that are in the community can be able to help them. I think that the mindset is right where it needs to be.

School personnel seem to believe in the munificence of the community. Their role is to support the school in its mission to improve student achievement.

Sea Ray Autos emphasizes community service as part of the company’s mission because they realize the value of giving back to the community in order to make it stronger. They are also strong advocates for the teachers. They realize that teachers
experience limits in funding to purchase items for the classroom. Sea Ray Autos supports teachers through awarding grants to those teachers that request funding for special projects that will advance student learning. Their role in the partnership is to provide support to teachers and students. Ms. Ram describes the decision to partner with Shell Elementary.

It’s been a region decision, so it wasn’t just myself and two other people making the decision as to what we wanted to do…it was really a vote that we sent out to everybody in the region, and allowed them to make the decision…the decision was that they enjoy it…the impact that they feel like they make. It’s very immediate, so they know specifically what they’re doing. And then outside of that, they really feel like kids, they are so important, but they touch so many more people. They touch their parents, they certainly have an impact on the teachers, and so if we can give more support to kids, then they have just as broad of an impact on other people that need the help.

Impacting student achievement is essential. The role of the community also involves providing a service that is beneficial and reliable. Ms. Ledger describes her view about their role in the partnership.

I think the reliability of what we’re providing is key. If our tutors weren’t reliable or they weren’t well-trained or they weren’t strong, I think we’d be in danger…I think the school would start to say, “Well, we’re not getting that much benefit from it, but we have to do paperwork, so this is not working for us,” so it’s key that I maintain not only hiring really strong tutors, but training them and managing them all year so that they’re motivated and dedicated and reliable and
they need to always be where they’re supposed to be with a book ready to go…I think that’s probably the other key in the partnership is that the service that we’re adding to the school is really strong and reliable. Schools are so busy…especially administration. They’re just swamped. And, so, if you’re more difficult to work with than you are helpful, you’re going to have a very short relationship there.

[laughter]

Ms. Beach understands the importance of working with the community and finds advantage in various types of partnership activities. She describes her expectations as simply being there for children.

I guess the biggest expectation is just that they believe in the children and that they want to do whatever it is…it’s not always a financial issue; it’s more that they come in and volunteer. We did training for them [community partners] yesterday through SERVE on how to help teach reading. So people come in and they help and it’s just the expectation of being there for children.

The partners realize that they have to keep up their end of the deal if they want the partnership to be successful. Each party has to be committed to his or her role and follow through with the specific intentions.

Supporting teachers is a chief role of the community partners. The importance of helping teachers was mentioned throughout the interviews. Teachers work hard at their job often without recognition. The community partners interviewed seem to share the belief that teachers often do not get the support that they deserve. The community’s role in supporting teachers makes their job a little bit easier and ultimately benefits students.

Mr. Chesapeake describes his view of the teacher with which he has the most contact.
She seemed like a good teacher…really trying to do something good and nice for her children and the parents. She asked and I couldn’t say no. I like to help people that are good people. She is good people. She works hard at that school. She is a good teacher. She really loves the children. Working at schools in America is hard work. At home, the teachers have more freedom. They teach children that want to learn. It looks harder here. A lot of rules and government telling you what to do. This is just what I hear, what it looks like when you hear about schools. But Ms. Smith, she works hard and is a good teacher.

Mr. Chesapeake believes that teachers work hard and he is happy to support their efforts.

Mr. River compares principals to his store managers. He sees the importance of their role in the end product and therefore thinks it is important that the principal and the teachers are supported by the community. He describes his views.

I find a parallel between our business and how we run it, with the management in our stores and the actual school sites and the principals in each location. They’re identical in nature in that our store manager…is the most important person in our business…we are kind of in the pathway to the airport over here. If one of those planes just miss it, and hit this building and kill all of us…those managers are going to unlock those doors and be running those restaurants. They do the hard work every day. And what happens at that Superior Seafood site and/or school site is relative to their ability to do their job and do it well. We give them every possible tool, great training…and we hope to help the district apply that same business principle in the schools itself. Give that principal the tools that they need, and if they’re dynamic and strong, it’s the trickle down theory that will
appear in their resource teachers, their department heads, and their teachers and then, ultimately, in their students and motivate them to great levels of achievement. And then they’ll see the opportunities as well.

Principal and teacher support are instrumental in building schools of lifetime learners. They keep the school running and students learning. Experience has led the community partners to believe that teachers and principals need to be supported. The role of the community is to support their efforts so that their job is more successful. It also involves communicating their involvement at Shell Elementary with other community members so that the number of supporting stakeholders grows. Mr. Landing describes his view on inspiring others to become school partners.

I wanted to inspire people to not just help Shell Elementary School or any school like it, but just to kind of make them think, you know, “What can I do?” and, “Where’s my passion at?” That was kind of my…large, general theme of why I was doing the run, it was because that, because I’ve had people in my life…that have done things that are far greater than whatever I’ve done, that made me sit there and think, “What can I do?” And…“What kind of impact can I have?”

The consistent role of community partners appears to be making a difference in the lives of students through teacher and principal support. This support can be financial or through volunteer hours. Dependable partnerships and those that inspire others are most beneficial for the school.

**Reflections from my journal dated February 3, 2011.** Ms. Reed views the support of the community as instrumental in the success of the school as a whole and the individual students. She seems to value effective partnerships and has a strong belief that
when things are done, they need to be done right. She references Sea Ray Autos as an example of one of the school’s most successful partnerships that is really aligned with academic achievement. She is all about accountability on the part of the teachers to make sure that the money given to them by the mini grants is used to support academic achievement. Teachers have a responsibility to make sure what they are spending is supporting the academic goals of the students. She also believes that volunteers should be held accountable if their role is to work directly with students on academic issues. She is a strong believer that if you make a commitment then you need to follow through.

As a teacher she understands that she has a role in bringing in partnerships to the school and in ensuring that they support the academics in her classroom. She also values the role of the parent liaison in building relationships further so that they are sustained over time. The parent liaison takes the partnership to the next level so that a strong relationship is built.

**Reflections from my journal dated December 2, 2010.** Ms. Tangier also feels that she has many roles to play as a teacher in this type of school. Teachers seem to play the role of parent, teacher, community involvement, etc. They work long hours and volunteer their free time. There seems to be a high level of gratitude when those outside of the school help out. The smallest type of help can mean so much at this school. Showing appreciation is vital in maintaining a successful partnership. The smallest type of donation can be turned into something that benefits students. Teachers are creative in putting donations to use whether it is materialistic or monetary. Community partnerships allow teachers to be creative and think outside of their normal structured curriculum. It
adds another layer of innovation and exposes the students to things they would not normally see.

Community partnerships have been a lot more structured since the hiring of the parent liaison. Community partnerships have always existed, but there was not a lot of structure in how they were maintained. Teachers worked in isolation and partners were specific to who each individual teacher managed to secure. Teachers are still instrumental in initiating partnerships with the community, but adding that additional piece of infrastructure has allowed for community partnerships to be nourished and maintained more successfully. The parent liaison piece seems to weave through the foundation of the district/state/federal mandates and provide strength to the school.

Community partnerships can take on a variety of forms. Some partners are known for a yearly donation to a specific event. Big companies partner through programs that are available to many schools in the community. Specific restaurants have existing programs that the schools participate in regularly. For example free food certificates that can be put in report cards. Other partnerships are more specific to the needs of this school. A volunteer that works directly with students as well as helps out on parent nights is another form of partnering. Grants are another huge way that community partners help this school. Teacher mini grants allow teachers to be creative and add additional resources to their classroom that otherwise would not be available.

Partnership outcome are huge. The physical value of the results of the partnership benefits the students in the classroom, but the fact that an outside entity is willing to help out seems to be of great value as well. Teachers feel appreciated when others notice that they need help and rise to the occasion. They do what they do for the students and feel
valued when somebody else tries to make their job a little bit easier. This may be what teachers need to keep them going.

**Demonstrating Collaborative Character Traits**

One of the most evident themes was the importance of building relationships over time. Building and maintaining relationships seems to be the focus of Ms Stratford’s interactions with the community partners. She uses the word “relationship” repeatedly to describe the partnerships she has built among the community. She believes that a partnership builds into a relationship. “Once we establish a partnership, then I can always go back and I like to build a relationship…” She admits that it is not always easy. Ms. Stratford sees relationship building as an important part of maintaining a partnership.

Ms. Ledger describes the personal part of being in a partnership with the school.

I think the key is getting to know the person a little bit. I think it’s much easier to maintain a partnership with the school, um, if you have a real relationship with someone. I know the reading coach fairly well now. We’ve gotten to the point where emails don’t have to be formal…She can send me a couple of word answer and its okay…. I think that that’s really the key, knowing somebody.

Relationship building is critical in order to have a partnership that lasts and is beneficial to the school. The relationships built between Shell Elementary and the community seemed to have several characteristics in common. These characteristics can be clustered into three major elements of this theme: communication, trust, and appreciation.

**Communication.** The importance of good communication surfaced several times when I analyzed the data. Effective communication assures that all participants in the relationship understand their role and the goals of any particular project or interaction
with the students. Good communication helps alleviate any problems that could occur and helps to make sure that the students and families get what they need. The discussion regarding communication that occurred by all parties that I interviewed indicates the importance of positive and frequent communication in a successful partnership. Ms. Smith describes communication in general.

I think that when something happens that’s great in a classroom and the outcome is positive, people talk. And when kids talk and they talk about what happened and who came and what they did and the experience….So when kids talk, they go and tell their parents. Then their parents talk…they tell other people. And other people spread [the word]… And I think it promotes not only the positive activities and events that are going on in our classroom, but it branches out to our school doing positive things, then it branches out into the community and, therefore, the businesses grow as well, because our children are speaking, and our parents are speaking, and then it’s carrying out into their world.

Communication requires that both parties express their needs and correspond with each other regularly so that vital information can be shared and strategic plans can be followed through. Ms. Ram describes the relationship as a two way street.

It’s been a great partnership. I think it’s a two-way street… as much as it’s great to have a business partner…we’re still requesting from them to tell us what they need and…be strategic in that…we do have a lot of money at times to spend, so making sure that whatever we’re doing we’re on the same page.

Individuals involved in the partnership are responsible for carrying out their element of the agreement. Communication on behalf of the school or the community partner is an
assumed responsibility of identified individuals. Successful communication leads to a more productive partnership. Ms. Ledger describes her key contact at the school.

Shell is a fantastic partner. Mostly because the reading coach there… has been so communicative. She’s just very reliable. She even gave me her cell phone. I try not to abuse that…She’s very quick on documentation. She quickly communicates if we need to add or drop a student. She’s been really reliable about the schedule and she seems to really appreciate having the tutors in the school. So, um, that makes it an easy partnership. I would never want to give up this partnership…it really flows well. There’s a lot of communication. As you know, schools get very busy …we all do…so sometime a partner will get busy and you won’t hear from them for a while and you have to kind of say, “How’s it going?”….but that’s not the case at Shell, there’s constant, fantastic communication…its ideal.

Communication between school personnel and community partners was described as essential in building a successful partnership. Reciprocal communication allows both parties to have a clear understanding of expectations and desired outcomes of the partnership.

Clear expectations are an essential part of communication. The school and the community partner establish roles and responsibilities at the beginning of the partnership that guide the actions of the participants. Communicating expectations up front helps alleviate any misunderstanding throughout the partnerships. Ms. Stratford describes how expectations are discussed at the forefront of the partnership.
When I first meet with the business partner and we agree to establish a partnership, I first and foremost ask what is their mission, what is their vision, what do they want to accomplish. Then I go back to my school and I work with my principal and my administration and then I develop a program or needs and wants on our end, and then I go back to that business partner and present, “This is what we need,” and to match it up. And I try to include the components of what the business partner wants. For instance, Sea Ray Autos, part of theirs was student support, teacher support and volunteerism, so I’ve put in components that will allow their volunteers to come in. I put in activities that will allow them to support teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week, for the holidays, Back to School Breakfast for the teachers...then I’ve put in components for the students, when they have, they buy books for the children at Christmas and they have activities just for them.

Establishing clear expectations at the beginning of the partnership was valued by both the school and the community partner. Clear expectations also means following through with what is stated at the initiation of the partnership. Ms. Stratford discusses the importance of following through on agreed upon tasks.

I expect them to follow through with what they say they’re going to do and what they promise to do. We do sign a business partnership form...that outlines what we’re going to do, and what they’re going to do...Part of our end of the bargain is always providing artwork to decorate their business. I send in letters to their national home offices and things like that. Whatever they expect from us, I try to adapt as much as I can, give them feedback, give them data...I do expect them, if
they say they’re going to provide volunteers, to provide the volunteers because we do not have a lot of parent volunteers, unfortunately, so we have to depend on outside help to get some of the programs and initiatives that we have…off the ground and running.

Establishing clear expectations is equally as important to the community partners as it is to the school staff. It allows for proper preparation and implementation of plans. Ms. Ram discusses communication that occurs throughout the year and expectations.

[They] communicate with us as far as what they need. At the beginning of the year we tend to have a pretty set schedule where we meet, we talk about…what the expectation is…what they’re focusing on….They communicate that and they invite us to the SAC meetings that we attend so we can see if we need to help them in any way possible….They keep us involved on a monthly basis.

Communicating expectations assures that there are no misperceptions involved in the partnership. It is important to both the school and the community partners to discuss their expectations so that they can move on with partnership activities and concentrate on meeting partnership goals.

**Trust.** A strong foundation built by trust is created by the interactions between individuals. Trust is cultivated by gathering information from one another based on experiences. Both school personnel and community partners expressed the importance of trusting each other. Trust is essential between the principal and staff as well as with the partners. There appeared to be several elements that were included in the concept of trust. These included confidence that individuals will meet expectations, a respect for
individual’s knowledge or expertise, and an environment that is welcoming and trusting of stakeholder involvement.

The trust between the principal and her staff was obvious. She delegates many of the responsibilities involved with building community partnerships to Ms. Stratford, the parent liaison. Ms. Beach trusts that Ms. Stratford will fulfill her duties and do what is best in order to meet the goals of the school. Ms. Stratford describes their relationship.

I’m very fortunate that she trusts me and has faith in me… I sit on the school advisory Council. I work with our student services….She does give me leeway to make sure that we do accomplish what we say we’re going to do…We have very good communication….I inform her about what’s going on, how it’s going, how we’re thanking people, what’s coming into the district….there’s lots of checks and balances along the way.

The trust has grown stronger as a result of successful experiences that have proven that each party is trust worthy. When a business or organization devotes resources to a specific cause, they want to be able to trust the recipient of their assets to put it to good use. Ms. Tangier describes the trust between Shell and the community.

There’s a trust element, because Sea Ray Autos knows that Shell isn’t just spending money so that we can have luncheons on the grounds for the teachers’ everyday…They trust that their money and the volunteer hours they’re donating are helping students achieve and improve. So there’s an element of trust there…I don’t know if when you first get into that relationship with a business, there’s that trust, yet. …Over time, then there’s more of a relationship developed and the business can trust that the school is using the money, they can see that the school
is improving in the grade, and the kids are improving….That is achieved through trust and through years of being together – like a marriage, almost.

Trust is an essential element in accountability. The school and the partner are accountable for following through with agreements which leads to a stronger trust in the future.

The community partners seemed to trust Shell Elementary to make the right decisions on behalf of students. Partners may have shared their opinions on issues related to curriculum, but they respected the teacher’s expertise and allowed them to make final decisions on how to best teach students. Mr. Chesapeake describes his hands off philosophy of participation.

I don’t often go to the school. I let them do what they do and I work at the restaurants. I am busy and they are good at what they do. They don’t need me there. I let them make that decision, when they give [incentives] to the students and why, but I think sometimes they use them for students who have perfect attendance or those that do really great things for others. That is just what I think, but I trust them, the school, to do what they know to do. They do good things with the education, so I trust them to do what they think is best.

Mr. Chesapeake may be a typical partner that makes donations, but does not participate in school decision making. The other partners that seem to be more visible at the school and involved in the decision making platforms also seemed to trust the school to make decisions in the area of curriculum. They acknowledged that the principal and staff are experts in education. Mr. River describes trust and relationship building.
One of the reasons why we are so strong as a franchise is because of the brand trust and relationship-building that we have nurtured for so long. We know every school board member on a first name basis, and including the superintendent, and the area directors and the principals and so forth. We know that they are doing a good job at what they do and need our support. We support them so that they can what is best for children.

Shell Elementary has proved to its partners that it is credible and can be relied on to make knowledgeable decisions for students. The repeated interactions that the school has had with the community have earned itself a strong foundation of trust that continues to be nurtured and grow.

Opening the doors to the community and welcoming them into the school shows that Shell Elementary also trusts its partners. Although schools are often in the center of communities, feeling welcome in a school is something that is often socially constructed based on experiences. Some parents and partners often do not believe they are welcome in a school based on their own school history. The principal and school staff at Shell Elementary seems to try to make experiences positive for visitors. They have an open door policy which allows the community to become a vital part of the school culture. Ms. Beach describes her view of inviting the community into the school.

We love to have them come into our school, be a part of it. Students actually write thank you letters to the different businesses for all the support that they give us and invite them to come to the school. We have people designated to go out there and get us more support if we need it. We have a great website where we
tell about the partnerships that we have and how people can help us along the way and be a part of the school.

Partners seem to feel comfortable at the school. Ms. Smith describes her view of the community’s perception of the school.

I think having people that want and are willing to allow the community to come in is one component…. To be honest with you…everybody that I’ve sought out or I’ve been in contact with has really loved coming here. They love our kids. They love our community. They love our school. They really have formed a bond with either teachers or other people that work here.

The community partners described the school as welcoming from the front office to the teachers and the principal. Ms. Ram describes the support felt from the school staff.

Ms. Beach, she has been very helpful and we actually have a Memorandum of Understanding that she has signed…putting us in a partnership. But then she really directed us primarily to the reading coach…as our primary contact for all things reading support….The, the whole administration is supportive – even the front office. When I come in they’re very, very nice and supportive…sometimes we’ll use them as paperwork carriers…“Here. I’m dropping this off,” and she’ll leave stuff for me. So, everyone’s been very supportive.

Mr. Landing seemed to feel the same way about the school staff. He describes his feelings about the school.

As far as the staff…I knew everybody, everybody was great to me…very supportive. Ms. Stratford was great…I’d call her and ask her questions about how I could do certain things… and Principal Beach, anytime I ever asked,
“Hey,” you know, “In a couple of weeks, can I meet up with you?” she was quite welcoming. I’m not really sure what it is. I guess it’s like what came first, the chicken or the egg. I know, initially, for me, it was more so the kids….I mean the kids are just great kids; you legitimately want to just be there and be around them. So, I don’t know if it’s just the kids are that way, or is it the school that creates an environment that allows them to be that way? And it might be a little bit of both.

Mr. Landing continues to discuss the progression of his relationship at the school.

It was more like a home, because you know everybody…like a neighborhood that you grow up in. When I initially was going there, I was just the kid that just showed up on Thursdays…and everybody was nice, but…after the first run, it was a completely different experience, just because I think they realized how much I did care, and that I wasn’t there just to show up on Thursdays, and…I cared more about the kids than maybe most people…I actually was invested, personally and physically and emotionally, into the school….I felt it was my responsibility to do something for the school….I saw Principal Beach at one time, and it wasn’t like meeting somebody you went to work with or something like that, it was more so like two friends meeting up, “Oh, how’s it going?”

As relationships grew stronger it appeared that the trust between the partners and the school staff grew as well. The welcoming environment seemed to tell the community that they were trusted and invited to come in to the school at their convenience.

There is also openness about sharing information by the school to the community. Shell Elementary shares academic achievement results on a regular basis at the monthly
SAC meetings and through other venues such as the newsletter and website. Ms. Ram describes the sharing of test results.

The biggest thing is the improvement in the education of the kids at Shell….I would think that ranks number one….Ms. Stratford and Ms. Beach will share the results from the previous year and how they’re doing…how they’re doing with their reading, math skills, FCAT tests, etc. So we always look to see that they’re continuing to grow in those areas.

Maintaining a transparent stance and allowing stakeholders to review whole school data shows that Shell Elementary trusts its partners to use the information to better the academic achievement of the students. The school is held accountable for using resources to effect student success and therefore they encourage community partners to use the data to help drive decision making.

**Appreciation.** A third theme that developed was the idea of showing appreciation. The school highly valued assuring that the community partners were appreciated while simultaneously the partners respected being thanked. Ms. Beach, Ms. Stratford, and the teachers equally felt that they were limited in the reciprocity of the community partnerships for which they were involved. There is not a lot that the school can give back to the partners other than gratitude and appreciation.

There seemed to be a strong belief that the community partners were looking for appreciation from the school. It appeared to be a vital element of the partnership. Ms. Beach describes her thoughts on showing appreciation.

I think that they definitely want to feel appreciated and I think that they know that if things are going the way they need to go, that they do like to get that “thank
you,” when they can… I don’t think it’s an expectation… they’re not doing it for something, other than making sure that the children are having success.

Showing appreciation was accomplished through writing thank you notes, creating artwork for partners to hang in their establishments, and acknowledging partners on the website, newsletter, and marquee. Showing appreciation is also a way to teach students that saying thank you is the appropriate response to a generous deed. Ms. Tangier describes her view on appreciation.

I think [sending thank you notes] shows appreciation… you could say you’re being greedy if you just ask, ask, ask and you don’t give back… It’s not the community’s job. It’s really nice when they do [support the school], because the school supports them by educating children that can read and write and do math so that they have an employee base later… they could say, “My tax dollars pay for your schools. My tax dollars pay for your salary. That should be sufficient… I don’t have to give anything else.”…. Definitely, thank you notes are a part of writing… they need to learn to write thank you notes, and that’s part of social skills training… there has to be a way that we’re teaching children to give back to their own community. Service learning is one of those things… definitely, if a community person or business has contributed to the school, the school and the students need to understand that this didn’t just come out of a hat somewhere. “People gave money so that you could have a court that was painted. And now you’re showing your thanks by giving them a card, and showing how much you appreciate what they did, and how you’re going to utilize it in learning.”
Ms. Smith agreed that sending thank you notes is the best way to show the community that their work is appreciated. She also believed in teaching students to show appreciations. She explains her view on showing appreciation.

I think it’s important that children write thank you notes, that children show their appreciation for the time that these people have spent coming into their rooms. That way people really know that we really do appreciate them coming in. We want to send the message to our kids that when you get something, you appreciate it, and you say thank you and you use manners. So we need to show children that when other people do things for us, like coming into our school, we need to show appreciation to them. And from what I hear, they really enjoy getting the letters…I think it’s definitely a motivating factor in them coming up again next year.

Ms. Reed supported the philosophy of showing appreciation to the community. She describes her view.

I just try to make sure in response to receiving things that we always make sure that the kids are writing thank you notes, and that they’re understanding where the things come from, and try to give a value to where they’re getting things from – that it wasn’t free, somebody had to work for it.

The teachers seemed to truly value teaching children to show appreciation. It seems as if they also value hard work and want to make sure that the children also learn to value it. Sending thank you notes showed their genuine gratitude for community support and served as a way to teach an important lesson to students.
The community partners appeared to feel that they were appreciated. They enjoyed the thank you notes and artwork and realized that even though it was a small token of appreciation it stood for enormous gratitude. Mr. Chesapeake expressed his gratitude of the school frequenting his establishment for a holiday party. This was another way that the school could say thank you. He explained his thoughts on appreciation.

Things are good at the school….I know the school appreciates what I do and they look like things are good…the people that I know and see from the school. The school does a lot of nice things. They came here for their holiday party….That looks like me helping them, but it was very nice for them to think of us, here, at the Crab Shack…to bring their business. Even though I helped them out by giving them a good deal, they did not have to come here. They could have gone anywhere and they came here. I think that shows that they try to thank me for what I do for them. We help each other out… (Laughter) it is all good.

Reciprocity in appreciation seemed to be very important. Each party seems to understand that they are getting something out of the relationship, but as long as it is mutual there seems to be an appreciation for the connection. Both parties want to feel and show appreciation. It is a way to nurture the relationship and make sure that it maintained for the future. Showing appreciation seemed to be critical in maintaining a positive relationship.

Nominating community partners for awards was another form of showing appreciation mentioned. There are several platforms in the community for which schools can nominate partners to receive recognition. One of the most prestigious awards is
given by a national funding agency for community projects. Mr. Landing describes how he won this award one year.

They actually caught me off-guard with that one….They just told me that there was some luncheon and that I should dress up nice…and it was just to say “thank you” for your work. All of a sudden they said, “Well, we’re going to talk about the nominees.” And I was like, “Oh, this is what’s going on,”…. And I didn’t really expect to win, I was just really happy…that they appreciated me enough to nominate me for the award. But it was fantastic….I received “Volunteer of the Year” award for education that year…it was really appreciated….I was happy that I got an award and…I was appreciative that they thought enough of me to nominate me for it. But then it started to kind of set in, and I was like, “Wow, that’s pretty cool.” And then a couple of months later I was running [pause] [laughter] for the second year…

Shell Elementary annually nominates their community partners for this award. Sea Ray Autos has also received awards for its dedication to providing financial and volunteer resources to the school. Ms. Beach believes in showing appreciation by nominating partners for awards. This is one way that the school can show gratefulness for the hard work of the community.

The school is limited on the how they can show appreciation. Policy limits the school’s ability to advertise businesses as a form of appreciation. This is intended to protect the students from exploitation. They are however permitted to say “thank you” to their partners by name, but the school can not be used as a platform for advertisements.
Websites and school newsletters must remain advertisement free. Ms. Stratford discussed her thoughts on the school’s limited ability to reciprocate partner generosity.

I understand that we can’t advertise for companies and things like that, but when I have companies that are giving sixty thousand dollars a year, I, I would like to…be able to say a little bit more than we can…maybe the district might want to consider readdressing how we handle those corporate donations or things like that, because I think if we sweeten the pot just a little bit more, I think that we would get more support…bottom line, everybody wants something. There is an agenda on everyone’s page…and I think that we could be a little bit more accommodating, because, basically we can’t give much more than artwork and, and that’s not always appropriate, or having the chorus sing there or things like that.

Ms. Stratford wants to give back to the community partners that support the school, but she doesn’t necessarily think about the repercussions of advertising for a business. It does not occur to her that there may be a potential for exploitation if businesses were allowed to advertise within the walls of a school. Her concern is in showing appreciation for the generosity of community partners of Shell Elementary.

The community partners also believed in showing the school appreciation for their hard work in educating students. Business partners supported teacher appreciation initiatives by donating time and money. Superior Seafood has historically been involved in teacher appreciation activities in the county. They support initiative on a large scale as well as at individual schools. Mr. River describes his involvement in the teacher of the year program.
We decided to get involved and advance the teacher of the year program. And we became a title sponsor back then and we have grown to be called the “founding sponsor,” now, of the teacher of the year program. And it is the premier event of this type. From what we have heard from our teachers of the year that have gone on to state finals, and some even on a national level, that what we do here in Ocean County is far and beyond anything that they’ve seen or heard from other teachers that they’ve spoken with anywhere else. So, we’re very proud of that and we love putting teachers up on a pedestal where they belong for what they do.

Tokens of appreciation given to teachers were thought to motivate teachers to continue working hard on behalf of students. Community partners appeared to willingly support teacher appreciation initiatives.

Appreciation was also mentioned in terms of what partners can personally gain from their involvement at the school. Community partners grew to appreciate their own successes in life through working with a high needs school. Ms. Ram explained how she personally felt rewarded and appreciated the opportunity to work with the school

I think that it’s unique, just to have a, a business partner that concentrates strictly on one school, but I can tell you that my husband…he’s a dentist, he has an office up the street, so I’m constantly encouraging him to participate in things like this, because I really feel as if the rewards are so much more beneficial from an individual standpoint…I feel like we gain so much more… interacting with the student and the faculty there…you have such an appreciation for really what you guys go through…. I think keeping in tune with that is so critical….I would say
that it’s been a great personal journey for me to be able to say, “I work for a company that gives back in this way,” and how much I appreciate it.

Community partners truly seemed to appreciate the partnership with the school on personal level. It appeared to be rewarding as an individual to give back to the community.

Communication, trust, and appreciation were three characteristics that surfaced throughout the interviews and seemed essential in building and maintaining a successful partnership between Shell Elementary and the community. Each participant mentioned these characteristics and portrayed them as existing in the current partnerships at the school. They seem to have grown over time and become stronger as the partners and the school worked together over the years.

**Reflections from my journal dated April 20, 2011.** Trust and longevity of the relationship is important in maintaining it. Having personal relationships is important in building a strong partnership. There seems to be respect between the educational system and the business viewpoint that each contributes to the other, but that each is still an expert in its own field. They feed off of each other and need each other at the same time. It is almost as if they are using each other, but both parties know it and are happy with the relationship as long as their needs are being met. Mr. River seems to feel this way and realizes the important role he plays in supporting the school, while the school district plays an important role in educating students that will later be an asset to his company.

**Reflections from my journal dated November 17, 2010.** Communication seems to be important to maintain a good partnership. Clear expectations communicate from the initial stages of the partnership help to maintain it so that both sides are happy.
The principal’s role is also important as her approval is needed for things to move forward.

Building and maintaining partnerships seems to have a well defined structure at this school. Everybody seems to have their roles and they keep in line with what is expected. The role of the parent liaison has appeared to put structure into the process and allow for the procedure to run smoothly. Staying within strict district/state/federal guidelines may be what has laid the foundation for building partnerships.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the data that were collected from November 2010 through May 2011. I described the setting of the case study and also included details about the partnership activities that occurred during the 2010-2011 school year. The data were sorted into three categories: 1) Building a Solid Infrastructure, 2) Defining Clear Roles, and 3) Demonstrating Collaborative Character. Building a solid infrastructure included information pertaining to mandated policy, a student centered focus, and the systems in place that pertain to partnerships. The information related to the roles of the principal, the school staff, and the community was delineated. The collaborative character traits that were identified include communication, trust, and appreciation. The themes that emerged during the study were described in relationship to the research questions proposed allowing for a thorough analysis to occur.
Chapter Five

Discussion

In this chapter I discuss the findings of this study. I begin with a summary of the study which includes the overview of the problem, a review of the purpose statement and research questions, a review of the methodology, and the major findings of the study. I then discuss my findings related to the literature in which a reviewed. I proceed to discuss any surprises I found while analyzing the data. I end this chapter with conclusions and implications for action, and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

Schools that work successfully with the community and ascertain community support tend to have community partnerships that positively influence student outcomes. Due to the increased needs of students in the United States, schools have had to respond in a way that focuses on increased student achievement and overall student success. Collaborative relationships between schools and the community are a response to dealing with various challenges that students face daily in their lives.

Overview of the problem. I believe it is necessary to comprehend at length the relationship between the school and the community especially from the viewpoint of the community partner in particular businesses. A sense of urgency has surfaced for schools and communities to join forces regarding educational issues as the aspiration to stay competitive in the global world increases and the challenge to build a competitive
workforce rises (Wang & Boyd, 2000). Building partnerships that are effective and meet the goals of all the partners involved require relationships and connections that have been fostered between schools and the surrounding community.

**Purpose statement and research questions.** I decided to conduct a case study and examine the relationship between Shell Elementary and the community that supports it. I chose to explore a school in a high poverty neighborhood and study what the school does to foster relationships within the community and vice versa. I decided to study this nature of school because of the Federal Title I program requirements of schools that serve children from predominately low socioeconomic backgrounds to build partnerships within the community. Minimal information was known however on how exactly partnerships are built and maintained between a school and the community.

I sought to understand how community partnerships are facilitated and maintained specifically at Shell Elementary. In addition, I wanted to figure out why the community partners became involved with the school, and if and how they benefited from the relationship. Specifically, with this study I attempted to answer these questions:

1) What are the characteristics of a collaborative relationship between a school and the surrounding community that are essential in order to build partnerships that meet the goals of each participant involved?

2) What are the roles of the school leader, support staff, and community members in building relationships between the school and the community?

The completion of a case study allowed me to find answers to these questions and gain a better understanding of the topic at hand.
**Review of the methodology.** I selected case study research as my methodology in order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the participant’s perspectives on building school and community partnerships. I decided to conduct a case study of Shell Elementary in order to answer the guiding questions and better understand the participant’s experiences. This allowed me to examine the school in-depth. Using case study methodology revealed how Shell Elementary functions in a natural setting in regards to building and maintaining partnerships in the community. I chose to focus on four sets of data: 1) interviews, 2) documents related to the study, 3) field notes, and 4) a researcher reflective journal. I utilized these data sets in order to determine common themes on the perspective of building school and community partnerships. I stayed mindful of my role as the researcher and continuously reflected on the impact my style has on the participants.

**Major findings**

I used the social constructivism theoretical framework to better understand how effective partnerships are built and maintained. It is essential to comprehend the meaning that the individual has placed on the partnership within the structure of its social and historical context. Three major themes emerged as a result of the data collection and analysis. Building a solid infrastructure emerged as the foundation of strong partnership between the school and the community. Adhering to mandated policy, focusing on student centered goals, and working within systems were vital elements of building a solid infrastructure. Defining clear roles also emerged as instrumental. The roles of the principal, school staff, and community were clearly defined. Demonstrating collaborative character traits emerged as a third theme that was necessary to build a
positive relationship. The meaning that the community partners and school staff have put on building relationships became apparent.

Each theme is made up of various elements that define it. Building a solid infrastructure requires that the school and community focus on mandated policy, remain student centered, and put systems in place to help manage the various partnerships and related activities. Defining clear roles focuses on the principal, the school staff, and the community. Each partner and staff member has to understand his or her role and work within the clearly defined structure of that role. Demonstrating collaborative character traits is at the core of the relationship building process. Communication, trust, and appreciation are elements of the various relationships that appeared instrumental in maintaining a strong connection.

Several key components emerged as part of each element of each theme. The elements and components that make up each theme are depicted in Figure 12. The findings support the existing literature reviewed and add to the literature in filling presented gaps. Building a solid infrastructure requires that the school and community adhere to mandated policy, remain student centered, and work within the systems in place. A formalized structure is vital in forming effective partnerships (WestEd Policy Brief, 2007). Mandated policy consists of Federal, State, and District policies that focus on school and community partnerships with the intent of improving student achievement. Both the school personnel and the community partners describe the policies as restrictive at times, but necessary to assure the safety of the students and the integrity of the relationships. They make certain that students and parents are not turned into mindless consumers who are bombarded with advertisements inside the school. The district
policies, in particular, aim to protect students from exploitation from business partnerships and to assure the financial fidelity of partnerships. The community businesses and organizations have policies of their own to which they must adhere and which guide their involvement in the community and the level of participation they have

Figure 12. Elements and Components of a Collaborative Relationship
with schools. Outcomes seem to drive the policies of the community partners. The businesses as well as the foundation need to see a return on their investment in the way of building community capital through improved student achievement in order to measure the success of the partnership.

Student centered partnerships are another element of building a solid infrastructure. The focus remains on student achievement through activities aligned with curriculum as well as supporting the whole child and his or her family. It is vital for both the community and the school staff to share a vision of partnerships that focuses on improving student achievement. Focusing on services that address barriers to learning and school is key to success (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2008). Activities consistently align with this vision and data must regularly be reviewed to assure that academic gains are being made throughout the year. Keeping the partnership student centered is significant to successfully achieving goals (Sanders, 2006). The teachers are the experts on making sure that partnership activities are aligned with the curriculum being taught in the classroom and support their teaching efforts. The community partners, the parent liaison, and the principal trust their expertise and rely on them to give input during planning and to provide feedback on the success of partnership activities. Support for students and their families outside of academics is also important when the end result would allow the student to then focus more efficiently on academics.

The third element of building a solid infrastructure is assuring that there are systems in place in which school and community partnerships can be developed and sustained within limits of mandated policies. The School Improvement Plan (SIP) is consistently used as a planning tool that focuses on improving student achievement.
Partnership activities have to be aligned with the goals of the SIP and performance data is used to evaluate success. This allows for the development of relationships that are clearly student centered with clear expectations of the roles and responsibilities of each partner. The School Advisory Council (SAC) is the forum utilized to assist the principal and faculty in the development, implementation and monitoring of the SIP which is required by legislation. An effective partnership team with external support is necessary to build a thriving relationship (Sanders, 2006). Governance by a body such as the School Advisory Council (SAC) leads to partnership oversight and assurance that student achievement is the driving force (Marzano, 2003). It also serves to protect students from exploitation from business partners and assure that partnerships do not undermine curricular messages and take time away from learning. Community partners are important members of the process and contribute to the support of the school’s mission. Successful partnerships are formed through collaborative relationships where all stakeholders participate in decision making and the evaluation of the achievement of partnership goals (Steriger, 2007). The Title I Tool Box is another tool that is used to document partnership activities and the school’s relationship with the community. The system of using the Title I Tool Box assures that all documentation is kept up to date and the school is operating within the limits of the mandated policies. These systems serve a purpose and seem to enhance partnership activities by keeping them student focused and both the community and the school working towards clear goals.

Defining clear roles is necessary in order for partnerships to thrive. Each stakeholder plays an important role in the process and demonstrates characteristics of a collaborative relationship that are required in order to build a strong partnership. The
participants from the school and community have shaped thoughts about their role in the education of children. The relationship is built on the foundation of a solid infrastructure and remains student centered.

The principal’s role is that of an authority figure and an ambassador for the school in the community. This role is vital in maintaining partnerships (Johnson, 2007). A principal who believes in working with the community, makes forming partnerships a priority, and fosters strong relationships with the community is essential (Ferguson, 2005b; Sanders, 2006). Ms. Beach appears to be a transformational leader in her utilization of teamwork and collaboration of stakeholders to inform decision making on school improvement initiatives. Transformational leadership is ideal for sustaining successful school and community partnerships. Her participation is essential in facilitating a positive relationship between the school and the community partners.

Ms. Beach is vital in building positive relationships and maintaining them through positive communication as well as her commitment to serving children. She empowers those individuals with direct interest or involvement in the school to focus on student achievement goals. She shares power and fosters connections that benefit the school and community as a whole while placing responsibility for change on all stakeholders (Northouse, 2010). Her visibility at the school and during partnership events is evidence of her commitment to success. Her willingness to pay for a fulltime Parent Liaison also demonstrates her dedication to building strong relationships with the community. She is the authority at the school and ultimately responsible for assuring that the various systems are functioning within the realms of mandated policy. Successful partnerships are sustained by transformational leaders that deem community collaboration as valuable
in supporting school efforts and have a thorough understanding of the relationship
between the various systems that exist in a student’s world (Sanders & Harvey, 2002;
Ferguson, 2005). Schools and communities thrive when led by transformational leaders
who focus on student success.

The role of the school leader is instrumental in developing and maintaining school
and community partnerships, but teachers and school staff also play an instrumental part
in the relationships (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Transformational leaders assure
that their staff is included in the change process as experts in their field (Marzano,
Waters, & McNulty, 2005). School personnel are the creators and implementers of
partnership activities. The Parent Liaison may be the single most important person at the
school who works with the community. She serves to collaborate with the teachers, the
principal, and the community. She coordinates partnership activities while adhering to
policy. It is instrumental for partnership activities to be coordinated in an effort to
maximize resources. Successful partnerships have a coordinator in place whose role is to
facilitate relationships and work toward goal attainments (Wang & Boyd, 2000). Ms.
Stratford’s role is fulltime which allows her the time and opportunity to concentrate on
building partnerships and nurturing those in existence. Learning about her position from
her perspective added to the small body of literature on partnership coordinators. Her
role is unique in that many schools do not pay for this position.

The teachers serve as ambassadors to the community. Their visibility in the
community as citizens allows them to communicate with potential and current partners
and bring information back to the parent liaison. They are instrumental in identifying the
needs of the students and keeping the focus of partnerships on student achievement.
They also focus on civic partnerships that support guiding students in critical inquiry. Partnerships that focus on curricular resources are sparse in the literature. The role of the teacher helps to fill that gap as they were influential in bringing resources directly related to teaching in the classroom. Teachers in the classroom often see firsthand the work of the partners and the success of the students. They are also often the first to identify needs of students that can be addressed through community involvement (Payne, 2001). They are essential in teaching students about appreciation and creating tokens of appreciation for the community partners.

The community has an important role in supporting education by agreeing to partnerships that are student centered and geared at school improvement. Community partners have a desire to build a fruitful community and understand that supporting education will potentially lead to that goal. Transformational leaders utilize the expertise of the entire school community to facilitate change and meet desired goals. Business partnerships benefit schools through financial support as well as partnership activities that involve volunteers. Ascertaining the point of view of the business partners was previously missing from the literature. Business leaders serve as advocates of education and help schools remain viable in a global economy while increasing the competitiveness of the workforce (Nelson, Palonsky, and McCarthy, 2007). Partners must show trust and appreciation for the school staff who are the experts in education and know what services will benefit their students. The community is also responsible for making sure that they communicate their own needs so that they can gain from the partnership as well. They must do this in a way that does not turn education into commercialism. The community
has a stake in the success of students and schools therefore their role is to be part of building that success.

Demonstrating collaborative character is essential in forming and maintaining a successful partnership between the school and the community. The characteristics that are important in building and maintaining partnerships are visible in the various roles and important to maintaining a solid infrastructure. Building a relationship seemed to be essential in establishing a strong partnership. Communication, trust, and appreciation are important elements in developing a productive relationship that led to positive outcomes for both the school and the community partners. Fostering authentic community engagement in communities that leads to expected outcomes for all stakeholders involved is most productive when schools and community members work together.

Communication between the school and the community is crucial in building a strong partnership. Engagement in two-way communication is essential in long lasting partnerships (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Communication involving not only giving out information, but also listening was identified as vital. The communication must be reciprocal so that both participants feel comfortable expressing their ideas and can come to a mutual agreement regarding partnership activities. Communication lines must be kept open so that misunderstandings are avoided. Clear expectations are a central component in communication. The school must express its expectations to the community partner and be willing to listen to feedback. Equally as important is the partner’s comfort in expressing their expectations to the school and feeling as if they were heard. A third component of communication is assuring that roles are clearly
defined. Openly communicating the responsibility of each participant assures that all stakeholders understand the function of their role in the partnership.

Trust is a second element that is vital in building a collaborative relationship between the school and the community. Trust was not mentioned in the literature reviewed, but it surfaced as critical in the conversations with the school staff and partners. Meeting expectations is one part of building trust. Trust is built over time when expectations of the partnership are met and each participant can count on the other to follow through with his or her part of the agreement. Another component in trust is having respect for each other’s area of expertise. The community trusts that the school knows best how to enhance academics for students. The teachers are trained experts in education with the principal as their instructional leader. The community supports their proficiency and follows their lead on implementing support activities. Also instrumental in building trust is maintaining a welcoming environment where the school is open to community involvement. A welcoming environment was found to support building relationships with the community (Marzano, 2003; Sanders, 2006; Johnson, 2007). School leadership is vital in promoting activities that create a welcoming environment where partner expertise is desired (Lawson, Claiborne, Hardiman, Austin, & Surko, 2007). The principal and staff trust the community to come into the school for the purpose of improving student achievement. Data are shared openly for the purposes of planning. There is a high level of trust that each participant has the best interest of the students and families in mind.

Appreciation is the third element in demonstrating collaborative character. The community strongly supports education by showing appreciation for teachers and their
hard work. Appreciation is yet another theme that was not evident in the literature although it was mentioned repeatedly by participants. The principal, parent liaison, and teachers demonstrated appreciation for community participation on a regular basis. Although policies often limit the type of appreciation that a school can show to a community partner, the school staff was creative in expressing thoughts of gratitude and used venues such as student artwork and thank you letters. Policies prohibit advertising in schools, on the website, or on the school’s marquee. It was important to the school staff that the students learn to express appreciation and therefore they modeled this character trait to the students. Teaching students to show gratitude was particularly important to the teachers.

The concept that student success can be positively influenced through collaborative relationships with the community is supported by research. Collaborative relationships between schools and the community lead to learners who thrive in school and continue their education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Schools that purposefully commit to improving school-family-community relationships have a greater number of students who perform on level or above compared to those who do not focus on partnerships (Sheldon, 2003). Students benefit from receiving extra support which leads to improved academic achievement (Bryan, 2005; Dryfoos, 2000). Strong school and community partnerships also lead to greater cultural capital for families in need which promotes higher student success. Henderson and Mapp (2002) identified the following five areas in which schools can benefit from community partnerships: 1) upgraded school facilities, 2) improved school leadership and staffing, 3) higher-quality learning programs for students, 4) new resources and programs to improve teacher and curriculum, and 5)
new funding for after-school programs and family supports. These were consistent with my findings. Simultaneously, community partners benefit from maintaining a strong relationship with schools by developing a future workforce that is productive and contributes to society as a whole (Sanders, 2003). Businesses may also benefit from school partnerships through increasing their consumer base and potential customers (Spring, 2008). Schools and communities work together in a way that leads to mutually positive outcomes for the school and the community.

A successful partnership between a school and the surrounding community leads to academic success for students. At Shell Elementary partnerships are built through collaboration of the principal, parent liaison, teachers, and community members. Sustaining relationships with the community that lead to positive outcomes is accomplished through building a solid infrastructure, keeping the focus on student achievement, and developing a clear system for supporting partnerships. Communication, trust, and appreciation are key elements of a collaborative relationship. An authentic relationship between a school and the surrounding community is essential in order to build partnerships that are effective and meet the goals of all the partners involved.

**Final Reflections**

Many surprises were revealed as a result of this process. One of the biggest surprises was the various socially constructed beliefs that surfaced throughout the interviews. Participant’s beliefs seemed to stem from their various experiences. The school staff seemed to have a strong belief system regarding what it means to live in poverty. Ms. Stratford described the neighborhood in which the school is located based
on its looks. “The community is…its pretty well kept…for a working class community, so it’s not a totally impoverished area.” She has a certain belief about what a neighborhood surrounding a school with a high percentage of free and reduced lunch students should look like. She comes to her position with a belief system about poverty. Her belief system may influence how she builds relationships with the community. Ms. Smith also lets her belief about poverty show through. “Ninety-seven percent of our children are on free and reduced lunch, so that means their lunch is paid for….We have had a lower number of parent involvement, but as the years have progressed, it seems that our parents are trying to get more involved.” It is interesting how her mention of free lunch is followed with her view of parent involvement. It seems as if she naturally associates poverty with low parent involvement. Ms. Reed also indicates her feelings about the parents and has the attitude that they owe something back to the school. “I don’t think they [parents] realize what’s done for their students by the teacher. I don’t think that they realize how much effort and time goes in by the community as a whole to raise their children.” She seems to have a strong belief that people should work hard for what they get. There is also an undertone in the discussions surrounding teaching appreciation and hard work that this is possibly an ethic they are not taught anywhere else. There seems to be an underlying theme regarding poverty and parental involvement. Who is it that needs to appreciate the hard work so much? Is it the student or perhaps the parent? The unspoken message appears to be that if the parents worked harder then there may not be such a great need for community support. It is not said forthright, but the underlying socially constructed belief seemed to be surfacing.
Another socially constructed belief that seemed prominent is the idea that education leads to a strong community and that strong community builds businesses. The philosophy of the business community appeared to be to support their own interests through partnering with the school. The school has a goal and the community partners have a goal. They all have their priority, but they realize that together they can achieve it more successfully. Each uses the other to get the end goal. With improved academic achievement as a result, it is difficult to argue that the partnership relationship is anything but positive. Everybody wants something. There is an agenda on everyone’s page. As long as students are protected from exploitation and the energy that the school puts into the partnerships is relative to the outcome it appears that the partnership is working and each party is satisfied.

One of the biggest surprises was the reason why community members individually choose their roles in the partnership. The partners interviewed all had a personal history of participating in community service activities or expressed what appeared to be a sincere desire to improve the conditions of the community. Even though they may represent a company or an organization, they are individuals who are in their specific roles by choice. Education was viewed as the mechanism in which to make a change in the community. A different company choice could have been made. The individuals spoke about the personal desire to facilitate change. Ms. Ram and Mr. River could have chosen a different job or role within the company, but each chose the position in which they serve. Building a partnership with a community member that finds working with schools rewarding seems to lead to a stronger connection between the
participants. Schools may find success in looking for community partners that have a personal interest in the school or are personally committed to supporting education.

Another revelation was the high level of participation in school governance on the part of some of the community partners, while simultaneously respecting the expertise of the educators in final decision making processes. The community partners, including the businesses, did not try to impose their own model or philosophy of organization or leadership on the school. They seemed to recognize that the school is unique in that their end product is knowledge and is very different from a tangible product. This finding did not support the research on school and business partnerships that deem these types of partnerships as harmful to students (Boyles, 2005; Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2007; Spring, 2008). The district policies attempt to protect students from harm and focus on partnerships that have an educational benefit for children. Although this particular study was not aimed at uncovering the benefit or harm to students, but rather on how schools and community businesses build relationships, it was clear that the systems in place were designed to shield students from exposure to commercialism and provide them with tools necessary to achieve academically.

Finally, my role as the researcher was revealed to be very important. I served as the research instrument as I led the interviews, scrutinized the documents, and kept the researcher reflective journal. The process of keeping the journal allowed me to freely document my thoughts and feelings as they surfaced. I did not feel constrained to answer a certain question or maintain a certain perspective while I wrote in my journal. I utilized my own unique style and was able to reflect on the information gathered in a way that helped me to synthesize my findings and make meaning of my discoveries.
Implications for action

Implications for policy can be made as a result of this study. The need for community support in the continued improvement of the educational system seems to be greater as the economic struggles of the country continue. Federal, state, and local policy makers need to focus on building community support in order to fill in some of the gaps where resources fall short. The focal point of action should stay on student centered partnerships that are aimed at improving student achievement and are aligned with the adopted curriculum of the involved school system. Systems should be designed that structure school and community partnerships in a way where stakeholders share governance and decisions are data driven. Business partnerships are often spotlighted as influencing students through the use of marketing strategies. They are viewed as being convenient for the business world and often exploitative to students. Safeguards in partnerships should always be put in place to assure that students are not exploited at the advantage of businesses or any stakeholder with a different motive in mind.

This study filled in several gaps that existed in the literature that can be utilized in order to build successful partnerships that meet the goals of both the school and the community. Obtaining the view of the business partners was instrumental and had previously been lacking from the literature. Business partnerships can benefit schools by providing resources that are often lacking from school budgets. Partnerships can be built with businesses that help lead to the goal of student achievement and concurrently promote the goals of the business while assuring that students are protected from exploitation. This information can be used in planning future partnerships. The concepts of building trust and showing appreciation added to the existing body of literature. These
characteristics were deemed valuable for both the school and community participants. Realizing the significance of these characteristics can be used in building partnerships that are gratifying to both the school and the community.

The role of the parent liaison stood out as key in building and maintaining successful partnerships. The principal at Shell Elementary made the choice to spend her Title I money on this position. She seemed to understand the benefits that this role brought to the school and decided that it was well worth the investment. This also shows her commitment to building partnerships with the community. Principals in Title I schools who have decision making power on how to spend the federal money budgeted to their school should consider the possible benefits that this role could bring to their school. Policy makers at the district level should also consider implementing procedures and providing resources to guarantee that each school has a specific person designated as a community liaison. This would give surety that relationships are built within the community and maintained to assure positive outcomes. The focus of partnership would remain educationally relevant and enhance the learning taking place in the classroom. The parent liaison position appeared valuable and was at the center of assuring partnerships were sought after and maintained with respect to all stakeholders and the educational goals of the school. Identifying a key member of the school to focus on partnerships also promises a stronger adherence to policies in order to protect students from commercialism and exploitation.

**Recommendations for further research**

The findings of this research study lead to recommendations for future research that could further add to the body of literature on the topic of school and community
partnerships. Expanded research could include a variety of school types and settings. Examining schools in affluent communities and how they build partnerships would be one area of research that is lacking in the literature. In particular, school partnership with businesses may look different in more affluent communities and there may be more issues related to commercialism due to families having more means to patron the partnering establishments. Rural communities may be another segment of the populations to explore. Potential barriers to school and community partnerships due to geographical location may add an element of difficulty in maintaining relationships. This would be beneficial to investigate. Exploring school and community partnerships in middle and high schools may also add to the existing literature. Critical thinking skills at this age level are more developed and should be continuously challenged by teachers. Students may have more of an opinion about community partners and their involvement in the schools. This would be an area to explore in which teacher and principal involvement may differ as well. Asking similar questions to different types of schools may lead to a greater knowledge of the relationships between schools and the community.

Another possible area for future research in the field of school and community partnerships might be from the student and parent perspective. School and community partnerships are considered necessary and beneficial to academic achievement. However, little is known about what the students and parents think about these partnerships. Are they viewed as helpful? Are families more likely to frequent a business or utilize the services of a community partner because they partner with the school? These are a few questions that could be asked. Capturing the viewpoint of the parents and students would
add to the literature and provide further knowledge that could be considered in implementing new partnerships.

A third possible area of investigation could be a qualitative examination of the partnerships that exist at the whole district level. Larger partnerships are often established at the district level that affects the entire school system. Developing and maintaining these types of partnerships may look different than what is done at the school level. Obtaining the vision of district leadership and school board members in regards to school and community partnerships may add to the body of knowledge that currently exists. With higher academic expectations and shrinking school budgets, how does building partnerships with the community play into the equation of school success? Do these larger types of partnerships further commercialize schools? These are just a few questions that could be addressed in future research.

Concluding remarks

It is imperative to gain a thorough understanding of how thriving partnerships are developed and maintained in order for schools to benefit from successful relationships with the community. Student success leads to whole school success which eventually results in community success. Examining partnerships through the lens of community resulted in the obtainment of important information that has been missing from the literature thus far. A systematic assessment of how relationships are built and maintained addresses a gap in the existing literature and makes a considerable impact in the field of research on school and community partnerships. The case study I conducted adds to what is currently known about school and community partnerships by filling in some of the gaps in the existing body of research.
Schools are more successful with community involvement and engagement. Principal leadership and belief in community engagement is essential in order to build capacity between a school and the community. It is important for community members to realize their role in supporting the goals of the school and be willing to become active participants in fostering a positive relationship that leads to improved student achievement. Relationships and connections ought to be fostered between schools and the surrounding community in order to build partnerships that are effective and meet the goals of all the partners involved.

Building a solid infrastructure, defining clear roles, and demonstrating collaborative character are essential in maintaining flourishing partnerships. At Shell Elementary successful partnerships are built mainly through the Title I Parent Liaison in collaboration with the teachers and with support from the principal. The Parent Liaison role is critical in facilitating a positive relationship between the school and the partners. She is vital in building positive relationships and maintaining them through positive communication, building trust, and showing appreciation. Positive relationships between the school and the community are most successful when mandated policy is followed, partnerships remain student centered, and clear systems are in place. Fostering authentic community engagement in struggling communities that leads to expected outcomes for all stakeholders involved is most productive when schools and community members work together.
References


Appendices
Appendix A

Letter to Participants Explaining Study

Dear __________________________,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. I am pursuing my dissertation topic on Perspectives of Building School and Community Partnerships. My committee members are Dr. Zorka Karanxha, Dr. Valerie J. Janesick, Dr. Margareth Kusenbach, and Dr. Patricia Alvarez-McHatton. The purpose of this study is to describe and explain selected participants perspectives on how a school builds authentic relationships with the community. Your participation in this study is requested. Participation in the study will require approximately two one-hour in-depth interviews. The interviews will, with your permission, be taped and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, you will not be identified by name on the tape. I and/or a professional typist will be transcribing the tapes. An outside reader will read the transcription of the tape; however, they will be able to identify participants as Participant A, or Participant B, etc. The audio files will be kept in a safe at my house. Each participant will be offered a copy of the audio files as well as a copy of the transcription. The participants and I will be the only ones with access to the audio files. Once the interviews are transcribed from a copy of the audio file, the audio file will be returned to me and erased. The master audio file will remain in my possession and will be destroyed three years after the publication of the dissertation. Interviews will be arranged at your convenience. The tentative schedule calls for one interview in October 2010 and a member check in November 2010. In addition, you may be asked to share relevant artifacts and documents. Your name and the name of the school and any other information gathered in this study will remain confidential and will only be used for educational purposes. I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my request. I look forward to your participation in the study.

The study has been approved by the USF Internal Review Board (IRB). If you have any concerns you may contact the IRB at (813) 974-9343. My major professor, Dr. Zorka Karanxha can also be contacted at (813) 974-6040.

Sincerely,

Myrna L. Hogue
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

IRB Study # Pro00002046

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study.

We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called:
A Case Study of Perspectives on Building School and Community Partnerships

The person who is in charge of this research study is Myrna Hogue. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge.

The research will be done at Shell Elementary School.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explain selected participants perspectives on how a school builds relationships with the community. This study is being conducted for a dissertation.

Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to discuss your views on building school and community partnerships. The study is expected to last from November, 2010 to August, 2011. Ten participants will be interviewed. The interviews will be one hour each in length and each participant will be interviewed twice. The audio tapes will be protected in my home and will be kept for five years.
**Alternatives**

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

**Benefits**

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study. The potential benefits to you are to contribute to the body of knowledge about successful school and community partnerships.

**Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

**Compensation**

We will not pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study. Participation is voluntary.

**Confidentiality**

We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. Members will be completely anonymous. All names will be changed for reasons of confidentiality. This information will only be known to me and the chair of my dissertation committee.

However, certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator and Dissertation Chair.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety. These include:
  - The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the staff that work for the IRB. Other individuals who work for USF that provide other kinds of oversight may also need to look at your records.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are.

**Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study, to please the investigator or the research staff. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be
no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Myrna Hogue at (813) 416-2026.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-5638.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

______________________________
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

______________________________
Date

______________________________
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands:

- What the study is about.
- What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used.
- What the potential benefits might be.
- What the known risks might be.

______________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

______________________________
Date

______________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Appendix C

Interview Protocols

Protocol A: Interview with Parent Liaison

1. Can you describe your role at the school?

2. How would you describe the community in which your school is located?

3. How would you describe the school? What is the culture of the school?

4. How do you describe community partnerships?

5. What types of partnerships does your school currently have with the community? Are there any “in the works or planned? What is your “vision” with these partnerships?

   What are the expected goals and outcomes? For each one give details.

6. What was/is your role in developing these partnerships?

7. What are some of the most important factors in developing and maintaining relationships with community partners?

8. What is the role of the principal?

9. What is the role of the partners?

10. Can you talk about any problems or challenges in making these connections? Give some examples. How could these challenges be overcome?

11. Is there a specific policy that governs your school and community partnerships?

   What are your feelings/thoughts about this policy?

12. How do you see the relationship of the school to community in the future?

13. After reviewing the transcripts from the first interview, is there anything on which you would like to comment or expand?
14. Is there anything else that I didn’t ask but you consider important about school and community partnerships?

15. Do you have any questions for me?

**Protocol B: Interview with Community Partners**

1. Tell me about your company/establishment. What is the culture of the company?

2. Tell me about the history of your relationship with Shell Elementary.

3. How would you describe your partnership with Shell Elementary?

4. What type of activities do you do for the students? Teachers? School wide?

5. What makes you want to continue your relationship with the school?

6. What type of outcomes are you hoping to achieve through your partnership?

7. What does the school do in order to maintain the partnership?

8. Who are the people that have been instrumental in developing and maintaining the relationship?

9. Tell me about your partnership activities so far this year.

10. Tell me about the principal’s role in your partnerships.

11. What makes you continue to maintain a relationship with this school?

12. Is there anything that you would like to see differently in the partnership with the school?

14. After reviewing the transcripts from the first interview, is there anything on which you would like to comment or expand?

15. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your partnership with the school?

16. Do you have any questions for me?
Protocol C: Interview with Principal

1. Tell me about your principalship at this school.
2. Tell me about your school and its needs.
3. Tell me about your school and its community partnerships.
4. What is the culture of your school when it comes to partnerships in the community?
5. What is your role in building and sustaining partnerships?
6. Who are the other key participants and what is their role in forming partnerships?
7. What are your expectations from partnering with the community?
8. What do you think are your partner’s expectations from partnering with the school?
9. Tell me about the current partnerships you have with the community.
10. What makes you to continue working with these partners?
11. What challenges have you had with partnerships?
12. How do federal/local policies influence these partnerships?
13. After reviewing the transcripts from the first interview, is there anything on which you would like to comment or expand?
14. Is there anything else you think would help me further understand the partnerships between your school and the community?
15. Do you have any questions for me?

Protocol D: Interview with Teacher

1. Tell me about Shell Elementary? Describe the culture of your school.
2. Tell me about your school’s community partnerships.
3. What are teachers’ roles in developing these partnerships?
4. Tell be about the outcomes of these partnership for the students in your classroom?

The school? You as a teacher?

5. What are some challenges that you see in sustaining successful partnerships?

6. Tell me about the partnerships at your school this year.

7. How have you been involved in developing and sustaining these partnerships?

8. Are there any specific examples of partnerships that you feel have been extremely successful?

9. Are there any specific examples of partnerships that you feel have not been successful?

10. After reviewing the transcripts from the first interview, is there anything on which you would like to comment or expand?

11. Is there anything else you think would help me further understand the partnerships between your school and the community?

12. Do you have any questions for me?
Appendix D
Member Check Form

Dear _________________.

Thank you for an enjoyable and insightful interview. Attached please find a draft copy of the verbatim transcripts of the interview. Please review the transcription for accuracy and completeness of responses. Please feel free to contact me at (813-416-2026) or via email at (mhogue@mail.usf.edu) should you have any questions. If I do not hear from you by __________, _____2010, I will assume that you agree with the attached draft of the transcription.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study.

Myrna Hogue

From: Janesick, 2004
Appendix E

Peer Reviewer/Outside Reviewer Form

I, __________________________, have served as a peer reviewer/outside reviewer for A Case Study of Perspectives on Building Effective Partnerships Between a School and the Community by Myrna L. Hogue. In this role, I have worked with the researcher throughout the study in capacities such as reviewing transcripts and assisting in identifying emerging issues.

Signed: ________________________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________________________

From: Janesick, 2004
Appendix F

About the Author

Myrna L. Hogue received her Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Miami with a major in psychology in 1994. She earned a Masters in Social Work from the University of South Florida in 1998 and thereafter became a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW). She worked in the field of mental health prior to becoming employed by the district for which she currently works. After ten years of serving as a school social worker in the Head Start Program as well as three Title I schools and earning her certification in Educational Leadership she advanced to the role of Coordinator of Social Work Services. Hogue plans to continue incorporating her knowledge and skills in the area of social work into leadership opportunities in the school district. Hogue is married to Ernest J. Hogue and has two sons, Thomas James, 14, and Justin Taylor, 11. The Hogue Family resides in Odessa, Florida.