

1. A Review of Research: To Develop a Conceptual Framework for Educational Partnerships

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The article revisits the literature on educational partnerships in an attempt to re-frame and update conceptual frameworks to be used by school and district leaders for partnership development and evaluation. It also synthesizes and analyzes empirical literature specific to developing educational partnerships or analyzing the strengths that contribute to the development of a conceptual framework - published between 1990 and 2018. Finally, the article presents perspectives of partnerships from education literature in preface to a proposed conceptual framework specific to educational partnerships. The article concludes with recommendations for advancing the literature on partnerships.

Keywords: *Educational Partnerships, Conceptual Framework, Developing Strengths in Partnerships, Evaluation of Partnerships*

Researchers agree that one of the critical challenges looming over secondary education is the need to guarantee learning opportunities for all students that will prepare them for the workforce and transition them into a high demand, high wage careers (Mann et al., 2018; McIver & Farley, 2005; Musset & Kurekova, 2018; Watters & Christensen, 2013). One way that educators resolve to meet this challenge is by creating partnerships with businesses and other community organizations (Bottoms, 2012; Castellano et al., 2003; Griffith & Wade, 2002). Over two decades ago, Tushnet (1993) found that educational partnerships with industry helped to connect students to the world around them, to their community's resources, and to the careers in which they will soon embark. In recent years, similar results on the benefits of school-industry partnerships were also published by Mann et al. (2018). Watters & Christensen (2013) and Musset & Kurekova (2018) discovered that the hands-on learning, associated with career and technical education, engaged students while also reinforcing conceptual understanding, but more importantly, their research showed that the hands-on learning, has more value when it occurs in the workplace. This means that working on real problems in actual job environments makes learning more relevant. These researchers also discovered that such experiences enriched learning results and prepared students to be knowledgeable, skilled workers (Musset & Kurekova, 2018; Watters & Christensen, 2013).

Significance of Study

Educational partnerships have been hot topics in popular, political, and professional literature (Baker, 1994; Mann et al., 2018; Musset & Kurekova, 2018). Partnerships have also been promoted in policy and legislation as seen in the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, the Higher Education Act of 1998, and the re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Baker, 1994; Barnett et al., 2010). For years, Departments of Education have promoted the implementation and sustainment of partnerships with grant programs (Baker, 1994). National policy initiatives for school-industry partnerships in Australia have made progress over the past 10 years (Torii, 2018). The Business-School Connections Roundtable (2011), the STEM Partnerships Forum (2017), and the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (2018) are a few of the initiatives implemented to strengthen school-community engagement to enhance student learning (Torii, 2018). Partnership with business organizations provide an avenue for accomplishing many of the goals set for educational institutions. They extend the walls of classrooms and provide relevance to ordinary lessons (Musset & Kurekova, 2018).

School leaders would benefit from a conceptual framework to guide them through partnership development and growth. Presently, school leaders are left to stumble through the role of school liaison to potential partners with little guidance. Practicing school leaders also need research to guide them in the craft of partnerships. Research on educational partnerships is needed for universities to use to educate school leaders on how to plan, develop, and sustain the partnerships. This present research is crucial to gain a better understanding of how partnerships work and how to foster their success. School leaders need guidance on how to create collaborative partnerships in their schools and to develop them for a variety of purposes.

Educational Partnerships Defined

Cardini (2006) defined partnerships as fundamental collaboration between at least two organizations for a joint purpose. Billett et al. (2007) described educational partnerships as a

strategy by which to comprehend and tackle concerns for building social capital. Jones et al. (2016) stated that employers engage in educational partnerships to build social and cultural capital for young people. Educational partnerships with business and industry have existed for decades (Watters & Christensen, 2013) and are described as “complex and varied” (Cardini, 2006, p. 398) and challenging to develop and sustain (Barnett et al., 2010). Watters & Christensen (2013) discerned that opportunities in the workplace environment, although difficult to maintain, enriched learning results and prepare students to be knowledgeable, skilled workers. Billet et al. (2007) cautioned on the complexity and challenges of educational partnerships. Some researchers suggest that a partnership should be regarded as a process rather than an event (Barnett et al., 2010; Grobe et al., 1990; Stanley & Mann, 2014).

Most partnerships are developed through trial and error, and no two partnerships are exactly the same in the manner in which they are enacted or sustained (Walters & Christensen, 2013). This diversity requires differences in the conceptualization and operation of partnerships. It also requires an understanding of partnerships and how to develop them from simple to complex.

Diversity in Partnership Arrangements and Frameworks

Cardini (2006) identified three types of partnerships in education: (a) inter-agency collaboration around a common problem; (b) collaboration between organizations and/or their specific agents to promote best practices; and (c) collaboration between public buyers and private providers. Cardini’s partnership types hold distinct purposes and structures; therefore, they must be validated and analyzed differently.

Intriligator (1992) presented an organizational framework by which to establish and evaluate the success of educational partnerships. She wrote that partnerships are markedly different, but proposed that educational partnerships can be analyzed and described on a continuum as cooperative, coordinative, or collaborative. The continuum presented by Intriligator (1992) described cooperative partnerships as autonomous, short-termed arrangements where specific goals are accomplished. Coordination partnerships are intermediate or long-term arrangements to address tasks that are moderately complex; and collaboration partnerships are long-term, complex arrangements that address goals that require the collaboration of partners to achieve. She wrote that interagency objectives must be scrutinized in terms of 1) the amount of time needed to realize the goal; 2) the complexity of the objective to be accomplished; and 3) the extent to which the objective can be accomplished by the school and one or more interagency units. When objectives are analyzed during the planning period, the type of partnership needed is determined.

Barnett et al. (2010) stated that it was hard for a partnership model to portray all that partnership encompasses. The researchers described partnership development in three parts. The first facet of partnership development detailed was the level of involvement into the process that all partners give. The level of involvement described begins with simple support, and then moves to cooperation to achieve goals with shared decision making. If the partnership is strengthened and sustained, the final level of involvement is more complex and identified by true collaboration between the partners. The second facet of partnership development discussed by these researchers is the structure of the partnership, which begins with simple and moves to moderately complex and finally complex and intertwined. The third and final aspect of partnership development identified by Barnett et al. (2010) is the level of impact of the partnership in achieving its goals and objectives. The level of impact explains how the partnership changes the process or program.

The impact is conceptualized as a hierarchy moving from simple results; to changes in management and leadership procedures; then systemic educational improvement, and new policy development. Barnett et al. drew a typology of partnerships that closely aligned the three typologies presented by Grobe et al. in 1990. Barnett et al.'s topology provided the springboard for the development of the new conceptual framework presented in this manuscript.

Educational agencies were encouraged by Barnett et al. (2010) to evaluate the interdependence required to achieve the goals set forth in a partnership. The researchers referred to the concepts of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration, which were described by Intriligator (1992) as a way to measure the interdependence needed for each partnership. Barnett et al. (2010) proposed four partnership models in their conceptual framework on partnerships. If a school had the resources needed to achieve their goals in certain areas, then the easiest way to address it would be independently without forming a partnership. The simplest model proposed by Barnett et al. was the vendor model, which occurs when a school or school system contracts with an organization for a specific service or training. This type of enterprise usually reflects a short-term cooperative relationship. Once the contract is fulfilled, the vendor and the school could either terminate the association or advance to a higher level, or model, of partnership.

Another partnership model proposed by Barnett et al. (2010) is the collaborative model. It involves an "intensive and sustained mutual exchange and benefit" (Barnett et al., 2010, p. 25). The researchers described the goals and objectives within the collaborative model as more complex and the partners as being intertwined in the process. The linking agents in the partnership must establish credibility and trust within their own organization because they are often asked to make commitments that must be honored for the length of the partnership.

The next model discussed in Barnett et al.'s topology (2010) is the symbiotic partnership model, which depicts a relationship between two organizations that transcend mutual gains to an increased production of benefits for all participants. This model has a vision, shared goals, and individual objectives linked with each partner. A dependency on the participants describes this model. Barnett et al. (2010) describe the goals in this model as "extremely ambitious, yet somewhat ambiguous" (p. 27). A symbiotic partnership may employ a staff by the partnership, whether on loan by a partnering organization or recently hired, their primary duties are to the partnership. The fourth partnership model proposed by Barnett et al. is the spin-off model, which occurs when the partnership between a school and an outside organization gains momentum and generates enough activity so that it was able to become a viable, new organization that is separated from the original partners who formed it (Barnett et al., 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual framework through which to provide guidance for the development and evaluation of partnerships by any school or district leader. The framework was realized through the analysis of literature on partnerships and conceptual frameworks. The conceptual framework will aid the field with understanding how school partnerships are operationalized and sustained, which may assist in creating and enhancing similar partnerships. The framework may serve as a guide for other partnerships to use to evaluate their progress from simple to complex.

Method

The present study integrates findings of two literature reviews – a review of partnerships in education literature and a more focused empirical review specific to studies examining conceptual frameworks for educational partnership development and implementation. This review of literature used specific keywords that limited the search results. The first review included a review of 19 theoretical articles, a dissertation, and empirical studies that centered on the definitions of partnerships, the development and/or implementation of school-industry partnerships, partnership policy, and strengths or challenges of partnerships in journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, and dissertations published from 1990 to 2018 in Academic Search Complete, Education Full Text, EBSCO, and JSTOR databases. Findings from this review are used throughout the article.

The more focused, empirically based sections of the manuscript depict the second literature review that utilized five journal articles published in Academic Search Complete and JSTOR full text databases utilizing key words “school-industry partnerships,” “educational partnerships,” “conceptual framework,” “AND Australia.” Australia was used for an international voice on school-industry partnerships, because it offers a comprehensive educational system where, like in America, industry engagement is usually a part of careers education for all students (Torii, 2018). Unlike Australia and the United States, Austria, Germany, Netherlands, and Switzerland separate students into ‘dual systems’ of academic or vocational pathways in secondary school (Torii, 2018). It should be noted that articles addressing elements or conceptual frameworks of partnerships unrelated to partnerships that occur in educational settings were excluded from review. This review was open to peer reviewed and empirically based journal articles published between 1990 and fall 2018 that encompassed the major elements of an empirical study (i.e. introduction, method, analysis, results, discussion), because a shortage exists in high quality, methodologically sound studies on educational partnerships.

Results

A new conceptual framework was proposed based on research on school-industry partnerships and conceptual frameworks on partnerships. The development of the framework is described in the next section. Then, the conceptual framework is presented and narrated.

Toward a Conceptual Framework for Educational Partnerships

Building on Barnett et al.’s framework on the types of partnerships that exist, the new conceptual framework describes the elements that foster the development of partnerships and a way to evaluate the strength of the elements within the partnership. While the research conducted by this group and by others in the field, provide findings that identify indicators that guide partnership development, the field needs a descriptive guide, grounded in field-based research to provide a foundation for partnership development between schools and other agencies.

In Griggs (2015) primary data from an internal program evaluation on a school-industry partnership provided by the school for a case study, and interviews with key participants in the partnership (e.g. school administration and business partners) were used to identify characteristics to describe and evaluate partnerships. Six elements were found to be responsible for the development and success of the partnership studied. They were used within the new conceptual

framework to aid the leader in gauging the level of involvement and the strength of the partnership at the cooperative, coordinative, or collaborative levels.

The six primary elements identified by Griggs (2015) that foster partnership success and sustainability include (a) purposeful planning and flexibility in implementation, (b) shared values and common goals, (c) open and regular communication, (d) commitment, (e) trust, and (f) leadership. Their effect and potency increases as the partnership moves from simple to complex.

Figure 3 presents the framework visual (on right) and a description of the levels and characteristics (on left). A narrative description follows the figure.

Collaboration Model

- Strong partner commitment at all levels;
- Complete trust in participants to work with shared values to realize the vision;
- Regular, open, and respectful communication;
- Innovative leadership at all levels in organizations.

Coordination Model

- Strong partner commitment at most levels;
- Trust grows in individual participants as commitment is shown;
- Shared values & goals prevail;
- Open & regular communication;
- Leadership grows at all levels in all organizations.

Cooperation Model

- Commitment, if seen, is in the most active participants;
- Organizational trust brings partners together;
- Vision & goals are identified;
- Communication occurs when necessary;
- Leadership at top encourages the partnership.

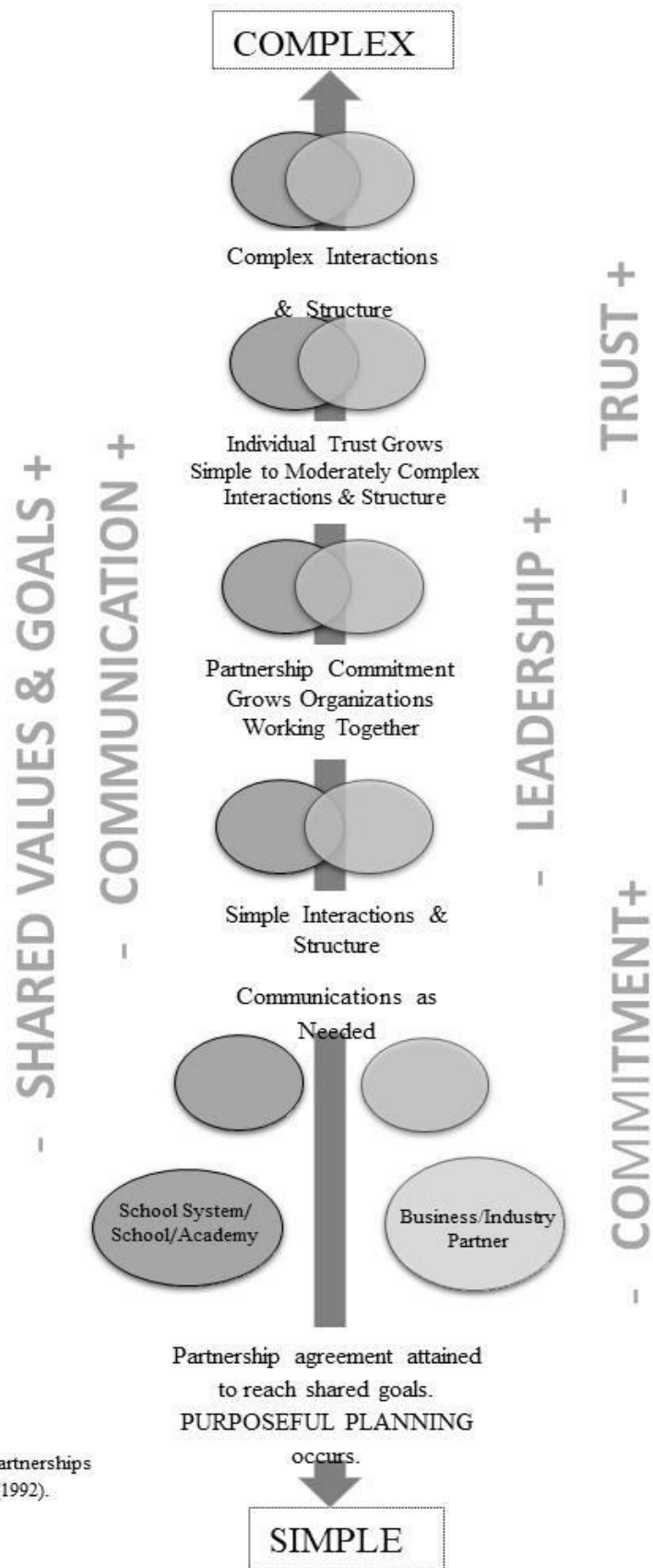
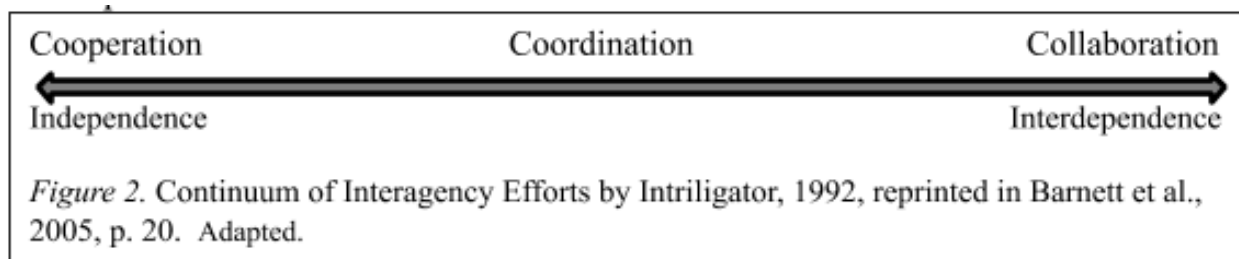


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework for Educational Partnerships
Adapted from Barnett et al. (2010) and Intriligator (1992).

The Conceptual Framework Narrative

Cooperation, Coordination and Collaboration Explained with Examples

Three words have been associated with partnership development in scholarly research: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration (Barnett et al., 2010; Intriligator, 1992). Intriligator (1992) placed the three concepts on a continuum moving from cooperation, which is independent, separate interactions - to collaboration, decidedly interdependent, connected relationships.



Cooperation has been used to describe partnership where the organizations retained their autonomy as they worked together to achieve short-termed goals (Barnett et al., 2010; Intriligator, 1992). Often the short-termed goals were to gain new resources, services, and/or for teacher training. As shown on the present conceptual framework, cooperative ventures characteristically have been simple in structure, short in time requirements, and lack participant commitment. Rarely, do cooperative relationships include many of the other elements, which typify more complex partnerships (Barnett et al., 2010; Intriligator, 1992). Sporadic planning and infrequent communication exemplify the completion of the goals in a cooperative partnership. Organizational trust characterizes this level of partnership, which means that because the organizations are known and trusted, the participants are willing to trust one another. This type of partnership often possesses leadership approval, but lacks their involvement. Cooperation is the most prevalent partnership found in education and these cooperative endeavors rarely change or grow into another more comprehensive level of partnership engagement (Albrecht & Hinckley, 2012; Barnett et al., 2010). *Examples:* In the cooperation state of partnership, teachers were known to have asked local businesses and parents to do such things as: read to students on days such as *Read Across America Day*; allow the junior class to build the homecoming float in their barn; contract to purchase equipment or teacher training; host a city league tournament at the school; donate money for technology, or sponsor student activities.

Barnett et al. (2010) label a partnership more focused on shared goals and teamwork to achieve those goals as coordination. In this framework, a partnership at the coordination level is described as longer in term and requires more commitment and regular communication among the partners. The structure of interactions and achievements are described as moderately complex. Trust between the organizations moves from trust in each organization and their previous behavior to trust of the individuals. Employees believe in the vision of the partnership and become personally committed. Communication and participant commitment is increased each time the members came together to accomplish goals. Leaders emerge at all levels of the partnership. Leaders participate and become committed to the outcome in this level of partnership because the goals are important to the whole organization. *Examples* of partnerships in this stage of development include: industry partners who host internship programs that provide a learning

environment for high school seniors year after year; members of groups such as parks and recreation who partner with a local career and technical building construction program to engage in such activities as building an archery range or to replace picnic tables in the park.

The strongest type of co-organizational initiative with multi-layered participant commitment to common goals and a shared vision was labeled by Barnett et al. (2010) and Intriligator (1993) as collaboration. The conceptual framework presented in this manuscript describes collaborative partnerships as providing mutually beneficial exchanges between all organizations. The shared vision, mission, and goals guide the movement throughout the partnership. Communication is open and regular in all areas including planning, accomplishing goals, staying in touch, and reflecting on interactions. Commitment from all organizations is consistent. The goal is to succeed and every participant works toward that end. Trust is a palatable component at all levels of partnership, but is deep and individual in collaboration. New participants arrive into the partnership trusted, because they belong to the organization and quickly move to individual trust as others did before them. Leaders at all levels (student leaders, teacher leaders, and industry leaders) are active participants in the partnership endeavor.

The interactions and structures of collaboration in a collaborative partnership are described as complex. A partnership distinguishes itself as collaborative when elements such as time, resources, planning, shared values, common goals, human commitment, trust, communication, and leadership move the partners forward through the conceptual framework of partnership. *Examples* of a collaboration state of partnership development are an industry that supports a career-academy with regular instructional visits to the school by mentors within the company, and guided field trips; a medical hospital that works with high school interns to study a common problem, collect and interpret data and then report on the data in a medical journal.

This study proposed a new framework divided into three distinct types: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration, along a continuum from simple to complex interactions. Each type can be viewed as a model of partnership. In the new framework, cooperation, coordination, and collaboration are used to describe the facilitators of partnerships (i.e. planning, values and goals, interaction, communication, trust, commitment, and leadership). A relationship between two or more organizations can begin at cooperative and move up the continuum to collaborative as it grows, or it can begin and remain at any one of the levels. Any partnership involving education can be described by this framework and its six essential elements. Other elements can also describe a partnership, but the six identified in this research are pervasive throughout the continuum from simple to complex.

The Differences in the New Framework and the Topography Proposed by Barnett et al.

The typology that Barnett et al. (2010) proposed, moved partners from a simple structure to a complex spin-off model as a newly created organization. This researcher's experience indicated that nothing involving students ever separates from the school. Rather it can be a new part of the school, inclusive in the school, but never exclusive. The Vendor Model proposed in the typology certainly exists in educational partnerships, but there are many other types of cooperative partnerships that do not involve vendors or service purchased that can be inclusive to the cooperation level of partnerships. The new conceptual framework chose not to label specific models beyond cooperation, coordination, and collaboration, which cover all relationships.

The new conceptual framework proposes a continuum for partnerships which can be measured by growth in the six facilitating factors (a) purposeful planning and flexibility in

implementation, (b) shared values and common goals, (c) open and regular communication, (d) commitment, (e) trust, and (f) leadership. Partners can focus on strengthening any of the six factors in order to move up the continuum toward true collaboration.

Discussion

The collaborative process essential to partnerships nurtures a sincere sense of shared responsibility for the education of the students involved. Torii (2018) identified industry partnerships that align their vision and mission to the school's strategic plan as critical to success. Buy-in at all levels within the partnership is another step to reaching the potential of partnerships (Griggs et al., 2017). This was defined as building a 'culture of partnerships' by Torii (2018). However, the potential of a partnership may not be attained without a logical process to follow that guides growth as does the proposed conceptual framework from this study. It seems that everything done in education begins as a 'partnership;' therefore, defining a true partnership is hard to do. As mentioned earlier, partnerships are not all the same. Often, they are unclear in their vision or goals – with different external pressures, expectations, motives, and goals for all the partners. Without strength and growth in the (a) leadership, (b) purposeful planning, (c) communication, (d) commitment, (e) trust, and (f) shared values and common goals, the partnership becomes unstable, conflicted in the six characteristics, and often dissolves.

The conceptual framework was proposed to guide progressive movement toward goal attainment. First, the partnership formation is agreed upon by all organizations involved. Shared goals are identified and action steps are planned. Purposeful planning is important at this stage. During the cooperation stage, the organizations are working individually to achieve the identified goals. Conversations occur as needed to get things done. Individuals involved in the action are committed to seeing it through, but commitment to the partnership does not pervade all the players at this stage. The partnership is little more than an agreement. Trust is only at the organization level, because they have a good 'track record.' Leadership initiates and often encourages the partnership at this stage. The goals are simple in design and implementation.

Coordination is the second stage that partnerships usually take, although some partnerships begin here. At this stage, communication is regular and becomes a valued part of the partnership because of its ability to begin and perpetuate motion in goal attainment. Purposeful planning continues, but the participants are also encouraged to be flexible in their actions. Plans change when the actions are student centered. Participants become committed to the vision and goals. They do whatever it takes to achieve the shared goals. Participants value commitment given by others as they are committed to achieving the goals, too. This commitment builds trust in one another. Therefore, trust moves from organizational trust – where you are trusted because you belong to a trustworthy company; to individual trust, which is more powerful. Dhillon (2013) referred to trust between partnering organization as the glue that holds the partnership together. Leaders begin to emerge at all levels – students, teachers, partners, and administration. Most educational partnerships are sustained in the coordination level.

The third and final type of partnership on this framework is collaborative. This stage is characterized by open, regular, and respectful communication. The partners realize that communication connects the participants and ensures all programs run smoothly. Shared goals are now mutual goals that all involved value and strive to attain. The commitment level of all involved is strong and comprehensive. The participants see the value in the partnership and believe that they have a place in it and can make a difference. Purposeful planning is still important to carry the

partnership to the next level - plan the next steps, the next innovations, and any new partners. The goals and actions are complex and interconnect the organizations and the participants to one another.

The researcher offers a conceptualization of partnership that places the characteristics on a continuum from simple to complex, from weaker to stronger, based on a review of literature and conversations with multi-level participants in a school/industry partnership (Griggs, 2015). The elements on the continuum support stronger levels of partnership, which aid the partners in achieving the goals. This continuum of characteristics in the conceptual framework offers a tool for understanding the process of partnership development. The continuum of weak to strong, simple to complex partnerships provide leaders with a tool to be used as a ruler to evaluate and develop their partnerships.

Limitations

The depth and breadth of this study are the main limitations. In order to develop the specific conceptual framework envisioned to grow and evaluate educational partnerships, much of the literature on partnerships that was beyond the purpose of the study was excluded from the review.

Future Research

While there is much work to be done in the study of school-industry partnerships, Australia is a beacon for other countries to follow. There is a need for a clear 'How To' for leaders in developing and sustaining partnerships for K-12 schools. Many programmatic efforts lack a solid conceptual or theoretical base for operation. Researcher need to add to our theoretical understanding of partnerships by continuing to unpack ways in which partnerships are personally experienced by students, teachers, leaders and the outside partners. The studies should include participants from different backgrounds with different experiences. Through better understanding of programmatic activities and the people involved, we will be able to generate better understanding and sustainability of partnerships to improve education. In order for the transferability and dependability of the new conceptual framework to be determined, future case studies on partnerships that use the conceptual framework presented in this research to guide the partnerships' growth and to evaluate its strengths are recommended. A study to extend and enhance the development of the conceptual framework would strengthen the present research.

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