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## Utilizing Participatory Action Research to Assess the Interagency Collaboration of a Community-Based After-School Program Partnership

Jessica L. Render

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UTILIZING PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH TO ASSESS THE INTERAGENCY  
COLLABORATION OF A COMMUNITY-BASED AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

by

JESSICA RENDER

(Under the Direction of Adrienne Cohen)

## Abstract

The study utilized a community-based participatory action research (PAR) approach to assess the development of an interagency collaborative and its replication at other locations. The partnership formed to provide a service-learning site for university students as well as a community-based after-school program for children living in a low-income housing community. Research participants completed the levels of collaboration scale developed by Frey and Colleagues (2006) along with a questionnaire about their desired level of collaboration, current and needed resources, and knowledge of other partners' goals. Collaboration is loosely defined as a group of partners working together to reach shared goals. The scale, questionnaire, and documents were triangulated to assess the overall collaboration of each partner both within and between groups. Results reveal that the overall level of collaboration for the partnership is closer to cooperation than coordination. For this partnership which was formed to provide service-learning opportunities to university students, community liaisons are at the center of communication. Faculty partners typically do not share information with each other because they respect and trust the abilities of their colleagues. Parents interviewed reported time and the demands of their own schoolwork as reasons they may not be able to get involved in after-school program events. In conclusion, partnership administrators should consider developing programs for parents that increase self-efficacy and time as well as formal protocols for sharing information among academics.

**INDEX WORDS:** participatory action research, collaboration, service-learning, parental involvement, low-income

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COLLABORATION OF A COMMUNITY-BASED AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

by

JESSICA RENDER

B.A., Mercer University, 2011

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## Literature Review

Level of interorganizational collaboration is a useful predictor of overall program sustainability and is increasingly being considered by grant makers (Marek, Brock, & Savia, 2015; Frey, Lohmeier, Lee, & Tollefson, 2006). Consequently, program administrators have begun to rely on collaborating with other organizations that can provide services that their program cannot. The terms most often used to describe complex relationships between partnering organizations are interagency and interorganizational collaboration.

Use of the term collaboration, whether interorganizational or intraorganizational, seems to be agreed upon widely by researchers, but the operationalization of the term is variable. In 2006, Frey and colleagues (2006) defined collaboration (interagency and interorganizational are used synonymously) as all organizations in the partnership regularly working together to make decisions and achieve common goals. Since then, other researchers have either broadened the definition or made it more specific. In an attempt to define collaboration, Thomson, Perry, and Miller (2007) concluded that it is:

A process in which autonomous or semi-autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process involving shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions (p. 25).

Other studies attempting to quantitatively or qualitatively assess interagency collaboration have chosen more specific definitions that stay within the semantic boundaries of the definition presented by Frey and colleagues (2006). Noonan, McCall, Zheng, and Erickson (2012) used the Levels of Collaboration scale (see Appendix) developed by Frey and associates (2006) to assess changes in interagency

collaboration over time and collaboration-improving strategies that impact changes in collaboration. The authors recruited 10 representatives of 10 state agencies involved in a Midwestern state transition team with the shared goal of easing the transition of disabled youth into adulthood. Reliability tests were distributed to research participants over the course of three years (i.e., the start of year one, end of year one, end of year two, and end of year three). Test-Retest reliability was not less than 0.80 and was determined to be a viable measure of long-term changes in collaboration. Shortly after, Nageswaran, Golden, Easterling, O’Shea, Hansen, and IP (2013) stated that collaboration involves “exchanging information, sharing resources, and/or coordinating services...” (p.1535). This definition was used by the researchers to determine factors that contribute to the success of interagency teams targeting youth with complex chronic conditions.

Several factors have been found to influence the success of collaborations including (*see* Table 1.)

Organizational Factors	Research Studies
Organizational History	Marek, et al., 2015; Watters & Diezman, 2013
Mutual respect, understanding, and trust	Marek, et al., 2015; Maloney, 2006; Watters & Diezman, 2013; White, Altschuld, & Lee, 2008; Callahan & Martin, 2007
Shared decision making	Marek, et al., 2015; Provan & Milward, 2001
Effective Communication	Marek, et al., 2015; Watters & Diezman, 2013; Noonan, et al., 2012; Scherer, 2009; Callahan & Martin, 2007; Maloney, 2007;



	Frey, et al., 2006
Established goals and objectives	Marek, et al., 2015; Provan & Milward, 2001
Skilled leadership	Marek, et al., 2015; Scherer, 2009; Provan & Milward, 2001
Partnership Configuration (structure of network)	Scherer, 2009; Provan & Milward, 2001
Adequate Resources	Marek, et al., 2015; Provan & Milward, 2001

Table 1. This table displays various studies that support each important factor for successful collaboration.

Additionally, Marek and associates (2015) have reason to believe that the level of impact that each factor has on collaboration is related to the characteristics of each interagency partnership. In a study evaluating the success of an interagency transition team, Noonan and colleagues (2014) found that strategies such as having partners participate in joint planning meetings, site visits to partnering organizations, joint professional development, and sharing information improves collaborative relationships. Based on 146 semi-structured interviews with staff and 28 clients of mental health interagency collaboratives, Shepherd and Meehan (2012) concluded that the presence of a “boundary spanning” collaboration facilitator could improve interagency collaboration (p.405). According to the researchers, this collaboration coordinator will be responsible for scheduling planning meetings, maintaining effective communication, and understanding relevant policies and interagency programs at the strategic, agency, service provider, and client level. Interestingly, the authors noted that macro-structural policies may serve as barriers to federally mandated interorganizational collaborations. Consequently, the authors suggest finding ways to circumvent political barriers such as maintaining

electronic record systems or using journals to log client information for alternating shifts of staff members. So, a case study approach to improving interagency collaboration may be most appropriate.

Although these studies have found the mentioned factors important for collaborating successfully, most evaluation studies have measured interagency collaboration using self-report scales that emphasize perception of collaboration (Marek, et al., 2015; Frey, et al., 2006). Data from such self-reported collaboration scales are commonly measured and analyzed using social network analysis (SNA) strategies. According to Butts (2008), social network analysis is defined as the study of the nature of social ties and the resulting relationships between the ties and exogenous variables. Frey and colleagues (2006) used social network graphs to assess changes in interagency collaboration and noted the need to supplement SNA data with other data on interagency collaboration. Cross and colleagues (2009) and Noonan, McCall, Zheng, and Erickson (2012) used mixed methods to assess collaboration. Noonan, McCall, Zheng, and Erickson (2012) measured strength of relationships using the Levels of Collaboration ratings developed by Frey and associates. A benefit of social network analysis is the ability to reveal structural gaps in the delivery of services (Cross, et al., 2009). Still, all studies reviewed relied mainly on self-reported collaboration which has been found to be a valid estimate of actual collaboration (Frey, et al., 2006).

In addition to relying on self-reported data, these collaboration scales tend to measure participants' perceptions of interorganizational relationships rather than actual collaborative behavior (Noonan, et al., 2012; Frey, et al., 2006; Woodland & Hutton, 2012; Marek, et al., 2015). For instance, Noonan and Associates (2012) and Frey and Colleagues (2006) evaluated the collaboration of interorganizational partners using a Levels of Collaboration Scale that measured perceived frequency of communication between each representative from least to greatest along a continuum from no interaction, network, cooperation, coordination, coalition, and collaboration.

According to Yin (2008) and Maloney (2007), partnership evaluations have emphasized a variety of methods, types, and participants, but there is a need for more rigorous assessments. Recently, researchers have sought to develop more reliable and valid assessments of collaboration. Provan and Milward (2001) attest that interorganizational networks should be evaluated at three different levels: 1) community, 2) network, and 3) participant and characterized by five interdependent steps that facilitate evaluation of interagency collaborations. Similarly, Martin-Rodriguez, Beaulieu, D'Amour and Ferrada-Viela (2005) suggest that truly successful collaboratives must consider intervening variables at the interorganizational (macro), intraorganizational (meso), and interprofessional (micro) levels. Additionally, studies examining ways of assessing interagency collaboration suggest that both formal and informal interactions between prominent organization personnel serve as units of analysis (Frey, et al., 2006, Provan & Milward, 2001, Noonan, et al., 2012). Provan and Milward (2001) use the term *network administrative organization* (NAO) to describe such a group of boundary spanning leaders. According to Provan and Milward (2001), key network members at the community level include client advocacy groups, funders, politicians, regulators, and the general public. Key network members at the network level include primary funders and regulators, the network administrative organization, and member organizations. Key network members at the organization/participant level involve the member agency board and management, agency staff, and individual clients. Woodland and Hutton (2012) have added to the work of Provan and Milward (2001) by suggesting that evaluation of collaboratives should entail defining collaboration, determining the organizational network, monitoring the stage of the partnership development, determining level of partner involvement in the collaboration, and assessment of partner communication, decision-making, and group dynamics.

In addition to rigorous methods, context-specific methods that consider members of the target population of collaboratives are needed (Marek, et al., 2015). As stated by Frey and colleagues (2006),

several factors such as interpretation of what is learned, institutional barriers to enactment, and individual perspective about collaboration, influence how collaborative efforts are adopted by each individual partner organization. Therefore, each unique organizational environment should impact implementation of a program (Livingstone, Celemencki, & Calixte, 2014; Castrechini & Ardoin, 2011), and should consider factors at the macro (interorganizational), meso (intraorganizational), and micro (interprofessional) levels (Martin-Rodriguez, et al., 2005).

Participatory action research (PAR) has recently emerged as a method of gaining community-specific insight into issues faced by program recipients (Livingstone, et al., 2014; Stringer, 2007). According to Stringer (2007), the purpose of PAR is to produce a “practical tool for solving problems experienced by people in their professional, community, or private lives” by utilizing an inclusive and iterative process of data collection and analysis (p.11). Similarly, PAR is a form of naturalistic inquiry that considers participant characteristics from their own perspective or social niche (Denzin, 1971). According to Denzin (1971), “the basic unit of analysis for naturalistic behaviorism becomes the joint act” of interaction and is ideal for studying group interaction (p.167). Among research studies involving youth in PAR, benefits to both the researchers and the participant researchers have been observed. According to multiple authors, PAR is a participant-centered approach to research that allows all stakeholders to be empowered by being involved in solving their own problems (Livingstone, et al., 2014; Castrechini, et al., 2011; Yull, Blitz, Thompson, & Murray, 2014). Additionally, PAR provides a platform for community members and researchers to work together to develop interventions most likely to be utilized and accessed by populations they are intended to serve. Researchers using PAR have also been able to collect more in-depth, context-specific, and culturally responsive data (Livingstone, et al., 2014; Castrechini & Ardoin., 2011). For example, PAR research studies completed to aid minorities revealed the need for programs to actively maintain cultural diversity (Yull, et al., 2014) and awareness.

In a PAR study involving four adult researchers and 16 black high school student co-researchers located in Montreal, Canada, students reported feeling empowered and confident in their ability to reduce dropout rates at their school. Through PAR, these youth were able to reframe the meaning of at-risk student. During four focus group discussions with students at-risk of dropping out, students revealed that they would benefit from a culturally responsive curriculum, culturally sensitive teacher-student relationship, mentors, and role models (Livingstone, et al., 2014).

Research that examines parent involvement in after-school programs suggests that strategies to improve parent involvement should focus on improving self-efficacy, self-esteem, and residential stability. Reece, Staudt, and Ogle (2013) and Jayroe and Brenner (2005) found that parents often do not participate as much as school professionals desire because they do not believe that they are important and capable of helping their children with schoolwork. Programs that first targeted the self-efficacy and self-esteem of parents yielded benefits for both parents and adults of low-income communities. Additionally, such programs found parents to be more willing to participate and more comfortable contributing to their child's education.

The purpose of this current study is to use PAR to increase the usability of the evaluation results. The After-School Program Collaborative seeks to improve student achievement by offering after school tutoring opportunities to at-risk student residents between the ages of 5 and ten. The PAR approach will be used to develop culturally relevant and usable intervention tools that will both improve the functioning of the collaborative and the delivery of services. This will include data-informed strategies to facilitate parent involvement. Furthermore, this research seeks to evaluate the replicability of the current collaborative. It also addresses the need for less subjective measures of interagency collaboration (Marek, et al., 2015; Frey, et al., 2006) by triangulating survey data, focus group data, and documents. In sum, it seeks to determine if the Collaborative is prepared to replicate its tutoring

program at other locations based on mastery of the seven factors known to impact collaboration by answering the research question, “What factors impact interagency collaboration?”

### Methods

The research utilized naturalistic inquiry to observe the collaboration of partners within their natural habitat. Naturalistic inquiry was determined to be most appropriate for understanding the relationship among small groups such as the after-school program collaborative (Denzin, 1971). All data both within and between each case were concurrently triangulated to define factors that impact interagency collaboration. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected independently, but combined for interpretation to confirm statements or reports across data sources (Terrell, 2012).

### Program Description

The after-school program partnership was formed three years ago to provide academic enrichment for low-income children who live in low-income housing and professional experience for students at a rural university. The after-school program began as a simple after-school tutoring program for as few as three children ages 5 to 10 and has since grown to offer services to as many as eight children. Program operating days and hours include Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 2:30 PM to 5:00 PM.

The after-school program is held in the community room of the low-income housing community’s main office. The program site, located in a rural city in southeast Georgia, is a community of 33 low-income families. Majority of the residents are single-parent, African American females. Pieces of what used to be a viable playground area are the only source of entertainment for children outside of program hours. The Director of the local housing authority works on site, next to the

community room within the community. The housing community is one of the smaller low-income housing communities in the city.

All youth participants of the after-school program are African-American. It is unclear if all participants are residents of the low-income housing facility; however, many participants are reportedly related.

Currently, the curriculum is based on the expertise of faculty partners from the College of Education and Child and Family Development/School of Human Ecology from a university located in the city. Service-learning students who are enrolled in special education courses at the university or child and family development courses in the school of human ecology volunteer consistently each week during the semester. The service-learning site serves as a real-world environment for service-learning students to practice their textbook knowledge. Two paid community liaisons (CL's) employed by the office of student leadership and civic engagement serve as managerial staff. The community liaisons are trained undergraduate students who orchestrate daily operations, curriculums, and all student volunteers. Community liaisons are also responsible for communicating program-related information to all other partners involved in the after-school program. Each community liaison works alternating program-days having one day in which both work at the same time. University student volunteers (who have a different role than service-learning students) serve as support for service-learning students and community liaisons. Student volunteers may volunteer as many days or as few days as they want each week. The Coordinator of Civic Engagement, who works in the office of student leadership and civic engagement, monitors the work of the community liaisons. The Assistant Director of Service Learning oversees the work of the Coordinator of Civic Engagement and is the founder of the partnership. The Assistant Director recruited initial partners in order to implement the after-school program, and is the problem-solver of the partnership.

## Research Participants

Participants were recruited using the Snowball method. The Assistant Director of Service-Learning was contacted about potential programs that needed evaluations. Additional research staff and professional participants were referred by her. Research participants, then, referred student participants via word-of-mouth and email.

All research participants were above the age of eighteen. A purposive sample of six representative members were recruited from the Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement, the university Department of Sociology, the university's College of Education, the university's School of Human Ecology, County Schools, County Schools Parent Involvement, and the city Housing Authority as recommended by the Assistant Director of Student Leadership in the University's Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement. Specifically, two representatives from the Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement (the Assistant Director of Service-Learning and the Coordinator of Civic Engagement), one senior service-learning student from the College of Education, one former Community Liaison, one faculty member from the College of Education, one faculty member from the School of Human Ecology, and one staff member from the local housing authority participated in the research (the Director of the Housing Authority). Collaboration between primary organization members has been found to be a valid unit of analyzing interorganizational knowledge sharing (Frey, et al., 2006, Noonan, et al., 2012, and Provan & Milward, 2001).

There were no representatives for the parent involvement coordinator group, the university department of sociology group, or the county schools group (i.e., teachers and principals). School system teachers were not recruited to participate in the research study so their desired level of collaboration was not obtained. Similarly, a representative for the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, who also sent service learning students to the site, did not participate in the research.



Three parents who participated in the research were residents of the low-income housing community and had at least one child enrolled in the after-school program during the spring of 2015. All three parents interviewed reported having at least a part-time job. Two out of three residents stated that they were enrolled in post-secondary programs. One resident was the grandparent and sole care-taker of a youth participant, but did not finish high school.

## Research Design

The research utilized a community-based participatory action research (PAR) approach to assess the development of an interagency collaborative and its replication at other locations.

According to Woodland and Hutton (2012), evaluation of interorganizational collaborations should involve five stages of development: 1) operationalizing collaboration, 2) identifying and mapping community organizations, 3) monitoring development of the collaborative, 4) assessing level of integration, and 5) assessing communication. For this study, the stages of development were condensed into two stages due to time constraints. Thus, principles of PAR were integrated into two stages of the Collaboration Evaluation and Improvement Framework (CEIF) presented by Woodland and Hutton (2012). Stage one involves defining collaboration (i.e. operationalizing collaboration). In stage two, network structure and partner integration were analyzed (i.e. stages three through five will be combined into one stage). Additionally, stage three is the presentation of results.

Based on a review of literature completed by Provan and Milward (2001), evaluation of interagency networks should consider the community, the network, and the organization/participant levels of analysis. Thus, each stage of the evaluation considered the input of stakeholders from each of the three levels suggested by Provan and Milward (2001). Inclusion of a representative sample of stakeholders from all three levels of analysis is consistent with principles of PAR; however, all

stakeholders did not respond to invitations to participate in the research. Stakeholders were recruited using the snowball method. The Assistant Director of Service-Learning was contacted and transferred contact information to other important partners. Parents of after-school program youth participants were recruited using door-to-door solicitation. Permission to recruit parents on the low-income residential property and the after-school program site was obtained from the Director of the local housing authority. Six parents agreed to participate in phone interviews, but only three were accessible during the data collection period. As a result, three parents were included in the research process.

Additionally, data collection and analysis followed an iterative four step process suggested by Stringer (2007) for PAR: 1) setting the stage, 2) building the picture, 3) interpreting and analyzing, and 4) resolving the problem. Setting the stage describes establishing meaningful, trusting, and respectful relationships with stakeholders. Building the picture is defined as a time for collecting data. Step three describes interpreting and analyzing the data. Resolving the problem involves establishment of interventions with input from all stakeholders. Consequently, each of the stages emphasizes use of stakeholder feedback on the analysis and interpretation of data. Hence, using the above three stages and four steps, two research questions will be answered:

1. Is the Interagency Collaborative effective?
  - a. What is the current level of collaboration?
  - b. Is the collaborative reaching its objectives?
2. What factors impact parent involvement in the After-School Program?

Stage 1: operationalizing collaboration. The operationalizing collaboration stage involves establishing an agreed upon definition of collaboration and shared goals. According to Provan and Milward (2001), networks that have a central, efficient network administrative organization (i.e., governing group) are best equipped to succeed as opposed to networks who grant equal leadership to *all*

members. Network administrative organizations are defined as central leadership committees responsible for distributing funds, delegating program commitments, and evaluating which partners to recruit and which to dissolve.

Here, we set the stage for effective relationships by answering questions about how collaboration is defined and the alignment of partner and group goals. Stakeholder groups were invited to separate initial planning meetings (i.e., a focus group) in which an interorganizational mission, goals, objectives, and the operationalization of collaboration was discussed (Shriberg, et al., 2012). The College of Education faculty member and the School of Human Ecology faculty member participated in a group interview. The Assistant Director of Service-Learning, the Coordinator of Civic Engagement, and the Director of the local housing authority participated in a focus group. Research materials were emailed to both the service-learning student and the community liaison, because they were unable to meet face-to-face.

Additional survey questions and a questionnaire assessing the current level of collaboration between organizations were completed at the start of each focus group, group interview, or distributed via email. Such questions as, “Who are current network partners?” “How do they define collaboration?” “What goals do they have for the network to accomplish?” “What are your network goals?” “What resources can your organization offer to achieve shared goals were answered during the initial focus groups?”

The initial planning meetings began with the stakeholders completing the Levels of Collaboration Scale adopted from Frey and colleagues (2006) (test-retest reliability 0.81) (see Appendix). The Levels of Collaboration Scale was presented as a single questionnaire and included additional closed-ended and open-ended questions related to collaboration. The additional questions focused on current and desired levels of collaboration, and alternative methods of acquiring resources.

The current level of collaboration for each partner and the desired level of collaboration were compared (Cross, Dickman, Newman-Gonchar, & Fagan, 2009). Participants who received the above research materials via email returned the completed forms electronically. All research participants were asked follow-up questions based on their responses.

The Levels of Collaboration Scale developed by Frey and colleagues (2006) was used to assess the current level of collaboration between each organization within the collaborative partnership so that steps for improvement can be made. Social Network Analysis principles were used to identify high-leverage partners, structural holes in communication, and weaknesses in relationships (Frey, et al., 2006; Noonan, et al., 2012; Woodland & Hutton, 2012). Each research participant who completed the scale and questionnaire (parents did not) was asked to respond as themselves on behalf of their organization, department, or group. Nodes represent an individual organization, department, or other entity. A unidirectional line represents a tie or relationship between partners. Line thickness corresponds to the collaboration rating reported by representative partners who participated in the research. For example, a reported collaboration rating of 1 is the skinniest line and a rating of 5 is the thickest.

Stage 2: identifying and mapping communities of practice. Resource information was considered in determining organizations to include in the collaborative to reach goals and objectives and minimize duplication (Castrechini, et al., 2011). Additionally, the current resources of each partner were compared to the resources still needed.

Current partner organizations were reviewed for degree of involvement. Quantitative data from the Levels of Collaboration Scale were analyzed with qualitative data (Frey, et al., 2006; Noonan, et al., 2012; Woodland & Hutton, 2012). Mean collaboration scores for both between and among groups were calculated (Noonan, et al., 2012; Frey, et al., 2006).

Three parents participated in phone interviews during which they responded to questions about their self-esteem, their self-efficacy, their residential stability, and their thoughts about the after-school program. A total of 25 questions were asked. Interviews lasted between 30 and 75 minutes.

Focus group discussions and phone interviews were audiorecorded and transcribed verbatim. Analysis of comments involved three processes: 1) open coding, 2) axial coding, and 3) selective coding. Emergent themes were also related to pre-determined categories known to impact interagency collaboration such as strong leadership. Member checking was used to ensure that comments and interpretations are accurate (Yull, et al., 2014). All transcribed and completed data were emailed to participants to verify accuracy and clarify ambiguous statements. Actual collaboration was assessed by triangulating data from group documents, e-mails, level of collaboration scales, and informal observation (Woodland & Hutton, 2012).

Stage 3: presentation of results and development of intervention. The participatory action research approach requires that the research be emergent and guided by the input of stakeholders. Consequently, all stakeholders will be asked to work together to develop a strategy of intervention to implement based on my interpretation and analysis of data.

## Data Analysis

The current research was submitted to the Institutional Review Board in April 2015 and approved by May 2015. Data collection took place between mid-May 2015 and July 2015. Eight out of ten research participants were female (80%). Collection of data from parents or guardians took place during the month of July 2015. All parents interviewed were African-American and female. Verbal consent was obtained from parents during phone interviews. Physical consent forms were completed either via email or during focus group sessions.

One graduate student was responsible for coding and interpreting all forms of data collected. These codes were compared both within stakeholder groups and between stakeholder groups. Focus group data were coded based on relation to the research questions. Factors found in scholarly literature to impact interagency collaboration were used to label comments in transcriptions. Transcripts were also coded for themes that were not found in scholarly literature, but were mentioned by study participants as influential. Emailed responses to the same survey and questionnaire submitted by the service-learning student and the Community Liaison were treated the same as transcribed documents. Member checking was employed. Research participants were asked to review transcribed and complete data for accuracy and validity. Member checking did not occur for data collected from parents. Validity measures were taken to reduce the potential for bias that typically accompanies use of the naturalistic approaches such as the PAR approach (Stringer, 2007; Denzin, 1971).

Each research participant completed a Levels of Collaboration Scale developed by Frey and Colleagues (2006). A mean score among all partners and mean scores for each partner were calculated to determine the overall level of collaboration of the partnership and the overall level of collaboration of each partner (Woodland & Hutton, 2012). Any documents received from research participants were used to support statements made during focus groups, interviews, or email correspondence. For the purpose of creating a social network graph, each research participant was treated as an individual representative (i.e., individuals responded based on their perception of their own collaboration with partners rather than their perception of their organization's collaboration with partners). The social network graph was created by hand in Google Drive using the insert drawing tool and modified using Microsoft Word. Additionally, parent interviews were transcribed, verbatim, and coded using the same process used to code the focus group and emailed data.

All data collected were kept on password-protected laptops and dis-identified from the names of participants using pseudonyms.

## Results

As previously mentioned, the research took two phases: 1) Determining how collaboration is defined by the after-school program partners, and 2) determining the appropriateness of the network structure for the determined definition. Phase one, referred to as operationalizing collaboration, yielded answers to questions such as, “How do you define collaboration?” Phase two, referred to as identifying and mapping communities of practice, yielded the answers to questions such as, “What is your desired level of collaboration?” Data from the focus groups and documents were used to develop answers to phase one, whereas data from the Levels of Collaboration Scale, focus groups, and the Questionnaire were used to develop answer to phase two.

### Operationalizing Collaboration

Focus group with Housing Authority and Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement (OSLCE). In some cases, partners discussed how the structure of the social network can affect their collaboration. Partnership maturity, partner proximity, and partnership configuration were mentioned by OSLCE and Housing Authority partners as factors that influence overall collaboration. Partnership maturity describes the length of time a partnership has existed and how efficiently communication happens. Partner proximity describes the geographical distance between partners. Partnership configuration describes the size of the partnership (i.e. the number of partners involved and the nature of their involvement).

*Partner Proximity.* When asked what has influenced their collaboration since the start of the partnership, the Assistant Director of Service-Learning described her experience communicating with university partners and off-campus partners. The difficulty, she claimed, increased with partners' distance from her position on campus. The Assistant Director said that as university personnel, they are "in the habit of talking to each other cuz [they] talk to each other about lots of other things, too. So, [she] feels like that communication is open." During the focus group conversation, the Assistant Director explained how she easily and frequently contacts university partners because they are inclined to have discussions about many other things. She believes that university partners are more likely to open emails from other university personnel. To her, this assumed obligation weakens as communication efforts are extended beyond the campus of the university. She says, "Once we get off campus, I think it's a little bit of a challenge" and, she adds, "...the parent involvement coordinators are even another step removed." The idea that communication weakens with distance away from campus seems to be related to focus group participants' accounts of partnership maturity and partnership configuration.

*Partnership Maturity and Partnership Configuration.* The Coordinator of Civic Engagement, another university OSCLE partner, mentioned how the partnership has not developed enough to actively seek the involvement of low-income housing facility residents (i.e., parents of after-school program child participants), teachers, and school principals:

Yeah. and I think we've just started to get some interest back to I think, you know, this past year. It seems like we've kinda gotten the radar scan of the like the principal or some of the teachers started to hear about the program and so expressed an interest in...in that communication, but we haven't really gotten to the point yet where um we've been doing that.



Based on the above quote, it is clear that the Coordinator of Civic Engagement does not believe that the partnership is mature enough to recruit new members. Although, she did not discuss what conditions would prepare the partnership for expansion, she does indicate that being ready is a necessary prerequisite. Similarly, she adds that although low-income housing residents who are parents of after-school program participants have been solicited to complete permission forms, they have not been asked to volunteer during program hours:

...I don't know how much we've explicitly asked parents for their involvement. I think we've gone around with flyers that say a program is starting, we'd love to have your kid. This is what we need you to do. Just, you know, fill out permission...that kind of thing...if you want them to come. But, I don't know how much...I think we're just at the beginning of asking them explicitly...do you want to be involved...can you be involved...that kind of thing.

The Coordinator of Civic Engagement, in the previous quote, provides support for the idea that partnerships must be at an appropriate level of maturity before they begin to actively recruit new partners. First, the OSLCE partners wanted to know if the parents like the program and what opportunities for involvement would be most appealing to them.

*Sharing Information.* According to the Coordinator of Civic Engagement, the Assistant Director of Service-Learning, and the Director of the Housing authority/low-income housing facility who attended the focus group, there is no formal method of communication between them and the other partners involved in the after-school program. Additionally, there is still some uncertainty among the OSLCE staff regarding the best method of communicating with the Director of the Housing Authority. When asked what method of communication he would be most responsive to, he mentioned that email would be ok, but phone calls are better. He also stated that his secretary would likely be responsible for

receiving his emails and phone calls. Therefore, any correspondence that does not take place in-person will be screened by his secretary.

There are, however, implied methods of communication between after-school program partners even though the most commonly used and mentioned method of communication by focus group participants is email. For example, the Coordinator of Civic Engagement, who supervises the community liaisons and student volunteers, described how she expects the community liaisons to communicate as needed both during and outside of program hours:

Um and so yeah...between the two of them [community liaisons] I think that's...changed a little bit with different folks um probably not really that formal of a...I've kind of expected them to speak with each other and you text and get in touch with each other.

The service-learning coordinator then explains how majority of the partners' collaboration is dependent on the collaboration and communication between the community liaisons. This responsibility placed on the community liaisons requires them, as students of the university, to develop advanced interpersonal skills.

...and that is kind of challenging to be willing to turn a lot of the collaboration, be comfortable with a lot of the collaboration sitting on them and balancing between when is the professional's responsibility to be communicating and when is it the student's leadership role to be doing that communication.

In the above statement, the Coordinator of Civic Engagement describes how she struggles to trust the ability of her community liaisons to manage majority of the partnership's collaboration efforts. Trusting

relationships, according to scholarly literature, is important to developing and maintaining interagency collaborations.

Formal methods of communication were not explicitly mentioned by Housing Authority and OSLECE focus group participants as contributing to increases or decreases in collaboration, but were noted as significant in scholarly literature.

*Offering Incentives.* According to the Director of the Housing Authority and the Assistant Director of service-learning, offering incentives has proven effective when efforts are made to include parents of children who participate in the after-school program. The Director of the Housing Authority, one who is most familiar with the parents' behavior, suggests that if we want to get the parents to come to after-school program events, there should be "a meal for 'em." The statement made by the director of the housing authority was supported by both the Assistant Director of Service-Learning and the Coordinator of Civic Engagement. When asked what recruitment strategies would most appeal to the parents, the Coordinator of Civic Engagement responded:

Um, we did have some parents come when their kids were doing a performance at the end of the year. Um, we had folds come in for that to kind of see their kids do that ummm...and there were refreshments there.

The statement given above indicates that collaboration, or simply, communication with the parents of program participants will be more likely if incentives are offered at events.

*Having shared goals.* The presence of shared goals was mentioned in relation to interagency collaboration by OSLECE partners, and has been listed in scholarly articles to increase interagency collaboration. Still, shared goals were mentioned by focus group participants. After-school program partners mentioned various independent goals, but the main shared goal mentioned by Housing

Authority and OSCLE was that of improving the school performance of after-school program participants. The assistant director of service-learning described what she believes the purpose of the after-school program partnership:

I think the number one priority is improved school performance...in my mind that the reason we're doing all that is to help these children who are struggling with poverty uh achieve and feel...confident in school and that starts incredibly young with your sense of self and your sense of your ability to make A's and be the good student instead of the bad student.

The Coordinator of Civic Engagement added that the shared goal of improved academic performance has brought together different disciplines. According to the Coordinator, this coming together has contributed to the development and enhancement of the after-school program curriculum. The knowledge-base that Education and Human ecology (i.e., child and family development) students has led to a change in the overall program curriculum to include socio-emotional development. According to the Coordinator, shared goals help the partnership and program progress:

Um, I would agree that that's the primary concern and primary goal for kinda us starting the program. Um, I think that as we've had a chance to work more with students that are in school of education and in childhood and family development...been learning from them about kind of the um...the childhood development piece also and kinda the interpersonal skills and kinda conflict management um and some of those other...other skills that just go along with kind of how we interact and how you just interact well and successfully with other people and so I think as kind of a secondary piece that that's come in, because the students and the volunteers that we have coming to staff the program are also coming in with that understanding of kind of pulling

the homework and the academic success in with the kind of um interpersonal or personal development piece, as well. So, I know they're working on that and they...I would consider that an important goal also.

The Coordinator of Civic Engagement, in the above quote, discusses how information and ideas are derived from various students from various programs of study; however, she does not discuss the inclusion of said students in decisions about the after-school program curriculum. Information on the level of collaboration between service-learning student volunteers and OSLCE staff is needed to fully assess the impact that students from varying disciplines have on the after-school program. Additionally, the Coordinator's statement implies that the program is customizable to the needs and backgrounds of the service-learning students who participate. Will the after-school program curriculum continue to change to meet the learning objectives of service-learning student volunteers or will a basic program design and curriculum skeleton be developed for the sake of longitudinal data collection and assessment? Also, will a fluid program curriculum produce improved academic performance and behavior in low-income child participants?

Focus group with education and human ecology faculty. Faculty partners discussed several factors that impact their overall level of collaboration with each other and among other partners involved in the after-school program. Alignment with faculty curriculum, institutional culture, and policy are among a few factors mentioned during a 60-minute focus group.

*Alignment with faculty curriculum.* According to the College of Education and Human Ecology faculty who participated in a focus group, alignment with faculty curriculum, university students showing a need for guidance, a belief that students like the service-learning site, strong leadership, participation in the evaluation project, sharing information, institutional culture, and discipline alignment impact collaboration. Additionally, partner proximity, institutional culture, discipline

alignment, resources, and policy were said to prevent collaboration between them and other partners involved in the after-school program.

When asked how the partnership first formed, Education and Human Ecology faculty members described how they were approached by the Assistant Director of Service-Learning. They spoke of conversations that they had, individually, with the assistant director of service-learning about their interest in collaborating to implement the after-school program and resources that they could provide. One faculty member from the college of education clearly stated how she was reluctant to get involved when initially approached by the assistant director of service-learning. The faculty member from the College of Education was concerned about the safety of her students who would be required to report to the host site, a low-income housing community. When the assistant director of service-learning presented the education faculty partner with a safe, alternative program site, the education faculty partner agreed to collaborate. The faculty member explained that she was interested in getting her students experienced in diverse environments and youth from diverse backgrounds:

...not just um...not just race, but...SES and everything so...I...not only that, but...there was a lot to be said for um...for seeing how kids are outside of an academic environment. So, getting' a little more insight and stuff like that into their home life...and that's how I initially got involved in it.

In addition to considering the safety of her potential service-learning students, the faculty member expressed how fit with her current curriculums was important for her to commit resources to the after-school program: "I said, 'I think this would be great for my special ed undergrads because we...in this one particular semester that we're...we're struggling with um...getting them involved in more diverse populations....'" The COE faculty member continued discussing how she originally wanted to add a

service-learning component to her First-Year Experience course and added it to her special education class, as well. Similarly, the faculty partner from the School of Human Ecology discussed how faculty members typically make decisions in semester blocks. She described how it is difficult to accept or make changes to her curriculum “midstream.”

*Related disciplines.* Faculty members discussed how having related disciplines is important to facilitating collaboration: “And, it makes the most sense for us to be in this ‘cuz we have you know, similar disciplines and so it makes sense that we would do that.” The faculty member, in the statement above, explained that only faculty members who represent disciplines related to the goals of the after-school program should be invited to join the partnership. Both faculty members expressed disapproval of past instances when faculty members teaching unrelated courses were invited to provide service-learning students. For example, one faculty member stated, “...we can’t just put like a biology class or something....” Such disapproval of unrelated disciplines relates to mutual respect, understanding, and trust. Mutually respectful, understanding, and trusting relationships have been found by scholarly researchers to increase interagency collaboration. During the focus group discussion, there was an implied lack of understanding and respect for faculty from disciplines unrelated to the program’s goals. The education and human ecology faculty proceeded to explain that they do not decide which faculty provide service-learning students. One faculty member added that, initially, founding partners wanted to “fill” seats. According to the faculty member, the founding partners did not have enough university student volunteers to match with low-income child participants. Thus, a lack of adequate resources led to a temporary relaxation of the partnership’s program quality standards and, for better or worse, increased the partnerships willingness to include additional faculty partners.

*University service-learning students show need for guidance.* Faculty partners discussed how their collaboration with service-learning students increased when students showed a need for instruction

or guidance. Faculty reported making arrangements to increase their communication with students who needed additional guidance. One faculty member described how she increased her communication with community liaisons because they were in need of training in child development theory and strategy:

I think we've worked with the community liaison...is that what they're called? The people who we pay...the student we pay to work out. We've worked with them more so that they're more consistent in their behavior management strategies and planning and working together.

So, faculty member have worked with community liaisons, but have trouble remembering their official job title.

*Strong leadership.* A strong leader who cares deeply about the afterschool program is important to maintaining the group's collaboration. The importance of strong leadership is also supported by scholarly literature. When asked what has facilitated the level of collaboration since the collaborative first formed, a faculty partner answered:

I think probably [Assistant Director of Service-Learning's] leadership...I mean, she's been..you know, she wanted to make it happen and to be successful when I was just kind of a loosey goosey kind of thing about it. And she was very...she was the...she was problem solver. She was the troubleshooter. You know, she was the logistics person.[...] I think herrrr...her leadership and how she kind of viewed it as something important. You know, to what it meant to be service learning... 'cuz that was her...really her focus. That gave us the opportunity to um...to use the site in a way that benefited a lot of us...the kids included, but me certainly....



According to the COE faculty partner, the assistant director of service-learning is the “troubleshooter” of the afterschool program partnership. This finding is consistent with current collaboration literature that states that strong leadership is essential to successful and collaborative interagency partnerships.

*Participation in the research.* There were instances where participation in the actual evaluation research activities seemed to increase the level of collaboration between the faculty partners as well as instances where faculty partners clearly discussed how their participation in the research influenced how they think about collaborating with other after-school program partners. During a focus group with the education faculty member and the school of human ecology faculty member, the human ecology faculty partner mentioned new information about student attendance to the education faculty partner:

... I have the sign-in sheets ‘cuz I double check them....in case you want to know [to the education faculty]. Um, of the students who are there, ‘cuz we ask the students to sign in and out because we need to document that too...

The statement by the school of human ecology faculty member seems to be an indication of just how often the two faculty members communicate with each other. The school of human ecology partner did not mention the sign in sheets until they sat down together for the focus group (which took place at the end of the Spring semester). Similarly, in a discussion about behavior management strategies employed on the low-income housing site, the COE faculty member expressed excitement about ideas presented by the school of human ecology faculty member:

But, I mean, that’s really interesting [...] that you’d [the human ecology faculty partner] bring that up ‘cuz I hadn’t really thought. I mean, I had thought about it a really long time ago, but I...the dynamics of having kids in there....that are related...

It is clear from the previous two quotes that communication between the two faculty members could be improved. The apparent low level of communication between the education faculty member and the human ecology faculty member may be due to high levels of trust between the two professors. A statement by the special education faculty partner indicates that the two are comfortable being autonomous, because they trust each other's expertise. She said, "So, when her kids are there, I'm like they know what they're doing and it's all good. When mine are there, it's the same thing."

The special education faculty partner and school of human ecology partner seem to transfer this sense of autonomy into their beliefs about the information-seeking behavior of their service-learning students. For example, when asked if the after-school program partnership would benefit from having a ListServe or RSS feed where students could ask and respond to questions about their service-learning experience, both teachers responded by saying that their students would only ask their respective faculty advisors, or the community liaisons on-site. For instance, a special education service-learning student who needs help would first ask the community liaison and then go back to class and ask their special education instructor. According to the faculty partners, the service-learning student volunteers would likely not use a ListServe or RSS feed.

This information seems to support the claim made by the Coordinator of Civic Engagement that majority of the interagency collaboration lies on the community liaisons. It seems that students who are on site will first ask the community liaisons. If the community liaisons do not have an answer, then the service-learning students (and possibly student volunteers) will ask their respective faculty members. The reverse of this communication pathway is uncertain. There is no evidence that service-learning students share information with the community liaisons on site once they have gotten accurate advice from their respective faculty members. There is also no evidence to support the idea that the education faculty partner and the school of human ecology faculty partner collaborate with each other when

addressing service-learning students' questions. There is, however, evidence that supports communication between community liaisons and the human ecology faculty partner (as mentioned previously).

The COE faculty member continued to discuss how simply participating in the evaluation research process and completing the research questionnaire has led her to think about current voids in collaboration and desired levels of collaboration with other partners:

...and so I think...I mean, just answering the questionnaire I'm like oh we need to do more with her...oh, we probably need to do more with her. I mean, we know what we're doing and we've got our components...our different service learning opportunities and all that. [...] But, I can...I mean, I'm the whole time I'm sittin' there thinking...why don't I move...why don't I go on site at [the elementary school]. Why don't I just put em at [the elementary school]....

New ways of thinking described by the education faculty partner are consistent with the use of participatory action research methods. The purpose of participatory action research, an approach used for this study, is to facilitate communication, understanding, and empowerment among participants. The finding that study participants increased their communication is expected.

*Sharing information.* Both faculty members agree that sharing information through email is ideal. When asked if she believes that she is adequately included in decision making for the after-school program partnership, the school of human ecology faculty member responded that she believes that the openness of the coordinator of Civic Engagement and assistant director of service-learning has made her inclusion possible. She says, "I think [the assistant director of service-learning and the coordinator of Civic Engagement] are very open to...if you can't attend face to face meetings...certainly email."

According to the faculty partners, reflective papers are the primary method of sharing information between the faculty members, service-learning students, and the coordinator of civic engagement. Students write reflective essays about their service-learning experience and what they have learned from it. The papers are graded by their respective instructor. According to the human ecology faculty partner, the reflective papers are copied and forwarded to the service-learning coordinator for review:

...but they [university service-learning students] have written assignments. Now, when we talk in class it's a big class-it's sixty students- and there are three sites so you know they can bring up issues in class or in writing. Generally, I'll say in writing. I usually copy, I say...I'll tell them after the semester is over, I copy their papers and give that feedback to [the Coordinator of Civic Engagement]. So, she has an idea of what the students are saying.

In the above quote, the human ecology faculty member describes sharing information with the coordinator. It is unclear, however, how often the two discuss the contents of the reflective papers. Also, there is no evidence to support that the coordinator shares copies of the reflective papers with the assistant director of service-learning or the community liaisons.

*Institutional culture.* Faculty partners discussed how teaching at an institution that encourages multidisciplinary collaborations encourages them to seek out opportunities to collaborate with other campus faculty and staff. According to the education faculty partner, "...It's kind of what we're always looking for...cross-campus affiliations, right. Cross campus collaborations...that's what this university is very big on. And so this certainly offered us that opportunity." To the education faculty partner, participating in the after-school program has allowed her fulfill her responsibilities as an employee of the university.

*Partner proximity.* Partner proximity proved to be a limitation to collaboration with employees of the housing authority. The human ecology faculty partner who participated in the focus group with the education faculty partner described how she had not met the director of the housing authority due to his failure to attend on-campus meetings: “I had not even met [Housing Authority Director] until recently. I actually went by there one day and introduced myself to him. Um, because I’ve mostly attended the planning meetings on campus and he has not been there....” The human ecology faculty member’s statement indicates the difficulty associated with interacting with partners who do not reside on the university’s campus. Both the housing authority director and the parents of children who participate in the after-school program live in the greater community. The housing authority director may be particularly unwilling to attend university-based meetings because he does not desire to participate. The director has stated, on the questionnaire, that he is content with providing a venue for the program and snacks for the children who participate. In contrast, the COE faculty partner described how she has no problem traveling to the housing authority (i.e. the afterschool program site). She claims that she has been in close contact with housing authority staff members. She described a time when she was alerted by housing authority staff that the child program participants were not being managed well. In response, she “ran right down there.”

*Having multiple service-learning sites to manage.* One barrier mentioned by the faculty partner from the school of human ecology was that of having multiple service-learning sites to manage. When asked if she would agree to establish a question and answer website for her students (e.g., an RSS feed), she mentioned how she has to maintain balanced evaluation criteria for her child and family development service-learning students across each site. She said, “eh...what’s tough for me, because I have three sites is I can’t require...I have to be consistent across what students are required for the sites they choose.” Hence, the desire to maintain equal service-learning requirements across service-learning

sites may lead to faculty members' reluctance to collaborate with other partners regarding changes to the after-school program's curriculum.

*Policy.* Policy was noted by both the special education faculty partner and the human ecology faculty member as a major barrier to collaborating with school officials such as principals, teachers, counselors, and parent involvement coordinators. Particularly, faculty partners mentioned how much easier it would be if the federal policy, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), did not exist:

I mean, it would be...if...if FERPA was not there, we could do it like that. I mean, 'cuz I had access... I mean, you can pretty much have access to any of...I mean, the school has all that kind of stuff....

Removal of the policy according to both faculty members would allow them to collect the data that they need to evaluate the after-school program's impact on academic achievement. Currently, they have not been able to gain direct access to the academic records of students.

Email interview with the community liaison and the education service-learning student. The service-learning student and the community liaison completed electronic copies of all research materials separately. Overall, university program staff/students who were interviewed believed that the program has met their participation goals. For the community liaison, these goals include "a desire to impact the lives of children coming up in similar circumstances that [he] endured as a child." For the college of education service-learning student, gaining an understanding of the home-life of the students that she taught during her practicum experience. Despite having slightly different reasons for participating, both students valued the opportunity.

The community liaison and the special education service-learning student reported barriers to having a collaborative relationship. Both students reported dissatisfaction with the ambiguity of their roles as program staff. The community liaison, a biology major (pre-med concentration), reported in his Spring 2015 Semester Plan that the uncertainty led to problems between himself, another community liaison, and the service-learning student volunteers:

Last semester, there were times when expectations between volunteers and liaisons were not fully spelled out. As a result, there may have been instances where volunteers found it difficult to express any feelings of uncertainty about what they should be doing or how to handle certain situation.

The community liaison's planned to prevent future issues like the one previously described. He planned to prevent such issues by "including a protocol section in the volunteer binder that will have a full detailed schedule for a typical day...[and]... a sheet including expectations and regulations for volunteers regarding dress code, conduct, responsibilities, and what to do when help is needed" (Semester Plan, Spring 2015). His statement indicates a desire to make the superiority of the community liaison role clear. Thus, providing clear protocols that leave student volunteers out of decision-making.

The service-learning student volunteer expressed a desire to be included in decisions related to the after-school program curriculum. According to the service-learning student, the community liaisons were not upfront about their plans for daily program activities and were not open to suggestions. When asked what has been her experience with the members of the low-income community or other members external to the afterschool program group, she described her frustration with the relationship she had with community liaisons. Although she reported to have a positive collaborative relationship with community liaisons, she mentioned not feeling like her ideas about the afterschool program curriculum

were openly received by them. She gave an example of a time when her ideas were ignored by the community liaison on duty:

We would go in with a full day planned of stationed, timed activities (homework, Ipad, outside, inside game, and math games) along with general rules, and tell the CL our plan, but their response would be that they already had rules and routines in place. So, we ended up sitting there at the tables doing homework or coloring. I think things could have been 100% different and more effective if we had met with the CL one day each week and planned out what we wanted to do, along with the rules and procedures that they must follow as a CL and came up with a combined plan.

Her statement clearly indicates her desire to be included in decisions regarding the after-school program curriculum. Her inclusion, however, is a question of the service-learning goals established for her by the education faculty partner.

When asked for details about how she approached the community liaisons with her suggestions, she described being polite and in return, respectfully ignored by them:

We [her special education cohort] would get there about 15-20 minutes before the kids started to arrive, and we would always go up to the CL and first ask if they had anything planned and the CL would say that there was nothing special planned. Then we would explain what we had planned, and the CL would always say that they had promised the kids more outside time for the day, or something along those lines. It always felt like there was some excuse, so we stopped planning. The times that the CL did say our activities would be good, when the kids got there, he would do his normal routine and disregard everything we had set up. The most problems



came on the days of parties that we had planned (Halloween, Christmas, Easter). Our professors would tell us the CL was expecting us to do it all, and we would plan and spend money for great games, snacks, and activities. Then, when we got there, the CL and child & family development majors would have their own candy, and it was just too much.

The special education major, in her statement, reveals subtle power-plays between the service-learning students who are education majors and the community liaisons who may or may not have relevant majors. She also expressed that she believes that someone with an education background would be better suited for the community liaison position. Similarly, the service-learning student also described barriers to collaboration related to variations in the courses of study represented among student volunteers. Consequently, program staff were reported by the service-learning student to remain separate. She talked about how university students developed cliques based on their fields of education:

Well, overall everything was a little disorganized. My cohort would plan activities, but the CL would want to follow their own schedule. So, we would work with tutoring the students, the CL would sit at a table and help, and then the child and family students would normally just sit and color with the students who did not have homework at a separate table. So, yes, we kind of just stuck to our own groups and did different activities with the kids.

According to the service-learning student volunteer, professor intervention between service-learning student volunteers and community liaisons improved collaboration. She described a Halloween party where the involvement of her professor helped her special education cohort implement their planned curriculum:

The most successful party was the Halloween one, and it went great. Our professor told the CL directly not to plan anything and let us do it all, and she came with us. The CL participated and helped, and the kids had a blast. I just think it all boils down to we needed more planned, set times for direct communication between my cohort and the CL about what we all expected from each other, without our professors being the middle man.

The community liaison interviewed placed value on the opportunity to communicate with after-school program faculty partners. He stated that sharing decision-making with faculty partners, the coordinator of civic engagement, and the assistant director of service-learning was worthwhile:

The use of collaborative decision-making has greatly facilitated the success behind my involvement in the program. The ability to draw advice from not only my fellow liaison, but faculty and experienced service-learning students alike, has kept me from making certain decisions that would not have been as beneficial to a particular situation or overall success of the program.

### Identifying and Mapping Communities of Practice

What is the level of collaboration? Results from the Level of Collaboration Scale developed by Frey and colleagues (2006) show that the overall level of collaboration is 2.21 out of 5.00. This indicates that the partnership is operating closer to the cooperation level (level 2.00) of collaboration. A cooperation level of collaboration means that partners are sharing information through a formal method of communication, have loosely defined roles, and are autonomous when making decisions. A close

look at the social network graph in Figure 1 shows relationships closer to collaboration (level 5.00) among university-level partners.

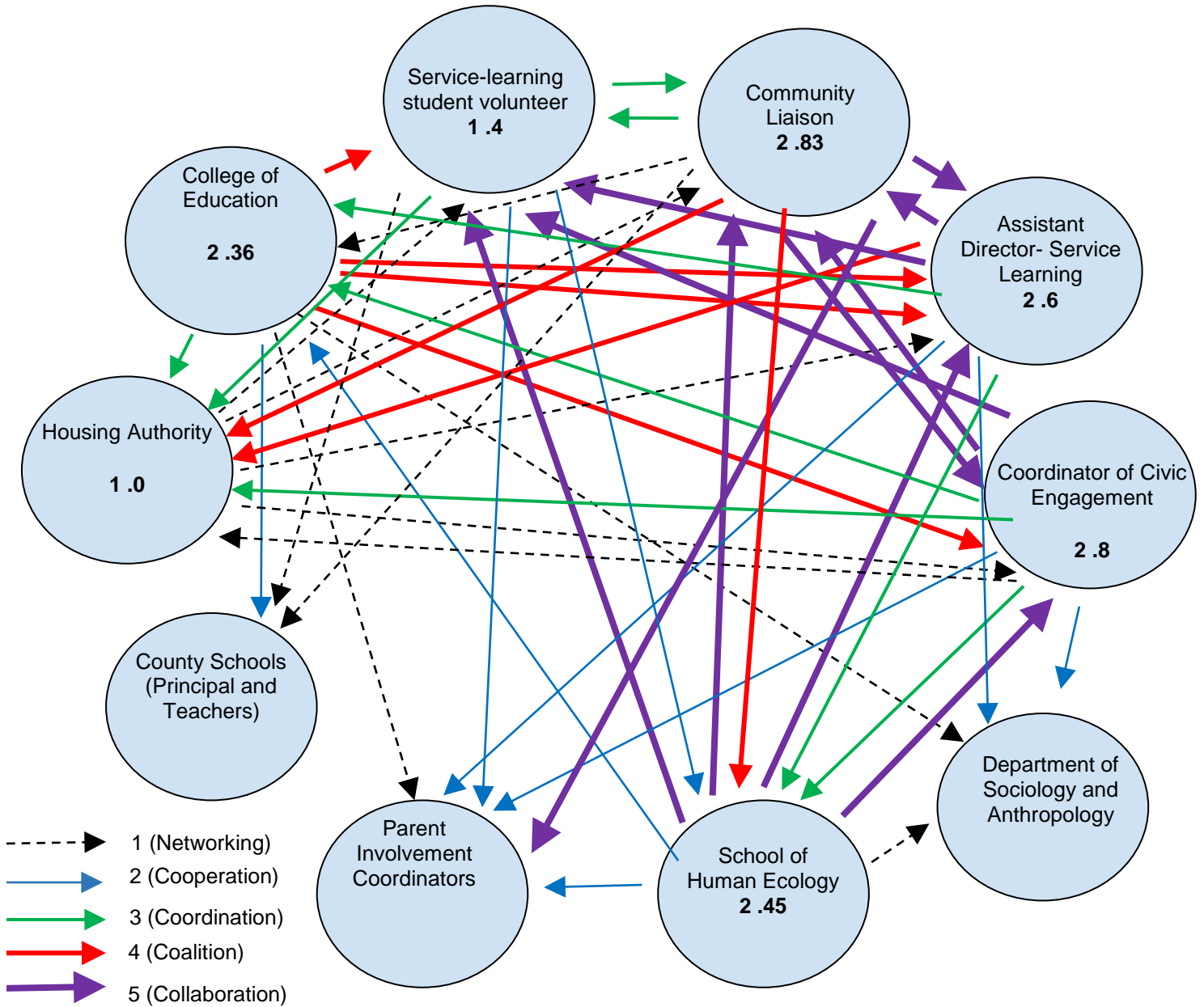


Figure 1. A social network graph of current collaboration levels reported by the Levels of Collaboration Scale (Frey, et al., 2006) after-school program partners. A dotted black arrow represents a perceived relationship characterized as networking (level 1). Similarly, a blue arrowed line represents cooperation (level 2), a green arrow represents coordination (level 3), a red arrow represents coalition (level 4), and a purple line represents collaboration (level 5). No arrowed line represents no interaction between partners. The numbers inside of each

circle correspond to the mean overall level of collaboration reported for each other partner. For example, the School of Human Ecology has an overall level of collaboration between coordination and coalition with all other partners involved in the after-school program collaborative.

Levels of collaboration seem to decrease as partners become less proximal to the university's campus. Furthermore, levels of collaboration appear to decrease as partners exist outside of the Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement. So, although decision-making may be shared among university-level partners, the opportunity does not seem to extend beyond the campus partners.

When the ratings are compared to the desired level of collaboration indicated by each partner, it is clear that most research participants desire more communication with the low-income community housing authority. However, the housing authority reports a desire to remain largely at the no interaction to networking level of collaboration with afterschool program partners. Consequently, the Housing Authority is content with provided resources, but remaining on the periphery of program decisions and activities.

Most after-school program partners desire an increased level of collaboration with local school system teachers and parent involvement coordinators. All partners who completed the questionnaire desired a higher level of collaboration with the parents of children who participate in the after-school program. Parents, however, were not asked to complete the questionnaire. The overall current level of collaboration (reported as out-going communication by participating partners) with low-income community parents is 1.17, or closer to networking. A networking level of collaboration means that partners are "aware of the organization, have loosely defined roles, have little communication, and make decisions independently" (Frey, et al. 2006). Results from the questionnaire reveal that most partners (except the housing authority members) desire a level of collaboration with parents that is around 3-

coordination or 4-coalition. In other words, most partners desire shared, frequent, and formal communication with parents.

#### What Factors Impact Parent Involvement in the After-School Program?

Phone interview with parents. Three parents, who are also residents of the low-income community and have children who participate in the after-school program, participated in 45-minute phone interviews. Overall, they reported liking the program and having positive relationships with program staff, but had trouble recalling any interaction with program staff. Furthermore, time and being enrolled in school were reported as main reasons they may not be able to be involved in after-school program events.

*Positive relationships.* Parents reported having positive relationships with university program staff and the staff of the local housing authority. Although having positive relationships with program staff and staff of the local housing authority was not mentioned to influence partner collaboration, it has been found in scholarly literature to increase interagency collaboration. When asked about their relationship with local housing authority staff members, parents stated that they were satisfied. In a few cases, residents/parents discussed interactions with local housing authority staff regarding the after-school program.

When asked about interactions with university program staff, all parents reported minimal communication levels. Furthermore, all parents reported having trouble remembering if they had even spoken to university program staff, at all. Some parents stated that they could recall being approached at the start of the after-school program by a young man or young woman about enrolling their child(ren) in the after-school program. An exception to this trend was a parent who talked about how issues with her child and other after-school program youth participants prompted her to have more interaction with

university program staff. Still, the parent could not remember the name of the young man or girl with whom she had spoken. Although parents reported having fairly positive relationships with after-school program partners, their relationship, in reality, seems to be somewhat non-existent.

*Sharing information.* All parents interviewed reported liking the afterschool program and that tutoring services were being offered, but they did not seem to be fully aware of the program goals mentioned by university partners. Goals such as personal development, improved socio-emotional skills, and improved leadership skills for their child(ren) were reported as desired components of the afterschool program curriculum by parents/residents. The same goals desired by parents were mentioned by other program partners as current and future program outcomes. Therefore, there seems to be a disconnect between parents' understanding of program activities and other partners' understanding of the program activities.

One resident whose child has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) mentioned how she was told via word-of-mouth about the after-school program by local housing authority staff upon moving to the low-income housing community:

...when I um moved...when I moved to [the low-income housing community] the people in the office...they told me about it so when I seen them come the first day...when I seen yall go over there...I ...I think he was a guy. I just walked over there and introduced myself and my son and they told me what they do for em and what type of program. He just started going.

According to the resident's statement, the housing authority staff were vital to informing her of the after-school program after the regular recruitment period carried out by community liaisons had ended. Thus, any new residents will likely learn of the program through word-of-mouth. Furthermore, this resident/parent reported taking initiative and introduced herself to program staff. Her willingness to take

initiative may have been due to prior knowledge of a similar program held at her previous low-income housing community described during a phone interview. Other longer-term parents/residents claimed that they learned of the program from flyers or from community liaisons who completed door-to-door recruiting at the start of the academic year.

A parent also provided information regarding increasing other parents' involvement in the community. When asked to suggest some things that need to change for the low-income housing facility to be a perfect community, the resident suggested implementing a community-wide newsletter or game:

...I guess they can send out the actual facility could communicate as far as sending out a calendar of different things that's going on um getting the community involved by having stuff like a first day thing of the month or newsletter or something like that to um get the parents involved. I stayed in Forest Heights one time and um they had started something where they would send out um monthly calendars and a newsletter and you know, could challenge the parent to a puzzle and you know, when you finish doin that you turn it in um...not a major incentive you know, but just...you could win a prize um...have something, you know, with the community um they need a better playground for one, for the kids [both laugh] cuz there's nothing to play on out here. Um, and they did that where they would have the parents to have to come to the office on a, you know, more than just a as needed basis and that got the parents involved which made it better for the kids because then them too...you know, the kids are more involved and parents are being active in their community and socializing one to another.

The mother of two described ways she believed would get other parents involved. She also explained how the implementation of such tactics at her previous low-income residence got the parents more involved. The increased involvement of those parents, she claimed, made the community experience

better for the children and other parents. According to her, those parents visited the main housing authority office on more than an as-needed basis.

When asked how the university partners and the after-school program can make the low-income housing community better, one resident suggested several changes along with a method of communication:

...imma put it like this...just say you in school you know how the teachers send you some papers and and and the stuff that they...you want your child to participate in they'll send you a ...that say how much money this and that.

Communicating program activities and events through letters seems to be a preference for this particular parent/resident. This could also indicate the level of comfort that the parent/resident has with school and after-school programs. The resident may be used to this level of involvement and so feels comfortable suggesting it and complying with it. It may be a process with which she is familiar; however, being asked to actually volunteer may be less comfortable and familiar.

*Issues between children.* For one parent, collaboration with university program staff and parents/residents was increased as a result of altercations between their child and other after-school program child participants. When asked if she had any interaction with after-school program staff, the mother of one female program participant described conversations that she had with program staff regarding her child's behavior. She struggled to recall the names of the community liaisons she had spoken with when probed for specific names, but was very willing to discuss instances when she felt obligated to communicate with the community liaisons regarding her child's behavior towards another after-school program resident/child participant. According to the parent, "there was one female that [she] spoke with. She had to walk [her] daughter home because boys were being disrespectfully rude to



her and [her daughter] got very upset.” When asked if she could tell me who, specifically, she spoke with, she replied, “Um, Ole Lord. I can’t remember their names. There was one lady and one guy that I spoke with.” The resident and parent went on to describe details of each altercation that indicate how issues between after-school program child/resident participants prompted more interaction between parents and university program staff.

This parent increased her level of communication with both program staff and low-income housing residents because she thinks of herself as the “peacemaker” of the community. According to her, she has collaborated with housing authority staff members to host community-wide parent-child activities and feels comfortable approaching other residents regarding the community and its residents. She described her role as peacemaker:

...and in the neighborhood [...], I consider myself as the peacemaker. [...]. So, um I’m the peacemaker and I don’t mind going to not one parent concerning any of the kids because that’s just me. I love children and I love taking care of em...

She believes, based on the statement above, that she is the neighborhood peacemaker. Altercations increase the likelihood that she will interact with another parent or program staff member. It is unclear if other parents or residents agree with her being the self-proclaimed peacemaker.

Three characteristics were found in the literature to influence parental involvement in out-of-school time activities for children from low-income families: (1) self-efficacy, (2) self-esteem, and (3) residential stability.

*Self-efficacy and self-esteem.* One resident/parent who is currently working on her nursing degree stated that she typically feels able to help her child with homework; however, she is intimidated by newer methods used in today’s schools. Still, she discussed finding different pathways to helping her

child with homework. Two of the three residents phone interviewed described times when they felt that university program staff, likely student volunteers and service-learning students, would be better at helping their child(ren) with homework than they would. In such cases, parents seemed to believe that the university students are doing what they (as parents) are not capable of doing. When asked if they would volunteer at the after-school program if asked by someone, all three parents/residents provided affirmative answers. It should be noted that parents were not probed for details about ways that they would volunteer or what they believed volunteering would entail. However, all parents agreed to volunteer in some supporting capacity such as preparing meals or giving motivational speeches. These activities, it seems, are what parents are most comfortable with agreeing to do. Again, parents/residents were not asked if they would tutor after-school program participants.

One mother of a child diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) told of how she believes that participation in the after-school program is better for her son, because he does not like getting homework help from her:

...yeah. I think its..uh when somebody else is helping him do his work...it makes him want to do...it actually makes him want to uh...ion know it's like he just be more interested like when he went [to the after-school program] he said he like it and it made him you know like want to do his homework or go get help with his homework.

The mother of three, as stated above, went on to describe how her son does not like to get help from her. She believes that he enjoys frustrating her, so he would be better off getting homework help with reading from university students at the after-school program.

Similarly, the parent who found alternate pathways to helping her daughter with homework also expressed her faith in the afterschool program staff's ability to provide help when she cannot.

*Residential stability.* Residents' reports of residential stability varied. One informant reported having no new neighbors within one year whereas another reported having at least one new neighbor. One informant told of having just moved into the low-income housing residence. Additionally, two out of three parents expressed a desire to move out of the low-income housing community and stated that they have always considered the location to be short-term. She said, "I don't want to be in [the low-income community] that long. Im tryna get a house. Just, I mean, right...as of right now... It's short-term...". Residents also described how they believe that most other residents are living there with the intention of staying forever. They made it clear that they do not want to live at the location longer than necessary. Consequently, one resident discussed a lack of desire to be social or involved in the low-income housing community. The parent/resident described her preferred level of communication:

...the reason I was so anxious to move...to get transferred from [her previous low-income community] to [her current low-income community] is because it's a lot of older people in [the current one] and they're more quieter. Like they don't bother you. You don't bother them, they don't bother you....So...I don't want to know them people like...we might speak, 'hey, how you doin?' And 'ooo, is it hot enough for you out here?' 'Yeah, baby.' 'Ooo, I got to work tomorrow.' 'See you later.' Stuff like that. Speaking to you ...you know, holding little brief conversations. Then we go...I go in my apartment, they go in their apartment. Now, as far as kicking it and chilling. uh uh...I don't want to do that cuz I don't want nobody coming and knocking on my door. That's just how much...my children don't even go outside like...if they do go, they go to the park. The kids over there, they play...when it's time to come in, they come in. You know, they don't...it's just people. I don't...I get peace of mind at home.

This parent, in particular, talked about how most residents move to the community because it is quiet. According to residents/parents the location is quiet and residents do not typically spend much time socializing with each other. She explained how she does not want to get overly involved. The lack of desire to be social may serve as a barrier to parent involvement. Participating in after-school program events may provide a platform for residents to know each other--an opportunity that some residents do not want.

*Time.* All parents interviewed expressed a willingness to volunteer at the after-school program if asked by after-school program partners despite being single parents. All parents or guardians reported a lack of time as the main reason they may or may not be able to volunteer. Two out of three parents interviewed explained that they attend school and/or work. When asked if she would volunteer at the after-school program, one single mother replied, “It just got to be like at a certain time like cuz...I think I get off at like four so....” This particular resident went on to describe how her course schedule further complicates her availability.

Residents also described having fairly unstable work hours. For one resident/single parent who works sporadic hours (i.e., three days a month or two weeks a month, and etc.), volunteering was still not possible. When asked if and when she had volunteered at the after-school program she replied,

...um we as parents...we try to help and to understand their homework or whatever, but between being a parent and working and trying to do everything else that you do for your child...sometimes it’s kinda tedious to give em that extra attention that the [university] students do.

She explained that being a student does not allow her enough time to volunteer at the after-school program. Overall, parents reported that they would benefit from programs that builds self-efficacy,

financial literacy, and problem-solving skills. According to informants, most parents do not know how to manage a budget and do not know how to handle altercations maturely.

## Discussion

This evaluation used a mixed-methods approach (emphasis on PAR) to assess interagency collaboration and provide culturally-sensitive results. The results indicate that the factors that influence collaboration vary from agency to agency. This finding is consistent with the findings of Provan and Milward (2001), Livingstone and Colleagues (2014), and Frey and Associates (2006) who state that each partnership is unique. Research participants did discuss how participation in the participatory action research impacted their thinking. Since a typical outcome of using the PAR approach is influence the thinking of participants, the finding is expected.

Overall, the interagency partnership is operating mostly at the cooperation level of collaboration. In other words, partners tend to make decisions independently, yet provide enough information to keep each other informed. A review of the social network graph (Figure 1) reveals that the level of collaboration among university partners is between coordination and coalition whereas the level of collaboration between university partners and off-campus partners is between networking and cooperation. This finding is consistent with research by Scherer (2009) who found that collaboration between partners tends to decrease with distance. Consequently, having one partner act as a boundary spanner may help to alleviate the impact of distance (Shepherd & Meehan, 2012). Still, staff members of the local Housing Authority have expressed a desire to remain at the no interaction level of collaboration; they are happy providing snacks and the program venue. Efforts should be made to develop a method of communication that will facilitate proactive problem solving while respecting the desired level of collaboration reported by the housing authority.

Faculty partners were found to be largely impacted by the timing of program-related decisions, professional relevance, institutional culture, and federal policy. Decisions that impact the course syllabi and service-learning student requirements outside of normal planning periods are not well-received by faculty partners. Faculty partners seem to be more likely to collaborate if the project fits well with their course curriculum and if changes happen in semester blocks. This suggests that faculty members will be less open to partnership and program decisions that occur outside of their normal planning periods.

An institutional culture of interdisciplinary collaboration facilitated collaboration. Partnerships that include faculty members from distant or unrelated disciplines may experience difficulty establishing faculty relationships that are mutually respectful, understanding, and trusting. This phenomenon is typically referred to as *legitimacy* in collaboration literature (Provan and Milward, 2001).

Despite efforts to increase collaboration, policies such as FERPA may serve as an unwavering barrier. Shepherd and Meehan (2012) suggest that partners should find ways to circumvent such barriers. Faculty members were also found to be too trusting of each other's expertise. The high level of trust described by research participants served as a hindrance to collaboration. Faculty members discussed not feeling the need to consult with each other, because they trust each other's ability to develop appropriate program activities. This finding may indicate the need for more formal opportunities to discuss each other's service-learning endeavors, because faculty members may not feel comfortable requesting information about another faculty partner's service-learning plans. An understanding that such information-seeking behavior is a normal condition of being in the after-school partnership needs to be established.

Both the service-learning student volunteer and the community liaison expressed the need to differentiate and clarify their participation responsibilities. The service-learning student expressed a lack of respect for the community liaisons capacity to successfully operate the after-school program due to

him being a biology major. The community liaison seemingly desired to establish his management role by disregarding the service-learning student's attempt to implement independently-developed curriculums whereas the service-learning student described her desire to be more involved in planning program activities. Program administrators should consider defining where the two roles overlap and divide. One solution would be to include both students in joint planning meetings--a strategy found to improve collaborative relationships among partners (Noonan, et al., 2012).

Gaps in communication between faculty partners and between university students have been identified. Findings reveal that Community Liaisons are at the center of information sharing and collaboration. Community Liaisons were said to communicate with parents, housing authority staff, service-learning students, student volunteers, Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement staff, faculty partners, and parent involvement coordinators; however, the partners with which the community liaisons communicate may not collaborate with each other. This, according to participant comments, is the result of a high level of trust in each partner's ability to do his or her job. This finding may be characteristic of partnerships in academia.

Parents who participated in the research commented on how beneficial they believe the program to be for their child(ren). All parents reported liking the program, but did suggest that the program would be better if more enrichment activities were offered. Parents expressed a desire to be involved in the program events, but stated that they often lacked time. Most parents reported working sporadic hours and/or being enrolled in school as barriers to participation. Additionally, low self-efficacy and residential instability were found to hinder involvement (Reece, Staudt, & Ogle, 2013; Jayroe & Brenner, 2005). Parents believed that the university students would do a better job helping their children with homework than they would. Research on parental involvement shows that parents will be more likely to participate if they have adequate self-efficacy and self-esteem. Studies by Reece, Staudt, and

Ogle (2013) and Jayroe and Brenner (2005) suggest that organizations that provide self-efficacy and self-esteem building activities for parents can expect parents to feel comfortable when volunteering and empowered by their ability to contribute to their child(ren)'s academic development.

How can parent involvement in the after-school program be improved?

The number one reason reported by parents as a barrier to their involvement was lack of time. One solution may be to integrate opportunities for parents to achieve the same ends (from different means). For example, the provision of incentives that will match the pay they will receive if they were working or the provision of help with their own homework. Jayroe and Brenner (2005) offered stipends to parents to establish them as necessary program staff. Such strategies emphasize building reciprocal relationships. According to Provan and Milward (2001) and Nowell (2009), the promise of reciprocity is a major pre-condition getting new partners to join collaboratives. Potential partners desire to partnerships that will lead to more benefits than costs (Provan and Milward, 2001).

Adult programming or personal development events that includes topics such as budgeting, self-efficacy, socio-emotional skills, and problem-solving skills would be most beneficial to the participants of this research study. Furthermore, events should feature hands-on, active learning activities that allow parents to practice new strategies and apply new information (Jayroe and Brenner, 2005).

Is the Partnership Reaching its Shared Goals?

Shared goals mentioned include improving the academic achievement of youth after-school program participants, improving the behavior modification skills and multicultural understanding of university service-learning students, and increasing parental involvement in after-school program events. The one goal mentioned by all stakeholder groups interviewed was improving the academic performance and behavior of youth program participants.



The comments made by informants during an initial conversation (i.e. focus group, phone interview, or email-distributed questions) indicate that the partnership is reaching its shared goals, but there are some comments that weaken the strength of this finding. For instance, the beliefs of faculty fellows and program administrators differ from their service-learning students' in regards to what is considered quality field training. Furthermore, most parents like the after-school program, but desire a more holistic curriculum. For example, one care-taker requested more enrichment activities. Focus group discussions with program leadership suggest that the after-school program has been modified to be holistic- including activities to improve the leadership and socio-emotional qualities of participants, but parents are likely unaware of such efforts. A few parents interviewed have a general sense of the benefits their children are getting during program hours- help with homework, snacks, and playtime.

During a focus group with partners from the Housing Authority and the Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement, the Coordinator of Civic Engagement and the Assistant Director of Service Learning mentioned that the after-school program youth participants enjoyed the after-school program so much that they petitioned their office to host the program from Monday through Friday as opposed to Monday through Thursday. Both university staff members agreed that the collective action displayed by the youth participants was proof that the program has a positive influence on the behavior of the children.

Faculty fellows who participated in a separate focus group meeting seem to believe that the program is successful based on indirect indicators such as attendance. The child and family development faculty member and the professor of special education, strongly believe that the program is successful and reaching its goals. They proclaim that the, "the children don't have to be there...so [...] they are voting with their feet. So, they do like it [the after-school program]," and "our [service learning] students aren't going in there [the low-income community] kicking and screaming."

A second-year service learning student from the college of education, confirmed the assumptions made by the faculty partners, but stated that her site experience could be better. As previously discussed, the line of separation between the roles of the service-learning student versus the community liaison has not been clearly defined. The ambiguity of the responsibilities of each has led to frustration and the formation of clique-like groups during the execution of program activities. Consequently, the service-learning students may benefit from opportunities to collaborate with community liaisons such as formal planning meetings- a suggestion recommended by the service-learning student.

All parents interviewed reported liking the afterschool program and the staff involved. When asked to name three things they like about the afterschool program, parents generally stated that they like that it gives their children something fun to do. Additionally, they value their child's opportunity to learn from university students who serve as role models as well as a chance to be social in a positive environment. One working parent described how her child was motivated to pursue dual majors as a result of participating in the after-school program:

For instance...my child has always wanted to um do something in the healthcare field, but working in the afterschool program at [the low-income community] with the [university] students...she now says, 'mom, I want to go to [the university] and I want to have a dual major....'

This parent's child has benefited, simply, from spending time around university students. According to the parent, the university students serve as positive role models for her child. Another parent talked about comments that her son made after his first day attending the after-school program. She said, "I asked him did he have fun...he said yeah. He said that everybody was nice. He said um...he thinks that he ate snacks and he played...but um...[...] he just really said he enjoyed himself, you know, and he couldn't wait to go back." In the statement above, the parent describes how excited her son was about

the program. His eagerness to return the following program day supports the claims of the faculty partners who attest that youth participants are attending the program because they like it rather than because they are required.

When asked to name three things they would change about the after-school program, parents typically could not think of anything; however, one parent requested more leadership-building activities and altruism-building field-trips. Although parents mentioned few things about the program that they want to change, parents did mention activities that they would like to see added to the curriculum. In response to questions about activities that would most benefit their child, informants listed activities that enhanced reading skills, sports, social coping skills, community outreach, and leadership skills. All parents desired a new playground for their children to improve gross motor skills during and outside of program hours, but statements made by the Director of the low-income community site (i.e., the local Housing Authority) suggest that this demand will not be met.

#### Is the After-School Program Interagency Collaborative Effective?

In sum, the partnership is operating at a level that is closer to cooperation. Closer and stronger relationships seem to be on the university's campus. The quality of interagency relationships decreases as efforts are extended beyond campus. The results of the sub-questions suggest that the collaborative is mostly effective at coordinating services despite the lack of communication with some partners. Focus groups with faculty partners reveal that they are satisfied with the service-learning experience that their students are getting. Communication between faculty partners, however, seemed to be fairly infrequent. Similarly, the parents of youth participants commented on how their children are more motivated to complete homework assignments and benefit from spending time with university students. Additionally, service-learning students and community liaisons report that participation in the low-income community

site has reached their participation goals. Still, discrepancies between the role of the community liaison and the service-learning student has negatively impacted the service-learning experience. Both community liaison and the service-learning student reported dissatisfaction with the loosely defined line dividing the two roles. While the service-learning student expressed a desire to participate in planning daily activities, the community liaison expressed a desire to clarify such tasks as his responsibility. The community liaisons are at the hub of communication, reporting communication with all partners including parents. It is, however, unclear how often faculty partners share important information with each other.

The results of this study suggest that the efficiency with which the collaborative operates and the strength of stakeholder relationship could be improved. One study by Nowell (2009) determined that the factor stakeholder relationships was the strongest predictor of a collaborative's capacity to produce systems change. Executive functioning most impacted the coordination of partnership business (i.e., information sharing and decision-making processes). The current partnership should consider the results (factors that impact the after-school partnership) and determine how to improve executive functioning and stakeholder relationships.

### Limitations

The current study sampled a small interagency partnership between affiliates of a large, public institution of higher education, a local housing authority, and affiliates of the local school system so the findings may not be generalizable to partnerships at other locations. Caution should be taken when attempting to reference the results of this report. Furthermore, this study used one individual to represent an agency. Only one community liaison out of two and one service-learning student were interviewed. No student volunteers were interviewed and no youth program participants were interviewed. Future

research could benefit from studies that compare multiple service-learning collaboratives, considers a larger, more diverse sample of university students, and integrates the perspective of youth participants. Including the actual youth participants in the research will provide researchers with an accurate conclusion about the impact of the program at the client level rather than only considering comments given by parents of youth participants.

Additionally, all representatives of agencies involved in the partnership were not interviewed. Members of the university department of anthropology and sociology and the parent involvement coordinators did not respond to recruitment efforts. Members of the local school system (i.e., teachers and principals) were not contacted to participate in the research study. Researchers who attempt similar studies as this one could attempt to compare and contrast interview results from groups of partners from each entity. Such an arrangement would decrease the effect of selection bias.

Desired level of collaboration data was not collected in numerical form so average scores could not be compared to the average scores found for the current level of collaboration. Furthermore, individual partners were interviewed as representatives of agencies, but responded to survey and interview questions as individuals. In some cases, more than one individual was interviewed from an agency. In such a case, individuals gave collaboration scores for each agency, but did not provide collaboration ratings for the other individuals within their agency. Since mean collaboration scores were calculated using ratings for each research participant, the lack of data was treated as missing and left out of calculations. Information about the missing data was obtained from other forms of data.

## Conclusion

Research such as the current study will benefit policy makers, service-learning and civic engagement coordinators, and professionals interested in increasing low-income parents' involvement.

Policies such as FERPA serve as barriers to effective interagency collaboration. Policy makers should consider developing addendums that facilitate the formal sharing of information considered necessary to holistic social services. An understanding of the power struggles that develop between service-learning students and community liaisons as well as the detrimentally high level of trust between academic partners will help coordinators of such programs mediate these relationships and establish data-informed communication processes. Additionally, insight gained about low-income parents and their involvement will help parent involvement professionals frame recruitment efforts appropriately. The results of this study also provide guidance for individuals interested in developing community-based programs in low-income communities.

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## Appendix A

Figure 1. Levels of collaboration scale [adapted from the work of Hogue, 1993; and Borden and Perkins, 1998, 1999]

This form is designed for those who work in one of the organizations or programs that are partners in the Cone Homes Afterschool Program. Please review these descriptions of different levels of collaboration. On the response section at the bottom of the page, please circle the name of the organization or group with which you are associated. Using the scale provided, please indicate the extent to which you currently interact with each other partner. (Skip your own row.)

Five Levels of Collaboration and Their Characteristics							
Networking 1	Cooperation 2	Coordination 3	Coalition 4	Collaboration 5			
Relationship Characteristics	+ Aware of organization + Loosely defined roles + Little communication + All decisions are made independently	+ Provide information to each other + Somewhat defined roles + Formal communication + All decisions are made independently	+ Share information and resources + Defined roles + Frequent communication + Some shared decision making	+ Share ideas + Share resources + Frequent and prioritized communication + All members have a vote in decision making	+ Members belong to one system + Frequent communication is characterized by mutual trust + Consensus is reached on all decisions		
Cone Homes Afterschool Program	No Interaction at All	Networking	Cooperation	Coordination	Coalition	Collaboration	
GSU College of Education	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Statesboro Housing Authority	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Bulloch County Schools	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Principals	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Teachers	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Bulloch County Parent Involvement	0	1	2	3	4	5	
GSU School of Human Ecology	0	1	2	3	4	5	
GSU Dept. of Sociology	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Office of Student Leadership & Civic Engagement (OSLCE)	0	1	2	3	4	5	
OSLCE Student Volunteers	0	1	2	3	4	5	
OSLCE Service Coordinator	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Parents	0	1	2	3	4	5	

## Appendix B

### Executive Summary

#### Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement

The study utilized a community-based participatory action research (PAR) approach to assess the development of an interagency collaborative, parent involvement, and its replication at other locations. A purposive sample of partners involved in a community-based after-school program for low-income youth ages 5 to 10 were recruited using the snow-ball method. Data collection followed the four stages of the PAR process mentioned by Stringer (2007) and five steps of the Collaboration Evaluation and Improvement Framework introduced by Woodland and Hutton (2012). The stages of PAR and the steps of the Collaboration Evaluation and Improvement Framework were used to answer the overarching research question: “What factors impact interagency collaboration?” Several sub-questions were also answered:

1. Is the Interagency Collaborative effective?
  - a. What is the current level of collaboration?
  - b. Is the collaborative reaching its objectives?
2. What factors impact parent involvement in the After-School Program?

The after-school program partnership formed approximately three years ago to implement an after-school program that offers tutoring and enrichment services to low-income youth who live in a low-income housing community. Youth participants receive tutoring services from university students and snacks during program hours. Community liaisons manage daily operations. Service-learning students, student volunteers, and community liaisons are responsible for providing tutoring and enrichment services.

### Results

#### Is the Interagency Collaborative Effective?

Partner proximity, partnership maturity, partnership configuration, sharing information, offering incentives, and having shared goals were mentioned by OSCLE partners as having an impact on collaboration.

**What is the current level of collaboration?** Results from the Level of Collaboration Scale developed by Frey and colleagues (2006) show that the overall level of collaboration is 2.21 out of 5.00. This indicates that the partnership is operating closer to the cooperation level (level 2.00) of collaboration. A cooperation level of collaboration means that partners are sharing information through a formal method of communication, have loosely defined roles, and are autonomous when making decisions.

When the ratings are compared to the desired level of collaboration indicated by each partner, it is clear that most research participants desire more communication with the low-income community housing authority. However, the housing authority reports a desire to remain largely at the no interaction to networking level of collaboration with afterschool program partners. Consequently, the Housing Authority is content with provided resources, but remaining on the periphery of program decisions and activities.

**Is the collaborative reaching its objectives?** The goals stated by partners from the Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement are to strengthen relationships with community partners, to provide professional experience for university service learning students, community liaisons, and student volunteers. Both the community liaison and the service learning student interviewed stated that their involvement in the

after-school program met their participation goals (i.e., gaining experience with diverse youth populations). OSLCE partners should consider if they want the participation goals of university students to be exceeded. One barrier to university students' participation goals being exceeded is the ambiguity of each student's role. Both the community liaison and the college of education service learning student stated that they believe that the role of the community liaison and the role of the service learning student needs to be clarified:

Well, overall everything was a little disorganized. My cohort would plan activities, but the CL would want to follow their own schedule. So, we would work with tutoring the students, the CL would sit at a table and help, and then the child and family students would normally just sit and color with the students who did not have homework at a separate table. So, yes, we kind of just stuck to our own groups and did different activities with the kids.

According to the service-learning student volunteer, professor intervention between service-learning student volunteers and community liaisons improved collaboration. She described a Halloween party where the involvement of her professor helped her special education cohort implement their planned curriculum:

The most successful party was the Halloween one, and it went great. Our professor told the CL directly not to plan anything and let us do it all, and she came with us. The CL participated and helped, and the kids had a blast. I just think it all boils down to we needed more planned, set times for direct communication between my cohort and the CL about what we all expected from each other, without our professors being the middle man.

All parents interviewed reported liking the afterschool program and the staff involved. When asked to name three things they like about the afterschool program, parents generally stated that they like that it gives their children something fun to do. Additionally, they value their child's opportunity to learn from university students who serve as role models as well as a chance to be social in a positive environment. One working parent described how her child was motivated to pursue dual majors as a result of participating in the after-school program:

For instance...my child has always wanted to um do something in the healthcare field, but working in the afterschool program at [the low-income community] with the [university] students...she now says, 'mom, I want to go to [the university] and I want to have a dual major...'

### **What Factors Impact Parent Involvement in the After-School Program?**

The number one reason reported by parents as a barrier to their involvement was lack of time. One solution may be to integrate opportunities for parents to achieve the same ends (from different means). For example, the provision of incentives that will match the pay they will receive if they were working or the provision of help with their own homework. Jayroe and Brenner (2005) offered stipends to parents to establish them as necessary program staff. Parents were hired staff which communicated to them that they were just as instrumental in helping impact the academic achievement of youth program participants as other certified staff. Such strategies emphasize building reciprocal relationships. According to Provan and Milward (2001) and Nowell (2009), the promise of reciprocity is a major pre-condition getting new partners to join collaboratives. Potential partners desire to partnerships that will lead to more benefits than costs (Provan and Milward, 2001).

Other factors reported to impact parent involvement in the after-school program were found to be positive relationships with staff, sharing information, issues between youth program participants, self-efficacy, self-esteem, residential stability, and time.

When asked what programs would benefit them most, two out of three parents stated a need for financial literacy. Parents also stated that the best way to communicate with them is through word-of-mouth, letters sent to their home, or community-wide newsletters.

### **Recommendations**

OSLCE partners should consider ways to define or clarify the difference between the role of community liaison and the role of service learning student by discussing the learning objectives of each with faculty partners.

Parents have likely not been highly involved in after-school program activities because they do not have time (i.e., they are working or have their own homework to complete). OSLCE partners should consider ways to make parents' involvement in after-school program activities lead to completed homework for both parents and youth and little to no lost wages.

## Appendix C

### Executive Summary

#### Faculty Partners

The study utilized a community-based participatory action research (PAR) approach to assess the development of an interagency collaborative, parent involvement, and its replication at other locations. A purposive sample of partners involved in a community-based after-school program for low-income youth ages 5 to 10 were recruited using the snow-ball method. Data collection followed the four stages of the PAR process mentioned by Stringer (2007) and five steps of the Collaboration Evaluation and Improvement Framework introduced by Woodland and Hutton (2012). The stages of PAR and the steps of the Collaboration Evaluation and Improvement Framework were used to answer the overarching research question: “What factors impact interagency collaboration?” Several sub-questions were also answered:

3. Is the Interagency Collaborative effective?
  - a. What is the current level of collaboration?
  - b. Is the collaborative reaching its objectives?
4. What factors impact parent involvement in the After-School Program?

The after-school program partnership formed approximately three years ago to implement an after-school program that offers tutoring and enrichment services to low-income youth who live in a low-income housing community. Youth participants receive tutoring services from university students and snacks during program hours. Community liaisons manage daily operations. Service-learning students, student volunteers, and community liaisons are responsible for providing tutoring and enrichment services.

### Results

#### Is the Interagency Collaborative Effective?

Triangulation of survey, focus group, and documents reveal that faculty partners believe faculty curriculum, related disciplines, university students showing a need for guidance, strong leadership, participation in the research, sharing information, institutional culture, partner proximity, having multiple service-learning sites to manage, and policy to be factors that impact their perceived level of collaboration between themselves and other partners.

Results from the Level of Collaboration Scale developed by Frey and colleagues (2006) show that the overall level of collaboration is 2.21 out of 5.00. This indicates that the partnership is operating closer to the cooperation level (level 2.00) of collaboration. A cooperation level of collaboration means that partners are sharing information through a formal method of communication, have loosely defined roles, and are autonomous when making decisions. The average level of outgoing collaboration for the College of Education faculty member is a 2.36 and the average level of outgoing collaboration for the School of Human Ecology faculty member is a 2.45. Coordination means that partners are “sharing information and resources, shared decision making, frequent communication, and defined roles” (Frey, et al., 2006).

Communication between the two faculty members could be improved. The COE faculty partner reported having no interaction at all (level 0) with the Human Ecology faculty member, whereas the Human Ecology faculty reported cooperating (level 2) with the COE faculty. This finding could indicate that the Human Ecology perceives that there is more outgoing communication to the College of Education faculty. The apparent low level of communication between the education faculty member and the human ecology faculty member may be due to high levels of trust between the two professors. A statement by the special education faculty partner indicates that the two are comfortable being autonomous, because they trust each other's expertise. She said, "So, when her kids are there, I'm like they know what they're doing and it's all good. When mine are there, it's the same thing."

### **Is the Collaborative Reaching its Objectives?**

The service learning student interviewed stated that participation in the after-school program met her participation goals. She did, however, express an interest in contributing more to planning daily activities (i.e., responsibilities that are associated with the community liaison role). One barrier to university students' participation goals being exceeded is the ambiguity of each student's role. Both the community liaison and the college of education service learning student stated that they believe that the role of the community liaison and the role of the service learning student needs to be clarified:

Well, overall everything was a little disorganized. My cohort would plan activities, but the CL would want to follow their own schedule. So, we would work with tutoring the students, the CL would sit at a table and help, and then the child and family students would normally just sit and color with the students who did not have homework at a separate table. So, yes, we kind of just stuck to our own groups and did different activities with the kids.

According to the service-learning student volunteer, professor intervention between service-learning student volunteers and community liaisons improved collaboration. She described a Halloween party where the involvement of her professor helped her special education cohort implement their planned curriculum.

Still, parents interviewed stated that they value the after-school program and have seen improvement in their child's motivation to complete homework and professional ambitions. One working parent described how her child was motivated to pursue dual majors as a result of participating in the after-school program:

For instance...my child has always wanted to um do something in the healthcare field, but working in the afterschool program at [the low-income community] with the [university] students...she now says, 'mom, I want to go to [the university] and I want to have a dual major....'

### **Recommendations**

Faculty partners should consider ways to discuss their respective service-learning assignments without overstepping professional boundaries. Additional communication with Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement should include ways to clarify the learning objectives of service-learning students and the learning objectives of community liaisons.