“REAL COLLABORATION IS EMPOWERING:” FACILITATORS, BARRIERS, AND BENEFITS OF A COMMUNITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP IN AN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

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“REAL COLLABORATION IS EMPOWERING:” FACILITATORS, BARRIERS, AND BENEFITS OF A COMMUNITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP IN AN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

By

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Community-school partnerships can play an important role in supporting students’ well-being, due to the influence of ecological systems on children’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Dearing et al., 2015; Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014; García Coll et al., 1996). More specifically, the systems in which children are situated (e.g., family, school, community) and the interactions between those systems impact children’s experiences and behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; García Coll et al., 1996; Stinchfield & Zyromski, 2010). Partnerships and consistency in values between these systems can help children thrive (Dearing et al., 2015; Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014; Ingraham, 2015; Nastasi, 2000).

Research has explored the factors that serve as facilitators and barriers to community-school partnerships broadly. For example, establishing trust (Ingraham, 2015), two-way communication (Meyers et al., 2012; Sanders & Epstein, 2005), clear expectations (Roche & Strobach, 2019; Sanders & Epstein, 2005), effective leadership (Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014; Sanders & Epstein, 2005), commitment to student success (Childs & Grooms, 2018; Sanders & Epstein, 2005; Sanders & Harvey, 2002), and partnership teams (Roche & Strobach, 2019; Sanders & Epstein, 2005) can enhance community-school partnerships.

While these studies provide useful recommendations, it is important to consider that the same approaches to community-school partnerships will not be effective in all cases, and unique needs and resources should be incorporated to ensure that community-school partnerships are culturally responsive (Perkins, 2015; Roche & Strobach, 2019; Washington, 2010). Further, community-school partnerships themselves may be an important part of culturally responsive practice (Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014; Pham et al., 2021) and provide unique benefits for students, families, schools, and their greater communities (Kim, 2018; Washington, 2010).
An aspect of culturally responsive partnerships is developing an awareness of the historical context in which partnerships operate, as well as the present-day impact (Miller & Hafner, 2008). This is particularly relevant for community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities, which exist within the context of colonization, residential boarding schools, and historical trauma (Brave Heart, 2003; Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011), as well as current disparities in mental health (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2019) and education (National Congress of American Indians [NCAI], 2018). Importantly, culture and identity are significant sources of strength and resilience for Indigenous children and communities (Brave Heart, 2003; NASP, 2020a). Community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities can incorporate these cultural elements (e.g., importance of place, working with Elders) to strengthen relationships and support students (Whiteford et al., 2017).

Little research has examined culturally responsive community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities, which may involve distinct facilitators, barriers, and benefits due to historic, contemporary, and ever-changing socio-political influences. Therefore, the current study contributes to the existing literature by exploring the facilitators, barriers, and benefits of a community-school partnership in an Indigenous community through the perspectives of individuals who have been involved in Project SELA, an ongoing partnership between a community and school located on a reservation in Montana. Project SELA aims to create a culturally responsive school-based social-emotional learning (SEL) program for students in this community through collaboration between university researchers, school staff, and members of the wider community. Individuals who have participated in the community-school partnership of Project SELA were interviewed about their experience and their perspectives of facilitators,
barriers, and benefits of this type of partnership, and results inform culturally responsive community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities to better support student well-being.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The current study examined the perspectives of school and community members who have been involved in a community-school partnership in an Indigenous community. In this chapter, I address facilitators, barriers, and benefits of these types of relationships through introducing the topic of community-school partnerships, describing culturally responsive community-school partnerships, discussing community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities, summarizing the larger research project of which the current study is a part (i.e., Project SELA), and providing details about purpose of the current study.

Community-School Partnerships

Children benefit when the systems that they are situated within work together to support their overall well-being. I begin this section with an introduction to an ecological perspective of child development as it relates to school psychology practice and reasons for establishing community-school partnerships. Then, I discuss specific factors that can facilitate or impede successful community-school partnerships.

Interactions Between Ecological Systems

Children develop in the context of their environments, including the interactions between ecological systems (e.g., family, school, community; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; García Coll et al., 1996). Importantly, consistency in values and expectations across these systems can benefit children’s development, and it is beneficial when schools and their surrounding communities have strong relationships and collaborate to support students (Dearing et al., 2015; Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014). Therefore, partnerships across ecological systems, such as among parents, peers, educators, and community leaders, support children’s well-being (Nastasi, 2000).
In fact, school collaboration with the other systems in which children are situated, such as family and community, are a necessary component of delivering comprehensive school psychology services (Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014). School psychologists are uniquely positioned to support these partnerships due to their ability to identify student, family, school, and community resources and needs, as well as their expertise with program development, collaborative problem-solving, and evaluation (Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014); therefore, school psychologists can play a central role in facilitating partnerships across school and community systems (Nastasi, 2000). According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Practice Model (2020b), school psychologists promote school relationships with families and communities to support students’ academic success and mental health and well-being. Through partnerships, school psychologists can positively impact school, family, and community systems to help children thrive (Ingraham, 2015; Nastasi, 2000).

Collaboration between schools and the broader communities surrounding them naturally occur for a variety of reasons, such as to provide academic, social, emotional, behavioral, or vocational support (Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014). Schools may see their communities as sources of support when addressing problems and involve them in finding solutions rather than working alone (Childs & Grooms, 2018). In fact, ongoing engagement of local perspectives in intervention development (e.g., parents, teachers) can enhance the intervention by ensuring it addresses a relevant problem, is acceptable to all involved, and is determined by local decision-making as well as evidence-based practices (Bell et al., 2017; Ingraham, 2015). In other words, the interventions used should be intentionally matched with the local context in which they will be implemented, and active participation from multiple local individuals can lead this effort (Ingraham, 2015; Meyers et al., 2012). Additionally, involving members from children’s
ecological context (i.e., caregivers, teachers) in defining children’s needs can lead to important conceptualizations of problems as a “mismatch” across systems rather than something lacking within the individual child (Sheridan, 2000, p. 346). This perspective is more solution-oriented, with a focus on individuals from these interacting systems (e.g., family, school) finding ways to support a “match” between a child and their environments by building on strengths of those systems and creating consistency in goals and expectations (Sheridan, 2000, p. 349).

Therefore, interventions and supports should not exclusively be focused at the individual level; students’ interactions with their schools, families, and communities impact their development, behavior, values, and experiences (Stinchfield & Zyromski, 2010). Without ignoring the needs of any individual, an important aspect of supporting children is providing services to those systems in which children are situated (Meyers et al., 2012). In order to do that, individuals facilitating relationships across systems, such as school psychologists, should use an ecological perspective to support children by making system-level change (Meyers et al., 2012).

**Components of Successful Partnerships**

Before effective change can be made within systems, the barriers and facilitators to intervention implementation and sustainability must be understood (Sanetti & Collier-Meek, 2019). Certain actions, known as implementation activities, can increase the likelihood of intervention success (Forman et al., 2013). Examples can include presenting information formally (e.g., at staff meetings) and informally (e.g., in the teachers’ lounge), acquiring necessary resources (e.g., space, materials, training), and making cultural adaptations to meet students’ needs (Forman et al., 2013). In this section, I review factors that have contributed to successful community-school partnerships in the existing literature.
Various terminology has been used to describe relationships between communities and schools, including “community-school partnerships,” “community-school engagement,” and “community-school collaboration.” For consistency, I use the term “community-school partnerships” in the current paper, although the reviewed literature used a variety of terms to describe this concept. I am conceptualizing community-school partnerships as “various forms of temporary or permanent structured connections among school and community resources” (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2005, p. 9), which is the definition used by Eagle and Dowd-Eagle (2014).

Effective community-school partnerships are “collaborative, empowering, proactive, and flexible” and require time and commitment to be successful (Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014, p. 197). A useful strategy to promote collaboration and build relationships is to provide opportunities for all participants to actively engage at all stages of the process (e.g., setting goals, collecting data; Meyers et al., 2012). Building trust is an important aspect of developing relationships (Ingraham, 2015), which includes a welcoming school climate and regular, open, and bidirectional communication between the school and community partners (Bosma et al., 2010; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Welcoming schools acknowledge that some family and community members feel uncomfortable in the school, and they intentionally work to be friendly and inclusive through holding meetings during evenings or weekends, hosting community organizations, and staff members engaging with members of the school community and visitors with a friendly and kind attitude (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). Additionally, schools that show gratitude and appreciation for community involvement are particularly welcoming and encouraging for establishing and maintaining community partnerships (Sanders & Epstein, 2005).
Communication is the foundation of these relationships and can allow for discussions about shared visions, decision-making, conflict resolution, and reflection, all of which improve the partnership (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). Effective communication can facilitate a collaborative and nonhierarchical relationship (Meyers et al., 2012). Community members who have participated in community-school partnerships have emphasized the importance of collaborative and relational dialogue rather than instructions from one side only (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). In other words, community members should be equal partners, and shared decision-making can help support strong relationships (Bosma et al., 2010; Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014; Ingraham, 2015). Effective two-way communication can also help partnerships develop over time as needs and resources change instead of keeping the relationship stagnant as other factors evolve, assisting both partners in determining the most useful methods of engagement (Sanders & Harvey, 2002).

Additionally, clear and honest two-way communication can help reduce conflict between school and community partners (Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014; Sanders & Epstein, 2005; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Clarifying the roles, responsibilities, and expected channels of communication early in a relationship can help partners avoid misunderstandings that could reduce the effectiveness of the partnership (Roche & Strobach, 2019; Sanders & Epstein, 2005). Certain expectations should also be clarified before collaborations begin (Roche & Strobach, 2019; Sanders & Epstein, 2005). For example, school leaders and community partners should consider (a) their vision of excellence, (b) the goal the partnership will achieve in working towards that vision, (c) ways to measure success, (d) the resources the partnership will require (e.g., time, space, personnel), (e) school or district policies about community partnerships, and (f) how
leadership will be determined for oversight of the partnership (i.e., planning, implementation, evaluation; Roche & Strobach, 2019; Sanders & Epstein, 2005).

Effective leadership is an important facilitator of community partnerships (Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014; Sanders & Epstein, 2005). In fact, even when principals themselves are not part of the partnership teams, they are an integral part of the partnership process by identifying team leaders with the necessary skills and experience, attending partnership events, and celebrating the community-school partnership (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). Community partners are also more willing to collaborate with schools that have administrators who are open to and supportive of the partnership and view the principal’s role as supporting other educators’ ability to maintain their collaborations (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). Principals with strong leadership that support community-school partnership view themselves as facilitators within and beyond the school, encouraging a collective effort to address the challenges the school is facing, and working to provide the resources needed for partnership activities (Sanders & Epstein, 2005).

Student-centered learning environments and a strong commitment to student learning is another factor that has led to successful community-school partnerships (Sanders & Epstein, 2005; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). School goals that view engaging the community as part of the plan to support student success, rather than as a separate effort, strengthen partnerships (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). This perspective can help create buy-in from both school administration and community members and belief that their partnership would help support students (Childs & Grooms, 2018; Sanders & Epstein, 2005; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). For example, community members who believe their efforts would benefit student outcomes and principals who believe resources exist within the community to support student needs (Sanders & Harvey, 2002).
Communicating this commitment to student success can facilitate community-school partnerships. Student success includes academic achievement as well as learning how to care for themselves and others (i.e., exposure to career paths, volunteer work), and student-centered learning can also be evident in the ways educators interact with their students (e.g., nurturing attitude, not punitive) and the access educators have to the resources they need to effectively support students (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). Schools that prioritize student learning can communicate that to caregivers and engage families in student learning in various ways, such as parent workshops and newsletters that include information about activities with community partners (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). Community partners have reported that schools that make their commitment to student learning and family involvement known are encouraging for collaborations (Sanders & Epstein, 2005).

When collaborations occur, effective teams enhance community-school partnerships, because they include many members, such as administrators, teachers, parents, community representatives, and do not put the responsibility of implementing the partnership on only one school-based individual, which has many benefits (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). When the collaboration is led by a team, it can maximize the impact of the relationship, ensures that the partnership is truly collaborative, and enhances services without repeating them (Roche & Strobach, 2019). In other words, a team approach is more likely to foster a feeling of shared ownership, and it is advantageous to have diverse perspectives involved in the partnership which allow for a well-rounded view of the students’ and the school’s strengths and needs (Sanders & Epstein, 2005).

Further, by sharing responsibilities among multiple individuals, each person is less likely to experience burnout, everyone can continue their unique talents and expertise, and when
individual team members change, the partnership is more likely to stay permanent (Sanders & Epstein, 2005), which can lead to more sustainable collaborations (Roche & Strobach, 2019). In addition to having partnership teams, those teams should meet regularly to continuously coordinate and implement partnership activities that will help achieve school goals (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). As a community-school partnership is established and throughout the relationship, the leadership team should assess the availability of resources (e.g., people, equipment) and where gaps exist that can be filled through the partnership (Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014; Roche & Strobach, 2019).

In summary, children develop in the context of their environments, and they benefit from collaboration across systems. Therefore, school psychologists can play an important role in supporting children’s well-being by supporting community-school partnerships. There are many factors that have been shown to facilitate the establishment and sustainability of partnerships between community and school partners in general. However, fewer studies have examined factors that contribute to effective culturally responsive community-school partnerships, or their specific benefits, particularly in Indigenous communities.

**Culturally Responsive Community-School Partnerships**

It is important to recognize that the same approaches to community-school partnerships may not be effective in all schools or communities, and the unique strengths and needs of schools and communities must be considered so that the establishment and outcome of partnerships are culturally responsive (Roche & Strobach, 2019). Community partnerships should support culturally responsive service delivery, which reflects the values of the community (Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014). In this section, I provide examples of ways in which community-school partnerships benefit students by supporting culturally responsive practice, discuss the
importance of valuing community resources, as well as other factors that enhance culturally responsive community-school partnerships.

**Partnerships to Support Culturally Responsive Practice**

Culturally humble school psychologists build relationships with families and communities and advocate for minoritized populations (Goforth, 2016). In fact, community-school partnerships are a domain of cultural humility in school psychology practice (Pham et al., 2021). These partnerships could include community-school partnerships to deliver integrated services, flexibility to meet community needs, participating and attending community events, protecting and advocating community values, and including community members in the development, implementation, and evaluation of school initiatives (Pham et al., 2021). Importantly, community-school partnerships may be an essential part of successful school systems for students, families, and communities of backgrounds that have been minoritized and marginalized in educational settings. For example, African American culture expresses the understanding that “it takes an entire village to raise a child,” and therefore, community-school partnerships align with the values and expectations of African American communities (Washington, 2010, p. 30).

Flexibility and openness to new ways of engaging with families and communities can enhance culturally responsive collaborations (Washington, 2010). For example, modifying the schedules of school staff members to meet with families and community members outside of traditional school hours increases the opportunities for collaboration (Washington, 2010) and promotes a school culture of inclusivity. Because caregivers may not have schedules that align with the traditional school day (e.g., unpredictable hours, limited vacation time), scheduling meetings with consideration of diverse schedules and not assuming parents’ attendance is
indicative of their interest in their children’s education can support collaboration (Washington, 2010). In other words, the process of partnering and the results of collaborations are improved when systemic inequalities are removed (Kim, 2018).

Transformative school-community collaboration (TSCC) describes collaborations that are focused on transformative outcomes that reduce inequality (Kim, 2018). The dimensions of TSCC, which result in transformations, include critical member capacity (e.g., organizing and interpersonal skills), equal member relations (i.e., relational equality), democratic network governance (i.e., fair and transparent decision-making), and empowering coordination (e.g., flexibility, shared goals for students; Kim, 2018). Collaborations founded in equality and empowerment may be limited in minoritized communities that have limited financial resources, and therefore, school and community contexts are important to consider when building TSCC and addressing barriers that may arise (Kim, 2018).

**Valuing Community Resources**

Importantly, culturally responsive collaborations also adopt a strengths-based perspective (Washington, 2010). It may be incorrectly assumed that communities with limited economic resources have few or no resources to contribute to supporting their students’ success (Washington, 2010). Community-school partnerships can be motivated by a wide range of goals and values, from acts of charity to action to promote justice in the education system (Perkins, 2015). The intentions of community partners should be examined to determine if they truly meet the needs of the students, families, and community members the partnership is meant to serve. For example, partnerships that are viewed as acts of service or charity imply that one group may be rescuing or saving the other, forcing certain expectations or definitions of success, and perpetuating assimilation and colonization (Perkins, 2015). This type of partnership devalues
communities and those who live in them, promotes erasure of their cultures and perspectives, and fosters their distrust of individuals who partner with the goal of charity (Perkins, 2015). However, community-school partnerships also have the potential to make changes to education systems that truly benefit students and incorporate local community perspectives through authentic partnerships (Perkins, 2015). True collaborations are beneficial for both partners (Miller & Hafner, 2008).

Miller and Hafner (2008) explain that collaborations should be based in dialogue, which they define according to Freire’s conceptualization. According to Freire, humility, faith in humankind, hope, and critical thinking are essential components of dialogue in partnerships, and they can help collaborators who have not experienced oppression avoid imposing their own ideas of what people from different cultural backgrounds need (Miller & Hafner, 2008). This method of dialogue also aligns with using collaboration strategies that are rooted in the strengths or assets of the community (Miller & Hafner, 2008). Instead of bringing outside ideas in to provide solutions for challenges, this approach identifies and builds on existing knowledge and experiences, with the belief that those resources are part of the solutions (Miller & Hafner, 2008).

An important aspect of identifying resources is understanding how resources are conceptualized. Perkins (2015) suggests that the dominant cultural narrative in the United States perceives only certain communities (e.g., White, middle-class) to have anything to support the school, while all others are perceived to have no resources. It is imperative that educators do not make assumptions about the communities surrounding their schools and invest effort into becoming familiar with those communities and the resources they contain, which can reduce the likelihood that existing resources will be taken for granted or ignored (Washington, 2010). An
important resource to consider are the people who are both knowledgeable about the community as well as known and respected members (e.g., businesspeople, activists, religious leaders; Washington, 2010). In fact, community organizing approaches specifically use this perspective, viewing students, their families, and their communities as resources and partners in educational reform efforts rather than viewing them as contributing to the problem (Ishimaru, 2014). In other words, opportunities to build capacity and relationships can result in impactful shifts in power that can transform previously conflictual relationships into genuine partnerships (Ishimaru, 2014).

**Factors that Enhance Culturally Responsive Partnerships**

Shared visions are another important component of enhancing culturally responsive community-school partnerships in minoritized communities (Ishimaru, 2014). For example, a sense of “mutual accountability” can strengthen relationships between the school and community when both parties realize they have the same goal to support students (Ishimaru, 2014, p. 202). Then, instead of placing blame for challenges or accountability for solutions on one group, leading to conflict in the community-school partnership, all involved accept a sense of responsibility and recognize that they can be partners in achieving their shared goal (Ishimaru, 2014).

Further, the roles, goals, strategies, and processes of engagement shift when a community-school partnership is viewed as a collaboration with mutual responsibility and resources instead of a traditional relationship (Ishimaru, 2014). For example, parents are viewed as leaders who make contributions to the changes, rather than passive recipients of professional services (Ishimaru, 2014). Expanding the goals of community-school partnerships from the exchange or receipt of discrete services (e.g., school supply donations, English classes) to
coordinated efforts to reform the educational system can be more effective at making an impact (Ishimaru, 2014). While these discrete services can be helpful and meet the needs of students, families, and communities, sustainable changes with long-term impacts are more likely to occur when partnerships address systemic issues (Miller & Hafner, 2008).

For example, if a school’s goal is to increase family engagement, hosting more events will not be an effective way to successfully achieve the goal if the systemic barriers to family engagement are not examined and addressed, such as through modifying the events to meet the needs of family members and their schedules rather than simply increasing the number of events (Ishimaru, 2014). Therefore, the strategies used to foster collaborations are also different between community-school partnerships and traditional relationships; flexible strategies are used to build capacity rather than just using existing practices that may be less effective at making significant and lasting changes (Ishimaru, 2014). Additionally, the perspective of the process of school improvement is that it addresses systemic issues in the larger community, versus the traditional perspective that school improvement is apolitical and isolated from the rest of the community (Ishimaru, 2014).

It is important for those involved in partnerships to thoughtfully consider who is in the leadership positions in order to produce the desired outcomes. For example, Miller and Hafner (2008) suggested that it is important that leaders can appropriately represent the interests, values, and perspectives of the community, including students and families. Additionally, collaborations are also strengthened when leaders have experience in both contexts. Not only is their knowledge valuable, but they are more likely to be trusted and respected by both members of the school and community due to their ability to “walk in both worlds” (Miller & Hafner, 2008, p. 102), which increases support for and the success of the partnership.
Further, Miller and Hafner suggested that partners work with an awareness of the historical context and its contemporary impact in order to develop mutually beneficial collaborations. The attitudes and amount of trust of the partners are deeply influenced by the historical context in which the collaboration exists, and when partners operate without intentionality rooted in awareness of this context, they are ignoring the significance of past injustices (Miller & Hafner, 2008). Therefore, an awareness of historical and present-day inequalities is essential for partners to understand and use to inform their collaborations (Miller & Hafner, 2008).

In conclusion, not all community-school partnerships should be approached in the same way. In order to appropriately meet the needs of all communities and schools, partnerships should be established culturally responsively. Community-school relationships themselves can be an important component of culturally responsive service delivery, but it is important that the individuals involved in the partnership value the unique resources of the local community and school and consider other factors that can facilitate culturally responsive community-school partnerships in order to best benefit students. The current study examined these factors that serve as facilitators or barriers to culturally responsive community-school partnerships as well as the unique benefits of these relationships, specifically in Indigenous communities.

Community-School Partnerships in Indigenous Communities

Engaging in community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities requires additional considerations to be culturally responsive and effective. In this section, I address the terminology used in this paper, the historical context of Indigenous communities and contemporary inequalities, as well as resilience and cultural sources of strength that can facilitate community-school partnerships and benefit students, families, and communities.
Terminology

The term “Indigenous” refers to the “first people of the land” (NASP, 2020a, p. 1), and it is one of many terms used to describe the first peoples of the Americas, including “Native American,” “American Indian,” “Native,” and “First Nations” (Warrior, 2014). Recognizing that there are differences in terminology and that it is most appropriate to use the names that Tribal groups have for themselves or the names by which they have come to be known since colonization (Warrior, 2014), I will use the term “Indigenous” in this paper. While the Tribal Nation in the current study is Indigenous to the Americas, the reviewed literature includes Tribal communities Indigenous to other continents. It is also important to acknowledge that this term applies to many peoples, and great differences exist among groups and individuals (Warrior, 2014).

Historical Context and Contemporary Inequalities

Awareness of the historical context is important for community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities, given the history of colonization and its lasting impacts. Indigenous communities in the United States are survivors of disease, forced migration, stolen land, forbidden cultural practices, forced attendance at residential boarding schools, removal of children, and lost traditional parenting practices inflicted by European colonizers and the United States government over generations (Brave Heart, 2003; Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011). These experiences caused cumulative emotional and psychological trauma among Indigenous individuals, families, and entire communities that has persisted over lifespans and generations (Brave Heart, 2003; Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011). The history of residential boarding schools is particularly relevant for the discussion of community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities, and schools seeking to establish partnerships with Indigenous
Communities must acknowledge the history that the school institution represents, recognize the lasting trauma that it has inflicted, and understand the distrust that many Indigenous community members may have of the public school system.

Currently, education and mental health outcomes indicate notable disparities for Indigenous youth in the United States. Therefore, in addition to historical injustices in the education system, Indigenous youth are experiencing contemporary inequalities in schools. For example, Indigenous students repeat kindergarten at a rate twice as often as their White peers, and the graduation rate for Indigenous students attending public high schools (67%) is lower than the national average (80%; NCAI, 2018). With regard to mental health disparities, almost half of all Indigenous high school students (45.5%) felt so sad or hopeless every day for two weeks or more that they stopped usual activities in the previous 12 months, compared to 36.7% in the total population, and the rate of Indigenous students who attempted suicide in the previous 12 months (25.5%) was much higher than the rate in the total population (8.9%; CDC, 2019). Disproportionate outcomes are also evident in special education and school disciplinary practices, as Indigenous students are more likely to be incorrectly identified as needing special education services compared to their peers, and Indigenous students make up only 1% of the general population but make up 3% of expulsions (NCAI, 2018).

**Resilience and Cultural Sources of Strength**

Despite the context of historical oppression and contemporary inequalities, Indigenous peoples are resilient, and culture and identity are important components of fostering resilience among Indigenous youth (NASP, 2020a). Specifically, traditional Indigenous methods (e.g., ceremonies, storytelling, language revitalization, tribal sovereignty, management of natural resources) have contributed to healing and survival in Indigenous communities (Brave Heart,
Further, NASP (2020a) emphasizes that communities and families are “critical partners” (p. 1) in supporting Indigenous students. Therefore, school psychologists and other educators should thoughtfully consider how they can truly engage with these partners and strengthen relationships between the school and wider community to use culture and identity as resources to foster student success and well-being, reducing disproportionate educational outcomes and mental health disparities.

It is important for educators to honor tribal sovereignty and Indigenous communities’ rights to language and culture revitalization through validating cultural identity, incorporating Indigenous knowledge, encouraging cultural practices (e.g., wearing traditional regalia at graduation), fostering a sense of belonging, and advocating for Indigenous ways of knowing (e.g., respecting extended absences for spiritual practices; Center for Native American Youth, 2019; NASP, 2020a). Educators can also support communities in their revitalization efforts, such as advocating for promoting Indigenous language learning, which can help Indigenous students engage with culture and identity and build resilience (Center for Native American Youth, 2019; NASP, 2020a). Schools and Indigenous communities can also build strong partnerships to collaboratively support the well-being of their youth. In fact, just as historical trauma is experienced by whole communities, healing and resilience may also be experienced by coming together and fostered in a collective way (Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011).

Acknowledgement and integration of the significance of place is an important component of community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities (Whiteford et al., 2017). In one example, the title of a program that teaches Indigenous knowledge to local high school students in Australia reflected the significance, “geographically, physically, culturally and spiritually” of the nearby river to everyone (i.e., Indigenous and non-Indigenous) who lived in that community.
(Whiteford et al., 2017, p. 1491). Participants expressed how the information shared through this program is valuable for students, families, educators, and the wider community. For example, the students and teachers are learning about the Indigenous community that they are a part of, which can strengthen relationships between teachers, Elders, and families. Further, students feel proud of their work, and they are able to show their family members who are able to build relationships with educators through informal interactions. Additionally, it strengthens the relationship between the school and the local community, which is important, because both systems have the shared goal of supporting students (Ishimaru, 2014; Whiteford et al., 2017).

Due to this shared value, this program is collaboratively implemented by Elders, parents, volunteers, and school staff, and this partnership has further increased respect and strengthened the relationships between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of this community (Whiteford et al., 2017). Relationships between the community and school in Indigenous communities are better established when educators leave the school building and immerse themselves in the local community to build connection (NASP, 2020a; Whiteford et al., 2017). This involves meeting with Elders, “taking the tie off,” and not acting defensively (Whiteford et al., 2017, p. 1494). The inclusion of Elders, who can provide necessary guidance and knowledge (e.g., accurate musical instruments to include in activities) is an important part of programs that are partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities. In fact, it is a specific strategy recommended by the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI; 2022) to support Indigenous students in schools. OPI (2022) recommended that schools work with communities to incorporate the local Indigenous language (e.g., signage, basketball plays), traditional stories and ways of knowing (e.g., inviting Elders), welcoming routines (e.g., smudging), and traditional
games, and to sponsor community events and build mentorship programs that reflect community strengths and build relationships to promote student well-being.

Additionally, the inclusion of permanent Indigenous staff members in the schools can also strengthen community-school partnerships, and these positions can be supported by program or external funding (Whiteford et al., 2017). Similarly, incorporating Indigenous ways of being in the school can affirm Indigenous students’ identity, increase confidence, and promote positive development and well-being (Center for Native American Youth, 2019; NASP, 2020a; Whiteford et al., 2017). More specifically, local artists and cultural organizations can contribute to creating physical school spaces that positively reflect the culture of Indigenous students in attendance, which can both strengthen community-school partnerships and foster cultural connectedness and positive identity development among students (OPI, 2022). Community-school partnerships can be transformative for the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members, increasing respect through greater understanding of culture and identity (NASP, 2020a; Whiteford et al., 2017).

In summary, it is important that school psychologists and other educators are aware of the resilience and sources of strength of Indigenous students, families, and communities, in addition to the context of historical injustices and contemporary inequalities, particularly within education systems, in order to facilitate effective community-school partnerships. Further, they should consider how these collaborations can benefit student success and well-being, such as through using culture and identity, honoring tribal sovereignty, supporting collective healing, and strengthening relationships. Therefore, there may be unique facilitators, barriers, and benefits of community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities to support student well-being.
Project SELA

The current project is a component of Project SELA, which began as an NIH-funded AI/AN Clinical & Translational Research Program to address the gap in existing literature regarding social-emotional learning and Indigenous students’ mental health. This project aims to adapt the SEL framework to create a culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate program for upper elementary students attending public school on a reservation in Montana and to examine the effectiveness of the program on children’s mental health. Project SELA is an ongoing project that uses culturally responsive community engagement (Goforth et al., 2021) and includes two levels of SEL influence on students: one intervention to increase teacher awareness of SEL (Goforth et al., 2022) and another to increase SEL among students (Sun et al., 2022). The research team acknowledges the importance of communication with and approval from Tribal leadership in conducting research (Deptula et al., 2023). Project SELA is approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Tribal College where the school district is located, rather than the IRB at the institution where the university-based research team is affiliated. Additionally, Tribal Council is regularly provided with updates about the project.

Creating a culturally responsive school-based program for this community is important, because the original SEL framework and previous interventions were not designed specifically for Indigenous students or for students attending public school on this specific reservation. When implementing interventions with ethnic or racial minoritized populations rather than the general population, cultural factors should be considered and unique dimensions can be incorporated to enhance effectiveness (Bernal & Scharrón-del-Río, 2001). This is especially relevant for Indigenous populations, because of the effects of colonization, both past and present.
Decolonizing practices deconstruct the notion of Native American inferiority and promote Indigenous peoples’ ability to prioritize their ways of knowing and to engage in Indigenous and Western research methodologies (Walters et al., 2008). An important aspect of decolonizing research is to respect the community’s role in defining problems, solutions, and success, and therefore, to involve community partners in the research process (Walters et al., 2008). Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is one method of engaging Indigenous community members as partners with non-Indigenous researchers (Walters et al., 2008).

**Community Relationships and Roles**

The partnership between university-affiliated researchers and community members in CBPR fosters a strength-based approach to reducing health disparities by building on existing sources of strength and resiliency (Holliday et al., 2016). As a CBPR project, the Project SELA university team works closely with a Community Advisory Board (CAB). The Project SELA CAB is a group including tribal council representatives, Elders, parents, educators, school-based mental health providers, and other members of the community that informs the development of the SEL program in a cultural and community context, with existing needs, strengths, and resources. Through monthly meetings, CAB has engaged in ongoing discussions about various aspects of their community and culture that are important for the development of a unique program to support their youth. CAB members have also created the SEL curriculum that is being implemented for the student-level program.

The two CAB members who have been involved in the creation of the SEL lessons have a unique and valuable perspective as members of both the school and wider communities. They are retired teachers in this community, and they have the ability to “walk in both worlds” (Miller & Hafner, 2008, p. 102). This allows them to contribute knowledge about cultural and
community values, relationships with Elders to support the use of culturally appropriate traditions and language, and understanding of the needs and resources of students and educators in the school to design activities appropriately. Therefore, their experiences as both community members and educators in the local school strengthen the community-school partnership, increase respect and trust from both groups due to their representation from both, and ensure that the curriculum being implemented truly meets the needs of the students, families, and community members rather than what outsiders from the university partnership, educators from outside the community, or community members with little understanding of the school system think will meet students’ needs.

A few CAB members are also current educators in the school, including the school counselor and school psychologist. The school counselor has also been involved in the development of the SEL program lessons and directly implemented the lessons in the 3rd-6th grade classrooms for the past two years. Therefore, the school counselor’s role also strengthens the program, because they are trusted and respected by both the school and community to deliver the SEL lessons, which incorporate cultural values and traditions, to students. The school counselor’s perspective about students’ strengths and resources through daily work in the school is also an important contribution.

Additionally, the school principal’s support and positive relationships with students, families, educators, and the wider community have been very important. Principal leadership and support can enhance and facilitate community-school partnerships (Sanders & Epstein, 2005), and in the case of Project SELA, the principal has been engaged and enthusiastic throughout the process and has even helped coordinate additional ways for the school, wider community, and Project SELA to come together and partner in additional ways beyond the classroom lessons.
(e.g., track and field day event). The principal’s leadership has helped foster a strong relationship between the school and the other Project SELA members, increasing project success.

Overall, Project SELA aims to support Indigenous students’ well-being with a culturally responsive SEL curriculum that is created and taught through a collaboration between the community and the school. The roles of specific individuals from the school and wider community have facilitated the successful development and implementation of the curriculum to uniquely benefit the students of their community. Importantly, Project SELA grew out of existing professional relationships between members of the university-based team and educators at the school, as well as financial resources acquired by the university-affiliated researchers. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the significant role of the university-affiliated researchers in establishing this community-school partnership, although relationships with the university-based team are not the focus of the current study.

**Current Study**

In summary, Project SELA is an example of a community-school partnership in an Indigenous community, and it incorporates many elements that prior literature encourages for partnerships to make sustainable and lasting positive impact on students. For example, both members of the school and wider community believed that the collaboration would support students (Childs & Grooms, 2018; Sanders & Epstein, 2005; Sanders & Harvey, 2002), the partnership team consists of school and community members (Sanders & Epstein, 2005) and has regular two-way communication (Bosma et al., 2010; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Sanders & Epstein, 2005), the program is strengths-based and incorporates community resources and cultural context (Perkins, 2015; Miller & Hafner, 2008; Washington, 2010; Whiteford et al.,
2017), and it focuses on transformative outcomes (Kim, 2018) to reduce mental health disparities among Indigenous youth.

Limited studies have examined community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities, especially in the United States; however, research supports partnerships among ecological systems to support children’s well-being (e.g., Dearing et al., 2015; Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014; García Coll et al., 1996). Various factors have been identified that facilitate community-school partnerships, but not all approaches to community-school partnerships will be appropriate for all communities and schools. Therefore, partnerships must be established in culturally responsive ways. Given the historical context of colonization and the role that school systems have played, as well as the current context of education and mental health inequalities, it is important to understand what facilitates and impedes positive partnerships specifically in Indigenous communities and the unique benefits that these partnerships may provide.

The current study will contribute to the existing school psychology literature regarding community-school partnerships and support practitioners working with Indigenous youth by examining the perspectives of individuals who have been involved in Project SELA. Specifically, this qualitative research study will explore the facilitators, barriers, and benefits of community-school partnerships in a specific Indigenous community in Montana through interviews with multiple individuals involved in Project SELA. Given that community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities are complex, incorporating the perspectives of multiple individuals allows both school and community members to share their thoughts, leading to a more complete understanding of the phenomenon (Kim, 2018). Although some findings may be specific to this community, results of this study can produce recommendations for culturally
responsive practice in school psychology to foster community-school partnerships in other Indigenous communities to support student well-being.

Aim 1 will examine school and community members’ perspectives of the facilitators to community-school partnership in Indigenous communities.

Aim 2 will examine school and community members’ perspectives of the barriers to community-school partnership in Indigenous communities.

Aim 3 will examine school and community members’ perspectives of the benefits of community-school partnership in Indigenous communities.
Chapter 3: Method

In the current study, I used qualitative methodology and analysis to explore perspectives of 1) the facilitators, 2) the barriers, and 3) the benefits of community-school partnership in Indigenous communities among school and community members who have been involved in this type of collaboration. It is important to understand the factors that influence successful community-school partnership and the benefits of doing so in Indigenous communities to improve culturally responsive practice for school psychologists and other educators in these communities.

Qualitative Methodology

My goal for the current study was to understand the experiences of school and community members who have been part of a community-school partnership in an Indigenous community, and specifically to understand their experiences of what makes a collaboration successful and the purpose of a collaboration. I used qualitative methodology, which focuses on understanding and describing process and meaning, for the current study rather than quantitative methodology, which focuses on prediction, confirmation, and hypothesis testing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, I analyzed the data in the current study using an inductive approach to identify themes that build hypotheses and construct knowledge rather than a deductive approach that tests hypotheses and believes knowledge is discovered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

More specifically, I used a phenomenological approach in the current study, which “seeks understanding about the essence and the underlying structure of the phenomenon” and helps readers better understand what it is like to experience it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). Phenomenological research is useful when understanding a shared experience to contribute to
changes in practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case, the essence of community-school partnership in Indigenous communities was investigated in order to inform culturally responsive practice through a deeper understanding about this type of collaboration. The core of this type of collaboration, including what makes it successful and its purpose, was examined through the experiences of people who have been involved. Therefore, the exploration took place with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest, another key feature of a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Then, through the analysis process, the data analysts went beyond describing the experiences of participants to interpreting meaning about the phenomenon through developing themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Researcher Positionality**

**Primary Investigator**

I am the primary investigator (PI) of the current study. I am a White, non-Indigenous, woman who lived in Pennsylvania until moving to Montana to begin graduate school in 2019. Through my public K-12 schooling, I had little education about or exposure to Indigenous culture, history, stories, and voices beyond the erasure narratives perpetuated by the dominant culture in the United States (e.g., account of the “First Thanksgiving”). My cultural humility as a researcher has grown throughout my graduate school experiences, especially through navigating challenging circumstances as I completed my master’s thesis project. I had initially proposed a project related to Project SELA that was inspired and supported by CAB members. After approval by my thesis committee, I presented it to the Tribal Culture Committee to request their permission and partnership in implementing the project. The Committee did not believe that the research aligned with their goals to protect their community and cultural knowledge, and they did not grant permission. I changed my project in order to respect their decision, act ethically,
and not perpetuate mistrust. Through this experience and subsequent discussion and reflection, I have learned about the importance of establishing trust and respect, as well as methods of doing so.

Throughout my time as a graduate student, I have been reading, listening, and learning about colonization of Indigenous communities, historical trauma, and resilience. It is important to me, as the PI of this project and as a future school psychologist, to listen to marginalized voices and learn about the experiences of minoritized individuals in the context of the racism, colonialism, and other injustices embedded in our society, schools, and other systems. Through previous coursework, research, and volunteer and work experiences, I have developed a passion for education, social justice, and actively supporting minoritized youth through my research and clinical work. This perspective, combined with my own privileged identities, the fact that I am not from the local community, and my role as a research assistant for Project SELA over the past four years, may have limited my ability to analyze the data in the current study objectively. For example, I may have interpreted an aspect of the collaboration differently from participants due to my background or I may have thought about a facilitator, barrier, or benefit to the collaboration due to my involvement that participants did not mention. These situations could lead to conclusions that are inaccurate, not culturally responsive, or that perpetuate colonialism. Therefore, it was important to include multiple other perspectives in the data analysis process in order to reduce the influence of my individual bias.

**Research Assistants**

All research assistants were members of the Culturally Responsive Evidence-based practices in School Psychology (CRESP) lab, and therefore, had interest in providing culturally responsive support to students and families. Two undergraduate students and one graduate
student in the CRESP lab were research assistants for the current study. Before data analysis began, all research assistants were given resources to become familiar with the topic (e.g., chapter about community-school partnership), cultural context (e.g., information about boarding schools), Project SELA (e.g., explanation of the project), and the data analysis process (e.g., training about coding).

One undergraduate research assistant writes that she is a non-Indigenous, White woman who has lived in Nebraska, Wyoming, Oregon, Tennessee, and also in Montana since 2017. Before moving to Montana and starting her undergraduate degree in 2019, she had very little knowledge of the experience of minoritized individuals, specifically of those from Indigenous communities. Her time working as an undergraduate research assistant with the CRESP lab at the University of Montana and participating in numerous Native American Studies courses has been immensely valuable to her. She appreciates the knowledge that she has gained regarding the Indigenous experience within the historical context of this country. This recognition has provided her with a deep personal humility and reverence for the Indigenous communities in Montana.

The other undergraduate research assistant wrote that she is a White, non-Indigenous woman who grew up in Eastern Washington, and when it came time to go to college, ended up in Montana. She has been surrounded by Indigenous history her entire life, and despite that, knew very little about the culture and history and even still does not know as much as she should. For example, in elementary school she had a unit about Pacific Northwest history where she was taught about the different tribes and how they utilized their land, but that was basically the extent of what she was taught. The Whitman Mission is in her hometown and she were barely taught the background of the site. Her K-12 education was primarily told through a Westernized lens.
She really only started getting snippets of Indigenous culture and the history through accounts she followed on social media. Her resources were pretty limited, until she got to college where she learned so much more, especially when she started working in the CRESP lab. The main project the lab was focused on was Project SELA where she got to transcribe and code stories and perspectives from Indigenous community members, and through that research is where she got the most information. She got a real and raw explanation of their history and culture where she learned so much more in the few months she worked on that project and on this dissertation than in the entirety of her K-12 education.

The graduate research assistant writes that she is a non-Indigenous woman of color who first identifies as mixed because of the multiple contrasting cultures of which she is a member. She grew up in and around Chicago, Illinois, going between the separate homes of her parents. Her father is an African American, with his family's history tracing back to times of slavery in the United States, beginning with his ancestors' removal from their homes in Western Africa. Her mother is a White American; her German and French roots run deep and remain part of the family's identity in the Midwestern US. From an early age, she knew of the conflict between the "Black" and "White" cultures and experienced the challenges of searching for her identity within them both. Her education in public K-12 schools was informative on the history of Indigenous cultures and the colonialization of the United States. She recalls frequently reading and discussing various histories and cultures throughout her early education. However, she had minimal first-hand experiences with the Indigenous communities who live in the area. As she continues to experience more of the world as an adult, she notices the amount of information she has still yet to learn, especially now living in the Western US.
In her previous roles providing direct services for mental health, she often collaborated with multicultural families from various backgrounds. In this work, she realized her passion for social justice advocacy and began initiatives to mitigate the harm caused by discrimination at a systems level. She wanted to do more to support children and their families as they navigate the layers of their intersectionality within this world while maintaining their well-being. Therefore, she chose to complete her graduate education in a place where she has support to build knowledge on how to be a culturally responsive scientist-practitioner and have opportunities to utilize such skills within rural communities. As a first-generation graduate student, she recognizes her privileged positions as a learner, researcher, and educator. She aims to practice humility as she listens to the voices of the minoritized students she works with and provide the advocacy needed to address the inequities experienced across systems.

Project SELA Team

Two other members of the Project SELA team and CRESP lab also participated in discussion about the data as part of the analysis process. They included the director of the CRESP lab (i.e., my advisor, Dr. Anisa Goforth) and another graduate student in the lab. Dr. Goforth writes that her positionality is a White cisgender woman who specializes in culturally responsive psychological practices in schools. Her worldview has been shaped by being raised in seven countries within an American education curriculum that largely ignored the real history of genocide of Indigenous peoples. As an advisor and mentor who is deeply involved in Project SELA, it was important for her to recognize that her perspectives may influence the results of this project, and purposefully waited until several rounds of analysis before reviewing the data.

The other graduate student writes that she is a White, non-Indigenous, woman who lived in South Carolina until moving to Montana to begin graduate school in 2020. As a school
psychology practicum student, she has worked in three public schools within Indigenous communities [on Flathead Nation], including a yearlong placement in the community within which the current study was conducted. These experiences have allowed her to build relationships with local Indigenous children and families and gain a better understanding of their cultural values and worldviews. She provided feedback to the research team as themes were reviewed and finalized for the current paper. Her feedback was influenced by her experiences, including conversations with families and educators of different racial and cultural identities within the community, and involvement as a research assistant for Project SELA over the past three years.

Further, the current study significantly overlaps with Project SELA. Therefore, it is important to recognize the contributions of the Project SELA team in addition to the bias that is introduced by my role in both projects. For example, the community-school partnership project which was discussed in the interviews of the current study was created by the Project SELA team over the past several years, and my involvement in Project SELA may have influenced my perspective as I analyzed data for the current research study.

Participants

In order to be eligible for participation in the current study, individuals must have participated in Project SELA as a member of the school or broader community and been 18 years of age or older. Participants ($N = 10$) were assigned pseudonyms to enhance readability of the results. Please see Table 1 for personal demographic information for each participant. One participant declined to answer any demographic questions. Of the participants who responded, 9 identified as female, 5 identified as American Indian/Alaska Native, and 4 identified as White. Regarding their highest level of education, 6 reported a master’s degree and 3 reported a
bachelor’s degree. They ranged in age from 24 years to 68 years ($M = 53.67$ years). Tribal affiliations were collected for all American Indian/Alaska Native participants and were not reported in order to protect participants’ privacy, as this may be potentially identifiable information in a small community. The majority of American Indian/Alaska Native participants reported being affiliated with the Tribal Nation on whose land the present study was conducted. Before individuals were contacted about participating in this study, Tribal Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained. Signed informed consent was also obtained from each participant prior to their participation.
Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Master’s Degree</td>
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<td>Tina</td>
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<td>Master’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Charlie</td>
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<td>No response</td>
<td>No response</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Procedure

Sample Size

Due to the specific eligibility criteria for the current study, there was a limited number of individuals who would qualify as potential participants. Ten people participated in this study,
and this sample included individuals from the broader community who have been CAB members as well as school staff members who have been involved in Project SELA. In order to foster a safe and trusting interview environment and protect the identity of participants to the degree that I can, I will not disclose further details about the roles of each individual participant, as such information could be identifiable due to the size of this small community. This sample size is consistent with typical sample sizes in phenomenological studies, which typically range from three to fifteen participants who have all experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

While recognizing that the number of potential participants was limited, sample size in the current study was also informed by saturation. Saturation refers to the process of collecting data until the new data no longer produce new insights into the phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, saturation is reached when new data no longer contribute new information to the study. Importantly, saturation is an ongoing determination by the researcher rather than a specific and obvious observation (Saunders et al., 2018). Therefore, in the current study, saturation was evaluated in an ongoing way through reflexive journaling by the PI and discussions between the PI and the research assistants.

**Recruitment**

Participants were recruited through purposeful and nonrandom sampling, which allows for in-depth observation of a phenomenon and is more useful for qualitative research than random sampling, which may allow results to be generalized to a population (Dworkin, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, participants were selected intentionally and invited to participate in the study based on the likelihood that they would contribute the most descriptive perspectives (Morse, 2003) of the facilitators, barriers, and benefits of community-school partnership in Indigenous communities. I recruited participants by selecting individuals who
would provide a wide range of perspectives and inviting them by email or phone to participate in this study (see Appendix A). I intentionally invited individuals who had a range of experiences, such as ones who were frequently involved and others who were occasionally involved, ones who have been involved more recently and others who were more involved a few years ago, ones who were involved in curriculum developed and others who were involved in curriculum implementation, etc.

**Interviews**

Data collection occurred through interviews, which is the most common source of data for phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All interviews were conducted either in person or virtually, according to each participant’s personal preference. Virtual interviews were conducted using Zoom, and in-person interviews were conducted in a private location of the participants’ choice (e.g., school, restaurant). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using Zoom (no video recording), regardless of whether they were conducted virtually or in-person. All transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and then uploaded to NVivo for qualitative data analysis.

**Interview Protocol**

Eligibility to participate was determined by my knowledge of the potential participant’s involvement in Project SELA. Invited participants who responded to the recruitment email or phone call with an interest in participating were asked to schedule an interview. At the time of the interview, participants were asked to review and sign an informed consent (see Appendix B) and complete a demographics questionnaire (see Appendix C). These forms were completed on paper or using an online Qualtrics form, depending on whether the interview was conducted in-
person or virtually. Participants were also provided a copy of their signed informed consent, either at the time of an in-person interview or by email following a virtual interview.

All interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix D). A semi-structured format allows the researcher to follow a guide, including questions or topics to discuss throughout the interview, while also allowing flexibility in the conversation for both the interviewer and the participant (Bernard, 2006). I began each interview with a warm-up question about the participant’s involvement in Project SELA to build rapport, increase comfort, and ease the participant into the interview conversation. Then, I asked participants about aspects of their experience that stood out, what it meant to them to be involved in the collaboration, and their specific perceptions of the facilitators, barriers, and benefits of community-school partnership in Indigenous communities. Inspiration for these questions was drawn from a general phenomenological research interview guide (Moustakas, 1994) and the specific research aims of the current study.

Data Analytic Strategy

In this section, I will describe the details of the data analysis process and methods of establishing trustworthiness and credibility. An overview can be seen in Figure 1.
**Figure 1**

*Overview of Data Analysis Process: Coding and Establishing Trustworthiness and Credibility*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparing for Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PI recorded personal reactions and initial themes in memos after each interview; RAs oriented to project and method; Transcripts edited for accuracy and uploaded to NVivo</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Step 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysts individually completed open and axial coding and discussed reflections at regular meetings; Individual lists of codes were merged in preparation for step 2</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Step 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysts collaboratively organized the axial codes by shared meaning and created themes; Analysts reviewed transcripts to ensure themes supported the data</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Coding Step 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysts collaboratively created names and descriptions for each theme to describe the data it reflects; Step 3 resulted in a list of preliminary themes</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member Checking &amp; Triangulation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary themes were sent to participants by email and discussed with members of the CRES lab &amp; SELA team; PI recorded feedback</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PI integrated feedback into the presentation and discussion of results</td>
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**Constant Comparative Analysis**

I recorded and transcribed all interviews using Zoom, and the research assistants and I listened to the audio while reviewing the transcripts to correct errors in the automatic transcription and ensure accuracy. Then, I uploaded all transcripts to NVivo in preparation for coding and analysis. While collecting and analyzing data simultaneously is recommended (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), the timing of research assistant training, transcript preparation, and participant availability for interviews in the current study resulted in most of the data being collected before we were ready to begin data analysis. Because of this, I did some preliminary analysis throughout the data collection process, which involved writing research memos after each interview that included my personal reactions and initial themes that I saw in the data. Then, the research assistants and I began more structured data analysis, and we engaged in weekly discussions about the process and results for more detailed and complete analysis of the data.

We analyzed the data using a constant comparative method, which is an inductive and comparative method of qualitative data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This means that themes are developed from smaller and more particular pieces of information in the interview transcripts rather than from larger and more general sources like hypotheses or theories, and that it involves comparing sections of data to one another and looking for similarities and differences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While this is an inductive process overall, it becomes more deductive as the list of codes is developed and later transcripts are compared to more existing codes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The three steps in the constant comparative method, including the goals and specific actions of each, can be seen in Table 2. Codes are available in a supplementary codebook (see Appendix E). The codebook includes the axial code name,
definition, and an example (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011), as well as the open codes that were grouped together for each axial code. The codebook is a compiled list of axial codes created by each of the four coders.

The first step, constructing themes, started with open coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). At this point, all information that seemed relevant to the research aims was seen as equally valuable, which is known as horizontalizing in phenomenological research, and individual units of meaning were identified (Moustakas, 1994). Then, axial coding was conducted, and this two-part process was repeated for each subsequent transcript, resulting in a combined list of codes that reflected patterns in the data that would become themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the second step, sorting themes and data, we organized all of the data and renamed themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and we removed repetitive themes (Moustakas, 1994). In the third step, naming themes, we created descriptions of what we saw in the data for each theme (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The process of refining themes and names continued through writing the results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which convey the common experience of participants and the description, meaning, and essence of the phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, 1994).

While step one was completed by each coder independently, steps two and three were completed collaboratively with all coders. I used a reflexive analysis approach to support understanding of the phenomenon of interest through constructing themes from group discussions with the research team (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Therefore, the results are not focused around consensus among the researchers or accuracy of the themes, but instead reflect the patterns of meaning that we identified in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2023), which provide insight about the experience of participating in community-school partnership in Indigenous communities.
Table 2

*Three Steps of the Constant Comparative Method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | Constructing themes | • Open coding: Read first transcript and write notes next to all data that seems relevant  
|      |      | • Axial coding: Review open codes and sort according to their meaning  
|      |      | • Repeat open and axial coding for subsequent transcripts  
|      |      | • Compare and merge lists of codes after each transcript is coded until saturation is reached |
| 2    | Sorting themes and data | • Review categories of codes present in more than one transcript and rename them  
|      |      | • Organize themes and subthemes  
|      |      | • Remove overlapping or repetitive themes  
|      |      | • Sort all data into tentative themes and review to ensure the data supports the themes |
| 3    | Naming themes | • Create labels to describe the data in each theme  
|      |      | • Can continue through writing the results |

**Establishing Trustworthiness and Credibility**

In order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, I used triangulation, member checking, bracketing, and reflexivity in the current study. Triangulation involved including multiple perspectives in two different ways, so that the results cannot be attributed to a single source only (Patton, 1999). In other words, participants with different points of view were interviewed so that the sample was not homogenous and therefore biased by being too similar. In order to have triangulation of sources in the current study, individuals with different roles in Project SELA were interviewed. For example, participants were from both the school and broader community, both school employees and volunteers, both Indigenous and White, etc., which allowed for us to observe consistency in themes across different data sources through the data analysis process, resulting in triangulation of sources (Patton, 1999).
Additionally, triangulation of analysts was used so that the findings were not the result of a single researcher’s analysis (Patton, 1999), so that the results include less individual bias. In the current study, three analysts independently coded each transcript and compared their findings, collaboratively creating themes, through discussion to have triangulation of analysts (Patton, 1999). Also, other members of the CRES lab and Project SELA research team were included in the data analysis through group discussions about the themes throughout the process. Specifically, after a list of preliminary themes was developed, a faculty member and doctoral student who both are members of both the CRES lab and Project SELA research team, provided feedback and reflections on the themes during a group discussion. This discussion further included additional perspectives to reduce bias in the data analysis, and these discussions among coders and with others were used to explore the topic of community-school partnership in Indigenous communities in more depth (Patton, 1999).

Member checking was also used to reduce bias in the current study, through returning the data to participants after it had been analyzed and asking them to provide feedback (Birt et al., 2016). This process of including participants in the interpretation of the data and the development of themes reduces bias introduced by the researchers’ perspectives (Birt et al., 2016). Rather than member checking after each individual transcript was coded, a full list of preliminary themes was shared with the participants after it had been developed, and they were encouraged to provide their input. Comments provided by participants through the member checking were integrated into the results. Therefore, member checking was used in the current study to reduce researcher bias and ensure that the interpretations of elements of community school collaboration in Indigenous communities are consistent with participants’ experiences.
Even with methods to reduce bias, such as triangulation and member checking, researcher bias cannot be eliminated and should be acknowledged and monitored (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In phenomenological research, this process is known as bracketing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Bracketing can occur through the researcher “discussing their personal experiences with the phenomenon…so that the researcher can focus on the experiences of the participants” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 124). Bracketing took place in the current study through reflexivity, which involves actively acknowledging and monitoring the researcher’s experiences, goals, beliefs, and emotions throughout the research process (Hsiung, 2008). I engaged in reflexivity at the beginning of and throughout the current study, and I encouraged the research assistants to as well. Specifically, we used reflexive journaling and group discussions to identify, examine, and attempt to set aside any personal beliefs that could interfere with data collection or analysis. For example, I wrote memos after all interviews and meetings with the research assistants, which included notes about these meetings and my personal reflections. Memos also allow the researcher to deepen the analysis through exploration of the data with reflection (Charmaz, 2008), as well as the relational aspect of research through continuous reflection of the researcher’s position in the study (Hsiung, 2008).

In summary, trustworthiness and credibility were ensured in the current study through triangulation of sources and analysts by including multiple perspectives in the data and analysis, member checking by returning results to participants for feedback, and bracketing and reflexivity through discussions and journaling to acknowledge personal bias of the researchers.
Chapter 4: Results

Results were presented as three themes: (1) tension in relationships, (2) authentic and sustainable relationships, and (3) supportive school environment. Within each theme, examples illustrating what the theme means as applied to community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities are provided, including selected quotes from participants (Eldh et al., 2020). In my presentation of the results, I continued to use the term “Indigenous” for consistency, although participants used other terms, such as “Indian” or “Native” during their interviews. Direct quotes from participants shared in the results include the language used by that individual.

Tension in Relationships

Within the first theme, participants reflected on various factors within the school and community systems, as they currently exist, that contribute to challenges building and sustaining partnerships. Specifically, these factors include outside resources, such as grant funding, trauma at both the individual and community levels, and misunderstandings among community members.

Participants in this study explained that outside resources (e.g., grant funding) often do not align with the interests and values of the local community and frequently are not dependable because the funds run out, creating barriers to successful partnerships. Therefore, tension in partnerships can be created when outside funding is involved. For example, Kim explained that “It [does not] seem like [you are] serving the population that [you are] working with, but that [you are] serving that grant.” Charlie shared more about this perspective, emphasizing how the timing of grants may not fit community needs:
The majority of programs are grant funded, and so they come and go, and historical trauma [does not] come and go. These issues that we face, suicide or other, [they do not] come and go. [It is] always there. [It is] always [going to] be there.

Another important aspect of this theme is related to trauma. Participants discussed the ways that trauma, at both the individual and community levels, makes establishing and sustaining community-school partnerships challenging. Participants provided examples about family members of current Indigenous students being taken away to attend residential boarding schools or being discriminated against and treated differently than White students in public school settings, and they explained that these generational experiences impact current community-school relationships and feelings of belonging for Indigenous students and families. For example, Leah said, “The parents [do not] feel welcome at the school…Some parents just flat out will not set foot on the school grounds…because of the institutional racism, the bad experience they had, or their parents had, or their kids are having.”

Charlie explained that community members often do not discuss with people who are not from the community the challenges that students face. Participants gave many examples of these challenges, including exposure to death, suicide, drug use, and children living with non-biological parents, and they connected these personal difficulties that students and families face to the challenge with establishing partnerships. For example, when thinking about family-school engagement, Emma expressed that she can understand why caregivers might not be willing or able to come to school for an evening event when they are dealing with all of those stressors.

Mary, an Indigenous community member, told a story about her child’s experience that illustrates another way that trauma impacts students and their experiences in school, especially when educators may not be from the community and do not understand the challenges their
students and families face. She stated that after her child’s peer died by suicide, her child reported getting in trouble by the teacher after “‘trying to check in with one of my bros, make sure they were okay. They were having a rough day, and I was just checking with them.’” Mary contacted the teacher and explained the impact of the child’s death on the community. She said the teacher responded by saying, “‘I really appreciate you helping out. I noticed [Mary’s child’s name] was having an attitude, and I just [did not] think it could be related to [the suicide].’”

In the third component of this theme, participants also reflected specifically on misunderstandings among community members, which are influenced by cultural and political differences within the community, as well as government systems such as the local school board and Federal Indian Education policies. Charlie explained that cultural differences among community members influence which spaces “certain groups feel accepted and welcomed” and attributed that to “just blatant institutional racism.” Similarly, Leah, an Indigenous community member, explained that there is a difference in worldview among members of this community that can lead to misunderstandings and prevent positive relationships from developing.

She told a story about a woman who lived in this community for thirty years and never attended the powwow. Leah said that she had a hard time understanding how people do not know if they are welcome to attend the event and that she believes these differences in perspective are often influenced by exposure to certain messages and not others. She said, “I hate to use the word ignorance, but it was. It was just not knowing. [It is] what they hear around the dinner table.” Leah also considered the ways current sociocultural factors contribute to differences in perspective that may not have previously been so evident in this community. She stated, “I think social media contributes to that. I think our last administration, a pandemic. Everything that got politicized, just kind of like spiraled people out into these different worlds…We need to come
back together.” Her statement highlighted factors that contribute to misunderstandings among community members that have not always been present. Other participants also considered the ways political differences contribute to strong opinions and misunderstandings among community members, leading to conflict between communities and schools.

For example, Kim explained that “Everybody has an opinion, and [that is] what politics is. So when it comes down to political parties and the influence that they have on public schools, I think [that is] something that cannot necessarily be ignored.” She said that it is important to provide students with information about “hot button issues” so that they can understand the topics and develop their own opinions. Emma also talked about the influence of politics on the public school. She said that even when the school communicates about programs and activities going on, “[there are] always people out there that are never going to see it for what it is and always feel that [there is] a conspiracy around it where there [is not].” She further stated that the intense emotions around these opinions makes it difficult for educators to have conversations with families and community members about these topics. She said, “[They are] not being receptive…which is why we have to pause. Take time. Settle the dust…You have to get everybody’s emotions out of it in order to really discuss it.”

Charlie also reflected on the challenge the emotional nature of these topics creates and said, “[There is] a certain demographic in our community that [does not] like certain words…and the second that they are triggered by those, they are not only [going to] oppose it, they are [going to] vehemently act against it.” Nicole, a non-Indigenous woman, shared an example of this exact situation happening. She said some caregivers called and said that they did not want their children participating in the social-emotional learning program, and she explained the difficulty of explaining to parents what the program really was compared to what they assumed it was.
Kim also acknowledged the opinions of caregivers in determining what children are learning, the diversity in perspectives among community members, and the difficulty of having those types of conversations.

In addition to discussing the interactions and relationships among community members with different opinions and worldviews, participants also reflected on the influence of these differences in community and government systems. For example, Kim, an Indigenous community member, discussed her experience with people bringing their own opinions to serve on different boards in the community. She said that sometimes people volunteer because they have some personal interest or goal in mind, which can lead to resentment when those personal motives are not fulfilled. Kim emphasized that this form of participation “is not how to be collaborative.” She acknowledged that these situations are complicated, while also describing how community decisions can be influenced by individual opinions, which may or may not align with the values, interests, and needs of the greater community.

Charlie discussed a similar situation and explained concerns about individuals who are not from the community and do not have their own children in the schools making decisions for the community as members of the school board. Charlie talked about the significance of local government seats and highlighted the power imbalance between the individuals holding these seats and the people impacted by their decisions. Charlie further explained that due to the previously discussed mistrust of these systems, Indigenous community members who are already marginalized are less likely to run for and hold seats on the school board, leading individuals with different (i.e., outsider) worldviews and opinions to make decisions about what goes on in the community. Charlie also stated that this challenge with representation, power, and shared cultural background is present within the school as well as on the school board. For example,
Charlie said that there is high turnover among teachers, administrators, and coaches, many of which are not from the local community.

Some participants also discussed state and federal government policies that may be designed to address these challenges, but do not really meet the needs of Indigenous students, families, and communities or are not respected. Leah explained, “I’m really glad that we have Indian Education for All, [it is that] the state really does not hold the schools accountable, though…Unless [there are] some stricter requirements and follow through, then I think it is all for nothing.” Paula, another Indigenous community member, also talked about the ways schools do not always respect or honestly follow through on required programming to support Indigenous students. She explained that a few schools on the reservation recently asked the Tribe to waive the requirement for them to consult with caregivers in order to access federal funding that is intended to support Indigenous students. Paula expressed surprise and disappointment that they made that request, because those schools are not respecting the importance of community collaboration to help students succeed.

Overall, participants identified several factors that contribute to tension in relationships and prevent communities and schools from developing and maintaining partnerships in Indigenous communities. These barriers include outside resources, trauma, and differing perspectives among community members.

**Authentic and Sustainable Relationships**

Within the second theme, participants reflected on various aspects of fostering respectful relationships among individuals with different perspectives and bringing those perspectives together to collaborate. They specifically discussed individuals increasing their own knowledge, awareness, and skills to improve cultural humility and communication, as well as increasing
understanding of the people involved, such as the unique roles and contributions of individual community members.

For example, participants explained that building relationships between educators and caregivers early leads to better collaboration and more interest in working together and partnering to solve problems if challenges later arise. Emma, a non-Indigenous participant, discussed the importance of establishing trust in order for communication to be successful, because people need to be open to receiving communication, as well as giving it. As a strategy, she explained that “It is easier to make a positive phone call than a negative phone call…they build trust…so when something bad happens, [it is] not so bad.” Paula expressed the same idea and explained that when educators need to talk to caregivers about challenges with students, it is easier to discuss and partner together when a prior relationship was established. Mary shared a similar reflection from her perspective as a parent, and she explained her child’s teacher only contacted her when something was wrong, never to build relationship with her, open conversation, or acknowledge her child otherwise. Leah also talked about her experience as a parent and explained how much she appreciated when teachers contacted her to share something good about her child.

Leah further emphasized how this communication and shift in power can also be initiated by caregivers, and “parents need to not be afraid of that.” She provided examples of introducing herself to her children’s teachers and communicating her expectations for her children at the beginning of the school year. Leah similarly recognized the importance of initiating these interactions in the community in order to build relationships among people with different backgrounds or perspectives, although they may be intimidating. She said, “We are not scary. We are neighbors…I think just taking that first step and then just making a gracious space for
people to be safe in, to have those conversations, and to listen to understand one another.” She explained that one-on-one conversations can help someone understand another person’s perspective, and “that creates that safe space for you to dig even deeper and work towards community solutions.” Kim stated that “having consistent communication that is in-person as much as possible can go a long way in calming tension.” She further explained that it is important for community members to build strong relationships with one another, because these relationships can help the community resist change from outside influences that do not align with their goals and values.

Participants also reflected on how individuals should handle uncomfortable conversations and respond when critical or constructive feedback is presented. Kim explained that these situations need to be viewed as “a teaching opportunity for the whole community, just to understand each other better and to be able to learn from each other.” Emma shared a similar reflection and explained the importance of being honest, not getting offended, and reflecting internally in order to improve.

Participants also discussed other strategies to increase trust between educators and schools and facilitate partnerships, such as including community partners. Tina, a non-Indigenous woman, explained that newsletters are an important form of communication from the school to families, and that it is beneficial that community members help to create them. Tina also talked about the significance of educators attending school events to increase trust and build relationships with caregivers.

Participants explained how increased visibility of partnerships and programs can increase trust and engagement. For example, Nicole said “I think it would be cool for the community to just be able to see who we are and what exactly our goal is.” She explained that this could help
increase understanding between all families, educators, and community members. Helping partners feel personally welcomed is another strategy participants discussed to facilitate collaboration. Kim explained that one-on-one conversations early in the partnership process are important for developing that relationship and personal connection.

Paula explained that this process of building trust and relationship can be difficult for educators who are not from the community, and she emphasized the need for humility and learning. She said, “It is not always easy to find that way in. It is awkward, but you just have to try, and people make mistakes, but you learn from them and try again.” Charlie explained that sometimes students and families have a more difficult time connecting with educators if they dress a certain way, for example, and that “there is a learning curve for anyone that comes in our community.”

Emma explained that honesty is also an important part of building trust. She said that “we all have bad days” and she is honest about that with the people she works with and apologizes when needed. Nicole also discussed the importance of repairing relationships when trust has been broken. She explained that after a situation that “really created a rift between the teachers and the project…we tried to rebuild some of that. I went around and checked in with all the teachers throughout the next week.”

Participants also talked about the importance of educators understanding family and community members’ perspectives when trying to work together. Kim said that it is necessary for schools to consider families’ schedules, not just expecting that they will attend events whenever they are scheduled, in order to increase collaboration. Tina also considered how to make people more comfortable when they do attend events or meetings. When talking about inviting people to CAB meetings she said, “if I were doing it again, I would really try to identify
small groups” so that they would feel more comfortable and would not be “walking in alone to a bunch of strange, often White faces.” Similarly, she explained the importance of increasing comfort by having “a focus that is not school.” In her experience, providing a locally catered dinner at meetings was useful for this.

Another aspect of this theme is related to how understanding the needs of the students, school, families, and community to be served is also an important aspect of developing and maintaining partnerships in Indigenous communities. Paula explained that many programs brought into these communities are often created elsewhere, and are sometimes implemented just because they are available and funded, not necessarily because it was something the community was looking for. She further explained that “real collaboration is empowering those Native communities to determine what they want to do…Authentic empowerment is having the voice to determine what those programs are…who are the people involved from the beginning…” She also put this concept in context of Indigenous communities specifically and said that empowerment is particularly important given the longstanding power imbalance.

Similarly, Kim reflected on the importance of fitting the interests and needs of community and school partners together. She said, “It always boils back down to individuals within the community and within the school…what they are already doing, and then what they see as vision for the future, and within the context of the historical values of the community.” Aware that many educators in this community do not live there, Nicole also emphasized the importance of listening. She said that the educators should make sure that “our ears are listening, and we are really learning from them, instead of trying to impart any of our own [views] on them.” Sarah, a non-Indigenous participant, reflected on the tangible outcomes of true
partnerships, such as the curriculum developed through Project SELA, and said, “I think that is really special. That it is made with them in mind. Not just kids everywhere, but these kids.”

Tina discussed how the unique needs of family and community partners should be considered in order to make collaboration accessible to them. For example, she acknowledged reading abilities in the context of historical trauma and said, “I think there are generations of kids who have not done really well in school.” She further explained that based on her experience, providing community members with more visual or interactive, rather than text-based, information can be beneficial.

Participants also discussed how designated time can support partnerships and help everyone learn more about the needs and goals of the school and community. Nicole explained that a retreat day was helpful for providing dedicated time for everyone to work on the project together. Erin also talked about meetings when everyone was able to sit and talk together. She said that at the beginning, “It was just hearing everybody’s concerns…It was not really uplifting, but it kind of like took off the blinders…It was really powerful to hear the voices of everybody.” Participants also reflected on whose voices were heard at those meetings. Nicole said, “listening to and getting ideas from local community members is the best way to build that partnership.” Leah said in her experience, “helping to get the right people at the table was key” and having meetings with everyone was important to “define our values…our community values…our family values…Tribal values as well.” Kim explained the importance of having both group meetings, which can be helpful for brainstorming, and individual conversations, which may better facilitate building relationships.

In addition to discussing the importance of building authentic relationships through trust and respect to facilitate community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities, participants
also discussed understanding the roles and contributions of the individuals involved in the partnership in order to promote engagement, buy-in, and sustainability. For example, some participants talked about the unique roles that certain individuals can fill in a partnership, identifying those individuals, and inviting them to get involved. Nicole explained that having specific individuals as part of the team who are connected to other people in the community is beneficial, because there can be even more collaboration. She gave examples of local artists who created materials within Project SELA because invested members of the partnership team knew them and invited them to collaborate. Similarly, Erin explained how it was helpful for consultation to have a CAB member with close relationships to some Elders and members of the Tribe’s Culture Committee. Erin further stated, “[It is] just our willingness to collaborate and share the resources. Share what we need.”

Participants discussed how the community Indian Parent Committees could be helpful for coordinating resources, gathering information, and facilitating community-school partnership. For example, Erin explained that the committees “are allocated money, and they figure out what to do with the money…[so they] could be a resource for teachers.” Similarly, Kim discussed the benefit of connecting with the Indian Parent Committee, “because they might be a good resource of being able to clue you in to specific people that might have the skill set you are looking for.” Kim also explained that the community in which this study took place requires approval from the Indian Parent Committee for any grant-funded programs.

Participants also discussed personal invitations to the partnership as a way to bring individuals and their unique skills to the team. Kim explained how every individual has something unique and valuable to contribute to a partnership, and when recruiting people to get
involved it is important that they know that. She also explained that it is also important for individuals to “feel that they are getting as much out of it as they are putting into it.”

Participants talked about how they chose to invite people, knowing that each individual could make their own decision about whether or not they wanted to become involved in the partnership project. For example, Tina talked about inviting “a range of people” in the beginning and “then letting them decide,” and Leah talked about inviting specific individuals who may have specific skills or interest in the partnership. Speaking about another team member, she said, “I kind of hated to bug her, because she just retired…She was such an amazing teacher for decades…I figured it was up to her to say yes or no, so I recruited her.” Kim, an Indigenous participant, thoughtfully considered someone’s time, resources, and ability to contribute to the partnership whenever she invited someone new to get involved. She explained that this is important, because she had firsthand experience being invited to participate in more community programs than she could reasonably commit to and understood how that experience could be difficult. Paula, another Indigenous participant, expressed the same idea. She explained that it is important to invite key individuals and “to look at what [they would] bring and how [that could] best be used in a time-efficient way so that you are utilizing what they have to offer in a gentle and respectful way.”

Reflecting on her own experience in this partnership, Kim expressed that while she supports the project, she questions whether she wants to be invested to the extent that she has been. She explained that her involvement is complex due to being a Tribal member. She said, “As a Tribal person…you [do not] necessarily want to say that you are representing the Tribe or anybody but yourself, and you want to make sure that you are being careful that things [are not] being abused.”
Erin, an Indigenous community member, also considered how time is a limited resource and how community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities could be facilitated through more people or time to support them. She talked about the benefit of having a school staff member coordinate cultural activities and community outreach. She explained that the people currently in those positions, like a Native American Studies teacher, “are so spread [thin]…you almost [need] like a liaison or a separate position.”

Participants also addressed the unique role of an individual in the partnership who is well-integrated into the different groups that are working together. For example, Leah said that “A lot of times in my professional work and sometimes in my personal life, I have served as kind of a bridge or an ambassador type person, because I’m a mixed-blood person.” Emma, a non-Indigenous woman, similarly explained that in her role she works closely with and has good relationships with both parents and teachers.

Participants also discussed some other specific roles, such as community leaders, that are essential for successful partnerships in Indigenous communities. Erin explained that she would like to see more opportunities for Elders to be in classrooms. Participants discussed the impact of respected community leaders and the way their involvement can influence other community members’ participation. For example, Tina named one community member and said, “She is a strong, respected community member, and I think her stepping in to do the work that she did was really a great advantage to the project.” Charlie stated that the participation of key individuals influenced their own decision to become involved. Paula further explained, “There are people in every community, in the school community, in the Indian community, that carry capital by virtue of their reputation and their work, and how they are networked in their organizations or communities, and that it is important to involve those people.”
Tina also discussed other reasons why local leaders can help facilitate successful partnerships. She explained that partnering with community leaders is also important because they have a better understanding of the community needs and interests, and they can “help you understand what will work.” She also talked about the support that community leaders can provide if tension should arise in community-school partnerships, “because when people fuss about things, it [is not] just the school who steps up to defend the program, but people within the community.”

Participants discussed the ways the role of a school administrator can also facilitate partnerships. Paula recognized that getting buy-in from everyone in a system does not happen immediately and noted that leadership is important. She recommended starting with the person with power in a school. Nicole said simply, “Sell it to your administrator and get them on board,” when discussing establishing community-school partnerships. Paula stated that “challenges are sustainability and systemic change and the thing that is commonly missing from these programs is administrative support.” Paula explained that when initiating change within a school system, such as starting a new program or establishing a partnership with the community, administrator buy-in is important. Without it, she said schools may have “sporadic implementation” or administrators may “[funnel] the money off for other things.”

Emma further explained the administrative role on a reservation involves “the outside world [and] the inside world and kind of meshing that together.” Nicole considered that there might be “more visibility because the principal or the superintendent is talking about it,” which might increase involvement and buy-in from other individuals and “might also make the connection between the school and community stronger.”
Participants discussed the importance of buy-in from other members of the school system as well. For example, Paula encouraged including the school board in community-school partnerships, and multiple participants talked about the importance of teacher buy-in to sustain community-school partnerships. Paula also said that teachers are “pretty over obligated,” and they may be asking, “if I am going to give my time to this and do this, will it be sustained?” Mary expressed a similar idea and suggested that becoming involved in the partnership might feel like more responsibility without compensation for teachers, so finding ways to increase their buy-in is important. Nicole stated that “teachers in the CAB meetings would have been really cool just to get their perspective initially as well.”

Participants talked about the role that caregivers can play in building and maintaining community-school partnerships relationships and ways to facilitate their engagement. Paula, an Indigenous community member, explained that “[I]t is difficult to involve parents in a meaningful and authentic way.” She acknowledged the historical context and the long-standing mistrust between Indigenous communities and the public education system in the United States. Paula further explained that there are ways to increase caregiver engagement with schools by “empowering parents to see that they do have power.” She provided an example and said, “One parent at a school board meeting might not make a difference, but if you have ten, the school board is [going to] listen.” She highlighted the importance of letting families know that they do have a voice and through collaboration, they have the ability to make positive change.

Participants also discussed other ways to facilitate more interaction between caregivers and schools. Emma stated that she noticed a shift parent engagement since the COVID-19 pandemic and suggested the need for more creative and diverse strategies to bring caregivers into the school. Erin acknowledged that many caregivers currently do not feel comfortable engaging
with the school and explained the importance of educators having that perspective in mind when scheduling outreach events. Participants also talked about the barriers that caregivers or community members face when trying to volunteer at the school and explained the need for a more accessible and welcoming process in order to facilitate more engagement between family and community members and the school. Mary and Charlie both discussed obstacles that prevent or limit opportunities for volunteering at the school.

In summary, participants discussed several factors that facilitate authentic and sustainable relationships within community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities. These factors include knowledge, awareness, and skills related to building relationships, communicating respectfully, listening to community needs, and making the partnership visible. They also include a greater understanding of the unique roles of everyone contributing to the partnership, as well as their skills, resources, and perspectives.

**Supportive School Environment**

Within the third theme, participants reflected on the characteristics of an ideal school environment that would meet student and community needs, which can be supported through community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities. These characteristics include training for staff, shared goals and values, community representation in the school, and benefits for everyone involved.

Participants talked about the importance of training for staff members so that schools are better able to meet the unique needs of the students and communities they serve, particularly due to the historical context influencing these present-day relationships. Paula discussed the reasons all school staff members should be included in these trainings. For example, she explained that school secretaries should be included in the training, because as the first person that caregivers or
school visitors may interact with, it is important that school secretaries make families and community members feel welcome.

   Tina, a non-Indigenous woman, reflected on the fact that many educators in this school are not from the community and do not share a cultural background with the majority of the students, although they may not think about that all the time. Charlie similarly considered the cultural backgrounds of school staff and explained that some educators have a hard time understanding historical trauma. Charlie further recommended that the school pay for educators to “go to the training or whatever it may be, to be more sensitive to some of the issues and concerns that we have as a community.”

   In the second component of this theme, participants also explained that supportive school environments share goals and values with the broader community and that community-school partnerships can be established around these shared interests. Charlie shared that tension arises in the community when families do not feel that the school shares their values. Comparing the public school to the Tribal language immersion school in this community, Charlie said, “Everything about [the Tribal school] is understanding emotion and family, and I feel like the public school is more of a system that is designed for certain people, and it is just all about numbers and pushing people through.” Leah, an Indigenous participant, also discussed how her family and community values were not always shared in the public school. She shared a story about a time her son got in trouble at school for lying, and she told the teacher that “in our culture, storytelling is a gift” and suggested that he have the opportunity to express that gift in literature class.

   Tina reflected on communicating shared goals with families. She said, “It still is sometimes very difficult to get the message across to parents that you just want [what is] best for
the kids,” and she recommended more opportunities for community input to support communication. Nicole explained that community input is important because schools should meet the needs of their students, which may not be the same as the needs of students in other communities. Leah similarly explained that unique cultural pieces that are integrated into school-based activities need to be personalized for every local community context. Leah continued to list ways in which schools could incorporate more input from caregivers and community members. For example, she described having opportunities for “parent input on the hiring of a teacher…maybe they [could not] be a voting member, but they could at least give their input.” She also talked about schools having advisory boards where community members could share their perspectives regarding curriculum materials, athletics, music programs, and discipline policies.

Sarah explained that community input, specifically guidance from Elders is important, and that there should be “a mesh” between that perspective and a more “Westernized” view. Nicole also discussed the importance of bringing the community and school perspectives together in order to uniquely support students, because sometimes those perspectives can seem at odds in this community context. Nicole said that it sometimes feels as though the community and school are working against one another, and she emphasized the importance of collaboration and teamwork. Other participants also talked about the importance of bringing perspectives together and working as a team to create a school environment that supports students.

For example, Erin discussed the ways groups with the same goals should not work in isolation. She said, “Whatever the programs are, your objectives could be pretty much the same, and [that is] for the overall wellbeing of students…Working together is way better than working on your own little island.” Erin gave an example about how the Tribal language immersion
school collaborated with public school for literacy programming at one point, which provided benefits for supporting students at both schools. Erin continued to discuss the importance of not working in isolation and explained how real-world situations in the community can support what children are learning in school. For example, she said that a social-emotional learning lesson focusing on managing behavior was enhanced by an activity that asked students how they would behave at a powwow.

Kim discussed the ways that collaboration and teamwork can also make things easier and reduce the workload for any individual person or program. Leah gave some examples about how shared goals and interests can initiate partnerships between school and community organizations. She specifically talked about Native artists who partnered with students through a community arts and culture program, a community food sovereignty program that was developed from high school students’ ideas about food sovereignty and food security, as well as a community garden program with student intern positions.

Participants also talked about how schools are a great resource for communities and how sharing goals and values and creating partnerships can lead to positive outcomes. Charlie said, “We should be able to access and utilize our school that we pay for” and continued to talk about how the school and gyms are not accessible to community members after hours. Charlie summarized the importance of including community voices in the school system and said, “[It is] our greatest asset, the schools, and if we participate in it, then we can make it whatever we want them to be.”

Another important aspect of this theme is further discussion about community representation in the school. Paula explained that the lack of representation of Indigenous people at all levels of the education system, including school board members, administrators, and
classroom teachers, is a challenge. Charlie connected this lack of representation within the school system to the historical context and explained that the people who are not in positions of power are likely the “most skeptical and mistrusting of the system” and are impacted the most, in terms of further marginalization, by the school system.

Participants talked about how the lack of representation in education systems goes even further than teachers, administrators, and school boards. They explained that Indigenous students and communities are also not represented in research or curriculum development, which informs the best practices and materials used in schools. Tina, a non-Indigenous participant, explained:

I love the fact that the idea was to develop something that was specific for this group, because this group is so underrepresented in every curriculum, every assessment, everything that is developed in the US. Nothing seems to get standardized for kids who are Native American…Nobody seeks them out to involve them, and so [it is] just not right.

Kim shared a similar reflection and said that she felt frustrated knowing that funding sources chose to invest elsewhere, rather than for this community, “because we are not a large enough population…it makes you feel like you are not valuable.” She further explained, “They never really get our perspective in there at all…we are a minority within the minorities, and it makes you more invisible, and being invisible [is not] something that feels very good.”

Thinking about the importance of the sense of belonging, Paula said, “I always ask teachers and administrators, ‘Do the Indian kids feel like this is their school?’ Because the school belongs to the kids.” Participants talked about ways that schools can foster that sense of belonging, some of which can be through community partnerships. For example, Tina said, “One of the big things is Indigenous people seeing their values and themselves reflected in specific
curriculum materials,” and she reflected on the gap that was left after the public school stopped offering Tribal language classes.

Leah explained that one important cultural component that schools can integrate is a sense of place. She said, “The sense of place [is] such an important part of our culture that a lot of our kids, through no fault of their own, [are not] maybe connected to the land like [we] were growing up.” Erin gave an example of an activity that incorporates this cultural value using a map, which was created as part of the community-school partnership. She talked about another activity in which hunting camp ethics were used to help students think about their behaviors, and she gave examples of how they could continue to integrate more cultural components in school activities, such as seasonal rounds. Erin explained that through integrating cultural values and activities, “the kids can see themselves in the curriculum.”

In the final aspect of this theme, participants discussed that students benefit from the supportive school environments fostered through community-school partnerships, and that other parties benefit from these collaborations as well. In fact, Sarah and Tina simply stated, “everybody benefits” from community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities, and other participants made similar statements. Nicole explained that her goal is to support kids, but “when the kids are supported, the community is supported as well.” Participants shared specific examples of how students, families, and community members benefit from these partnerships. For example, Erin explained that when the school staff collaborate with community members for curriculum development, they can all better meet students’ needs.

Mary, an Indigenous community member, discussed how students and families benefit from discipline policies that include community input. She explained the impact on families when young students are expelled and there is no other school nearby. Emma also talked about
how families can be supported by positive relationships and partnerships with the school, indirectly supporting students. She talked about attendance, as an example, and said, “Attendance is always easier when people buy in and have a good partnership…Parent support is always better.”

Importantly, participants stated that community members also benefit from community-school partnerships. Participants discussed the benefits that they have experienced through their participation in a partnership. Specifically, they talked about building close relationships with other participants and feeling a sense of community, as well as experiencing growth and personal learning through their participation. For example, Erin explained that she enjoyed the “comradery that [she has] shared” with the other partnership participants through developing close relationships with people who are “all dedicated to the same thing.” She also stated that she liked learning more about the culture and worldview of the Indigenous people in this community. Kim similarly explained that benefits of participation for her included “that socialization and that humor and the comradery that goes with it.” She also stated that she appreciated the way her participation “was adding to [her] sense of self and identity.”

Overall, participants explained that supportive school environments for Indigenous students can be facilitated through community-school partnerships, and they specifically include training for school staff who may be outsiders to the local community, coming together over shared goals and values, incorporating community input and increasing representation of Indigenous perspectives in the school, and they lead to benefits for students, families, and community members.

In summary, there were three primary themes in the current study. The first theme (i.e., tension in relationships) reflected factors within the school and community systems that present
challenges for building relationships, such as outside resources, trauma, and misunderstandings. The second theme (i.e., authentic and sustainable relationships) reflected aspects of building relationships and collaborating across different perspectives, such as cultural humility, effective communication, and understanding the unique roles and contributions of the individuals involved. The third theme (i.e., supportive school environment) reflected characteristics of a school environment that would truly meet the needs of the students and community, which include trainings, sharing goals and values, incorporating community representation in the school, and benefits for all involved parties.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the facilitators, barriers, and benefits of a community-school partnership in an Indigenous community through the perspectives of individuals who have participated in the partnership. Results were presented as three themes: (1) tension in relationships, (2) authentic and sustainable relationships, and (3) supportive school environment. These results will be discussed within the unique context of the current study and local community, as well as within the context of the existing literature. This section will also address implications, limitations, and future directions.

Tension in Relationships

The first theme reflected participants’ perceptions of barriers to community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities. More specifically, outside resources, trauma, and differing perspectives among community members contribute to tension in relationships and present challenges to developing and maintaining successful partnerships. For example, programs that involve grant funding can lead to feelings of mistrust if community members believe that grant requirements are prioritized over their own interests and needs. If community-school partnerships do involve outside sources of funding, respect and communication need to be maintained so that relationships are not harmed in the interest of accessing financial resources. The goals of outside programs may not be relevant for the local context, and partners should prioritize their relationships with community members so that any resulting programming aligns with the community’s interests, needs, and goals. It is important for programs to be matched with the local context (Ingraham, 2015; Meyers et al., 2012).

Another barrier to building and sustaining relationships due to outside funding is the relatively short funding periods of grants. For example, the temporary nature of grant funding
can interfere with community members’ buy-in and desire to become partners, because they may not want to put their time or hope into a partnership that they do not believe will last. Short-term partnerships sustained solely through grant funding are not trusted by members of this Indigenous community. Due to the complex, systemic, and generational sources of trauma, levels of need and mistrust are high. Partnerships that demonstrate long-term investment are important for fostering trust and allowing for collaboration, and therefore making more positive change than partnerships based in temporary sources of outside funding.

Historical factors contribute to mistrust and difficulty establishing partnerships in Indigenous communities. Family and community members not feeling comfortable interacting with the school presently makes sense given the historical relationship of mistrust and colonization, particularly in the context of residential boarding schools and the harm that the current public education system may represent (Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011). It also makes sense that there might be tension or distance in family and community relationships with the school when students are currently having negative experiences. Statistics show that Indigenous students are disproportionately represented in both special education and school expulsions (NCAI, 2018), demonstrating present-day injustices in the school setting.

Additionally, educators can become frustrated with limited engagement from caregivers, but it is important for them to recognize the challenges that families may be experiencing and to respond with empathy, compassion, and understanding. Educators need to consider student behavior in context and understand how traumatic experiences impact Indigenous students and families. The differences in cultural backgrounds and experiences between educators and students can contribute to misunderstandings and conflict. While this is likely to be a challenge whenever educators and students do not share a cultural background, it is possible that this
presents a particular level of difficulty in this community, where most educators are non-
Indigenous and commute from a larger town off the reservation.

The differing perspectives of community members, the challenges that presents, and the factors contributing to misunderstandings have increased in recent years. More specifically, the widespread influence of social media, national-level politics, and the global pandemic have significantly impacted this small, rural community. This change may be due to a variety of factors, such as increased access to and engagement with internet media, or more people with different worldviews moving into this community during the pandemic. Conflict and tension have increased as nationally politicized conversations have entered this community. The school is impacted by these differences, as discussions about public education are inherently political. School improvement is, in fact, not apolitical and should be integrated with the larger community (Ishimaru, 2014).

Different perspectives similarly impact other community and government systems. For example, Indigenous community members being less likely to run for school board due to systemic factors (e.g., historical trauma, distrust) can leave positions available for other people with different worldviews to make decisions for the community. Therefore, these systems perpetuate patterns of inequality, although partnerships could help alleviate power hierarchies. For example, transformative school-community collaborations focus on outcomes that reduce inequality through factors like relational equality and transparent decision-making (Kim, 2018). Relationships are also impacted by high turnover and little community representation on the school board and among school staff. When educators are seen as outsiders and only stay for a short time, it is difficult for community members to develop trust with the people in power in
their school systems. Because of deeply rooted mistrust, demonstrating commitment is important for establishing relationships between educators and community members.

Additionally, state and federal government policies may have been designed to support Indigenous student and communities, but they do not always do so. In particular, the lack of oversight and follow-through of systems that are designed to promote collaboration between schools and Indigenous communities can interfere with the development of partnerships, contribute to mistrust, and indicate disrespect to the very community members that the systems are intended to support, perpetuating patterns of colonization, racism, and power imbalance.

Throughout the interviews, participants discussed factors that present barriers to partnership through creating tension in relationships. Outside resources may not have shared goals with community members and may not sustain partnerships due to their short-term nature. Historical trauma contributes to Indigenous communities’ mistrust of school systems, leading to difficulty establishing partnerships. Additionally, current traumatic experiences that students and families face lead to difficulty engaging with and having positive experience with schools. This may be especially true when educators are not immersed in the community and may not share the same experiences. Different perspectives, worldviews, and opinions among community members contribute to misunderstandings, conflict, and hurt feelings, preventing partnership-building and decision-making that is in the best interest of all students, families, and community members.

**Authentic and Sustainable Relationships**

The next theme captured participants’ perceptions of facilitators to community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities. First, participants explained that developing and maintaining community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities requires specific knowledge, awareness, and skills to support building relationships, having respectful
conversations, understanding community needs, and increasing visibility of the partnership. These strategies are all based in cultural humility and effective communication, which build trust and foster genuine partnerships, in which everyone’s voices are heard.

One example is the impact of educators building positive relationships with caregivers. It is important that educators view caregivers as partners (Ishimaru, 2014) and define children’s needs collaboratively (Sheridan, 2000) to support children’s well-being (Nastasi, 2000). Building relationships can lead to shifts in power that transform tension and conflict into collaboration and partnership (Ishimaru, 2014). This is true beyond the relationship between educators and caregivers as well. For example, positive relationships between community members can make it easier to come together and resist changes in the community from outside influences. This may be particularly relevant in our current cultural context, in which small, rural communities are more susceptible to the influence of nation-wide political controversy and differing worldviews due to a variety of factors (e.g., social media, recent political activity, COVID-19 pandemic).

Partnerships are facilitated through personal relationships and respectful communication. While cultural differences can be barriers to establishing relationships, educators can build trust by being open to learning and through rebuilding and sustaining relationships when trust has been broken. It can be difficult to manage the needs and perspectives of all parties involved at once, but that is important for everyone to continue to feel respected and to maintain trust and buy-in for a partnership. Open, two-way communication between school and community partners can foster trust in relationships and maintain partnerships in which everyone feels welcome and respected (Bosma et al., 2010; Ingraham, 2015; Sanders & Harvey, 2002).

Additionally, skills that foster relationship-building and advocacy for minoritized populations are important components of cultural humility and can promote authentic
community-school partnerships founded in trust (Goforth, 2016; Pham et al., 2021). For example, educators attending community events can help build trust (Pham et al., 2021), and in Indigenous communities, specifically, community-school relationships are enhanced when educators immerse themselves in the local community with openness (NASP, 2020a; Whiteford et al., 2017). Putting intention into personal relationships is essential for building trust and respect, which can allow partnerships to form and be sustained within the historical context of mistrust.

In the second aspect of this theme, participants reflected on the importance of understanding the unique needs, roles, and contributions of individuals to facilitate participation in and sustainability of community-school partnerships. “Authentic empowerment” requires that the community identifies their needs and has agency over both the content and method of any program development. Existing literature has also emphasized the importance of empowerment in effective community-school partnerships, in which community members are equal partners and share in collaborative dialogue and decision-making (Bosma et al., 201; Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014; Ingraham, 2015; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Further, the intentions of community partners are important, because if they are not acting in accordance with community voices, they can be perpetuating assimilation and colonization (Perkins, 2015).

Opportunities for collaboration also need to be accessible to families, such as providing more visual information rather than text for caregivers who may have limited reading abilities. This is an example of using flexible strategies to build capacity and engagement, rather than relying on traditional practices that may be less useful for making lasting changes (Ishimaru, 2014). In the same way that simply hosting more events will not effectively increase family engagement unless the systemic barriers (e.g., work schedules) are addressed (Ishimaru, 2014;
Washington, 2010), simply sending more lengthy written materials home will also not successfully improve family-school interactions. Considering families’ needs and using creativity and systemic change to improve school partnerships with families and communities leads to culturally responsive collaborations (Kim, 2018; Washington, 2010).

Additionally, dedicated time for meetings facilitated communication in this community-school partnership. Similarly, previous research has highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for all participants to engage in the process and discuss their goals, decisions, and reflections over the duration of the partnership through regular meetings, in order to facilitate sustained collaboration (Meyers et al., 2012; Sanders & Epstein, 2005; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Partnerships can also be facilitated by having a better understanding of the resources within the community, the connections that already exist, and how they can be shared. Awareness of unique strengths is an essential aspect of culturally responsive partnerships (Roche & Strobach, 2019), and instead of focusing on bringing outside ideas and resources into a community as solutions, the community’s existing knowledge and resources need to be considered and valued (Miller & Hafner, 2008). Knowledgeable and respected community members are one example of existing resources (Washington, 2010), and collaboration with Indian Parent Committees, for instance, can be important for establishing and sustaining partnerships.

Another aspect of getting individuals involved in the partnership is giving personal invitations based on unique skills and perspectives to encourage participation. Recognizing and communicating individual contributions and benefits can increase buy-in and engagement. Buy-in from both school administration and community members can be increased when all parties are seen as important to supporting student success (Childs & Grooms, 2018; Sanders & Epstein, 2005; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Discussing individual roles can also support clarifying roles and
responsibilities, which is important early in a partnership for avoiding misunderstandings and maintaining partnership success (Roche & Strobach, 2019; Sanders & Epstein, 2005).

While encouraging participation is helpful, awareness that participation requires time, effort, and other resources is necessary to not significantly burden anyone. It is important to include individuals who have unique knowledge and resources to enhance the partnership while balancing the impact of participation on their time, energy, and emotions to maintain positive relationships and sustainable partnerships. This may be particularly important to partnerships in small, rural, Indigenous communities, which have a limited number of community leaders. A similar idea is true even among educators who may want to coordinate more community outreach but have limited resources. With a staff member who could dedicate more time to that type of programming, schools may better be able to connect with the community to support Indigenous students. A team approach can address concerns about limited time and resources, because it allows for shared responsibilities (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). The team approach also has other benefits, including fostering a feeling of shared ownership, sustaining partnerships when individual team members change, and incorporating diverse perspectives and skills (Roche & Strobach, 2019; Sanders & Epstein, 2005).

Partnerships are also strengthened when leaders are immersed in both contexts, because they are more likely to be trusted and respected by everyone, and they have valuable knowledge from their experiences to support the partnership (Miller & Hafner, 2008). In other words, individuals who are accepted members of two groups partnering together have a unique perspective and ability to foster continued communication and collaboration between two groups. Local leaders also have an important role, specifically so that the interests and values of the community are appropriately represented (Miller & Hafner, 2008).
communities, Elders can support the cultural components of community-school partnerships, as well as increase trust and buy-in for other community members. When time is a valuable resource and there are a limited number of people to participate in so many community programs, individuals look to community leaders to determine where they should invest their time. Community leaders may also have better awareness of community needs and resources.

School leaders also play an important role in establishing partnerships. In order for change to happen within a school system, everyone needs to feel invested and motivated. For partnerships to develop and be maintained, school leaders need to believe and invest in that collaboration. Principals can be facilitators within and outside of the school, supporting a collaborative effort to benefit students (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). Teacher buy-in is also important for implementing and sustaining partnerships and school-based programs, and their voices are important for developing authentic community-school relationships. However, teachers want to know that their investment will be worth it before they give their limited time and energy to something new. This can be facilitated by inviting teachers into the partnership and communicating that their perspective is valued. Various strategies, such as presenting information formally and informally, obtaining necessary resources, and making adaptations to meet the unique needs of students, can increase buy-in with teachers (Forman et al., 2013).

Caregivers also play a role in the partnerships. Community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities can be facilitated through letting caregivers know that they are valued members of partnership teams and that their participation can make a difference. Welcoming schools are characterized by friendly and inclusive systems (Sanders & Epstein, 2005), and schools can facilitate collaboration and partnership with families and community members by making volunteers feel more welcome and by recognizing and removing barriers that make
engagement difficult. Further, mutual responsibility is an important aspect of community-school partnerships, meaning that all partners, including caregivers, are believed to have valuable resources to contribute to the partnership (Ishimaru, 2014). In other words, increasing accessibility for caregivers to volunteer their skills and time might be a significant way to use existing resources and increase collaboration.

Participants’ reflections highlighted multiple factors that can facilitate community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities related to cultural humility, respectful communication, and understanding the unique needs of the community and roles of individuals. Together, these factors can promote greater buy-in and engagement and can facilitate partnerships in which all voices are heard, collaboration is authentic, and outcomes are sustainable.

**Supportive School Environment**

In the third theme, results emphasized the benefits of community-school partnership in Indigenous communities, which could support an ideal school environment that would truly meet student and community needs. Participants described training for staff, shared goals and values, community representation in the school and benefits for everyone involved, as characteristics of supportive school environments that could be fostered through partnerships.

Trainings for school staff could allow them to interact with community members in more helpful and supportive ways, especially in the context of historical school-community relationships in Indigenous communities. Trainings are important due to the differences in cultural background and worldview between educators and students. Educators and school staff members would benefit from more information and resources about how to approach interactions with students, families, and community members so that differences are recognized and responded to appropriately. Welcoming schools facilitate community-school partnerships
through staff members intentionally engaging with visitors with kindness and friendliness (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). Training for all school staff (e.g., secretaries, bus drivers, teachers) about how to be welcoming and why it is important in the community context can help schools improve engagement and partnership in Indigenous communities.

When educators have not had the experience or lived in the community, they may not understand the influence that historical trauma has on students or school partnerships with the community, although awareness of that impact is essential. Educators and students having different cultural backgrounds presents challenges, and for schools in Indigenous communities to be truly supportive environments that meet the needs of their students, educators need to learn more about the community context in which they work. Partners should work with an awareness of the historical context and its contemporary impact in order to build trust and not ignore past and present injustices (Miller & Hafner, 2008).

Another aspect of this theme is establishing and communicating shared goals and values between the community and school, which can be a benefit of a community-school partnership. Currently, community members do not always feel that public schools are meeting the needs of their students, and the community should see that the public school shares its values and is focused on supporting students’ strengths rather than punishing them for their differences. Creating consistency in goals and building on strengths across systems can strengthen community-school partnerships (Sheridan, 2000). When goals are shared, community-school partnerships are enhanced, because all parties recognize that they can play a role in achieving success rather than placing blame or accountability solely on the other group (Ishimaru, 2014). Additionally, communicating those shared goals is important. Schools should communicate that
student learning is their priority, such as through newsletters that highlight activities with community partners (Sanders & Epstein, 2005).

Further, supportive school environments seek and value community input and show families and community members that they share the same goal of supporting their students. Programs implemented with ethnic or racial minority populations should be modified to incorporate cultural components so that they are a better fit and more effective for the community (Soto et al., 2018). For example, the use of advisory boards can provide opportunities for individuals from both the school and community groups to bring their perspectives together, listen to one another, integrate cultural elements, and make collaborative decisions that lead to the best learning environments for students.

Community input also includes guidance from Elders. This may be especially relevant in Indigenous communities, where culture, identity, and traditional methods are important components of resilience in the context of historical and contemporary oppression (Brave Heart, 2003; NASP, 2020a). Strengthening partnerships between the school and community can bring culture and identity into the school, supporting Indigenous students’ success (NASP, 2020a). Including Elders is part of this process, as well as incorporating traditional local languages, stories, routines, and games (OPI, 2022). Decolonization occurs when Indigenous ways of knowing are prioritized and not seen as inferior to Western views (Walters et al., 2008).

Establishing partnerships between the public school and other community organizations or events can be additional sources of collaboration. Connecting community events to school-based lessons can make the curriculum more relevant to students, can increase opportunities for them to practice skills with community support, and can align goals and values between the school and community so that neither is working alone. When there are shared goals, it is most
efficient for people to collaborate and work together; partnerships are better than everyone working individually (Childs & Grooms, 2018). Community-school partnerships can foster supportive school environments for students through sharing resources, collaborating to reach shared goals, and increasing opportunities for students to learn and apply skills.

Representation from the community in school-based decisions is important so that the school reflects community values and interests, with the overall shared goal of supporting students. When there is a lack of representation of Indigenous people across the education system and non-Indigenous individuals make decisions for school systems in Indigenous communities, the resulting decisions can be harmful to Indigenous students or conflicting with community values. Not only does a lack of representation leave out important perspectives that should inform decisions, but it also sends a message that Indigenous people and their unique experiences are not valued. Instead, including permanent Indigenous staff members, incorporating Indigenous ways of being, and displaying Indigenous art and culture in schools can affirm Indigenous students’ identity and promote well-being (Center for Native American Youth, 2019; NASP, 2020a; OPI, 2022; Whiteford et al., 2017). School spaces should reflect values of the community (Eagle & Dowd-Eagle, 2014), and specifically integrate significance of place (Whiteford et al., 2017) and language revitalization (Center for Native American Youth, 2019; NASP, 2020a) in Indigenous communities. Supportive school environments are ones in which all members feel a sense of belonging and know that their voices and experiences are valued.

Within this theme, participants’ reflections also emphasized the benefits of community-school partnership for everyone, not just students. For example, when community members are involved in school policy decisions, changes can lead to more supportive school environments for students and their families. When families know that schools value their input and make
decisions with them and their students’ best interests in mind, they have better relationships with schools, and are more likely to collaborate with educators in supporting their children’s education. Community members who participate in community-school partnerships can directly benefit from their participation while simultaneously contributing to programs that benefit children and families and foster supportive school environments. Overall, partnerships can be beneficial for students, families, educators, and the wider community (Ishimaru, 2014; Whiteford et al., 2017), particularly in Indigenous communities where healing and resilience may be facilitated and experienced collectively (Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011).

In summary, participants reflected on aspects of supportive school environments that would meet student and community needs, which included training for school staff about the community context, sharing goals and values across the school and community settings, increasing Indigenous and community representation in the school, and recognizing that the benefits of community-school partnership extend to everyone involved.

**Implications**

The results of this study highlighted the importance of relationships in community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities. Participants reflected on how relationships can be barriers to partnerships when they are sources of tension, as well as how relationships can be facilitators to successful partnerships when they are authentic and sustainable. Participants further discussed the benefits of community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities in the context of an ideal, supportive school environment, where belonging and success are fostered for everyone. Notably, participants’ reflections suggested that any community-school partnership is made up of personal relationships, sometimes when the individuals have very different cultural backgrounds or worldviews (e.g., an Indigenous caregiver and a teacher who does not live in the
community, an Indigenous community member and a White community member, an Elder and a principal). They explained that these personal relationships can be both obstacles and solutions to successful community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities.

The relationships between Indigenous communities and public schools have historically been characterized by harm and mistrust (Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011), and participants explained the impact of that on present-day relationships between these systems and the individuals within them. This mistrust and tension can be exacerbated by factors such as outside grants, high turnover and educators not living in the community in which they work, and differing worldviews and misunderstandings among community members. However, these factors can be overcome when personal relationships are established and founded in trust. Certain strategies can support relationship and trust-building, such as respectful communication, empowerment, and understanding unique roles and contributions. Strong, positive, trusting, personal relationships can serve as the foundation for community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities and ensure that the partnerships will be sustained in a way that meets the community needs and fosters supportive schools for Indigenous students.

These results suggest that it is essential for school psychologists and other educators to build those personal relationships, particularly in Indigenous communities, where the institution they work for may represent oppression and injustice, given the historical context and present-day disproportionality. Time is a valuable resource for school psychologists and educators, and it can be easy for relationship-building activities (e.g., calling caregivers with positive updates or actively listening and validating caregiver concerns during meetings) to be forgotten or intentionally dropped when it seems like there is not enough time to accomplish everything. However, the results of the current study suggest these moments matter, and choosing to make
an investment in relationships is important. These interactions build trust, which can support partnerships, and lead to various other benefits for students, schools, and communities. Importantly, given the limited time and long list of responsibilities for school psychologists and educators, intentional relationship-building cannot be up to just one individual. It should be a systemic approach to interacting with caregivers and visitors, where all school staff work to intentionally build trust and have positive interactions.

Part of the process of providing culturally responsive services, building personal relationships, and developing and sustaining community-school partnerships is listening to community needs, uplifting community voices, and empowering community members to identify their priorities, goals, and resources. Particularly in minoritized communities where power to make decisions and integrate traditional ways of knowing into school systems has historically been taken away, it is important for partnerships to genuinely value community perspectives and existing resources. Authentic collaboration removes power imbalances and increases representation of community values. School psychologists and educators should consider how they can increase representation of community perspectives, values, culture, and identity at various levels, such as Indigenous individuals on the school board or school staff, Indigenous language, stories, and art in the classroom, etc. (Center for Native American Youth, 2019; NASP, 2020a; OPI, 2022; Whiteford et al., 2017).

Further, in order to sustain partnerships, buy-in and respect must be maintained. In addition to building trust and personal relationships, members of partnership teams, such as school psychologists, should evaluate engagement and sustainability in an on-going way. For example, it may be important to check-in with individuals to see if they have been given too many responsibilities, especially knowing that some community members may be committed to
many community projects due to the limited number of people to fill those roles. Buy-in, respect, and trust are especially important for partnership sustainability, particularly when individuals may be coming together despite significant differences in cultural background or worldview. These individual differences may be more prominent now compared to the recent past, due to cultural shifts related to social media, national politics, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These differences have the potential to contribute to more mistrust in communities deeply impacted by colonization, so maintaining trust and respect is especially important to establish and sustain successful partnerships.

In the context of these differences in cultural background and worldview, it is especially important for school psychologists and educators to engage in critical reflexivity and work with cultural humility (Goforth, 2016; Pham et al., 2021). Examining one’s own biases and attitudes and approaching differences with openness and curiosity can support trusting, respectful relationships and strengthen community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities, where partners may not share the same identities, experiences, or worldviews.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Including the perspectives from additional projects or communities in future research would be beneficial, because Project SELA may be particularly unique. Project SELA is an example of a community-school partnership, focused on creating and implementing a culturally responsive social-emotional learning curriculum for Indigenous students. It may be different from other community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities, because it was facilitated by a university-affiliated research team that serves as a third partner in the project. This third partner introduces additional resources, goals, and perspectives that may uniquely contribute to barriers, facilitators, and benefits of community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities.
While the university-based researchers were able to provide resources such as funding, time, and academic expertise, there are likely also drawbacks to the third partner’s involvement in this community-school partnership. For instance, Project SELA was initiated as a community-based research project, meaning that there has been a research component from the very beginning. Due to a history of exploitation and harm by outside researchers in Indigenous communities (Deptula et al., 2023), this aspect may have impacted participants’ trust and buy-in differently than if a partnership was initiated outside of a university-based research project. Additionally, the university-based members of the Project SELA team are outsiders to this community and the project is funded through grants, both of which are factors that could have hindered trust and buy-in from community members. Therefore, it is possible that participants who have been part of a project without university-based partners may have different views, and future research may want to explore their experiences, as well.

Also, the perspective of caregivers is notably missing in the current study. Many participants reflected on the relationship between the school and caregivers and considered caregivers as members of the community; however, none of the participants are currently caregivers to students attending the school where this partnership is taking place. All participants were required to have participated in Project SELA in some capacity in order to be eligible, and Project SELA has not successfully engaged with many caregivers thus far in a sustained and meaningful way, limiting the opportunity to interview a caregiver in the current study. The historical context is important for understanding why this group has been slower to engage and build trust with the project, and many participants are family members, caregivers to former students, or caregivers to students at nearby schools. Therefore, they may have adequately brought forth the perspective of caregivers; however, given the extent to which caregiver
relationships were discussed in the results, future research may want to intentionally and explicitly include the perspectives of current caregivers involved in community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities. Similarly, students were not included in the current study, and they may have a unique perspective about what it means for their communities and schools to be partners in supporting their success and well-being.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the existing relationships many participants had with the interviewer. I conducted all interviews and had already been involved in Project SELA for approximately three years. During that time, I was able to build relationships with educators and community members who ultimately participated in the current study. While this may have helped to develop rapport and increase comfort during an interview, it may also have led participants to feel uncomfortable sharing their true thoughts, feelings, and experiences due to our pre-existing relationship. Additionally, I had previously developed closer relationships with some participants more than others, which means that any depth, intimacy, or honesty in the interviews impacted by our pre-existing relationship was not consistent across all participants. Therefore, future research may want to consider how existing relationships could impact interview dynamics. Existing relationships may help foster trust, comfort, and openness in Indigenous communities due to cultural values and historical context, but there may be situations in which a neutral interviewer may be better.

Conclusion

In the current study, participants discussed different aspects of community-school partnership in an Indigenous community, including facilitators, barriers, and benefits. It is clear that these partnerships are important, and one participant even stated, “real collaboration is empowering.” The results and recommendations in this study may not be surprising to
practitioners or community members who are already well-immersed into community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities. For instance, the themes that were discussed in the interviews in the current study were previously brought up in some way over the past five years as part of individual or group Project SELA conversations. However, as participants noted, sometimes information is not shared with individuals who are “outside of the circle.” In order for schools and communities to successfully support students’ learning and well-being, it is important for information about the facilitators, barriers, and benefits of partnerships in Indigenous communities to be shared. While some of the information shared in this study may be unique to this local community, I expect that these overall themes would apply to other Indigenous communities and may serve as a foundation for establishing and maintaining community-school partnerships to better support students, families, schools, and communities.

Through my experience as a research assistant on the Project SELA team, I was inspired by the partnership that developed between the CAB and the school. More specifically, I observed the investment of community members and educators, the creativity of integrating local values into lesson plans, and the enthusiasm among students while engaging with culturally relevant classroom activities, resulting from community-school partnership. In Indigenous communities, the process of community-school partnership is unique, and in order to use these partnerships to support student learning and well-being, it is important to understand the factors that influence those partnerships. The results of the current study suggest that personal relationships are the most important aspect of community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities. Investing the time to make personal connections fosters trust and authentic collaboration, which can lead to true community-school partnerships and the benefits they provide.
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Appendix A: Recruitment Email/Phone Script

Email:

Dear [name],

I hope you are doing well. For my dissertation, I am interested in exploring community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities. In order to do that, I would like to interview individuals who have been involved in Project SELA in different ways. Given your role, I believe your perspective would be a valuable contribution to a discussion about this type of collaboration.

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview, which would take approximately 45-60 minutes at a time that works with your schedule, and you would be provided with a $20 gift card to thank you for your time. Please let me know if you have any questions. If you are interested in participating, I will provide you with more details, and we can schedule a time to meet. Thanks for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Amy

Phone Script:

Hi [name], this is Amy Violante from Project SELA. How are you? I was wondering if you have a few minutes to talk about a new component of Project SELA that I am working on. Would now be okay? [If they say no, ask if they’d prefer a follow-up email or when would be better for a phone call.] Through my experience being part of the SELA team, I’ve been particularly inspired by the partnership that has developed between the CAB and the school. For my dissertation, I am interested in exploring community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities, just like Project SELA. In order to do that, I would like to interview individuals who have been involved in Project SELA in different ways. Given your role as [role description], I believe your perspective would be a valuable contribution a discussion about this type of collaboration. I would like to invite you to participate in an interview, which would take approximately 45-60 minutes at a time that works with your schedule, and you’d be provided with a $20 gift card to thank you for your time. You don’t need to decide right now, and I can email you this information if you would like to think about it. Do you have any thoughts or questions at this time? [If they indicate that they would like to participate, send email with next steps or ask if they’d like to schedule an interview at this time and complete paperwork at the interview. If they indicate that they need time to think about it, send email with information above. If they indicate that they do not want to participate, thank them for their time and express interest in seeing them at the next SELA event.] Thank you for your time today, and I look forward to talking to you again soon!
Appendix B: Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

A Qualitative Examination of Facilitators, Barriers, and Benefits of a Community-School Partnership in an Indigenous Community

You are being asked to participate in a voluntary research study. The purpose of this study is to better understand factors that contribute to successful community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities, as well as the benefits of this type of collaboration. Participating in this study will involve a demographics questionnaire and an audio-recorded interview, and your participation will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Risks related to this research include potential discomfort due to emotional experiences while reflecting during the interview and due to having the interview recorded; benefits related to this research include contributing to a better understanding of culturally responsive school-based services for students. The alternative to participating in this study is to decline participation or withdraw at any time without penalty.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Amy Violante, Doctoral Candidate
Department and Institution: Department of Psychology, University of Montana
Supervisor: Dr. Anisa Goforth, Professor of Psychology, University of Montana
Contact Information: 406-243-2917; Skaggs Building Room 143, 32 Campus Drive, Missoula, MT 59812

Why am I being asked?
You are being asked to be a participant in a research study about the facilitators, barriers, and benefits of community-school partnership in Indigenous communities. The purpose of this research is to better understand factors that contribute to successful partnership and the benefits of this type of collaboration. You have been asked to participate in this research because you have participated in Project SELA.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with Salish Kootenai College or the researchers. If you decide to participate in the research, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What procedures are involved?
The study procedures are an online demographics questionnaire and an audio-recorded interview with the principal investigator. The research will be performed at a time and place convenient for you, including a virtual option, for a one-time meeting of approximately 45-60 minutes following your completion of the questionnaire, which will take approximately 5 minutes. You will also be contacted during the data analysis process and invited to provide feedback on the results.

**What are the potential risks and discomforts?**  
It is anticipated that participation involves minimal risk. You may experience potentially negative feelings when reflecting on your experience with community-school partnership and may feel uncomfortable about having the interview recorded. This discomfort typically goes away quickly.

**Are there benefits to participating in the research?**  
Although you may not directly benefit from taking part in this study, your participation may help provide valuable information to the field of culturally responsive school-based services for students.

**What other options are there?**  
You have the option to not participate in this study.

**Will my study-related information be kept confidential?**  
We will use all reasonable efforts to keep your personal information confidential, but we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. When this research is discussed or published, no one will know that you were in the study. But, when required by law or college policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by: a) The Institutional Review Board that approves research studies or b) auditors responsible for oversight of research.

**Will I be reimbursed for any expenses or paid for my participation in this research?**  
You will be given a $20 gift card to Big Sky Sasquatch in Arlee for being in this study.

**Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?**  
If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. The researchers also have the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if they believe it is in your best interests or you were to object to any future changes that may be made in the study plan.

**Will data collected from me be used for any other research?**  
Your de-identified information could be used for future research without additional informed consent.

**Who should I contact if I have questions?**
Contact the researchers Amy Violante or Dr. Anisa Goforth at amy.violante@umontana.edu or 406-243-2917 if you have any questions about this study or your part in it, or if you have concerns or complaints about the research.

**What are my rights as a research subject?**
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Salish Kootenai College Institutional Review Board at (406) 275-4931.

I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded in order to be transcribed and analyzed. I understand that the recording will be destroyed following data analysis. I understand that I must be 18 years or older to participate in this research.

I have read the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I will be given a copy of this form.

I agree with the statements of consent above and wish to participate in this research project.

________________________________________  __________________________
Signature                                      Date

________________________________________
Printed Name

________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent          Date

________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent
Appendix C: Demographics Questionnaire

A Qualitative Examination of Facilitators, Barriers, and Benefits of a Community-School Partnership in an Indigenous Community

Demographic Questions
1. What is your age? ______________
2. What is your gender? (please circle one)
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. Non-binary/Genderqueer
   d. Other: ______________
   e. Prefer not to respond
3. What is your race/ethnicity? (please circle all that apply)
   a. African American/Black
   b. American Indian/Alaskan Native, tribal affiliation: ________________________
   c. Asian
   d. Hispanic/Latinx
   e. Multiracial
   f. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, tribal affiliation: ________________________
   g. White
4. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
   a. High school/GED
   b. Some college or Associate’s degree
   c. Trade/technical/vocational training
   d. Bachelor’s degree
   e. Master’s degree
   f. Doctoral degree
5. Please provide an email address and phone number that you would like the researcher to use to contact you later about results.
   a. Email: _____________________________
   b. Phone: _____________________________
6. What is your name? _____________________________
Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Guided Interview Script for School and Community Members Involved in Project SELA

Beginning of Interview Script:
Thanks again for taking time out of your day to speak with me. I know that you have already indicated your interest in discussing community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities by scheduling an interview. For approximately the next 45 to 60 minutes, I will be asking you different questions to learn more about your experience with and perspectives of the purpose of community-school partnership in Indigenous communities and what contributes to its success.

Before we begin, let’s review the informed consent form. The information that you provide during the interview will be kept confidential. That is, I will make sure that your name is not linked with any information we share through publications or presentations. I will also be recording and taking notes to make an accurate record of your perspective. Only members of the research team will have access to the information you share. This information will be kept in password-protected secured cloud storage. There is no right or wrong answer to the questions that will be raised; the important thing is that you share your experiences and opinions. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Take a couple of minutes to review the additional details on this form, and let me know if you have any questions. We will sign 2 copies.

Do you have any questions about the informed consent or how we will be spending the next 45 to 60 minutes?

Interview Warm-Up:
Tell me about how you came to be involved with Project SELA.

Main Guiding Questions:
1. What aspects of your experience being involved in Project SELA stand out to you?
2. What does it mean to you to be involved in this type of collaboration between the school and the community? What are your thoughts and feelings about the experience?
3. What should community-school partnerships in Indigenous communities look like? Why are those factors important?
4. In your experience, what are some factors that facilitate this type of collaboration?
5. In your experience, what are some factors that are barriers, or obstacles, to this type of collaboration?
6. Tell me about why you support this type of collaboration or think it is important.
7. Who benefits from this type of collaboration? What are those benefits?
8. What do you wish other people would know about this type of collaboration? For example, if this was done in another school or community, what changes would you suggest?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience with community-school partnership in Indigenous communities?
Ending the Interview:
Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this research. As said before, you will be receiving a $20 gift card to Big Sky Sasquatch in Arlee for your time. You may be contacted again after the analysis process inviting you to provide feedback on the results before conclusions are finalized.

Finally, I want to remind you that your name will be kept confidential and separate from any of your answers in the interview recording or notes. If at any point you have any questions or are concerned about your comments being used, please contact me at the email address provided on the informed consent form, which you have a copy of. Do you have any questions before we end? Thank you.
## Appendix E: Codebook

Note: This codebook compiles all axial codes created by the data analysts, including the definitions, the open codes that make up each axial code, and one example quote for each axial code.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axial Code Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authentic empowerment</td>
<td>having the voice to determine what the programs look like for the people involved</td>
<td>Adopting the program; honest partnerships; listen to understand; student centered program</td>
<td>“I think just taking that first step and then just making a gracious space for people to be safe in, to have those conversations, and to listen to understand one another, and not be so, I guess rigid, or you know, harsh.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barriers</td>
<td>barriers to community-school collaboration</td>
<td>Covid; drug use; frustrated teachers; legislation, struggles with school; student-child issues; time and resources; trauma</td>
<td>“Often teachers don't want somebody telling them what to do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barriers</td>
<td>interactions that act as barriers for the project’s and/or schools success</td>
<td>Institutionalized racism; school barriers; substance usage</td>
<td>“Some parents just flat out will not set foot on the school grounds because of the…institutional racism, the bad experience they had, or their parents had, or their kids are having.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>benefits</td>
<td>benefits of community-school partnerships</td>
<td>Building relationships; cultural understanding; SELA positives; well-being</td>
<td>“The fact that that the team reached out to people in the community, and really tried to get that voice in the materials that are being sent home to parents…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building relationships</td>
<td>importance of building personal relationships with the community</td>
<td>Community involvement from beginning; creating welcoming spaces; difficult conversations; establishing trust;</td>
<td>“They have to feel like they trust you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges and issues</td>
<td>controversy in community acceptance</td>
<td>Community involvement barriers; controversial in the community; Covid; funding; hesitant to join; ignorance to diverse experiences; lost steam; organizing opportunities for collaboration; program buy-in; programs generated outside of the community; technology as barriers, whole child vs SEL</td>
<td>“They just didn't know any better, and I hate to use the word ignorance. But it was. It was just not knowing. You know it's what they hear around the dinner table, and so that became apparent to me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>the various aspects of collaboration</td>
<td>Benefits of collab; collab importance; future directions; role; CAB; Elders; position; school administration; school board; SELA; student</td>
<td>“I think one of the big things is the Indigenous people seeing their values and themselves reflected in, you know, specific curriculum materials.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>[not available]</td>
<td>Bring people together; parent input; building connections; community connections; CAB; community and school connections; community values and engagement; community invitation; community partnerships; parents, teachers, and community; spending time together; collaboration benefits; collaboration with Native communities; collaboration with</td>
<td>“It has given me a little bit of a chance to connect with the community a little bit more.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration is challenging</td>
<td>acknowledgement that establishing partnerships and maintaining collaboration is difficult</td>
<td>[none]</td>
<td>“It’s difficult to involve parents in a meaningful and authentic way.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration within school</td>
<td>discussion of improving relationships and increasing understanding among educators</td>
<td>Collaboration with teachers</td>
<td>“Teachers in the CAB meetings would have been really cool.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td>[not available]</td>
<td>Spreading the word; understanding SEL; visibility of project; social media</td>
<td>“We have the newsletter back up and running, and I think that's a really good way to disseminate information because it gets shared with local businesses.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community</td>
<td>the general umbrella for varying aspects of the community</td>
<td>Community divide; community events; community interaction with newcomers and or outsiders; community interaction with non-Indigenous people; community involvement; connections; culture; historical trauma; impacts for community; lack of community trust; parental involvement</td>
<td>“I can't over emphasize the not only the cultural differences between maybe teachers or our administrators that come to our school, but the cultural differences within our community.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community and outsiders</td>
<td>discussion of the community relationships with outsiders, including educators</td>
<td>Community-school conflict; educator and student cultural differences; educator turnover; educators not part of community; real collaboration; surprise to outsiders; understand needs; worldview differences</td>
<td>“I think mostly that it's the lack of communication and the lack of understanding.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community engagement with school</td>
<td>discussion of the ways that the community can and does engage with the school</td>
<td>Career opportunities; collective action; community input; community member resources; community program; community</td>
<td>“whether you're a scientist that has hydrology and water as a part of your study as a scientist, whether you have somebody that is”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>response to trauma; community speakers; consistency; existing community resources; increasing community involvement; knowing protocol; school board; school events; school improvement; substitute teaching; volunteering</td>
<td>part of a nonprofit that's bringing donations into the school, whether you're a person that's trying to bring in a new curriculum…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>Community development; community mapping; community resources; death in the community; Elders involvement; expectations of participation; experiences of researchers vs community; invested volunteers; involvement from the ground up; local meetings; time commitment</td>
<td>“It has been hard to collaborate with the community just because, like the outreach, it’s like hard to get people to come to things.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-school collaboration</td>
<td>suggestions for or evidence of community-school collaboration</td>
<td>Community concern; community involvement; curriculum; lack of community involvement; administrative role; parent cooperation; communication; parental concern; SEL; SELA negatives; trust</td>
<td>“when you talk about community and school relations, there is oftentimes a lot of mistrust, and that plays right into historical trauma.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>covid</td>
<td>acknowledgement of the impact that covid had on collaborating</td>
<td>[none]</td>
<td>“It just is what it is, but like Covid kind of waylaid it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural humility</td>
<td>research, self-awareness, sharing knowledge</td>
<td>Cultural perspectives; reflection and humility</td>
<td>“I like the fact that it caused me to have to do a lot of reading and research myself, so that I could be confident in the answers I was giving when I was sharing information with people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum development</td>
<td>Thinks that teachers would typically be the ones to develop curriculum</td>
<td>Formatting to the system; fortitude; frameworks for SEL; integration of culture; SEL and culture; intro to project; need for social curriculum; remote curriculum development; spirituality in the curriculum; time to develop</td>
<td>“Getting things that really matter or that are relevant to them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education-related benefits</td>
<td>benefits of school-community partnerships that are related to education related outcomes</td>
<td>Attendance; increased student engagement</td>
<td>“Education is always easier. Attendance is always easier when people buy in and have a good partnership.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotions</td>
<td>discussion of how emotions can interfere with the ability to discuss and understand one another</td>
<td>[none]</td>
<td>“You know what I mean, because you have to get everybody's emotions out of it in order to really discuss it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evaluation</td>
<td>importance of evaluating the impact or success of programs towards the goals</td>
<td>[none]</td>
<td>“I'll these other programs out there and the kids are still not graduating. They’re still not graduating.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everyone benefits</td>
<td>discussion of how everyone benefits from the partnerships</td>
<td>learning</td>
<td>“I feel like just about everybody benefits from it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences in general</td>
<td>Administrative experience; classroom experience; familial interaction; impactful experiences students face; pandemic;</td>
<td></td>
<td>“I have really really appreciated it. It has given me a little bit of a chance to connect with the community a little bit more, although not”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relevant anecdote; student + children experience; teacher experience</td>
<td>nearly to the extent that I was hoping or thinking.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences off the reservation</td>
<td>opportunities for experiencing diversity [none]</td>
<td>“And so that really showed me like a diversity out there. And you know there is life off of the reservation, and it just like was this door, this window to the world.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilitators</td>
<td>examples or interactions that facilitate the success of Project SELA and the school/community School facilitators</td>
<td>“You can begin to understand someone's perspective. Then you know, then, that creates that that safe space for you to dig even deeper and work towards community solutions.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generational trauma</td>
<td>[not available] Suicides in community</td>
<td>“If we have, you know, generations of dysfunctional families and all this generational trauma. Yeah, that totally makes sense that, you know, our people would react in that way.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>[not available] [none]</td>
<td>“With my kids it was not acceptable to not do your homework.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improving community relationships</td>
<td>discussion of the importance of increasing understanding, empathy, and improving relationships among community members Collaboration among community; cultural differences within community; understanding among community</td>
<td>“think one is that we don't bite. People think we're too scary, or so I don't know what it is. I really don't know, but you know it's that we're not mean we're not scary, we're we are neighbors.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Policies and Procedures</td>
<td>recent waive of policy regarding consultation with Indian parents Utilizing resources and skills</td>
<td>“And so that policy holds the school accountable to consult with parents, you know, to collaborate with a tribal Education Department to do”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>authentic and meaningful consultation.</td>
<td>“We've progressed a little bit with integrating content and teaching about the place where you live...so that's changed a little bit with the State law.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning different perspectives</td>
<td>enjoyed learning about the tribes perspectives</td>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td>“I really like learning about the [name of other Tribe] way and the way they look at the life or the world. And um, you know their world view in perspective.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minoritized</td>
<td>few Indian’s teaching or on the school board</td>
<td>Mixed identity perspectives; institutional racism</td>
<td>“No Indians on the School Board, or only one or two, you know, always being the minority number.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mistrust factors</td>
<td>discussion of factors that contribute to mistrust between schools and communities</td>
<td>[none]</td>
<td>“Some experiences were worse than others, but that mistrust is blatantly evident for anyone inside that circle.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>multiple perspectives</td>
<td>discussion of including the perspectives of multiple people involved in community school partnerships</td>
<td>Increasing understanding; misunderstandings; outside resources</td>
<td>“I think educators needed to be involved. Parents, elders. you know, just people that are passionate about the kids.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal and community challenges</td>
<td>discussion of the challenges that individuals in this community experience, personally and collectively</td>
<td>Burnout; community trauma; historical trauma</td>
<td>“There's a whole slew of things, suicide, drug abuse, I think that knowing all of those challenges certainly made me hopeful that some kind of work is being done.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political parties</td>
<td>discussion of how political parties can create challenges for partnerships</td>
<td>Individual opinions</td>
<td>“Everybody has an opinion, and that's what politics is. So when it comes down to political parties, and the influence...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>opinions and what to teach in schools vs at home</td>
<td>Community divide</td>
<td>“Everything that got politicized to that just kind of like spiraled people out into these different worlds.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>trainings</td>
<td>Feedback on lessons; learning culture and language; learning from each other</td>
<td>“The school secretaries, those are the other people that should be involved with the training, because they are often the first face that a person sees, and I have interacted with some very unpleasant school secretaries.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program support and capital</td>
<td>identifying key people to support the program and utilizing cultural/social capital</td>
<td>[none]</td>
<td>“But there are people in every community, in the school community, in the Indian community, that that carry capital by virtue of their reputation and their work, and how they're networked in in their organizations or communities. And I think, identifying those people to involve them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression of Ed for all</td>
<td>integration of cultural content and teaching about the land - Indian Ed for All state law</td>
<td>[none]</td>
<td>“We've progressed a little bit with integrating content and teaching about the place where you live…so that's changed a little bit with the State law.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>project SELA</td>
<td>general mentions of Project SELA</td>
<td>Stand out experiences with SELA</td>
<td>“I think the sessions you do with the kids are great and the lessons you do with the kids are great.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public school compared to Tribal school</td>
<td>discussion of comparing the public school to the Tribal</td>
<td>Public school difference; public school for certain</td>
<td>“I feel like the public school is more of a system that's designed for...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Educators</td>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>Reflecting Community Values</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>relationship between collaboration and reciprocity, a cultural value</td>
<td>[none]</td>
<td>diversity in the community and differing ideas</td>
<td>descriptions of various types of relationships whether it be personal, professional, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about reciprocity and being able to really have the teachers, you know, in order for them to form a connection and ownership also, and have buy in, you know, you need to be able to get with them and understand what their needs are.”</td>
<td>“Anyone going there to work or be a part of the school should be able to understand what historical trauma means.”</td>
<td>“You know, there's a lot of diversity within our individual selves and within our community members.”</td>
<td>“I have the relationship with the parents, and understand the history and the trauma of it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of recommendations that would allow schools to better engage with and support this community</td>
<td>Different grade levels; educator knowledge of community context; educator knowledge of student background; educators’ knowledge of historical trauma</td>
<td>Connection to land; mapping out values</td>
<td>Community-school partnership; familial relationships; personal relationships; professional relationships; student-teacher relationships + interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>representation</td>
<td>transience of or lack of representation</td>
<td>[none]</td>
<td>“It might have been harder for them to connect with her, because they're simply not used to seeing that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resource distribution</td>
<td>Discussion of distributing resources so that the ones who need the most help receive the most</td>
<td>[none]</td>
<td>“It’s utilizing our resources effectively, making sure that the people that are most underserved are the ones getting the most help.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>kids are not graduating. rates are not changing even with new programs being implemented</td>
<td>Discipline; discipline problems; expulsion; invest in the kids</td>
<td>“The discipline problems are horrible.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>role of individuals in partnership</td>
<td>discussion of the important role that individuals can play in establishing and maintaining partnerships</td>
<td>Community relationships; key partners; respect; trust; unique contributions</td>
<td>“I think the best you can do is try to pull in leaders, local leaders to participate.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>role of school administrator</td>
<td>discussion of different aspects of the role of a school administrator in partnerships</td>
<td>Administrator as bridge; collaboration with administration; support for teachers</td>
<td>“Sell it to your administrator and get them on board.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELA</td>
<td>discussion of SEL, Project SELA, etc. Content that is related to SELA but not directly the community-school partnerships</td>
<td>Research component; SEL; SEL changes</td>
<td>“Project SELAs done nothing but benefit us.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sharing knowledge</td>
<td>[not available]</td>
<td>Learned concepts</td>
<td>“So that has helped me get to know community members better and a little bit more just about the [Tribal name] community, because I've lived so close to this place all my life, and just...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay positive</td>
<td>didn't know that much prior to working here.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>strategies to support relationships</td>
<td>“I guess we just have to stay positive with what we have.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support staff</td>
<td>“So they were really able to like kind of fold in local people to create stuff for us.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting kids</td>
<td>“When the kids are supported, the community is supported as well.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sustainability</td>
<td>“But it falls off the face of the earth, you know, because people weren't, didn't really have that commitment, or that that buy in.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>systemic influences on relationship</td>
<td>“Historical trauma oftentimes makes it to where you do not trust government agencies, hospitals, doctors,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher buy-in</td>
<td>Staff development to gain buy-in and professional courtesy</td>
<td>Integration of lessons; invitation; proud of the project; supporting teachers; teacher support</td>
<td>“Often teachers don't want somebody telling them what to do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching hot topics</td>
<td>forming opinions for themselves</td>
<td>[none]</td>
<td>“Our ability to take current issues that are sometimes hot button issues and figure out how to continue to teach so that kids have access to all sides of information and are able to digest those with each other and the teacher, so that they're able to form opinions up for themselves.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unique cultural context</td>
<td>aspects of the partnership that are unique to cultural context</td>
<td>Community values; context of reservation; hope; importance of place; including Elders; language; tailored for local context; two-eyed seeing</td>
<td>“The majority of programs are grant funded, and so they come and go, and historical trauma doesn't come and go.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what school should be</td>
<td>discussion of the role the school would play in the community ideally</td>
<td>Belonging; discipline; lack of public school supports; lack of representation; meeting families’ needs; meeting kids’ needs; retention and graduation; school as community resource; school as safe space; socioeconomic status; strengths; student-teacher relationships</td>
<td>“I always ask teachers and administrators at do the Indian kids feel like this is their school, because the school belongs to the kids.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>