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A partnership model to support teachers' capacity, resilience, and collective growth

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Abstract

Purpose – As schools, universities, and policymakers seek sustainable ways to improve literacy outcomes, this article provides a foundation for continued innovation, collaboration, and shared learning between schools and university faculty. This adaptable, conceptual model integrates both instructional and relational elements, encouraging schools and universities to view partnerships not as short-term projects, but as sustainable systems of professional learning and improvement.

Design/methodology/approach – This proposed plan for sustainability between university faculty and schools is designed to be replicable across K-12 systems and higher education contexts. University faculty members collaborated with teachers to design, administer, and analyze literacy assessments, while also facilitating team meetings where educators discussed student data and identified instructional implications. The conceptual framework guiding this work emphasizes co-ownership of learning and reciprocal professional collaboration between university faculty and educators. This framework positions data analysis as a shared practice for continuous improvement, fostering a sustainable and adaptable structure that supports and responds to students and teachers.

Findings – Findings indicate that when educators and university faculty shared ownership of data analysis and engaged in ongoing cycles of inquiry, instructional decision-making became more intentional, adaptive, and responsive to student needs. The development of the use of literacy data, coupled with resilience-building practices such as reflective dialogue using structured protocols and instructional walkthroughs, contributed to a culture of trust and continuous improvement. The partnership between schools and universities offers new opportunities for sustained collaboration focused on mutual benefit and long-term sustainability.

Research limitations/implications – For research, future studies would benefit from empirically testing and refining the model across varied K-12 contexts to examine long-term impacts on literacy outcomes and teacher learning. Additional research could also explore how university faculty apply insights gained through school partnerships to enhance instruction for pre-service teachers.

Practical implications – For practice, the framework and model are beneficial for both K-12 educators and university faculty. The partnership between schools and universities offers new opportunities for sustained collaboration focused on mutual benefit and long-term sustainability. Educators who participated with university faculty received targeted support that enabled them to engage more deeply with data and its instructional implications. In turn, university faculty were able to integrate these experiences into their own teaching, better preparing pre-service teachers through exposure to authentic data analysis procedures and protocols.

Social implications – For policy, this model and framework offer potential guidance for policymakers seeking to invest in relational capacity and data-use infrastructures. By emphasizing relationships and the use of literacy data, the framework aligns with policies that promote sustainable approaches to data use.

Originality/value – This paper identifies a need to study an innovative conceptual model of a university-school partnership designed to support literacy improvements through collaborative data collection, interpretation, and use. This model emphasizes structured agreements and partnership practices that promote resilience and collective growth among school teachers and university faculty.

Keywords Sustainability, Data analysis, Capacity building, University-school partnerships, Literacy instruction

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Introduction

Adolescent and young adult literacy concerns have been a focus in schools and districts for decades, as poor literacy can have lasting effects on students' life outcomes. Lack of effective adolescent and young adult literacy can lead to adult illiteracy which is associated with limited employment opportunities, higher likelihood of poverty and incarceration, poorer health outcomes, and reduced life expectancy (Diallo, 2020). According to Ortlieb and Young (2016) poor adolescent and young adult literacy performance can lead to generational literacy concerns. Generational literacy is the understanding and skills associated with literacy across different generations. It encompasses the ability to read, write, and use information effectively, which is crucial for participation in society and education. A parent's literacy level is the single greatest predictor of a child's future academic success, outweighing neighborhood or income factors. Generational literacy is a challenge affecting millions of Americans each day.

To address these issues, schools must understand their students' literacy needs and support teachers in providing high-quality instruction. The concept of teaching the whole student supports the foundational learning of reading and writing skills. A whole student approach, which ensures that students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged, sets the standard for school improvement (ASCD, 2007). This approach emphasizes that teachers not only attend to children's academic growth but also to their social and emotional development (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). When secondary teachers foster language-rich interactions, differentiate instruction, and align learning experiences with students' developmental needs, teaching the whole student supports the development and foundational skills required for reading and writing success. Secondary teachers have the responsibility to teach the whole student transferable skills through content area literacy as well as discipline-specific tools that will benefit the students' subject-specific learning and disciplinary literacy (Miller *et al.*, 2018). These skills are critical to educating the whole student, as these practices support students' critical thinking and capacity to engage with complex texts and tasks across disciplines in meaningful ways.

Despite the recognized importance of teaching transferable and discipline specific literacy skills across content areas, national assessment data suggests that many students are not developing these skills and competencies at expected levels. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data showed that over the past 27 years, reading proficiency gains have been minimal: from 217 to 220 for fourth graders, 260 to 263 for eighth graders, and 292 to 287 for twelfth graders (Diallo, 2020). One possible reason is that teachers often lack the time, tools, and structural support to collect and use literacy data as evidence to guide instruction and adjust practices to improve student outcomes (Truckenmiller & Toste, 2025). Teachers require dedicated time to design intentional classroom interactions that actively influence learning (Valencia *et al.*, 2024). Teachers also require time to effectively use curriculum, create assessments that align with the standards and expectations for academic proficiency, and analyze assessments to support their instructional decisions. These practices increase students' opportunities to learn content and apply their learning to meet the demands of complex understanding needed for success on the NAEP assessment and literacy achievement (Valencia *et al.*, 2024).

Professional learning structures such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can provide the time and support required by fostering collaborative conversations, shared responsibility for student learning, and collective use of assessment data. When embedded within a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), PLCs further strengthen instructional coherence by supporting data-based decision making, aligning Tier 1 instruction, and ensuring targeted support for diverse learners (Garrett *et al.*, 2021). Teachers' attitudes toward data use can influence how effectively they use data and whether they develop their own data literacy further (Lee *et al.*, 2024). When schools implement effective systems within a MTSS system, teachers are better positioned to meet the needs of all learners and improve instructional and assessment outcomes.

While PLCs embedded within MTSS provide essential structures for collaborative conversations and data use, schools often require additional expertise, research-based support, and sustained professional learning to build capacity, resilience, and collective growth. One approach to addressing these academic challenges within the school system and structure is through partnerships between schools and university literacy faculty. Such partnerships can build teacher capacity through shared data systems, professional learning, and collaborative data interpretation. University faculty can also use these partnerships to inform the preparation of pre-service teachers. Preservice teacher education and school-based partnerships are a collaborative approach designed to bridge the gap between educational theory and practical classroom experience. These partnerships, often between universities and K-12 schools, move beyond traditional student teaching models to create mutually beneficial outcomes for teacher candidates, in-service teachers, school administrators, and K-12 students (Allan & Johnson, 2025).

While existing partnership literature has documented the benefits of collaboration, less attention has been given to how partnerships systematically engage in shared data practices to drive instructional improvement and decisions. This article addresses this gap by proposing an innovative conceptual model of a university-school partnership designed to support literacy improvements through collaborative data collection, interpretation, and use. The model emphasizes structured agreements and partnership practices such as data walks and collaborative protocols that promote resilience and collective growth among school teachers and university faculty. The guiding questions are: (1) How can structured partnerships be designed to support teachers' use of data around literacy needs? and (2) What agreements and routines make such partnerships sustainable and innovative?

Background and literature review

In recent years, educators have been called upon to use student data to inform instruction and improve literacy outcomes. Yet, research consistently shows that teachers often lack the time, support, and organizational structures needed to use data effectively. This disconnect between policy expectations and classroom realities emphasizes the need for frameworks and models that support literacy data and collaborative professional learning with schools and university faculty. Collaborative partnerships with university faculty have the opportunity to support educators with state, district, and school initiatives and to integrate professional development into their learning systems. Research has increasingly pointed to the value of collaborative frameworks, models, and partnerships in supporting teachers' data use. Studies of university-school collaborations suggest that relational supports play an important role in helping educators make sense of their literacy data for instructional use (Milton, 2019).

When the goal is to bridge the gap between educational research and classroom practices, Research-Practice Partnerships (RPPs) is one approach to supporting that bridge (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). The RPPs are arrangements between researchers and practitioners sharing an open-ended commitment to build and sustain working collaboration. The main goal of the RPPs is to create spaces where collaborative relationships can develop between researchers and practitioners and are designed to address practical problems of educational practice while creating new knowledge and understanding (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). There are five important components to a successful partnership that are important when using RPPs in education that include building trust and cultivating partnership relationships, conducting rigorous research to inform action, supporting the partner practices in achieving the goals, producing knowledge that can support educational improvements, and building capacity of researchers, practitioners, and organizations that engage in the partnership work (Henrick *et al.*, 2017). Within the partnerships, goals are created along with shared accountability, which creates sustainable solutions that are co-created by schools and university partnerships.

As a result, sustainability is a central challenge and goal of these partnerships. For instance, Panuel *et al.* (2021) found that a high school and university partnership fostered ongoing

collaboration by building structures for teachers to share needs and receive targeted support. Importantly, this relationship persisted beyond the initial partnership, illustrating how sustained collaboration can strengthen educator capacity and commitment. Building capacity and commitment is imperative to the framework of sustaining partnerships with schools and university faculty. The capacity of educators has the potential to grow and develop within the framework for sustainability.

Although sustained collaboration can strengthen educator capacity and commitment, the literature identified challenges throughout the use of Research- Practice Partnerships (RPPs). These challenges include long-term partnerships, balancing research and practice priorities, and supporting effective practices that go beyond local contexts (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). Few studies have examined how RPPs can be structured to build teacher capacity, support university faculty, and sustainably inform policy. This gap is what this model seeks to address.

Using the principles of RPPs and building on them, the present model emphasizes relational capacity, collaborative data use, and sustainable university-school partnerships to improve literacy outcomes. By relying on the instructional and relational elements, this model extends prior research on RPPs and offers a practical guide for implementing sustained and mutually beneficial collaboration between the schools and university faculty.

While RPPs provide a structure for sustained collaboration between educators and university faculty, understanding how educators learn through collaborative practices is essential. Wenger's (2000) concept of communities of practice (CoPs) emphasizes social processes through which participants within a community co-construct knowledge and develop a shared identity. In order for participants within a community of practice to develop meaningful, practice-oriented knowledge, they must be actively engaged in the process of creating, refining, communicating, and applying knowledge generated within and by the community (Wenger, 2000).

To sustain the level of engagement required, communities of practice (CoP) thrive when participants have access to support structures that facilitate engagement and learning. As Wenger (2000) describes, dedicated teams can provide guidance and resources to ensure the community of practice remains focused and connected while addressing barriers such as time constraints or organizational demands. Within the context of this framework, such support structures are particularly important for helping educators and university faculty use their community of practice as a way to inform their instructional decisions around the literacy needs of their students. Organizational learning theory (Levitt & March, 1988) supports the implementation of community practices because routines and beliefs change in response to trial-and-error experimentation, and the quality of the success or failure of the actions taken within an organization is considered. For example, in a university faculty partnership, student data is analyzed and used to inform instructional decisions. When instructional outcomes are successful, educators' beliefs may shift, which supports the development of capacity building. However, when university faculty and school partnerships do not experience success based on student learning outcomes, opportunities for capacity building may be limited. The partnership provides support that has the potential to enhance the learning experience for both educators and university faculty.

Research-Practice Partnerships and Communities of Practice can influence an educator's adaptability. Adaptability can be described using three components of cognitive adaptability, behavioral adaptability, and emotional adaptability (Granziera *et al.*, 2019). Cognitive adaptability involves changing one's thoughts about a situation or circumstance, behavioral adaptability refers to adjusting one's actions to manage changes in a situation, and emotional adaptability occurs when an individual regulates or responds to fluctuating emotions when faced with change or uncertainty (Granziera *et al.*, 2019). When university faculty and schools partner, adaptability may shift among the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions. This fluctuation in adaptability can support the development of resilience for both educators and university faculty members.

A study that examined high school educators engaged in community partnerships found that collaboration helped teachers uncover three themes related to their learning about content

literacy that included shifts in their thinking about reading, changes in their beliefs about instructional practices, and the development of new understandings about adolescent learners and adolescent literacy (Clary *et al.*, 2012). This study mirrors the goals of university faculty school partnerships. The partnerships aim to support educators in using data to inform instructional practices and to help university faculty strengthen the connection between teaching in K-12 classrooms and preparing future teachers to be effective educators. Through these collaborations, university faculty gain insights from practicing educators, contributing to a reciprocal exchange of knowledge.

Through the use of this model, university faculty and educators have the potential to implement systems that support effective instructional decision-making and establish sustainable processes that support teaching, learning, and long-term school improvement.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this study provides a lens for understanding how structured-university partnerships can support high school literacy improvement. This framework centers on three key constructs, including data collaborative partnerships, use of literacy data, and resilience-building practices. Data collaborative partnerships include a shared responsibility and support the use of literacy data systems created by both the university faculty and teachers within the school. The use of literacy data in this conceptual framework is defined as the ability to collect, interpret, and act on student literacy data, which is a critical component to the success of resilience building. Resilience-building includes agreements and practices that sustain and support innovative work. These practices encompass co-ownership of learning, reciprocal professional collaboration, participation in professional learning meetings using structured protocols, instructional walkthroughs, and reflective practices on data-informed instruction to strengthen the dialogue among educators. These constructs illustrate how collaborative structures, teacher capacity, and sustainable practices interact to support effective literacy instruction. Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the framework, highlighting the relationship among these constructs and their role in guiding school literacy improvement initiatives.

Figure 1. Visual representation of the relationship among the constructs guiding literacy improvement initiatives

Effective literacy improvement in high schools requires more than individual teacher effort. It requires sustained collaboration between schools and external partners, such as universities. This study is grounded in several theoretical perspectives that inform the design and implementation of university-school literacy partnerships and guide understanding of how teachers use data collaboratively. These theories provide a lens to examine the interaction of partnership structures, teacher data literacy, and organizational supports that sustain innovation.

Research-practice partnerships (RPPs), as described by Coburn and Penuel (2016), call for long-term collaboration between researchers and practitioners to address practical educational problems. Coburn and Penuel (2016) RPPs use intentional strategies to foster partnerships, with roles, routines, and protocols used to structure the interaction between the school and the university researcher as data is analyzed. This shared responsibility directly informs the conceptualization of data-collaborative partnerships. By fostering mutual accountability through the university literacy faculty and classroom teachers within the school and aligning research with classroom practices, RPPs provide a model for how university literacy faculty and high school teachers can work together to collect, interpret, and implement effective instructional practices based on literacy data.

The framework of Communities of Practice (Wenger, 2000) complements Coburn and Penuel's (2016) RPP theory by highlighting how learning occurs through participation in social contexts. Teachers and university literacy faculty function as members of a community, where there is a shared concern and passion about literacy instruction and data use. The interactions include shared problem-solving conversations and are based on reflective practices. This supports the emphasis on collaborative routines and professional learning as a process that develops teacher data literacy and promotes collective growth through the community of practice.

Organizational learning (Levitt & March, 1988) provides a perspective on learning from direct experience, learning from the experience of others, and how we can interpret the experience and sustain practices over time. This theory is important for the conceptual framework for sustainability. Adaptive capacity (Granziera *et al.*, 2019) refers to teachers' needing to be adaptable in various situations within the learning environment. The ability for teachers to be able to adapt and manage changing situations is core to creating resilience of practice within schools. Through understanding organizational learning and adaptive capacity theories, it is recommended that structures include agreements, routines, and leadership practices to help stabilize innovation and support continuous improvement. These ideas inform the construct of resilience-building mechanisms, which include formal and informal practices designed to maintain the integrity and impact of the university-school partnership over time, even as staff or contexts change.

Research on the essential elements of comprehensive data literacy (Ruedel *et al.*, 2021) and teacher data literacy frameworks emphasizes the critical role of educators' capacity to collect, interpret, and act on student literacy data. Data literacy includes dispositions, knowledge, and habits of practice that allow teachers to make informed instructional decisions. By integrating these frameworks, partnership structures, and organizational support, a coherent, sustainable foundation for the collaborative literacy conceptual framework and design is established for long-term practice.

Methods- conceptual approach

This study implemented a collaborative action research design to develop a sustainable university-school partnership model, with the goal of creating a framework that is replicable across K-12 and higher education contexts. University and school educators collaborated to co-construct assessments, implemented structured dialogue protocols, engaged in professional learning, and facilitated knowledge transfer between the educators and the university faculty. Data sources used to guide planning, action, and reflection that enabled continuous refinement

of both instructional practice and the partnership framework included educator reflections and student assessment outcomes. The original implementation took place at a large, comprehensive high school experiencing challenges in literacy achievement. The high school was located in an urban setting and served 1,458 9th-12th-grade students. The demographic composition included 53% White, 29% Hispanic, 10% African American, 7% multiracial, and small percentages of Asian and Native American students. Along with these demographics, 3% of the student population was identified as multilingual learners. University literacy faculty provided data analysis expertise and facilitation throughout the development of a co-created assessment process. University faculty members collaborated with teachers to design, administer, and analyze literacy assessments, while also facilitating team meetings where educators discussed student data and identified instructional implications. Figure 2 in Appendix outlines the timeline and topics for implementation throughout the school year.

The model was structured as a university-school partnership in which literacy assessments were co-designed by educators and university literacy faculty. The assessments required students to read a passage and respond to comprehension questions assessing their ability to identify the main idea, cite textual evidence, determine vocabulary meaning through context, summarize, and make inferences. Students were also asked to reflect on the reading strategies they used while engaging with the passage.

To support data-informed instructional decision-making, educators used structured protocols during data analysis meetings. The protocols were adapted from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (Buchovecky, n.d.). The ATLAS protocol process guided educators through four stages: (1) identifying the factual patterns in the data, (2) interpreting and posing questions about what the data revealed, (3) discussing implications for instruction, and (4) determining next steps to support student learning. This structured approach was used consistently to foster collaborative inquiry and reflection on student progress.

A second component of the plan involved supporting educators through professional learning experiences aligned with the school's annual improvement initiatives. University faculty collaborated with school leaders to design and facilitate professional learning sessions delivered at the beginning of the academic year and reinforced throughout the year during faculty meetings.

The conceptual framework guiding this work emphasizes co-ownership of learning and reciprocal professional collaboration between university faculty and educators. This framework positions data analysis as a shared practice for continuous improvement, fostering a sustainable and adaptable structure that responds to the evolving needs of both students and teachers.

The implementation of this framework is ongoing. Planning began in the summer before the school year, when university literacy faculty collaborated with school leadership to align initiatives and professional learning goals. During the district's planned professional development week, university faculty facilitated sessions introducing the year's literacy initiatives and their own roles in supporting teachers.

Once the school year began, the university literacy faculty partnered with teachers to design an assessment that helped identify the reading needs of ninth-grade students. After administering and analyzing the assessment, results revealed that students needed additional support in making inferences, identifying main ideas, and summarizing. Based on these findings, teachers revised their instruction to emphasize these core comprehension skills.

University faculty joined weekly professional learning meetings to collaborate with teachers on instructional adjustments. Data from classroom assessments were discussed using the ATLAS protocol (Buchovecky, n.d.), which supported structured reflection and deep conversations about students' learning needs and instructional implications. Instructional walkthroughs were conducted regularly to foster shared observation and reflection between university faculty and teachers, allowing for ongoing dialogue about effective literacy instruction.

Throughout the year, educators and university faculty reflected on how data-informed instruction and implementation. The partnership fostered renewed instructional practices, strengthened dialogue about effective strategies for diverse learners, and facilitated knowledge transfer between the high school and university contexts. Ultimately, this collaboration not only enhanced student learning but also informed the preparation of pre-service teachers through the integration of real-world, data-driven practices into university coursework.

Model description: key components

The conceptual framework provides a lens for understanding how structured university-school partnerships can support sustained improvement across K-12 systems, with a particular focus on high school literacy outcomes. Grounded in theories of research-practice partnerships (Coburn & Penuel, 2016), communities of practice (Wenger, 2000), and organizational learning (Levitt & March, 1988), the framework integrates the social, organizational, and instructional dimensions of collaborative school improvement. It emphasizes that meaningful literacy improvement occurs when educators and university faculty share responsibility for data use, professional learning, and instructional innovation.

The framework is organized around three interrelated constructs, including data collaborative partnerships, the use of literacy data, and resilience-building practices. Together, these constructs illustrate how collaborative structures, teacher capacity, and sustainability mechanisms interact to promote effective literacy instruction and continuous improvement. The following sections describe each construct in greater depth, outlining how they collectively inform the design and implementation of the university-school literacy partnership model.

At the core of the model, educators and university faculty co-created both an initial assessment and a series of ongoing assessments designed to be teacher-friendly and actionable. These assessments supported data-informed instructional decision-making by identifying key literacy indicators such as inference-making, summarization, and main idea identification that guided intentional instructional planning. The data collaborative partnership was reinforced through professional learning that occurred before the start of the school year and continued throughout the year, supported by university literacy faculty using the ATLAS protocol (Buchovecky, n.d.). Through these collaborative processes, both teachers and university faculty engaged as co-learners, reflecting on practice and student data to refine instruction.

The partnership was further strengthened through instructional walkthroughs and reflective dialogue, which created spaces for vulnerable yet productive conversations about literacy practices. These routines fostered trust among educators, university faculty, and school leaders, helping to build a culture of inquiry and shared accountability.

The sustainable structure of this partnership enables it to endure beyond leadership changes, district priorities, or funding cycles. Feedback loops established through professional learning communities and walkthroughs promoted a culture of repetition and refinement rather than compliance, reinforcing a continuous cycle of data-driven instructional improvement.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the university-school partnership, drawing on data collected from educators alongside university faculty. Analysis of the data revealed several key themes related to the implementation of instructional practices and perceived impact of university-school partnerships.

Changes were evident in the educators' instructional practices, particularly in the use of high-impact instructional literacy strategies and methods. These changes were documented through classroom walkthroughs and analysis of instructional data. Along with the documented walkthroughs and analysis of instructional data, educator reflections indicated shifts of instructional beliefs, including increased attention to data-informed decision-making.

Following walkthroughs, the university faculty and educators engaged in reflective conversations focused on observed instructional practices. Educators identified and named high-impact instructional literacy practices observed during walkthroughs. Educators observed increased implementation of high-impact literacy practices during classroom instruction during walkthroughs. In the observations, teachers were noted for modeling reading strategies, including making inferences and summarizing text to support student comprehension. One educator reports observing teachers "modeling reading strategies such as making inferences," while another noted that teachers were "modeling summarizing text for students to understand the important information."

Educators also identified instructional practices aligned with close reading and text analysis. Observations included teachers annotating texts, writing in the margins, and facilitating discussions around primary source documents. As one educator explained, "I noticed teachers using the five components of close reading that we learned from our professional development day." Educators also observed teachers checking for understanding through the use of text-dependent questions. Table 1 summarizes the high-impact instructional literacy practices observed from the walkthroughs.

Along with observation of high-impact instruction through walkthroughs, university faculty supported educators in analyzing instructional assessment data, and educators collaborated within their professional learning community (PLC) teams to plan lessons aligned with student needs and high-impact instructional practices. Analysis of data indicated common instructional needs. Educators consistently noted that students required additional support in reading strategies and practices, including making inferences, identifying main ideas, and analyzing text. One educator observed that "students need instruction around making inferences," while others noted the need for instruction focused on "how to find the main idea" and "how to analyze a text." Table 2 presents patterns identified through educators' analysis of assessment data.

Educators also describe the perceived impact of the university-school partnership on their instructional planning and use of data to drive instruction. These perceptions centered on increased collaboration, intentional lesson design, and the integration of high-impact instructional practices. Educators described the university-school partnership as contributing

Table 1. High-impact instructional literacy practices observed

Educator	Observations of high-impact literacy practices
Educator	"I observed teachers modeling reading strategies such as making inferences"
Educator	"I observed teachers modeling summarizing text for students to understand the important information"
Educator	"I saw teachers annotating and writing in the margins"
Educator	"I noticed teachers using the five components of close reading that we learned from our professional development day"
Educator	"I heard teachers facilitating discussion around a primary source document that students read "
Educator	"I noticed teachers checking for understanding and comprehension by asking text-dependent questions"

Table 2. Patterns identified through analysis of assessment data

Educator	Patterns identified
Educator	"Students need instruction around making inferences"
Educator	"Students need instruction of how to find the main idea"
Educator	"Students need instruction on how to analyze a text"

to increased collaboration and collective problem-solving, which supported resilience building within instructional teams. Participants reported meeting more frequently in their professional learning community (PLC) teams with a shared focus on identifying instructional solutions aligned with student needs. One educator explained, "Through this partnership, we meet a lot more with our PLC teams. When we meet, we are focused on coming up with solutions for what our students need."

Educators also noted increased intentionality in data-informed lesson planning and described the partnership as a collaborative, co-learning relationship with university faculty. A participant shared, "As a collective group, we are more intentional in planning our lessons using data than we were in the past." while another emphasized, "With the university faculty, we are a collaborative team co-learning and working towards the best ways to integrate effective and high-impact instructional practices." Table 3 outlines educators' perceived impact on the university-school partnership.

Overall, these findings illustrate that the university-school partnership promoted data-informed practices, collaborative professional learning, and the use of high-impact instructional practices, supporting educators' capacity, resilience, and collective growth. University faculty extended this learning into the work with pre-service teachers by modeling data collection processes and facilitating data analysis discussions, thereby bridging research, practice, and teacher preparation. The findings suggest that school-university partnerships are essential engines for educational innovation, moving beyond traditional service-learning to create sustained, mutually beneficial, and evidence-informed improvements in teaching and student achievement. When deliberately structured, these collaborations bridge the research-practice gap, positioning universities as partners in solving school-based challenges rather than merely external researchers.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how a structured university-school partnership model could support sustained improvement in K-12 classrooms, with a specific focus on high school literacy instruction through collaborative data use, professional learning, and reflective practice. Findings indicate that when educators and university faculty shared ownership of data analysis and engaged in ongoing cycles of inquiry, instructional decision-making became more intentional, adaptive, and responsive to student needs. The development of the use of literacy data, coupled with resilience-building practices such as reflective dialogue using structured protocols and instructional walkthroughs, contributed to a culture of trust and continuous improvement. This discussion situates these findings within the theoretical perspective that guided the study through research-practice partnerships, communities of practice, and organizational learning. It also explores how the integration of these frameworks advances understanding of sustainable university-school collaborations.

This model represents a shift from traditional top-down professional development toward a co-designed, embedded approach to capacity building between university faculty and school educators. When professional learning is continuous, job-embedded, and aligned with

Table 3. Perceived impact on the university-school partnership

Educator	Perceived impact
Educator	"Through this partnership, we meet a lot more with our PLC teams. When we meet we are focused on coming up with solutions for what our students need"
Educator	"As a collective group, we are more intentional in planning our lessons using data than we were in the past"
Educator	"With the university faculty, we are a collaborative team co-learning and working towards the best ways to integrate effective and high-impact instructional practices"

instructional goals, teachers not only feel supported but also perceive a coherent trajectory for their professional growth. The model's design for sustainability emphasizes building local expertise rather than fostering dependence on external university partners. This structure supports schools in maintaining improvement efforts despite leadership changes or shifting district priorities. Importantly, the use of adaptable data protocols enables teachers across disciplines to analyze student learning in consistent, meaningful ways.

Despite its promise, several challenges were identified. Time constraints, resource alignment, and potential power dynamics between university faculty and school staff occasionally complicated collaboration. Sustaining the momentum of the work without external funding was also a concern, as much of the university support was voluntary and driven by professional commitment. To address these challenges, partners used strategies that allowed for the gradual expansion of co-learning and co-creation of assessments that fostered reflection and instructional refinement. Transparent communication and shared leadership structures emerged as essential components in cultivating trust and sustaining engagement among participants.

The findings suggest that sustainable university-school partnerships require not only shared goals and structures for collaboration but also a culture of mutual accountability and professional trust. The intentional integration of research-practice partnerships, communities of practice, and organizational learning components provides a replicable framework for fostering data-informed instructional improvement that endures beyond external support or funding cycles.

Implications for practice, policy, and research

The findings from this model and framework have important implications for practice, policy, and future research. Central to the framework is building teacher capacity to create, analyze, and use literacy data effectively, without requiring the implementation of large new systems at the school or district levels.

For practice, the framework and model are beneficial for both K-12 educators and university faculty. In addressing the guiding questions of how structured partnerships can be designed to support teachers' use of data around literacy needs, the study highlights intentional designs and routines between the university faculty and educators. Classroom walkthroughs, data-focussed conversations, and reflective sessions provide structured opportunities for educators and university faculty to collectively observe instruction, collaboratively analyze student data, and intentionally plan effective and high-impact literacy instruction. The routines fostered collaboration that ensured consistency in instructional practices, and promoted collective problem-solving support that adds to the sustainability and innovation of the partnership. Educators who participated with university faculty received targeted support that enabled them to engage more deeply with data and its instructional implications. In turn, university faculty were able to integrate these experiences into their own teaching, better preparing pre-service teachers through exposure to authentic data analysis procedures and protocols. The partnership between schools and universities offers new opportunities for sustained collaboration focused on mutual benefit and long-term sustainability.

These findings align with prior research emphasizing the role of bridging the gap between educational research and classroom practices through Research-Practice Partnerships (RPPs) (Coburn & Penuel, 2016) and how sustained collaboration can strengthen educator capacity and commitment (Penuel *et al.*, 2021). The use of the framework given in this study extends this work by illustrating how university-school partnerships can operationalize the practices within the framework to support teachers' capacity, resilience, and the collective growth of their literacy instructional practices.

For policy, this model and framework offer potential guidance for policymakers seeking to invest in relational capacity and data-use infrastructures. By emphasizing relationships and the use of literacy data, the framework aligns with policies that promote sustainable approaches to data use.

For research, future studies would benefit from empirically testing and refining the model across varied K-12 contexts to examine long-term impacts on literacy outcomes and teacher learning. Additional research could also explore how university faculty apply insights gained through school partnerships to enhance instruction for pre-service teachers.

Conclusion

The findings from this study highlight the importance of partnerships and capacity building in effective literacy data use. As schools, universities, and policymakers seek sustainable ways to improve literacy outcomes, this framework provides a foundation for continued innovation, collaboration, and shared learning between schools and university faculty. Achieving sustainable literacy improvement requires more than new assessments or professional development for teachers. It demands structured, resilient university-school partnerships grounded in shared agreements and collective practices that promote mutual growth. This adaptable, conceptual model integrates both instructional and relational elements, encouraging schools and universities to view partnerships not as short-term projects, but as sustainable systems of professional learning and improvement.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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