Resilience Navigating Tensions:
The Complexities of Implementing a Longitudinal
School-Board University Research Program

Arlene L. Grierson, Ph.D. (arlenegrierson@gmail.com)

Tiffany L. Gallagher, Ph.D. (tgallagher@brocku.ca)

Faculty of Education, Brock University

St Catharines, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

This self-study explores the tensions navigated by two teacher educators in their implementation of a funded longitudinal school-board university research program. We illustrate the complexities of attempting to be responsive to unpredictable situations that arose, most of which were attributable to the continuously evolving educational context, priorities, needs, and interests of our school-board partners. Analyses of our experiences documented the applicability of the framework of Berry's (2008) tensions as a lens to understand, and next, engage in productive discourse about our reiterative dilemmas as educational researchers. This in turn, promoted our resilience in navigating these tensions and fostered our growth. Initially conceived as the tensions of teaching teachers (Berry, 2008), this study illustrates that they are also the tensions of educational researchers working with school board partners. Enhanced understanding of these tensions may likewise enable other educational researchers to understand, discuss, and navigate issues that arise in their efforts to implement long-term collaborative school-board university research projects.

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In part to enhance the potential that educational research influences policy and practice, collaborative partnerships between school-board districts and university faculty members have been advocated widely (Henrick et al., 2016; Lopez-Turley & Stevens, 2015; Schuck, 2013). Nonetheless, researchers acknowledge these partnerships are complex and negotiating the interface between the diverse cultures of university researchers and educational practitioners may be difficult (Ebbutt et al., 2000; Erikson & Young, 2011; Henrick et al., 2016; Schuck, 2013). Despite the challenges, there are calls (e.g. Coburn & Penuel, 2016) for studies into the strategies that partnerships employ, the approaches that they take to address problems of practice, and how their research informs the wider field.

This self-study explores the experiences of two teacher educators who attempted to implement a funded five-year research program in collaboration with school-board partners that was based on a proposal to engage in a longitudinal exploration of the experiences of school-board literacy coaches. We reveal the applicability of the framework of tensions (Berry, 2008) as a lens to understand, engage in productive discourse about, and navigate the reiterative dilemmas we encountered, in our attempts to be responsive to a plethora of unpredictable situations that arose. Most of our dilemmas were attributable to the continuously evolving context, priorities, personnel, needs, and interests of our school-board partners.

In the introduction of this paper, we first provide an overview of the complexities of school-board university partnerships and next, review the tensions other self-study researchers have encountered engaging in such partnerships. Following descriptions of our theoretical framework and methodology, we detail how Berry's (2008) six tensions were pervasive in our reflective discussions about our research partnership. We next illustrate how the shared understandings of our tensions as educational researchers developed through the first two years of this collaborative self-study, then provided a common language for collegial discourse, and how this in turn, affected our actions and perceptions of the essence of our partnerships. We illustrate how these tensions were a catalyst for our growth, as we became resilient and learned to be responsive to the uncertain terrain of the evolving educational context. We hold that these understandings may similarly enable other educational researchers to understand, engage in productive discourse about, and navigate the issues and dilemmas that may be encountered in their collaborative school-board research partnerships.

Background Literature

Despite the complexities of their successful development and implementation, school-board university research partnerships can be mutually beneficial (Henrick et al., 2016; Lopez Turley &

Stevens, 2015; Martin et al., 2011). Such partnerships can facilitate: sharing resources and expertise, bridging the theory-practice divide, and promoting the likelihood that educational research will positively impact policy and practice (Schuck, 2013). Factors enhancing the potential for the success of such collaborative partnerships include establishing trusting relationships, working towards common, mutually beneficial goals (Lopez Turley & Stevens, 2015), as well as developing in-depth understandings of the school-board and university contexts, and the complexities of each (Henrick et al., 2016; Phelps, 2019).

Research-practice partnerships between school-boards and universities are also known as insider-outsider partnerships, with the term insider referring to school districts and the term outsider to universities (Phelps, 2019). The need to bridge the gaps that exist between the norms, power relations, and organizational structures of school-boards and universities can complicate the development of strong research-practice partnerships (Phelps, 2019).

The organizational structure of Canadian schools is decentralized, with each of the 13 provincial or territorial governments holding legal, financial, and administrative responsibility for publicly-funded elementary and secondary schooling in their jurisdiction (Wallner, 2012). This affords each provincial government the authority to determine which programs and approaches will be funded, with considerable power residing in the hands of each provincial Minister of Education (Wallner, 2012). Regional school boards act as a bridge between individual schools and the provincial government, which provides funding for schools through these boards. The provincial government controls the development of curricula, instructional materials, and the determination of which programs and approaches will be funded and implemented by school boards (Wallner, 2012). Provincial education policies are inherently politically-oriented and often influenced by public opinion and beliefs rather than research evidence (Galway & Sheppard, 2015).

On the other hand, "university-based researchers operate according to their own, different accountability and reward systems, this has typically required that they follow their own research agendas while maintaining an appropriate level of independence from the government policy environment – even publicly criticizing government policy in some circumstances" (Galway & Sheppard, 2015, p.5). Nonetheless, the acquisition of external research funding is important to universities (Galway & Sheppard, 2015). Casey and Fletcher (2017) explored the complexities of seeking external funding as faculty members, noting how in doing so, "…we were paying the piper while simultaneously losing our ability to call the tune" (p.118). They noted how responding to the academic demands to acquire external funding, and after acquiring funding, responding to the demands of funders, might have adversely affected their abilities to engage in work that they perceived to be meaningful to their communities of practitioners and themselves as researchers.

As noted by Mockler (2013), the acquisition of external funding to support research-practice partnerships can complicate these partnerships, as the funding can bring with it a pre-ordained focus or goal that does not meet the evolving need of school-boards. Creativity on the part of university and school-board partners is requisite to solving such gaps and moving forward with productive partnerships (Mockler, 2013).

Recently, while exploring the complexities of research-practice partnerships, Ko et al., (2022) noted the importance of "...seeing the researchers as learners who must also develop adaptive expertise as they work with teachers, schools, and districts. Documenting these forms of learning must also be valued as important scholarship" (p. 51). Self-study research is a form of scholarly inquiry intended to uncover the learning of teacher educator-researchers as they work with teachers, schools, and districts (Loughran, 2007).

Previous self-study research has investigated the tensions experienced by faculty members engaging in short-term (i.e., one or two year) collaborative school-board university research projects. For instance, Erickson and Young (2011) investigated their experiences establishing a partnership with teachers who were engaged in creating educational materials, noting how as a function of common values, beliefs, and ways of acting, their school-board university partnership initially brought forth little to no tension. However, differences in perceptions of the expectations with respect to allocation of time to the project and the quality of materials developed by teachers in this project, later brought forth tensions which Erickson and Young (2011) attributed to the different and competing discourses of researchers and teachers.

Similarly, Ikpeze and colleagues (2012) engaged in a self-study investigating their experiences in a professional development school partnership. Not unlike Erickson and Young (2011), they encountered tensions which they attributed to "border crossing, which involved redefining and reinventing" (p. 282) themselves as teacher educators. Ikpeze and colleagues (2012) recognized that they had to relinquish their "deficit thinking," about the teachers with whom they worked and value their practitioner craft knowledge as different but not inferior to the knowledge of teacher educators.

More recently, McConn and Mason (2019) engaged in a self-study during which they also documented tensions between a researcher and teachers involved in a one-year, school-board university research partnership. Initially conceived as a partnership, what developed was a community of practice within which the researcher coached teachers as they worked collaboratively to enhance teachers' classroom practices. McConn and Mason (2019) concluded that the tensions, which were a function of working together in their shared classroom, while initially stressful, in hindsight were productive. Moreover, they could be resolved when the researcher released their preconceived notions of teachers' professional development needs and reframed and restructured their interactions with one another. Importantly, this study highlighted the importance of the researcher embracing the differences and commonalities in the university and school contexts, as well as teachers and researchers suspending judgment, valuing one another's skill sets, and engaging in critically reflective dialogue.

Collectively, these self-studies (Erickson & Young, 2011; Ikpeze et al, 2012; McConn & Mason, 2019) illustrate that requisite to navigating school-board university research partnerships is developing respectful relationships and learning to work productively in complex contexts. In a similar vein, teaching teachers involves learning to deal with complex contexts, develop relationships, and be responsive to unpredictable classroom issues and dilemmas

(Loughran, 2006). These dilemmas have been described as tensions that teacher educators must negotiate in providing responsive teacher education (Berry, 2008; Loughran, 2006).

Although teacher educators frequently conduct research with school-board partners, their experiences navigating these partnerships, particularly those that are long-term, and their learning as researchers through these partnership experiences are not well explored (Ko et al., 2022). This self-study sought to extend existing understandings of this important domain of teacher educators' work and addressed the research question: What issues arose in the implementation of this longitudinal school-board university funded research program, and how were they navigated?

Theoretical Framework

This study was conducted within the theoretical framework of social constructivism, which emphasizes the role of context, social interaction, and language in the processes through which individuals construct representations as they make sense of experiences (Schwandt, 2003). Schwandt (2003) elaborates that the role of context is noteworthy as for example, cultural contexts or settings influence individuals' lives including their communications. Within these contexts, social interactions are opportunities for individuals to construct and co-create knowledge with others. Integral to such knowledge creation is sharing and engagement in learning through language.

Freire (2000) outlined the importance of language, more specifically of "naming the world," as a precursor to understanding, engaging in critically reflective dialogue, and working towards change. Friere (2000) posits that education is the means to develop (or maintain) the state in which learners co-exist. Education and specifically pedagogy, might be a means to assist individuals in learning about, understanding, and changing their world (Friere, 2000). In particular, there is a blending of roles among teachers and learners, as both have meaningful contributions and value with the classroom. This tenet was integral to our work as we assumed multiple roles as teachers, teacher educators, educational researchers, and learners as articulated in our self-study.

Through self-study of her teacher education practices together with an analysis of the literature, Berry (2008) named and described six interrelated, interconnected tensions in teacher education summarized as those between:
1. Telling and Growth: telling teacher candidates about teaching and facilitating their growth through active learning;
2. Confidence and Uncertainty: promoting confidence in teacher candidates' teaching abilities, while making explicit the uncertainty of teaching;
3. Action and Intent: managing dichotomies that may exist between teacher educators' actions and teacher candidates' perceptions of their intents;
4. Safety and Challenge: negotiating when and how to move beyond safety and embrace the challenges of uncomfortable learning experiences;

5. Valuing and Reconstructing: valuing teacher candidates' experiences and conceptions, while enhancing their abilities to reconstruct them; and
6. Planning and Being Responsive: balancing planned learning opportunities with being responsive to unanticipated opportunities as they arise.

Berry (2008) suggested these six tensions, which must all be negotiated, provided a framework to enhance existing understandings of the issues that define teacher educators' practices and engage in productive dialogue about them. Yet, the applicability of this framework as a lens to understand and navigate the issues and dilemmas of faculty in their research endeavors with school-board partners does not appear to have been examined. This self-study addressed this void in the literature.

Methodology

Self-study documents faculty members' engagement in reflecting, reframing, and restructuring their experiences, and demands making their understandings public in order that they may be critically reviewed, used, and extended by others (Loughran, 2007). Self-study methodology should be rigorous, transparent, improvement-aimed, and move beyond the self, illustrating how and why personal conceptions have been challenged or altered and extending these insights to the broader community of teacher educators (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Loughran, 2007). Additionally, to promote positive change and build a coherent body of knowledge that can be used to inform the field, Zeichner (2007) noted the importance of self-study researchers demonstrating how their research builds on and extends the self-study findings of others.

This self-study used qualitative case study methods (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014) to explore the experiences of two educational researchers. More specifically, as we were interested in investigating a phenomenon over time, within its real-life context, we employed longitudinal chronological case study methods, which are descriptive and enable researchers to explore changes in a phenomenon over time (Yin, 2014).

Context and Participants

This study took place in Ontario, Canada where we are faculty members who have a long-standing productive relationship as co-investigators. Importantly, we each also have an established track record of engaging in several productive, mutually beneficial, collaborative research partnerships with school-board personnel. These previous partnerships formed the foundation of our collaboratively developed funding proposal to engage in a five-year research program investigating the professional learning of literacy coaches and a sampling of elementary school teachers with whom these coaches worked in two Ontario school boards.

The funding proposal was developed and reiteratively refined over a period of five years. The first four years our proposal was submitted, it was recommended for funding, yet ranked just below the level of the proposals that were actually granted funding, and as such, we did not receive research funds. With encouragement from the anonymous reviewers' comments

(shared with us by the research funder), together with encouragement from our colleagues, and from our school-board partners, we persevered, carefully massaging and resubmitting the proposal each year after revising it in response to the reviewers' suggestions. The fifth year submission was successful and we were delighted to be awarded funding to begin our longitudinal program of collaborative research.

The primary participants in this self-study are Arlene and Tiffany, two teacher educators, each of whom is an experienced educational researcher. Importantly, the vast majority of their research has been undertaken successfully in collaboration with school-board partners, and as such they initially perceived themselves to be well equipped to develop and engage in this collaborative five-year program of research.

To triangulate evidence, and to demonstrate our interaction with others and establish trustworthiness, which are essential elements of self-study (LaBoskey, 2004), participants in this study also included nine school-board coaches, and three provincial literacy leads. The nine coaches and the three literacy leads were participants in research projects undertaken as part of our five-year program of research.

Data Sources and Analyses

Data gathered over five years included the successful funding proposal, email communication between the researchers throughout the period 2016 and 2021, researchers' written reflections, field notes gathered during school-board research sessions, five annual school-board research reports, and transcriptions of six researchers' reflective meetings (audio recorded). We also analyzed transcripts of our interviews with school-board coach participants each year and our interviews with the three provincial literacy leads in 2017 and 2018, the two years in which they participated in this research.

These data were analyzed through coding and categorizing as described by Creswell (2014). First, we reviewed all data for identification of idea units, next looking for emerging patterns. As we identified dilemmas we reiteratively encountered during our initial data analysis in May 2018, Berry's (2008) tensions resonated. We then used inductive coding (Creswell, 2014) with Berry's (2008) tensions, as a framework to analyze and interpret our findings.

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Findings

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In this self-study, we illustrate the complexities of attempting to be responsive to the unpredictable situations that arose, most of which were attributable to the continuously evolving priorities, personnel, needs, and interests of our school-board partners. Our findings document how as educational researchers, we uncovered that we navigated the six interconnected tensions identified by Berry (2008) as we attempted to implement this five-year research program. The findings also elucidate how this awareness next promoted productive discourse, and how this in turn, affected our actions and conceptions of the key goals of our partnership.

More specifically, our findings documented that our six interconnected and interrelated tensions as educational researchers were between:

1. Telling and Growth: Deciding when to facilitate growth through active learning and when to "tell" research partners/participants information;
2. Confidence and Uncertainty: Remaining confident while also aware of the uncertainty of the evolving foci and direction of our school-board partnerships;
3. Actions and Intent: Uncovering dichotomies that may exist between researchers' actions and school-board partners/participants' perceptions of their intents;
4. Safety and Challenge: Moving beyond safety and embracing the challenges of school-board/university research partnerships;
5. Valuing and Reconstructing: Valuing while supporting school-board partners/participants' abilities to reconstruct their perceptions; and,
6. Planning and Being Responsive**:** Balancing planned directions or experiences with being responsive to unanticipated situations as they arise.

In keeping with longitudinal chronological case study methods (Yin, 2014), we present our findings chronologically. We have clustered our findings in three overarching themes: Uncovering our Tensions, Productive Discourse about our Tensions, and Resilience Navigating our Tensions. Our interconnected tensions as educational researchers are illustrated in vignettes that depict our experiences, each of which is supported by excerpts from our data.

Uncovering our Tensions

We were thrilled when we were finally awarded funding for our proposed five-year study, developed in close collaboration with school-board personnel over several years, with the successful proposal submitted over seven months prior to receiving notice of our successful funding application. The research sought to determine how to support the professional learning of school-board literacy coaches, and consequently enhance teachers' instruction and their students' learning. Two school-boards with whom we had worked closely for many years, had supported and contributed to the development of the research proposal. Each of these two school-boards had active literacy coaching programs that had been in place for over a decade.

However, when external funding was awarded in the Spring, the focus of the Ministry of Education and consequently of our school-board partners, was shifting. At the onset of the next school year, literacy coaching would no longer be funded and therefore would be discontinued by school-boards. With assurance that it would be acceptable to the funder, we began refocusing our study more broadly on professional learning through small group sessions and associated coaching as implemented by the participating school-boards. In doing so, we encountered a plethora of dilemmas.

From the outset of our journey to implement this funded research, we lacked control over the interest, direction, and focus of our partners. While leadership changes in one board affected their commitment to proceeding as planned with the study, an alternate school board recommended by Ministry of Education personnel declined to participate, attributing this to

being overwhelmed by too many new Ministry of Education sanctioned programs. Our interconnected tensions between ***confidence and uncertainty***, between ***planning and being responsive*** to unpredictable situations, and between ***actions and intent***, are illustrated in the following reflective discussion.

> Arlene: *If I look at the progress that we had in the spring; we had such enthusiasm from the former superintendent… And it's just a shame that he retired… because his replacement basically just gave it to their research department and they have stonewalled it since… I just think it's not high on their list. I think, although they said mid-October and they said that they review applications in order of when they are received. We know that the former superintendent said they would review ours… he will present it and he will garner support. And he thinks this is exactly what they need, again, it comes down to what is relevant to them. He saw how it fit within their model for coaching PD and that it was a perfect fit and basically said that he would help it get through. And it was nice that we had a meeting with him and his replacement. …now it's his replacement's call and he doesn't know anything about this… That [ethics] application was delivered in August. It was supposed to be reviewed by the middle of October; we are now at the end of December. And we've been told it's going to be January before they look at it…*

> Tiffany: *It shows the importance of relationships… key people. You can't just come from the outside and swoop into a school-board… the former superintendent before he retired; he just saw the relevance. He saw that this was going to fill a niche and it was an answer to his problem and he thought it was a perfect fit and he was so keen.*

> Arlene: *It's just like School Board C…...there's no coordination because it was the Ministry that said go to Board C, they would be a perfect fit…yet because of the projects and other things coming down from the Ministry the school-board says no.*
>
> <div align="right">Transcript, Researcher's Meeting, December 19, 2016</div>

Our lack of control over the direction of the project revealed our need to negotiate ***moving beyond safety to accept the challenges*** in developing these research partnerships, and navigate ***interconnected tensions between confidence and uncertainty, and between planning and being responsive*** to unpredictable situations, such as unanticipated labour disputes that precluded our ability to work with elementary teachers in one school-board, as well as leadership changes, and continuously evolving school-board priorities.

> Tiffany: *I don't know if I'm feeling okay, I'm just resigned to the whole thing because it's so disjointed. So, I don't take it personally because I feel like I have no control.*

> Arlene: *I think that makes it feel uncomfortable because we had such a plan. So well planned out and we had so much interest from so many boards and I could see it all playing out the way we proposed it. And now I can't see where it's going…if I look at our five-year plan - the first year was to collect baseline data, and then to use that to develop*

professional learning or collaborative inquiry groups for these coaches. But I don't see where we're going to [do that].
Tiffany: *I think it's worse than we thought because we don't have full access [in Board A because of labour disputes]. I'm optimistic that they will still be open to what we want to do in Year 2.* Transcript, Researcher's Meeting, December 19, 2016

Throughout the first year of implementation our research was limited to working with coaches and teachers in one school-board. Additionally, as a consequence of a labour dispute with elementary teachers in this school-board, we were unable to work with coaches and/or teachers in the elementary panel. Together with our school-board partner, we decided to refocus our study to work with secondary school teachers who were involved in four initiatives, each of which included participation in small group sessions and individualized coaching. These included projects with coaches devoted to: Disciplinary Literacy, Resilient Readers, English Language Learners, and Digital Technology.

Furthermore, our research expanded to involve three Provincial Literacy Leads who were working on the Disciplinary Literacy, Resilient Readers, and English Language Learner projects, together with the three coaches in this school-board. The inclusion of the Provincial Literacy Leads added an additional unanticipated layer to our research.

Nonetheless, as illustrated in our reflective conversation, our ***reiterative tensions between confidence and uncertainty, and between planning and being responsive to unpredictable situations*** persisted, in part, as a function of ongoing uncertainty about forthcoming and continually evolving priorities. As researchers, we felt that we were responsible to the funder and had to ***move beyond safety to accept the challenge*** of proceeding irrespective of the uncertain direction of our five-year study.

> Arlene: *We're at the whim and the mercy of transitioning school-board personnel, with their differing agendas and perceptions of needs. And they move in and out of their roles and carrying on a five-year plan is impossible.*

> Tiffany: *So, I think, the way I kind of see it in my mind now, back in May and June we didn't know we would have the Provincial Literacy Leads. So, we now have them … I don't know how long that relationship will continue, that's why I'm hesitating. So, we've kind of got a replacement.*

> Arlene: *So, we shouldn't really worry.*

> Tiffany: *So, I'm not getting upset yet. Um, it just totally doesn't match what we applied for…. So, in other words then, we have to say, how are we going to definitely get what we need for the next four years from what we have?*
> > Transcript, Researcher's Meeting, December 19, 2016

Throughout the first two years of our program of research, our pervasive interconnected tensions between ***confidence and uncertainty, action and intent, and valuing and reconstructing perspectives*** persisted, as illustrated in our discussion about continued lack of access to participants in School Board B, following school-board ethics approval to proceed. Although ethical approval was finally granted by the board to work with teachers in this school-board, personnel at the school-board office advised us that they did not perceive their coaches to be "ready" to engage in the research project. We perceived that despite our goal of observing and working collaboratively with coaches as discussed and outlined in the approved research proposal, there was a perception amongst school-board personnel that we sought to evaluate their coaching initiative.

> Arlene: *I think he [former superintendent] would be quite surprised to see two years later that we've gone nowhere …and I do think that there's a perception of researchers evaluating something rather than documenting.*

> Tiffany: *Yeah, we're outsiders… University too which is even more threatening.*

> Arlene: *…if you think about trying to get it from their perspective, as a teacher, you know, it was stressed that you should use evidence-based practices, …that you should evaluate your teaching methods… that was the role of research. So, even though we have highlighted and explained and outlined that our initial role is to observe… their perception of what research does and what research means is really one of evaluating rather than observing.*

> Tiffany: *It precedes us, right? It's bigger than us.*

> Transcript, Researcher's Meeting, April 8, 2018

Our experiences illustrate that Berry's (2008) tensions provided clarity in defining our dilemmas as educational researchers, as we endeavored to work collaboratively with our school-board research partners.

Productive Discourse about our Tensions

Importantly, following analyses and interpretation of the first two years of our data through the lens of Berry's (2008) tensions, shared understandings of our tensions enhanced our discourse about our dilemmas. Our language changed, as illustrated in our discussion about whether to move beyond safety to accept the challenge of valuing while attempting to reconstruct the perspective of our partners with respect to enhancing teachers' accountability for change.

> Arlene: *And again, that's **safety and challenge**, …am I willing to move beyond safety and accept the challenge of saying to them "there's a lack of accountability…"*

> Tiffany: *You're confident, you know what needs to happen and you know what works.*

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Arlene: *I am confident but as a researcher and as a partner I don't think I'm willing to* ***move beyond the safety*** *of having this partnership where at least they're allowing us access and* ***accepting the challenge*** *of saying what I really think.*

Tiffany: *You and I are very vulnerable.... Because so much has gone into building that relationship and now I see some of these areas for improvement.* ***And do I stay safe? Or do I accept the challenge?***

Arlene: *…***confidence and uncertainty too***. We're confident with the existing relationship but we know that it's uncertain terrain…that it could all blow up tomorrow and so, do you move beyond safety and say what you know from research-based evidence, needs to happen to enhance…implementation of change?*

<div align="right">Transcript, Researcher's Meeting, June 27, 2018</div>

This change in our dialogue continued to enhance our ability to navigate our reiterative tensions, which were a function of the continually evolving educational context. Disappointingly, after two years of implementation, a newly elected provincial government discontinued school-board funding for several coaching initiatives we had been researching. Our research investigating the Disciplinary Literacy, Resilient Readers, and English Language Learner projects, as well as the experiences of three Provincial Literacy Leads who were supporting the school-board coaches working on these projects came to an abrupt, unforeseen conclusion. We felt accountable to the funder but lacked control over the direction of our project.

Tiffany: *In terms of our provincial government, that's not changing.*

Arlene: *No, it is not changing. So we won't go back to being able to follow Resilient Readers, Disciplinary Literacy, ELL - all those projects*

Tiffany: *I mean if we thought there were problems a year ago. Those problems have expanded.*

Arlene: *Those problems are real… We are accountable to the funder but we have no control. It spins out of control all around us. We do the best we can …I don't know where we are going [with the research] next year.* ***That's confidence and uncertainty.***

<div align="right">Transcript, Researcher's Reflective Meeting, April 8, 2019</div>

Additionally, as a function of decreased funding, although the Digital Coaching project continued, funding for classroom teachers to meet with coaches to plan for and/or debrief after coaching was discontinued. Our understanding of the need to navigate our tensions, particularly our tension between planning and being flexibly responsive to the evolving educational context, enhanced our perception of the importance of our responsiveness to the needs of our partners, as illustrated in the following discussion.

Arlene: *Teacher's are not given their release time, no time to get together to debrief and all of the gains that remain in prior years like Resilient Readers and Disciplinary Literacy.*

> *To then put that all on the backburner for an entire year… everything from the time the [provincial election] writ was dropped in May [2018], there was no PD, everything that has started was put on hold and it has never been picked up again.*
>
> Tiffany: *…with the Ministry withdrawing their support for the coaches…The structures don't exist anymore.*
>
> Arlene: *We have to **plan and be flexibly responsive to unanticipated situations**…we applied for a grant when literacy coaches were funded. We were flexibly responsive to changing our direction and all of a sudden going to digital coaching, ESL, Resilient Readers, Disciplinary Literacy. But this is like the Nth degree…. being flexibly responsive to a totally unanticipated situation. We value where our school-board partners are coming from …They've got to proceed with some sort of **confidence and it is uncertain** if they will have any time to do coaching next year.*
>
> Tiffany: ***But that's really our project…being responsive to what they need.***
>
> <div align="right">Transcript, Researcher's Meeting, June 24, 2019</div>

This realization was in stark contrast to our initial hopes that our school-board partners "...will still be open to what we want to do," and concerns about "...getting what we need" (Tiffany, Researcher's Meeting, December 16, 2016), as expressed at the onset of this partnership. In hindsight, through reconstructing our experiences, we recognize that our acknowledgement of the key focus of our project as being responsive to meeting our school-board partners' needs was a nodal moment (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001), that affected not only our perceptions, but importantly, our subsequent actions.

Resilience Navigating our Tensions

Despite our reiterative tensions, resiliently we remained focused on enhancing existing understandings about coaching. We continued to research the one remaining initiative, Digital Technology (DT) coaching, and expanded this in 2019 to include a collaborative book study between DT coaches (Helen and Jenna, pseudonyms) in two different Ontario school-boards. This began fruitfully, and the DT coaches appeared to appreciate their opportunities to collaborate and learn from and with each other.

> Jenna: *The meeting with Helen was very helpful.*
>
> Researcher*: She [Helen] said in a text message, 'Oh I hope that Jenna...,I hope that I was able to give her at least one good idea! [laugh]*
>
> Jenna: *Oh! [laugh]*
>
> Researcher: *She saw you write something down and I don't know what it was.*

> Jenna: *[laugh] Ah and I think I shared something with her. I sent her a QR…You know what, it's not even whether I got something from her or not, it's [that] sometimes we need peers to be able to throw ideas around.*
>
> <div align="right">Jenna, Coach Interview, January 15, 2019</div>

> *We're not in the same [school] board which is nice…. She was willing to share her wealth of knowledge. I thank you for that connection.*
>
> <div align="right">Helen, Coach Interview, June 11, 2019</div>

However, after reading several sections of the book and beginning to discuss how to implement innovative ideas from it, the cross-district book study project came to an unanticipated end. The COVID-19 pandemic began and caused enormous disruption across educational settings and the discontinuation of many initiatives, including our planned book study. Indicative of our new understanding that being responsive to participants was the essence of our project, at the end of the school year, we prepared a summary of the book we intended to study collaboratively, for coach participants' future use.

> *As this most unusual year draws to a close, we wanted to thank you for our collaborations… We truly have all benefited from the shared resources and knowledge that we were able to circulate this year. We did have grand plans to continue our meetings this past Spring and to do the work that our book, The Launch, had inspired us to do. Alas, there will be a time for this in future, no doubt.*
>
> *For now, attached is something for you to archive for when that time comes and you are working with teachers in DT - this is a summary of the chapters of The Launch along with notations of implications for coaching.*
>
> *Have a safe and restful Summer, you all deserve some time to relax.*
>
> <div align="right">Email Communication from Tiffany, June 19, 2020</div>

Despite the disruptions to our planned book study sessions, it was affirming that the coaches appeared to appreciate their collaborative learning.

> *I am grateful for the collaborations and learnings that stemmed out of our work this year. Wishing everyone a safe and restful summer.*
>
> <div align="right">Email communication from Coach, June 26, 2020</div>

In an attempt to be responsive to the continually evolving educational context, we investigated the experiences of the DT coaches and those of teachers they supported, as educational systems and our research project pivoted with the move to emergency remote learning during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was fruitful in promoting an enhanced understanding of the importance of the DT coaches' roles during the pandemic, particularly their responsiveness, resourcefulness, and relationships with teachers. Our findings, together with our associated recommendations, were shared with our school-board partners.

Year 4 Findings
Responsiveness:
(1) Coaches are Responsive to Support Transitioning all Teachers to Online Learning;
(2) Charged with Supporting Students and Parents;
(3) Built Teachers' and Parents Technological Confidence and Competence;
(4) Mentored using Digital Tools like FaceTime and Zoom.

Resourcefulness:
(1) Procuring Resources (devices, software, licenses);
(2) Unusual Roles related to Publishers and Troubleshooting;
(3) Webinars for Teachers' Professional Learning;
(4) Shared Learning Material Platforms.

Relationships:
(1) Built Trusting Relationships with Teachers;
(2) Provided Emotional Support for Teachers;
(3) Bolstered Confidence in Teachers related to their Trepidations.

Recommendations:
● School board funding for supporting teachers' digital instruction through coaching should be a top priority as post-pandemic models of education will undoubtedly include pervasive technology use.
● Schools and boards should consider parent education for technology use in the home

Excerpts from School-Board Research Report, May, 2021

While this line of inquiry was unexpected, it was nonetheless worthwhile for us as researchers and for our school-board partners. Over the duration of this program of research, we increasingly learned to be resilient, as we uncovered, then learned to name and discuss our reiterative tensions. This in turn, enabled us to confidently hone the skill of becoming flexibly responsive to the evolving educational context and seek to enhance understandings that could benefit educational researchers and practitioners.

Concluding Thoughts

Perhaps naively, in part, because as we developed the basis for this collaborative research partnership with common goals and what we perceived to be in-depth understandings of the commonalities and differences in these school-board and our university contexts, we anticipated that in keeping with researchers' assertions (Henrick et al., 2016; Lopez Turley & Stevens, 2015; Schuck, 2013) the planned research program would be that which we implemented. It was therefore of some surprise to find that, like other self-study researchers (Erikson & Young, 2011; Ipkeze et al. 2012; McConn & Mason, 2019), we encountered tensions working in collaboration with school-board partners.

However, our tensions differed from those identified in previous self-study research. They were not a function of the different discourses of researchers and teachers (Erikson & Young, 2011), nor did we initially perceive them as particularly productive (McConn & Mason, 2019). In part, this may be attributable to differences in the scope and duration of our project and those of collaborative school-board university research of other self-study researchers who worked with teachers in one school (McConn & Mason, 2019) and/or school-board (Erikson & Young, 2011) over a one-year period.

As previously noted, our intended partnership was long-term (five years), with the participant pool to be coaches and teachers from two school boards. All of these participants had to be responsive to the evolving priorities, demands, and changes within the leadership of school-boards, as well the change in the provincial government, Ministry of Education, and its associated priorities. We began our research with a presumption of continuity – in school-board priorities, personnel, and programs. As detailed herein, our reality was trying to learn to be responsive to continually changing priorities in education, some of which were a function of changes brought forth by a newly elected provincial government. In hindsight, the development of our school-board university partnership failed to recognize the pivotal role of the provincial government in determining the direction of publicly-funded education as outlined by Wallner (2012).

Our self-study responds to Zeichner's (2007) call for self-study researchers to demonstrate how their research builds on and extends the self-study findings of others. Importantly, we document the applicability of the lens of Berry's (2008) tensions to understand and engage in productive discourse about our dilemmas as educational researchers. Initially conceived as the tensions of teaching teachers (Berry, 2008), this study illustrates that they are also the tensions of educational researchers working with school-board partners. Consistent with Freire's (2000) assertion, naming our dilemmas enhanced our reflective dialogue, which in turn affected our actions and fostered our growth as research partners. In keeping with the assertion of Ko et al., (2022), this self-study details the importance of researchers learning to develop adaptive expertise as they work with school-board partners. We hold that our ability to first name and then discuss our tensions as educational researchers fostered our adaptive expertise.

Significantly, through this self-study we learned that resilience, together with a willingness to seek enhanced understandings of the ever-evolving educational context, are requisite to negotiating the tensions of educational researchers working in collaboration with school-board partners. Accordingly, our learnings align with the theoretical framework of social constructivism as context, interactions, and language collectively supported our ability to make sense of these experiences (Schwandt, 2003).

Interestingly, despite initially not perceiving them to be so, consistent with McConn and Mason's (2019) findings, this self-study revealed that over time, tensions in our school-board university research partnership could be a catalyst for our productive growth. Requisite to this, was being flexibly responsive to unexpected research opportunities, thereby enhancing understandings that may benefit practitioners and researchers. We concur with Mockler (2013) that the

acquisition of funding brought with it a pre-ordained focus that did not meet the evolving needs of our school-board partners, that creativity was requisite to overcoming this gap, and this enabled us to move forward with a productive partnership.

Enhanced understanding of Berry's (2008) tensions heightened our ability to name, engage in productive discourse about, and navigate the issues and dilemmas that arose in the implementation of this longitudinal funded research program. Importantly, these understandings may likewise enable other educational researchers to enter these partnerships with their eyes wide open, and negotiate and discuss potential issues and dilemmas that arise in their efforts to implement collaborative school-board university research projects.

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