NNERPP EXTRA

Delivering fresh ideas from the intersection of ed research, policy & practice

Welcome to Round 3!

By Paula Arce-Trigatti | NNERPP

Welcome to the first issue of Volume 3 of NNERPP Extra! We are so excited to be kicking off our third round of this quarterly magazine. Thank you for joining us for another year! Even as we pass the one-year mark of the Covid-19 pandemic that continues to pose substantial challenges for education in America and beyond, we look forward with hope to a better spring and summer. We hope you, too, remain well and safe.

In this issue, we examine pandemic-related research, important questions around researcher independence in the presence of mutually beneficial partnership work, considerations for equity-centered partnership meetings, and an op-ed on the role of RPPs in building an enduring improvement infrastructure:

- **Research Insights**: We continue our examination of research on online learning experiences during Spring of 2020, this time focusing on the experiences of students and families.

- **RPP Deep Dive**: We consider how researchers can maintain independence in RPPs – and if they should.

- **Extra Credit**: We present guiding questions and practical tips for holding equitable partnership meetings.

- **Op-Ed**: We feature an op-ed that proposes using stimulus funds to build an improvement infrastructure, with RPPs playing an important role.

- **Research Headlines**: We share a roundup listing all of our members' research from the past quarter.

Happy reading!

NNERPP | Extra Online
Be sure to check out the NNERPP | Extra website if you'd like to explore this issue's articles (and more!) online.

About NNERPP
NNERPP aims to develop, support, and connect research-practice partnerships in education to improve their productivity. Please visit our website at nnerpp.rice.edu and find us on Twitter: @RPP_Network.

Schooling During the Pandemic, Part 2: Insights from Students and Families

By Nina Spitzley | NNERPP
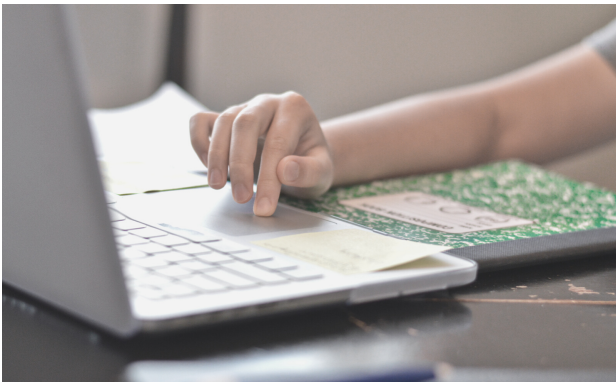
In this "Research Insights" edition, we present the follow up to "Schooling During the Pandemic, Part 1: Insights from Teachers" from our previous issue (December 2020). Collectively, these two articles explore the online learning experiences of teachers, families, and students during the early phase of the pandemic, as examined by five studies produced by NNERPP member RPPs. In Part 1, we focused on the "supply" side of schooling, looking at the experiences of teachers as they adjusted to distance learning in the Spring of 2020. Here in Part 2, we focus on the "demand" side of schooling –the experiences of students and families– which are explored in the remaining studies.

Why This Series

When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in the spring of last year, schools all across the U.S. were forced to respond quickly and with little preparation, resulting in a shift from in-person learning to online formats amidst school buildings closures. This unprecedented challenge in the field of education, including for teachers, students, and families, led to a number of disruptions in learning opportunities. In this two-part series, we seek to capture important lessons or insights from this time to inform current and (possibly similar) future conditions, as studied by our members.

Overview and Context

We turn to the following artifacts to examine the experiences of students and their families during distance learning in Spring 2020:

TABLE 1. List of RPPs + Artifacts Included in This Article

PARTNERSHIP	ARTICLE
▶ Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership: WEERP is a partnership between the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the Socially Responsible Evaluation in Education center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.	Suggestions from Wisconsin Families for Improving Home/Remote Learning
▶ Detroit Education Research Partnership: DERP is a collaboration between the Every School Day Counts Detroit coalition, Detroit Public Schools Community District, and researchers at Wayne State University's College of Education.	Detroit Students' Experiences During the Novel Coronavirus Pandemic
▶ Urban Education Institute: UEI at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) brings together a number of education stakeholders and community groups in the greater San Antonio region, including UTSA, area school districts, CAST network, Pre-K 4SA, SA Works, San Antonio Education Partnership, Raise Your Hand Texas Foundation, San Antonio Area Foundation, Baptist Health Foundation of San Antonio, Goodwill Industries of San Antonio, the City of San Antonio, UP Partnership Café College, Alamo Colleges, and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.	Parts 2 and 3 of the three-part "Teaching & Learning in the Time of COVID-19" study: Student Engagement and Learning Food Insecurity, Digital Divide, Work, & Caregiving

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Below, we provide a brief description of the context in which these studies occurred.

››WISCONSIN:

Wisconsin schools were ordered to close by March 18, 2020, and remained closed through the end of the 2019-20 school year. Districts developed their own reopening plans detailing modes of instruction for the fall.

››DETROIT, MI:

School buildings in Detroit were closed on March 13, 2020, for the remainder of the school year. Detroit Public Schools Community District outlined a phase-in approach to reopening for the fall.

››SAN ANTONIO, TX:

Schools that had not already closed previously were ordered to close to in-person learning for the remainder of the academic year on April 17, 2020, with the goal of reopening in the fall, either in person or virtual, to be outlined in district reopening plans.

Research Questions

The following is a summary of the research questions included in each partnership's study:

››WISCONSIN:

This study examined how families in Wisconsin perceived and experienced their students' home / remote learning, including their perceptions of student engagement and student learning, access to materials, and the challenges faced by families. Families were also invited to share suggestions for improvement.

››DETROIT, MI:

This study examined how Detroit high school students experienced school engagement and participation early on in the pandemic, how their experiences early on in the pandemic were shaped by their experiences with school and attendance before the pandemic, what their personal experience was with COVID-19, and what their thoughts were on going back to school in the fall of 2020.

››SAN ANTONIO, TX:

This study examined what worked and didn't work for teachers, students, and families during emergency distance learning in the Spring of 2020, how engaged students were during distance learning, and what other societal factors affected overall learning experiences. Parts 2 and 3 of the three-part publication, included in this article, focus on students' and families' experiences.

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Research Methods

Of the three studies, the team in Wisconsin conducted a state-wide survey, the team in Detroit, Michigan conducted interviews, and the team in San Antonio, Texas conducted both surveys and interviews – the study in Detroit included a small district-wide sample and the one in San Antonio included a city-wide sample.

>>**WISCONSIN:**

In Wisconsin, sixteen school districts signed up to use a "Family Home/Remote Learning Survey" as of July 2020. A small number of families from other districts also completed surveys, for a total of 3,227 families across all districts. Most families completed their surveys in May 2020.

>>**DETROIT, MI:**

In Detroit, the study team interviewed 29 Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) high school students via phone or Zoom for about 30 minutes in May and June 2020. Note that only high school students were interviewed.

>>**SAN ANTONIO, TX:**

This study collected survey and interview data from May 22 to July 1 from representative samples of teachers, parents, and high school students for each of seven participating school districts (East Central, Edgewood, Harlandale, Judson, Northside, North East, and Southwest) as well as an eighth set of schools known as the the Centers for Applied Science and Technology (CAST) Network for a total of 1,669 participants. For the purposes of this article, we focus on the parent and student sample. In total, 884 parents and 241 students participated.

What Does the Research Show?

Three common themes emerged across findings from all five studies included in this series: the importance of access, engagement, and guidance and supports. In Part 1 of this series, we examined what the teacher-focused studies found for each of these themes. Here, we highlight findings from the student- and family-focused studies and how students' and families' experiences were similar to or different from teachers' experiences.

>>**ACCESS**

Challenges with student access to remote learning, including lack of internet access, lack of access to devices, and technological problems, emerged as a major concern for teachers across the three studies we examined in Part 1. It was also a common theme among students and families in the three studies examined here, though less consistently so across studies.

- In Wisconsin, 25% of responding families reported challenges with their students engaging in home/remote learning because of a lack of or bad internet access or access to devices. Importantly, this reflects families' experiences after many schools had already distributed devices and worked with families to acquire internet access. Internet access was especially problematic for families living in rural Wisconsin and living on the Menominee reservation.

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- In the 29 interviews with high school students conducted in Detroit, a few students named problems with technology or the internet, or a phone being their only device to access schoolwork, as barriers keeping them from participating in remote learning.

- In San Antonio, most students reported having adequate technology and internet access for distance learning, even though disparities did exist. 89% of students were always able to access the internet for school when they needed it and 79% of students were always able to use a computer/digital device for school. 64% of families reported either purchasing or already owning digital technology for their student's remote learning while 34% received their computer technology from their school. The more crucial challenge that emerged was lack of access to food: 26% of surveyed students and parents said they were experiencing food insecurity. Many families reported that districts' efforts around providing meals were only helpful to a certain extent – transportation issues and schedules for pickup prevented families from reaching school meals.

»ENGAGEMENT

Teachers surveyed in Tennessee, Michigan, and San Antonio, TX in the collection of studies in Part 1 reported student engagement as a major challenge. Similarly, a lack of engagement emerged as a clear theme across the interviews and surveys with students and families in the Wisconsin, Detroit, MI, and San Antonio, TX studies we examine here – as did some reasons for this lack of engagement.
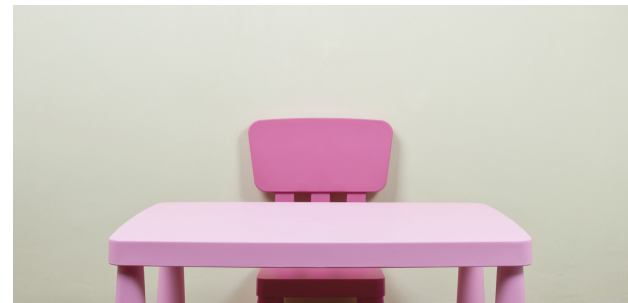
- In the Wisconsin study, as referenced above, 25% of the surveyed families indicated that lack of internet access or insufficient devices kept their students from engaging in remote learning. Additionally, most Wisconsin families agreed that their student was not learning as much as they were before the COVID-19 crisis. Only 15% of families said their students were learning at the same level as before. In their free responses, several families indicated that the lack of new, challenging material and the lack of accountability kept students from being fully engaged.

- Of the 29 high school students interviewed in the Detroit study, most reported participating consistently in remote learning to some extent; however, there was extreme variation in the number of hours they were doing schoolwork or logged on to online classes, and 28% of students reported that they had not participated at all. Students gave several reasons for not participating, including problems with technology, increased family responsibilities, disinterest, and lack of information or unclear information/instructions. This study also examined the connection between students' pre-pandemic attendance and distance learning participation, finding that 90% of students with strong pre-pandemic attendance had participated in some distance learning during the school closures, while just 63% of the chronically absent students had participated at all.

- Of the students and parents interviewed as part of the San Antonio study, 64% reported that students learned less during distance learning. However, 11% said they learned more. 54% of students said that they had fewer engaging lessons during distance learning compared with pre-pandemic learning. Students gave similar reasons for low or decreased engagement as those named in the Detroit study, including frustration with technological problems, working (oftentimes increased hours due to the economic impact of the pandemic on their families), and increased caregiving responsibilities at home. Student engagement and motivation were also related to food insecurity: While food-insecure high school students represented 20% of all high school students surveyed, they represented 65% of high school students who said they never turned in assignments.

Schooling During the Pandemic, Part 2: Insights from Students & Families, continued

››GUIDANCE AND SUPPORTS

In Part 1 of this series, we examined teachers' top sources of guidance and support and areas where they needed further support. Students and families also identified several supports they would like to see or would have needed.

- Asked about how their students' schools could better support them with remote learning, many of the surveyed families in Wisconsin spoke favorably of their school's, district's, or teachers' efforts, but also noted several challenges. These included the problems with **internet access** noted previously and the **difficulty for working parents to support their children's learning**. The most common suggestion for improving remote learning was for teachers to provide **more online, synchronous virtual instruction**. Families also suggested recording such instruction and posting it online. Families also indicated a need for **better organization and more streamlining** across teachers and schools around expectations and online technologies and a need for **more / better communication** with students and their families, such as emails to parents that help them monitor their student's assignments and work, feedback to students, and providing opportunities for support and clarification. As mentioned previously, families also suggested holding students **accountable** for their work. Some families also commented on the need for schools to support students' and families' **social emotional health** – this was also mentioned by teachers in the studies examined in Part 1.

- In the interviews with Detroit students, one theme that emerged was students' **lack of a regular schedule or routine** during distance learning. This suggests that students may need much more support in learning how to create and maintain schedules to account for their various responsibilities. Students were also asked about their personal experiences with COVID-19 and many witnessed the impact of COVID-19 first hand. Nearly 40% of the interviewed students personally knew someone who had contracted COVID-19, and a quarter knew someone who had died from it. This suggests that more **socioemotional support** is needed, as was mentioned in the Wisconsin study as well. Lastly, students' confusion about expectations indicates the same need for better communication that was pointed out by parents in the Wisconsin study.

- The high school students in the San Antonio study provided similar suggestions as the parents in the Wisconsin study around providing more **synchronous instruction** and further reported that creative, project-based assignments giving them **autonomy and choice** made lessons more engaging. Both students and parents in San Antonio said that **clear, frequent, and consistent communication** from teachers was extremely helpful, as were student one-on-one time with teachers and **social emotional check-ins**.

Implications and Recommendations

The following takeaways emerge from the studies examined here:

(1) First, lack of internet access and/or lack of access to devices is a major barrier to participating in online learning for some students. Addressing these concerns is foundational to ensuring more equitable remote learning in the future. This aligns with teachers' concerns highlighted in Part 1 of this series.

(2) Students and families also named a number of other challenges to distance learning participation, some of which are easier to address for schools than others. For example, increased caregiving responsibilities at home for students are challenging to address, but students and families provided concrete suggestions for ways to make remote learning more engaging, such as more synchronous, interactive virtual instruction.

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(3) Additionally, many families and students were not clear on what was expected of them during remote learning and struggled with confusing messages and demands, but were also quick to suggest solutions: These include using the same remote learning platforms across schools in the same district, providing clear sets of expectations to families and students, and communicating more frequently with students / families. In Part 1 of this series, we found that teachers, too, struggled with a lack of clarity and guidance around what was expected of them during the early phase of the pandemic, given the unprecedented nature of this shift to distance learning. Now a year into the pandemic, we expect that districts, schools, and teachers have greater clarity and are able to provide clearer expectations to students and families.

(4) Some students struggled more than others. Students who were most vulnerable to being disengaged and chronically absent from school before the pandemic also were less engaged (or not engaged at all) during the pandemic; students experiencing food insecurity were less engaged and less motivated. In the studies examined in Part 1 of this series, teachers had similar observations about deepening inequities. Socioemotional support as well as targeted logistical support for groups of students (for example, more efficient meal distribution; targeted transportation support once schools reopen fully or partially) are crucial to addressing these inequities.

In Practice

Because the studies included in this article were produced as part of an RPP, they each have the intention of informing the work of the practice-side partner(s) in each RPP. In this section, we briefly highlight how study findings have impacted practice so far.

»WISCONSIN:

In Wisconsin, the results of the survey informed the creation of a reentry plan. It also reinforced the decision of school districts to bring grading back to schools in the fall of 2020. Most directly, local districts used their results to inform their own policies and practices regarding the 2020-2021 school year.

»DETROIT, MI:

The study helped inform an ongoing effort among Detroit school leaders and community organizations to support students during the pandemic. With little data to identify students who were most at-risk for disengagement, school and community partners in the RPP turned to chronic absenteeism data as a potentially useful proxy. The interview data from students also offered some grounding for discussions among partners about the kinds of additional support families might need going forward, including clearer communication about distance learning and expectations, access to technology, and help setting a regular schedule.

»SAN ANTONIO, TX:

Superintendents and school leaders of each of the eight school systems featured in the study used the findings to inform reopening strategies and plans for learning. CAST Schools took it a step further and spent the school year working in partnership with the Urban Education Institute's Improvement Science team on concrete ways to improve

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student engagement for students amid the pandemic. The Institute uses Improvement Science methods to help campuses and school systems learn to improve by putting teachers in the driver's seat. This work led to a new collaborative initiative between CAST and the Institute to showcase strategies for using blended learning in order to improve student achievement across diverse student demographics in schools with persistent achievement gaps. Also, the findings on increased food insecurity among students and their families culminated in a joint effort with the San Antonio Food Bank in which one of the partner school districts in the study held a massive drive-through food distribution in its stadium parking lot.

Additional Insights

Before we close, we'd like to bring to your attention a few additional Covid-related pieces produced by RPPs in NNERPP. We highlight two of these studies in greater detail below to point out additional insights specifically related to this Research Insights series. We also include a list of all other Covid-related research undertaken by NNERPP members and invite you to further explore these studies!

Putting Professional Development into Practice during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Research Report on the Personalized Learning Environments Pilot

This study from the Stanford-San Francisco Unified School District Partnership was initially designed to examine outcomes of a Personalized Learning Environment (PLE) Pilot program across 12 school sites in the San Francisco Unified School District. The pilot program equipped teachers with classroom resources and extensive professional development to design personalized and flexible learning opportunities that build student agency and ownership. Amid the outbreak of the pandemic in spring of 2020, the RPP refocused the study to examine teachers' and students' experiences during distance learning and more specifically, their perceptions of how and if the PLE Pilot prepared them for distance learning. As such, this study provides valuable insights not only into the benefits of this particular professional development program or a personalized learning approach, but also more generally into aspects of in-person instruction that can facilitate distance learning. For example, educators reported that several aspects of the PLE Pilot helped them in their distance learning instruction and also facilitated students' adaptation to this new way of learning: Teachers gained experience with digital tools, learned new ways of using technology in instruction, strengthened collaboration with other teachers, and developed mindsets that prepared them for distance instruction such as incorporating more student agency and voice. These teachers' students, in turn, began distance learning accustomed to the kinds of devices and digital platforms used, and had experience developing agency and ownership of their learning.

Educator Resilience: Stressors, Compassion Fatigue and SEL Competencies/Support

This study from the Oakland Unified School District-UC Berkeley Research-Practice Partnership takes stock of the experiences of educators in Oakland Unified School District during the spring of 2020 at the request of the district's Social-Emotional Learning team. Notably, this study focuses on the mental health and wellbeing of teachers, rather than their more practice-related challenges. Survey responses from 321 educators revealed that their biggest stressor during the distance learning phase was what schooling would look like after the shelter in place order was lifted. Educators were also highly stressed about student engagement during distance learning, the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic crisis, as well as students' mental wellbeing, health, and safety. A majority of educators strongly or somewhat agreed feeling "compassion fatigue," which measures how much stress, burnout, and secondary trauma teachers experience, while teaching remotely. Moreover, educators' positive sense of school connectedness and online teaching self-efficacy functioned as factors related to job resources that could prevent educators from experiencing higher levels of compassion fatigue. A companion brief examines educators' sense of teaching efficacy during distance learning.

Schooling During the Pandemic, Part 2: Insights from Students & Families, continued

Other publications (starting with the most recent):

- Why Do Detroit Students Miss School? Implications for Returning to School After COVID-19
- Instructional Delivery Under Michigan Districts' Extended COVID-19 Learning Plans
- To What Extent Does In-Person Schooling Contribute to the Spread of COVID-19? Evidence from Michigan and Washington
- Teaching & Learning in the Time of COVID-19: Challenges and Solutions From Alamo Colleges District Faculty and Students
- Examining Equity in Remote Learning Plans: A Content Analysis of State Responses to COVID-19
- Exploring the Evidence on Virtual and Blended Learning
- New York Early Care and Education Survey: Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on New York Early Childhood System
- COVID-19 and Third-Grade Reading Policies: An Analysis of State Guidance on Third-Grade Reading Policies in Response to COVID-19
- State Policies to Address COVID-19 School Closure
- Return to Learn: How Michigan School Districts Plan to Reopen in Fall 2020
- How America's Schools Responded to the COVID Crisis
- How Did Michigan School Districts Plan to Educate Students During COVID-19? An Analysis of District Continuity of Learning Plans
- Considerations for Reopening Pennsylvania Schools

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How Can Researchers Maintain Independence in RPPs? Should they? Reflections from the Field

By Paula Arce-Trigatti and Nina Spitzley | NNERPP, with invited guests from the NNERPP Community

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the defining characteristics of research-practice partnerships (RPPs) is the mutualistic collaboration that occurs between researchers ("R"s) and practitioners ("P"s) as they embark on partnership efforts. In RPPs, the research that is produced is typically a direct reflection of a jointly defined problem of practice across R and P, with a "two-way street" of communication enabling expertise from both research and practice to inform the work. And yet, in reality, the specifics of what that collaboration looks like, especially in terms of the roles Rs and Ps play within the partnership, is not as straightforward as it may initially appear. At NNERPP, we often field questions around the "working together" aspect of RPP work, including the following:

> How can researchers maintain their independence in RPPs when partnership work often means working closely with practice-side ("P-side") partners all along the research process?

This is an important and much-asked question, with no easy answer. On the one hand, researcher independence is important to uphold in instances where the p-side partners may be interested in examining the effects of a district-led policy, for example. In this case, researchers would prefer to provide an unbiased account (as much as possible) of the policy effects, and be careful so as not to serve as a mere "rubber stamp" on district policies. On the other hand, authentic partnership collaboration requires many iterations of joint work, where Rs and Ps regularly negotiate the aims of the partnership, the questions investigated, and the milestones of success. In this sense, attempting to maintain researcher independence is misguided at best and impossible at worst.

In this Deep Dive, we take a look at how we might think about this topic, drawing on relevant pieces from the research realm as well as reflections from NNERPP members and friends. In particular, we invited correspondents from our community to share their thoughts on the following prompts:

> Q1: How important is it to maintain independence between "R" and "P" partners? Why?
> Q2: How close is "too close"? When do you know you've crossed the line and can no longer consider the research an "independent" perspective?
> Q3: How have you navigated this tricky balance between maintaining research independence and building trust / being useful to your P-side partners?

The synthesis of ideas we present below is by no means the final word on this – in fact, as you'll see, there are many different takes on this question just coming from our handful of NNERPP members and friends. Instead, our goal is to gather an initial set of viewpoints on this important topic as a starting point for further deliberation. To that end, we invite you to join the conversation as well, by sharing your own thoughts to the above questions via this link.

How Can Researchers Maintain Independence in RPPs? Should they? Reflections from the Field, continued

II. FROM THE RESEARCH

We first turn to the research on RPPs to help inform our thinking on the question of researcher independence. Penuel, Allen, Coburn, and Farrell's "Conceptualizing Research-Practice Partnerships as Joint Work at Boundaries" (2015) is especially relevant and informative to this conversation given its reimagining of partnership work as more than just a complicated mechanism to enable the translation of research to practice. The authors introduce a conceptual framework that characterizes the collaborative work of RPPs as one requiring "boundary crossing" of Rs and Ps – that is, to fulfill the aim of **joint work**, RPPs **must** allow for R-side and P-side participants to regularly move beyond the pre-existing norms and routines that define their workspaces and roles in the absence of an RPP.

Three key ideas emerge from this paper related to our deep dive topic here: First, if we let go of the notion that one of the main functions of RPPs is to merely translate research to practice, the question of researcher independence becomes less important. Second, by embracing and planning for boundary crossing to occur across R and P, we can reframe questions about researcher independence as questions about where the boundaries of the researcher role lie. Third, if partnerships do not thoughtfully plan for boundary crossing through the development of **boundary practices**, joint work will be stalled. We elaborate further on these ideas in what follows.

»Translation is Not Enough

The Penuel, et al. (2015) study seeks to explain how Rs and Ps (Ps are district leaders, in their case) engage with each other in the context of an RPP, especially when one considers that **joint work** is a key goal–and critical component–of partnerships. The authors first describe an enduring framework that has been applied to partnership work previously, what they call the "translation metaphor": In this conceptualization, the bulk of the work that occurs in RPPs is reduced to simple translation, where the main role of Rs is to **translate** findings so that Ps can understand the evidence before them (and therefore, use it).

The authors argue that this metaphor vastly misrepresents what really goes on in partnership work and raise a number of shortcomings with the application of this framework to RPPs. Here, we focus on two of the criticisms that are relevant to our understanding of researcher independence:

- The translation metaphor is insufficient to characterize the joint work occurring in RPPs because it assumes that the "**directionality of learning is one-way, and [that] the goal is for knowledge to travel unchanged**" (p. 185).

- The translation metaphor is also inappropriate as a framework for RPPs because it suggests a very narrow view of research use by Ps by assuming that "**what decision makers should prize most about research is that it can generate trustworthy evidence that they can use instrumentally to make decisions**" (p. 186).

So, what do these two criticisms have to do with our question of researcher independence?

If we think partnerships should "aim for greater mutualism and reciprocity" (p. 185) in their work, which happen to be the very ingredients that lead to **joint work**, then the translation metaphor is a very "impoverished" way (the authors' description,

How Can Researchers Maintain Independence in RPPs? Should they? Reflections from the Field, continued

which seems apt) of describing how Rs and Ps work together. That is, the assumption that Rs (alone) must produce a translated version of knowledge in order for Ps to receive it (unchanged) and use it does not accurately describe how Rs and Ps work together in RPPs. Indeed, the authors share that "[t]he partnerships we have studied teach us that researchers and practitioners working in partnership are engaged in processes of collaboration and exchange that are both **messier** and potentially **more transformative** than the one-way translation of knowledge of research into practice" (p. 183; bolding ours). Moreover, we also know that use of research happens a number of different ways beyond this simple linear characterization, nevermind that what "research" Ps find valuable is typically much broader than the results of one study (e.g., Penuel, et al., 2016).

In our case, these ideas help us see how a translational view of RPP work might lead to questions regarding researcher independence, and more importantly, result in tension when preservation of this role is challenged. But as the paper points out, the simplified translational metaphor describing RPP work is not appropriate given the "messy" and multi-directional nature of the work. Based on the above reasoning, we instead might ask ourselves: if partnership work does **not** seem messy or complicated or requires bi-directional knowledge flows, are you actually in an RPP? Put another way, if you are actively trying to preserve the lines of your role as a researcher (and hence, in some ways, upholding translation as the main outcome of your efforts), can you ever really be engaged in **joint work**? These questions suggest that inquiry into researcher independence may really be more about questioning **where the boundary lies** in terms of an Rs role in the RPP, with the question itself really just serving as a symptom of an underlying (and unnamed) tension. We turn to this tension next.

»Boundary Crossing: It's a Must

So, if the translation metaphor is not accurate nor appropriate for describing partnership work, what is? Penuel, et al. (2015) introduce a new conceptual framework that moves us away from translation and closer to describing the "messy" reality that is partnership work. The framework itself integrates "cultural-historical perspectives [that] offer a view of diversity and difference not as obstacles to [be] overcome, but as **a value inherent to social and professional activity**" (p. 187; bolding ours). The concept of "**boundary crossing**" is introduced and defined as "an individual's transitions and interactions across different sites of practice" (p. 188). Indeed, the "notion of boundary crossing…provides a way to identify when and how particular cultural and institutional boundaries become relevant" in RPPs (p. 190). Boundary crossing occurs when Rs and Ps move into spaces where they might feel "unqualified" (p. 188) to act, such as when researchers are asked for advice on a topic outside of their expertise or when P-side folks are asked to present at an academic conference, for example. Perhaps most importantly, boundary crossing is identified as being **required** to fulfill the aim of **joint work** in RPPs.

When viewed this way, the preservation of researcher independence may actually not be a problem needing to be solved at all. Instead, the question of how to **support co-construction of research** requiring **boundary crossing** that leads to **joint work** might be more appropriate. Moreover, if we explore this second question further, we might also ask: What dimensions of partnership work define (i) where boundaries lie and (ii) how far these can be pushed or need to be pushed?

On the first question of where boundaries lie, we hypothesize that partnership type (i.e., research alliance, design-based, or networked improvement community) strongly influences the degree to which boundary crossing exists. For example, in partnerships that are structured as "research alliances," there is a greater chance that Rs and Ps stay in their lanes, preserving

How Can Researchers Maintain Independence in RPPs? Should they? Reflections from the Field, continued

– to some extent – the pre-existing boundaries that define their roles. In many research alliances, building **theory** may very well be an activity that is done across R and P, while building **evidence** to inform decision making may or may not be. In other types of RPPs, such as design-based partnerships, the roles of R and P tend to be more blurred given the large emphasis on the co-construction or co-design of research and knowledge. There are likely other partnership dimensions that impact whether or not boundaries are more or less defined, but the key takeaway here is that tension regarding researcher independence may have a lot to do with how the RPP is organized.

In terms of the second question raised above (i.e., how far can boundaries be pushed or need to be pushed), the answer is likely to differ based on partnership approach, individual preferences, organizational incentives, and so on. Given that there is not necessarily a clear answer here, we turn to our correspondents' thoughts shared in section III, who provide valuable insight based on their experiences. Before we visit those, however, there is one final idea from the Penuel, et al. (2015) paper to ponder together related to the concept of **boundary practices**.

≫Do You Boundary Practice?

As we discussed in the last subsection, the authors argue that boundary crossing is a necessary condition for joint work to occur in RPPs. To meet this condition, the authors suggest RPPs should (i) establish the existence of boundary crossing (i.e., by recognizing moments that may require Rs and Ps to blur their traditional roles) and (ii) purposely plan for these through **boundary practices**. Boundary practices are defined as "new routines that bridge the practices of researchers and those of practitioners as they engage in joint work" (p. 190). Moreover, "[p]roductive boundary practices make surfacing cultural differences and conflict **a routine part of practice** and **frame these as resources for joint work**" (p. 190, bolding ours). A hallmark of these activities is their hybridity, resulting in practices that are unfamiliar to both Rs and Ps prior to entering into partnership work. In short, boundary practices are instances where R truly informs P **and vice versa** (i.e., a bi-directional flow of knowledge), leading to opportunities that help surface and make productive use of the different perspectives and skills partners bring to the work (p. 192). Taking this into consideration, we can see how the concerns about researcher independence may actually be the result of partnerships not actively pursuing boundary practices, and leaving boundary **crossing** an unexplored domain.

In case we needed further evidence of the importance of exploring and defining boundaries, we call upon another related paper here as well, which offers ideas on the importance of negotiating roles in RPPs, especially with respect to partnership productivity. In their investigation of collaborative work in RPPs, Farrell, Harrison, and Coburn (2019) suggest that **ambiguity in roles or differences in people's expectations** of roles can **create confusion and conflict**. Moreover, uncertainty about roles might be an even greater challenge in RPPs than other organizations, since partnerships require members to work together in new ways "that are unfamiliar or go against established organizational and institutional norms" (p. 2).

How Can Researchers Maintain Independence in RPPs? Should they? Reflections from the Field, continued

Drawing on observations of partnership leadership meetings and interviews with school district leaders and R-side partners, Farrell et al. (2019) find that negotiation of roles and organizational identity was an important feature of the RPP's work, with partners defining and redefining "what was within or out of bounds for the RPP" (p. 5). Time spent talking about roles during meetings took time away from other more substantive work efforts; however, these discussions also led to **reorganizations of roles that contributed to new ways of working together**. The authors find that two factors contributed to the need for role negotiation: (i) The R-side partner's multifaceted identity and (ii) shifts in personnel and leadership at the district (p. 9). Overall, this study suggests that **confusion about roles may stall collaborative work**, while effective renegotiation can then lead to **new ways of working together**. Consequently, **even long-standing partnerships may want to explicitly "revisit or reestablish shared understandings about roles"** (p. 11, bolding ours) on a regular basis.

And this leads us back to the question we first posed: **How can researchers maintain their independence in RPPs when partnership work often means working closely with practice-side partners all along the research process?** After reading through both the Penuel, et al. (2015) and Farrell, et al. (2019) studies, we might recommend:

- Inviting partnership members to talk through the assumptions behind this question, carefully considering whether the question might stem from a translational view of RPP work and whether this view is appropriate;

- Holding partnership discussions that explore examples of boundary crossing that occur at both the partnership and project levels to consider where boundaries need to be identified, negotiated, and encouraged; and

- Negotiating roles across R and P, specifically as they relate to the research process, as a first step towards identifying boundary practices that the partnership may meaningfully engage in.

III. FROM THE FIELD

Next, we turn to reflections from the field. In total, we had 14 respondents weigh in, some of whom answered the questions in small groups of two (see all respondents in Table 1 below). We synthesize their thoughtful reflections for each of our three sub-questions below.

Table 1. Contributing respondents and their roles and partnerships.

Lyzz Davis, Principal Researcher at American Institutes for Research, and Matt Linick, Senior Researcher at American Institutes for Research (formerly Executive Director of Research and Evaluation at the Cleveland Metropolitan School District), and both part of the Cleveland Alliance for Education Research
Callie Edwards, Interim Associate Director for the Friday Institute Research and Evaluation (FIRE) Programs, and part of The Reedy Creek Magnet Middle School Center for Digital Sciences/Friday Inst. for Edu. Innovation RPP
Katie Eklund, Co-Director of the Madison Education Partnership and Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison
Cheri Fancsali, Deputy Director of the The Research Alliance for New York City Schools
Emily Green, Research Associate at ETR and part of A Coordinated, Cross-Institutional Career and Technical Education Cybersecurity Pathway (CCICTE) as well as Computing for the Social Good

How Can Researchers Maintain Independence in RPPs? Should they?
Reflections from the Field, continued

Table 1, continued. Contributing respondents and their roles and partnerships.

Eric Grodsky, Co-Director of the Madison Education Partnership and Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison
Steven McGee, President of The Learning Partnership and part of the Chicago Alliance for Equity in Computer Science
Julie Riordan, director of the REL Northeast & Islands at Education Development Center (EDC) and **Clare Waterman Irwin**, Research Scientist at EDC and part of REL NEI
Stacey Sexton, Evaluator with SageFox Consulting Group and Director of RPPforCS
Guillermo Solano-Flores, Professor of Education at Stanford University and part of the Stanford-Sequoia K-12 Research Collaborative
Beth Vaade, Co-Director of the Madison Education Partnership and Innovation Project Manager and Interim Executive Director of Research, Accountability & Data Use for the Madison Metropolitan School District
Laura Wentworth, Director of Research Practice Partnerships at California Education Partners and Director of the Stanford-San Francisco Unified School District Partnership

>>Q1: How important is it to maintain independence between "R" and "P" partners? Why?

Interestingly, maintaining independence between research- and practice-side partners is not a major concern for the majority of our respondents: some note that they have not encountered this as an issue in their RPP (Callie, Emily, Guillermo), while others say it is not necessarily a goal, either. As Stacey succinctly puts it, independence between R and P is "neither possible nor desirable." Beth elaborates further that the idea of independence is even "a bit misleading" in an RPP context, since R-side and P-side partners need to (i) commit to the same end goals, (ii) agree on how the work is conducted, and (iii) be open and honest with each other. Similarly, Emily describes the purpose of RPP research to "support the practice-side partners in reaching their goals," which necessitates close, joint work.

Others echoed these thoughts and even regarded too much independence as problematic, embracing interdependence or co-dependence instead: RPPs are "dependent by design" and characterized by and strengthened through their joint work rather than independent, "siloed" work (Laura). Callie further notes that "collaboration and equal partnership are essential to the RPP model." Cheri agrees that by nature, the R- and P-sides "cannot and should not be" completely independent of each other, as this would work against the "underlying premise of an RPP." Katie adds that R-side and P-side partners "miss important and valuable information on both sides," such as different perspectives, questions, and data points, when operating too independently. Eric also sees "co-dependence" rather than independence as characteristic of the RPP model and points out that such co-dependence is possible without compromising the integrity of the research when a high level of mutual trust, respect, and "even admiration" for each other is there.

Our respondents do agree that, in Cheri's words, "there is a balance" – research findings must be credible and reliable, and maintaining a level of independence that ensures this is important. The key, Cheri adds, is unbiased data collection and

How Can Researchers Maintain Independence in RPPs? Should they? Reflections from the Field, continued

unbiased analytic methods, tools, and choices. Similarly, Julie and Clare say it's important to maintain enough independence as to not bias the research questions, design, and interpretation of findings; however, researchers must at the same time maintain enough proximity to P-side partners to understand the context, aspects of which include "legislative initiatives and policy agendas; decision making authority within the partner organization; familiarity with the data; [and an] understanding of organizations that work with the partner organization to be able to forward map change based on research findings."

Our respondents additionally have different definitions of what "independence between R and P partners" means, or offer different considerations for a number of aspects of independence. For example, independence can be interpreted as Rs and Ps acknowledging the boundaries of their roles and the work that happens independently based on these roles, says Laura. Yet, she adds, dependence on each other outweighs the independent elements of the work and is in fact necessary in order to build trust, which is hugely important for successful RPP work. Similarly, researchers should be "critical friends" (Callie) and free to "[express] and [advocate] for [their] ideas" (Eric) and "professional needs" (Emily), but that should never stand in the way of joint, collaborative work. Katie adds that likewise, practice-side partners should be critical friends, too, and free to question the research design, methods, and findings based on their own expertise. Beth says that independence might mean that R-side partners are not as wrapped up in the political context as P-side partners, and Emily offers an interpretation of independence as meaning that researchers do not get pressured by P-side partners to bury unflattering results. This is important, she says, but less likely to happen if mutual trust is built and clear procedures are negotiated from the outset through **joint** work.

Similar to Emily's interpretation, others also interpret independence in terms of objectivity, which includes methodological validity of the research (Stacey). Eric clarifies that independence should never mean "disregarding the constraints and obligations of your practice partner," but does mean that it must be clear that university researchers do not work "for" the district but are objective partners. Lyzz and Matt add that if defined as objectivity, researchers in an RPP must be objective the same as any other researcher – this objectivity is not bound to or changed by their connection to any agency, nor is independence from the practice organization necessary for the research to remain objective. In a similar line of thought, Stacey cautions not to "assume that the presence of practitioners as partners taints the research process in any real way." In terms of researchers' objectivity, Stacey also points out that everyone inadvertently brings their own "baggage, preconceptions, [and] value judgements" – complete objectivity is perhaps impossible. Steven adds that researchers do have a responsibility to question and acknowledge their own assumptions, and that any vested interests in research outcomes can and must be kept out of the data by researchers actively seeking to falsify any hypotheses they hold about the outcomes of their investigations.

>>Q2: How close is "too close"? When do you know you've crossed the line and can no longer consider the research an "independent" perspective?

In line with observations and comments regarding the importance of researchers' objectivity in response to the previous question, many of our respondents point to any situations that jeopardize this objectivity as being "too close" and crossing the line. For example, when the R-side feels pressured by the P-side not to publish certain findings that might make the P-side organization look bad or challenge the status quo, the research is no longer objective or independent (Julie and Clare).

How Can Researchers Maintain Independence in RPPs? Should they? Reflections from the Field, continued

More generally, "if researchers lose the ability to conduct ethical and rigorous research, that is a sign that independence has been lost" (Emily). A "willingness to sacrifice objectivity" for any reason might indicate a need for researchers to step away from RPP work and self-reflect on their role and position, add Lyzz and Matt. Callie and Laura advise that R- and P-side partners should stay within their role and be clear about what that role does and does not entail.

Similarly, "distorting … findings to fit with a particular narrative" (Beth), which could happen on both the R and the P side, is crossing the line. Cheri adds that this entails making decisions about the research design and methods driven by a desire to advocate for a particular position even if it is not supported by the evidence, or making decisions about the research that take it off course from the actual problem of practice you are trying to address driven by any personal preferences on either the R or P side. Steven points out that in addition to distorting findings, making claims that go beyond what the data actually supports also compromises researchers' independence. Stacey adds that the R-side should conduct research that also contributes to the larger body of knowledge and not only stick to the question asked by the P-side. On the flip side, if the P-side feels coerced into going along with the R-side research agenda, that is equally problematic (Stacey).

>>**Q3: How have you navigated this tricky balance between maintaining research independence and building trust / being useful to your P-side partners?**

Our respondents share plenty of practical advice for maintaining a good balance. Callie, Julie, and Clare point to the importance of being transparent about everyone's role and responsibilities and the nature of the shared work from the very beginning of the partnership and the beginning of all partnership relationships. Katie and Cheri add that having both the R-side and the P-side represented at all stages of the research process helps in hearing and considering the needs of both sides throughout. Talking through the rationale and justification behind research methods for any given project with P-side partners builds trust, Cheri explains. More generally, building relationships first, before commencing RPP work, is crucial, says Beth.

One practical approach recommended by Beth, Emily, and Cheri is having a "no surprises" policy, wherein no findings are published without being shared with the P-side partners first. Importantly, "sharing" means leaving the space and time for responses and discussions around findings, particularly difficult ones. Including P-side partners in the sense-making of data is always important, says Cheri. Peer review is another mechanism for ensuring research objectivity, Steven points out, outlining his partnership's peer review process whereby the research is subjected to peer review from researchers and practitioners who are not involved in the core partnership through the partnership's advisory boards, through publishing at conferences and in academic journals, and more informally through debates with those who disagree with the policy recommendations put forth in the research. Lyzz and Matt share additional strategies for maintaining objectivity, including ensuring that researchers are not involved in the development of a program they are evaluating and avoiding any financial stake in the organizations in your partnership, such as paid contracts separate from partnership agreements.

To give a practical example of navigating the balance between research independence and mutual trust among partners, Laura recalls a tricky incident where both the P-side and the R-side partner in her partnership had conducted their own similar analyses and ended up with different results, leading to some tension. In addition to both parties working to compare their data sets, methods, and analyses to see why they were coming up with different findings, resolving this situation also required the P-side to trust the researchers' sample, data management, and design of the analysis in order to ultimately trust the findings.

How Can Researchers Maintain Independence in RPPs? Should they?
Reflections from the Field, continued

IV. CONCLUSION

In this Deep Dive we took a reflective look at the question and role of researcher independence in RPPs, consulting both the research literature on RPPs and inviting members and friends from the NNERPP space to weigh in as well.

From the research perspective, we landed on three potential next steps for partnerships that are grappling with this question, including exploring whether team members are thinking of their work solely in a translational manner, fostering team discussions that encourage the identification and negotiation of boundaries (and roles) across R and P, and developing and implementing boundary practices that lead to new ways of working together.

From our community, our respondents suggest that researcher independence is not necessarily contradictory to the very much interdependent nature of RPP work, especially if interpreted as objectivity. Three key themes emerged for their responses, including the need for researchers to make objective choices around the research design and interpretation of findings (which can be done in close collaboration with the P-side, where P-side partners also have a say in the research design and participate in sense making of the data); all partners are responsible for maintaining ethical standards; and an emphasis on the need for collaboration rather than independence for effective RPP work.

Ultimately, the exact boundary for where R and P roles begin, end, and overlap in collaborative work will likely differ by partnership or project, but as we learned in this effort, it should be a topic for active consideration in RPPs. In future work, we might think further about the potential influences affecting how Ps are able to participate in RPPs. For example, what forces prohibit or encourage P-side partners from fully engaging in partnership work? How might the partnership navigate those? As we continue to ponder these and related questions, we invite you to think with us as well – please remember to share your own thoughts in this survey if you'd like!

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How to Hold Equitable Partnership Meetings

By Paula Arce-Trigatti and Nina Spitzley | NNERPP

Questions around partnership meetings –how to facilitate them, how to make sure they are effective, how to make them collaborative and equitable– have recently risen to the top of our conversations across the network. Partly because of the need to hold many more virtual meetings during Covid-times, this renewed interest has prompted us to reconsider the importance and "how tos" of meetings in research-practice partnerships (RPPs). As we thought more deeply about partnership meetings, we realized their critical role in being the "place" where true partnership work actually happens: While stakeholder groups do engage in separate work in the course of an RPP project, the essence of "joint work", a hallmark of RPPs, occurs in partnership meetings. Indeed, meetings are where problems of interest are co-identified and negotiated, key decisions are collaboratively thought through, and opportunities for relationship building frequently occur.

In spite of the crucial role meetings play in partnership work, there are few resources available on how to hold equitable partnership meetings. If we hope to facilitate any of the core activities outlined above in the context of RPP meetings, special care must be taken to ensure that "joint work" is, in fact, supported. Although we've previously offered guidance around holding partnership meetings more generally, here we focus exclusively on key ways to support equitable partnership meetings, outlining guiding questions and useful tips we encountered in our scan of available resources, combined with our own networked-sourced knowledge of promising practices.

The Special Importance of Meeting #1

Before we head into the discussion of what to do in meetings, we first clarify the types of meetings you may encounter in partnership work, making a special distinction between the first meeting of your RPP (i.e., "Meeting #1") and subsequent meetings (see Table 1).

Meeting #1 may be one of the most important meetings (or set of meetings, really) your partnership will ever hold, as it is in that meeting where partners first come together before the work actually commences. In our experience, we have seen a general trend towards using Meeting #1 to plan what the partnership will work on as opposed to using it to plan how stakeholder groups will work together. One result of this prioritization is that the RPP may end up launching straight into the work without having first discussed a number of important considerations for collaboration, including establishing and documenting equitable ground rules that will support the meaningful participation of stakeholders. In the absence of such discussions, it can be quite easy for the RPP to adopt pre-existing power imbalances among partners that will inevitably influence stakeholder participation and move the partnership in the wrong direction with respect to equitable engagement.

How to Hold Equitable Partnership Meetings, continued

Table 1. Description of Typical Partnership Meeting Types

MEETING #1: The initial partnership meeting(s) that occurs before the work commences	SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS: Partnership meetings that occur once the work officially commences and after ground rules have been established in Meeting #1
Main Task • Setting the ground rules for how all major aspects of the partnership will unfold, especially as they relate to collaboration	**Main Tasks Vary by Meeting Type:** • Kickoff meetings (e.g., identifying research questions, determining project goals, etc.) • Data meetings (e.g., planning, initial sensemaking, etc.) • Results meetings (e.g., preliminary findings, sensemaking, etc.) • Periodic check-ins (e.g., "what's new", "do you need anything", etc.)

We thus strongly recommend that these crucial conversations to take place during Meeting #1. And because this initial meeting is so important, in what follows, we'll spend the bulk of this article offering a number of guiding questions for partnerships to reflect on as they plan for Meeting #1, with practical suggestions under each question.

Guiding Questions for Meeting #1

The main goal of Meeting #1 is to establish ground rules, norms, and clear processes that will guide equitable collaboration going forward. Note that the routines themselves should be developed equitably, with meaningful input from a diverse set of stakeholders. To create an equitable environment, it can be helpful to agree on norms of interaction. For example, partnerships might work to create space for multiple truths, whereby meeting attendees embrace different perspectives and seek to understand others' truths; acknowledge impact versus intent, whereby meeting attendees recognize that the things they say or do may have unintended negative impacts on others and take accountability for such impacts; and be willing to be uncomfortable, whereby learning from mistakes is prioritized over arriving at "tidy resolutions" (Resource Media, 2018).

To help facilitate discussions, we offer the following guiding questions to consider together during Meeting #1:

>>How will the partnership enable key stakeholders to collaboratively build meeting agendas?

Meeting agendas are a critical element in organizing the work and prioritizing what needs attention. If only one or two people are determining what shows up on the agenda, then the perspectives of those one or two people will end up having an outsized influence on the direction of the meetings, and in turn may have an outsized influence on the direction of the partnership itself. Thus, the facilitation of equitable partnership meetings starts by encouraging many voices to contribute to meeting agendas.

We suggest:

- Creating a shared Google document where all meeting agendas are stored and that all stakeholders have access to. Partnership members could then be invited to add, edit, or comment on agenda items prior to a meeting, making for a "living" document. During the meeting, a designated notetaker can take notes on the same document, so that all meeting attendees see the outcomes of each agenda item being recorded in real time and can also review or search meeting notes at any later time – the agenda and notes for each meeting would be stacked upon the next (Green, 2017). (More on notetaking below.)

How to Hold Equitable Partnership Meetings, continued

- Allocating different agenda items to specific meeting attendees (ideally, those who put these items on the agenda as especially crucial to them), which can also help keep meetings efficient and ensure multiple voices are heard (Green, 2017).

- Stating your desired meeting outcomes in the agenda at the outset (Banse & Lee, 2020) and defining what success looks like for the meeting – for example, perhaps learning together is the goal of a meeting and makes it successful even if not all problems get solved or questions answered (Resource Media, 2018).

>> How will the partnership mitigate unequal dynamics of power and privilege during meetings?

Although RPPs by design address the historical imbalance of power that has characterized the production of research knowledge, power dynamics can still be a challenge throughout RPP work and specifically during partnership meetings. Meeting attendees must be conscious of and explicitly challenge power dynamics, especially historical patterns of power and participation (AORTA, 2017; National Equity Project, 2013) based on a number of factors, including age, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, national origin, race, and gender as well as the intersections of these factors.

We suggest:

- Mitigating unequal dynamics by rotating meeting facilitation and/or leadership roles when possible (Youth Development Executives of King County [YDEKC]) or by holding meetings at locations that help partners that might traditionally feel less empowered be more comfortable – for example, holding meetings on school district grounds rather than a university campus (Lash, Wortel-London, & Velesaca, 2018).

- Using jargon-free language that everyone understands, even in the meeting agenda (YDEKC).

- Making an explicit effort to have all voices be heard by, for example, breaking meeting participants into small groups for part of the meeting, which can make participation and exploration of ideas easier (YDEKC) and ensure that everyone feels safe to contribute ideas and disagree with others (Lash, Wortel-London, & Velesaca, 2018; National Equity Project, 2013).

>>How will the partnership recognize and respect multiple forms of expertise and ensure diverse representation of expertise at meetings?

Related to issues of power dynamics and privilege, expertise has also historically been attributed to only certain individuals in the production of research. Challenging these assumptions, the very concept of an RPP is based on the acknowledgement that researchers, practitioners, community members, and other stakeholders all hold valuable expertise. Partnership meetings are one of the best mechanisms to ensure that these various kinds of expertise get to actively contribute to the partnership work. While different meetings might require different participants, the core partnership team should include someone from each relevant stakeholder group (YDEKC).

We suggest:

- Consistently having the p-side voice present at meetings (Lash, Wortel-London, & Velesaca, 2018). One way of explicitly acknowledging expertise beyond including different stakeholders in meetings is to name practice-side partnership members as co-PIs on grants whenever possible (Lash, Wortel-London, & Velesaca, 2018).

How to Hold Equitable Partnership Meetings, continued

- Developing equitable processes for determining who the relevant experts are that need to attend a given meeting, whereby diverse stakeholders get to define the kind of representative expertise that is needed. RPP brokers might have an important role in seeking out experts given a meeting's purpose and goals due to their familiarity with a number of actors across partner organizations.

- Acknowledging that no single person knows everything but that the group can best learn together, make new meaning together, and expand everyone's thinking together (AORTA, 2017; National Equity Project, 2013).

>>How will the partnership allocate key meeting roles and responsibilities?

Two key roles include the meeting's facilitator and notetaker. The facilitator plays an important role in ensuring that meetings are equitable by balancing power dynamics, which includes (respectfully) calling out instances of unequal dynamics, such as when something hurtful is said or when a specific group of people is repeatedly interrupted (AORTA, 2017). The facilitator should additionally pay attention to the group's tone and body language, which can also reveal inequitable dynamics (AORTA, 2017). In terms of the meeting notetaker, they too hold power in that they determine how information is recorded and "therefore remembered" (Green, 2017). Taking notes is especially important for documenting collective decisions and meeting outcomes (YDEKC).

When establishing these roles, we recommend keeping in mind the underlying power dynamics that can result in unintentional reinforcement of the very dynamics your partnership might be trying to address (for example, assigning the notetaking responsibilities to the only woman on the team).

We suggest:

- Electing a meeting facilitator who is not already in a management position or leading one of the teams / organizations involved in the partnership meeting (Green, 2017) – for example, consider having a broker facilitate the meeting (Kulshreshtha, 2020), as brokers already function as a bridge between different groups and are familiar with the priorities of different stakeholders while being more neutral than direct representatives of any stakeholder group or involved partnering organization.

- Electing one designated notetaker or scribe, as that will help with clarity (Green, 2017). At the same time, be aware that this role should entail more than passive note taking and be willing to give the scribe the power to step in at any time during the meeting and request clarity when needed (Green, 2017).

- Sharing the meeting notes in real-time, by giving everyone access to the same Google document where the notetaker is currently taking notes. This will also allow for someone in the meeting to take notes while the notetaker is talking, which is something that is easily missed if not assigned.

How to Hold Equitable Partnership Meetings, continued

Good Practices No Matter the Meeting

While the above recommendations focus on key aspects of the discussions that should occur during Meeting #1, we now turn to a number of general good meeting practices your RPP should consider adopting, regardless of the meeting type:

- Regarding calendar invites:
    a. Make sure to send one as soon as everyone has agreed upon a date/time
    b. Do NOT send a calendar invite without first confirming whether that day/time works for meeting participants
    c. Even if a calendar invite has been provided and your participants have RSVP'd, it's still a good idea to confirm the meeting via email reminder either the day before or the morning of

- When sending a calendar invite or reminder, we also recommend sending a link to the team's shared meeting agenda document as well.

- Consider what activities can be done without meeting so as to use the time together most efficiently. It's important to recognize that not every partner is being compensated in the same way for participating (i.e., time spent on the project might be "paid for" for some members of the project, such as the PI, whereas others are essentially donating their time – be respectful and mindful of that privilege).

- A good way to close a meeting with equity in mind is to offer acknowledgement to individuals' or teams' contributions (Banse & Lee, 2020).

In Closing: A note on the role of equitable meetings in overall RPP equity

Equitable partnership meetings are, of course, a natural extension of equitable partnerships; thus, another way to think about equitable partnership meetings is to consider how the partnership itself realizes equitable engagement. For example, this resource defines equity in RPPs as "all partners [having] shared interest and equal voice in the purpose, conduct, and outcomes of a study" (Ryoo, Choi, & McLeod, 2015) and identifies a number of characteristics of equitable partnerships that can directly be applied to partnership meetings, including challenging unequal power dynamics, acknowledging and placing equal value on all diverse types of experience and knowledge, and collaboratively defining research goals and definitions of success – all of which also show up on our list of guiding questions and practical suggestions above.

In this article in a previous issue of NNERPP Extra, the authors make the case that a truly equitable partnership centers equity across three domains: in the partnership itself, in the research, and in practice / implementation. Within this framework, partnership meetings fall within the "partnership" domain, which considers equity in interactions, dialogue, and institutional structures within the RPP. However, we would argue that partnership meetings also have a role to play in the "research" and "practice/implementation" domains, as meetings are where the collaborative work comes alive. Similarly, this previous NNERPP Extra article about attending to equity in evaluating RPPs mentions meetings as a mechanism to achieve equity goals in terms of developing equitable relationships and equitable systems.

Finally, the thoughts we previously put forth in this NNERPP Extra article on applying lessons identified by Chicago Beyond to an RPP context also apply to the more specific context of partnership meetings; in particular, the reflections we surfaced around validity and access are quite relevant to partnership meetings and also emerge to some extent throughout the previous paragraphs.

How to Hold Equitable Partnership Meetings, continued

Without a doubt, equitable meetings play an important role in overall RPP equity. An RPP's meetings might even give important insights into an RPP's overall health: Tense and ineffective meetings that do not emphasize collaborative meeting agendas, the lifting up of all voices and expertise, and a thoughtful approach to meeting facilitating and notetaking might signal problems of inequity or power within the partnership as a whole. At the same time, meetings are a mechanism through which to improve a partnership's progress towards equity goals. To that end, we hope you test out the guiding questions and suggested practices described above in your RPPs' quest to support equitable joint work – let us know how it goes!

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OP-ED

The Role of RPPs in an Education Improvement Infrastructure
RPPs can help states and districts use stimulus funds to build a rapid improvement infrastructure.

By David Hersh | Proving Ground

With the recent passage of the third stimulus package, bringing total education stabilization funds to over $180 billion, Congress has created a rare opportunity for states and districts to invest in creating a more responsive, resilient, and dynamic education system. We know the education system we had before the pandemic was not working for all students. Now is our chance to fundamentally change it.

Much of the focus in allocating stimulus funds has been around the specific **interventions** states and districts should spend it on (see here for the full stimulus bill; Section 2001(e) covers Education). This strategy is a mistake that will cost students critical opportunities to grow. Rather than spending one-time funds on the latest panaceas, states and districts can ensure **enduring improvements** by investing in an improvement **infrastructure** that will enable them to remove barriers to student success and make decisions informed by evidence aligned to their students and schools. Research-practice partnerships (RPPs) are a key part of this infrastructure; by leveraging them, states and districts can build it more quickly, efficiently, and effectively.

The problem with a panacea-driven approach.

The vaccination strategy to end the pandemic illustrates the risks of a panacea-driven approach. The rapid development of effective vaccines was a success. But that was just one necessary condition for ending the pandemic. To save lives, the vaccines need to be disseminated effectively, stored and administered in the way they've been shown to be effective, and administered to enough of the population to protect those most vulnerable to the virus – indeed, an **infrastructure** is necessary in order for the vaccine to actually lead us out of the pandemic. All three of these conditions have proven challenging, slowing the process of ending the pandemic.

These conditions are not unique to vaccines. Solving a widespread problem in any field requires that those on the ground have access to the solution, the capacity to implement it well, and an understanding of to whom the solution should be applied. Solving the challenges currently facing educators is no different. The education system needs effective ways to disseminate knowledge to educators about which interventions are and are not effective for which students, educators need the bandwidth to implement effective interventions as designed, and the capacity to choose the right interventions for their students. None of these conditions have been met in the U.S. education system.

Moreover, there is a fourth condition that was met in the case of the Covid-19 vaccine that has not been met in education. While public health relies on a robust system for testing vaccines to determine which ones work, education has no comprehensive and rapid system for generating evidence of effectiveness. As a result, states and districts could easily spend $180 billion on popular interventions that might not actually catch students up, and have nothing to show for their efforts when the money runs out.

The Role of RPPs in an Education Improvement Infrastructure, continued

For one-time stimulus funds to have a large and lasting impact on teaching and learning, state and district leaders should use them to invest in building an improvement infrastructure that will allow educators to meet the challenges of this moment and support their ongoing evolution into nimble, resilient institutions that can better serve our children, particularly the most vulnerable, who have fallen even further behind over the last year.

What would an improvement infrastructure look like?

First, states can use stabilization funds to build systems to mobilize the knowledge that exists and the knowledge that will be generated by districts so it is available to all educators throughout the state. Educators should have a catalogue of what works, what doesn't, and in what contexts at their fingertips. States can succeed where the What Works Clearinghouse has failed in this effort.

Second, states and districts can use stabilization funds to create opportunities and support systems for education leaders to engage actively with the knowledge being mobilized. By providing tools and training, they can ensure educators have the ability to select interventions that meet their students' needs, implement them well, and use results to make decisions about what to do next. Likewise, states and districts can increase educators' bandwidth and opportunity to select, implement, and decide well by reducing other demands on their time.

Finally, states and districts can begin laying the groundwork for a culture of experimentation to emerge, using stabilization funds to implement and evaluate pilots of the programs and practices educators adopt, rather than rushed full-scale adoptions. Feeding the results of pilots back to the field using the knowledge mobilization systems states create would reinforce this culture, helping educators internalize the value their experimentation provides to the field.

This is not to imply that stimulus funding is by itself sufficient to create the conditions for improvement. Culture change takes time and is limited by more than funding. Other barriers, such as compliance requirements that create competing demands for educators' time and discourage experimentation, need to be addressed as well. Innovation would benefit from more collaborative state-district relationships that are not inherently resource issues. But this moment offers an opportunity to leverage the urgency for change and the rare influx of funding to get the ball rolling and inspire institutional change.

The Role of RPPs.

The two main counter arguments against using stimulus funds on infrastructure are that 1) it's too difficult or expensive and 2) it means choosing long term gains over urgently-needed help. Neither is true. RPPs offer both proof that improvement infrastructure can be developed at a reasonable cost and an existing infrastructure that states and districts can leverage in institutionalizing improvement more comprehensively.

First, there are many examples of RPPs using, generating, and disseminating evidence in cost effective ways. In authoring the Improving Improvement series for NNERPP Extra, Jennifer Ash and I have begun detailing a few of them. For example, the National Center for Rural Education Research Networks (NCRERN) and the Impact Florida Covid Recovery Cadre (the CRC) are using, generating, and disseminating evidence from rapid-cycle RCTs. Both are supporting districts' efforts to address students' needs during the pandemic. If states paid for these and similar efforts, it would cost a very small fraction of what the states received in ESSER II funding. ESSER III funding makes them a rounding error. The same is true if the districts, rather than their states, were to fund the work.

The Role of RPPs in an Education Improvement Infrastructure, continued

Secondly, investing in an improvement infrastructure does not require forgoing urgently needed interventions. It does mean ensuring we do not forgo evidence in the name urgency. As coronavirus deaths mounted, the Federal Drug Administration waited to approve broad administration of vaccines until they were confident they would work for American citizens – because forgoing evidence in the name of urgency can lead to greater harm. Similarly, investing in improvement means being systematic and thoughtful about selecting evidence-based interventions, customizing them for context, implementing them well, generating local evidence to inform decisions about whether to continue or not, and sharing that evidence so others can decide whether to try them. These are precisely the kinds of activities that can be taken up with an RPP.

The CRC mentioned above offers a case in point. Created in the summer of 2020 to address Algebra needs amplified by the pandemic, these Florida districts rapidly identified evidence-based interventions aligned to their root causes, are currently implementing them, and will learn if they were effective within the month (see more on this work in our most recent Improving Improvement article). The results will be rapidly disseminated not just amongst the four participants but also to over a dozen districts in the Impact Florida network and more widely to Proving Ground's network of over 60 districts nationwide.

This approach could be adopted by and incorporated into the state-district relationship to accelerate the construction of an improvement infrastructure. Proving Ground is currently working with a few states to do exactly that. The basic framework is that the states will support their districts by creating intrastate continuous-improvement networks of districts collectively engaged in both solving shared challenges and building capacity to solve future problems. Rather than try to build state capacity on short notice, the states will leverage Proving Ground's existing infrastructure and expertise to support the networks in the short term while Proving Ground will help build the states' capacity in the long term. Similarly, other established RPPs can leverage existing expertise and relationships to accelerate the creation of an improvement infrastructure.

It is therefore both practical and impactful to use RPPs as the cornerstone of enduring improvement efforts. By acting strategically and collaboratively now, states and districts can transform education improvement infrastructure across the country. With this new, evidence-generating infrastructure in place, educators will be in a position to spend far more of their time doing what they do best: finding new and better ways to prepare students for life after public education.

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Research Headlines From NNERPP Members: Last Quarter

ATTENDANCE

DETROIT EDUCATION RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP examines
-- Third grade reading and attendance in Detroit
-- Why Detroit students miss school

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

METRO ATLANTA POLICY LAB FOR EDUCATION
examines how career, technical, and agricultural education
course-taking varies by student and school characteristics

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

HOUSTON EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
examines wraparound needs

COMPUTER SCIENCE

CHICAGO ALLIANCE FOR EQUITY IN COMPUTER SCIENCE
examines the evolution of an instructional coaching program
for CS teachers in Chicago

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

REL MIDWEST
develops framework to evaluate the implementation of
Networked Improvement Communities

COVID-19

EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE
examines
--- Instructional delivery amid Covid-19 (January update)
--- Instructional delivery amid Covid-19 (February update)
--- Instructional delivery amid Covid-19 (March update)
--- Relationship between in-person schooling and the spread of
Covid-19

URBAN EDUCATION INSTITUTE
examines how five colleges responded to the sudden shift to
emergency distance learning

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

BOSTON P-3 RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP examines
-- When benefits of pre-K fadeout
-- Role of skill type in pre-K fadeout

EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE
examines early implementation and effects of Michigan's Read
by Grade Three Law

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, continued

HOUSTON EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
examines equity in access to pre-k

MADISON EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP
documents the creation of a professional development
series for math instruction for 4K teachers

NYC EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH NETWORK
examines early childhood educators' professional
development

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY
examines elementary school outcomes for Arkansas Better
Chance pre-K participants

REL MIDWEST
examines reading achievement in the early grades

REL NORTHEAST & ISLANDS
examines characteristics of universal prekindergarten
programs in Vermont

REL SOUTHWEST
examines student participation in state-funded pre-K in
Oklahoma

ENGLISH LEARNERS

METRO ATLANTA POLICY LAB FOR EDUCATION
examines the impact of an intensive English program

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY
examines outcomes for English learners attending Arkansas
Better Chance Pre-K

HIGH SCHOOL

HOUSTON EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
examines how course requirements for academic
endorsements in Texas high schools align with college
admissions requirements

POST-SECONDARY

EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW ORLEANS
examines the impact of school reforms on the quality of
colleges students attended

Research Headlines From NNERPP Members: Last Quarter, continued

POST-SECONDARY, continued

GARDNER CENTER
evaluates community foundations seeking to achieve
equitable college completion rates

REL MIDWEST
examines how Indiana students' college and career readiness
and early college success vary by type of high school
enrollment

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY
examines the influence of the timing of merit-aid receipt on
post-secondary outcomes

UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM
examines sources of two-year college data

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

REL NORTHWEST
examines changes in exclusionary and nonexclusionary
discipline practices in Oregon

STUDENT MOBILITY

HOUSTON EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM examines
-- Student mobility during the summer months
-- Student mobility during the school year
-- Student mobility within and between districts

STUDENTS

UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM
examines the education attainment of Chicago Public Schools
students

TEACHERS

EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW ORLEANS
examines what factors are associated with teacher mobility
within New Orleans

METRO ATLANTA POLICY LAB FOR EDUCATION
examines how principals make teacher hiring decisions

REL CENTRAL
·develops model that can predict teacher shortages
·examines how teachers use assessment data

REL MIDWEST
examines Indiana's teacher pipeline

End Notes