

Equitable Research-Practice Partnerships: A Multilevel Reimagining

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Abstract

Research-practice partnerships (RPPs) are a promising tool for producing educational research that supports sustainable and equitable school reform. However, the status quo in RPPs poses some challenges to the achievement of these admirable aims. We show the pervasiveness of these obstacles using institutional logics—historical patterns, practices, and systems used to make sense of our world (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). In fact, we argue neoliberal market, bureaucratic, and professional logics operate at the institutional, organizational, and individual levels to compromise the goal of using RPPs for equity. We then present a social justice logic for RPPs that interrogates inequity and strives for authentic, democratic resource allocation and inclusion. A social justice logic for partnerships suggests institutional consideration of activist participatory research traditions, organizational respect for the richness of community knowledge, and individual dialogue on partnering across intersectional identities. The framework we present and the futures we imagine call on RPP participants, supporters, and leaders to consider how they might reflect, reorganize, and redouble their commitment to creating the conditions for socially just RPPs to flourish.

Key words: research-practice partnerships, equity, social justice, institutional logics, school reform, multilevel analysis

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Modern educational systems are being asked to take on increasingly more roles and responsibilities. The demands range from creating ambitious learning environments to supporting access to healthcare and disrupting deeply-rooted racial inequities. Fortunately, one way of meeting these growing needs is using partnerships to unite researchers studying these issues with the students, families, educators, and out-of-school organizations working to improve outcomes for learners.

Partnership discourses in education have shifted from researchers and school districts merely cooperating for data access to research-practice partnerships (RPPs) that use authentic collaboration to promote equity (Coburn et al., 2013; Wagner, 1997). Since RPPs were first formally defined by Coburn et al. in 2013, they have been increasingly adopted as a tool to close the gap between the creation of research and the people who use it. Though traditionally *research* implied university and *partner* implied school district, now RPPs include research institutions like think tanks and practice institutions like nonprofits, museums, community organizations, and state education agencies (Arce-Trigatti, 2021; Arce-Trigatti et al., 2018). These changes in the structure of educational partnerships and the urgency of current social movements suggest the need to update our knowledge on RPPs.

Rising to meet this need, in July 2021, Farrell et al. interviewed partnership leaders and reviewed partnership studies to redefine a RPP in education as:

A long-term collaboration aimed at educational improvement or equitable transformation through engagement with research. These partnerships are intentionally organized to connect diverse forms of expertise and shift power relations in the research endeavor to ensure that all partners have a say in the joint work. (p. iv)

Although this definition of RPPs suggests equity, diversity, and equalizing power, institutions tend to maintain or exacerbate the inequities they set out to disrupt (Diamond, 2021; Lac & Fine, 2018; Warren, 2018). We use this conceptual paper to outline specific ways that institutions, organizations, and individuals may contribute to more equitable processes and outcomes in RPPs.

In order to establish our argument, we begin by outlining our theoretical framework on institutional logics—historical patterns, practices, and systems we use to make sense of our world. In the growing literature on RPPs, most of the scholarship has highlighted individual problems without considering the overarching sociological forces that connect these issues. So we conceptually review recurring challenges in the research practice partnership literature to develop a unifying framework through institutional logics. We demonstrate that the current state of affairs of market, bureaucratic, and professional logics have undermined the use of RPPs for equity at the institutional, organizational, and individual level. Each of these logics is shaped by neoliberal emphases on individualism, private sector solutions, and corporatizing previously shared public domains (Apple, 2017).

Our interrogation of current practices is intended to prompt conversation and action among the many actors committed to using RPPs to advance educational justice. Then we contrast these established power relations with an empowering social justice logic that reimagines RPPs as progressive structures that build upon established and adjacent research traditions, funds of local knowledge, and participants' intersectional identities. Our multilevel approach expands the existing literature while offering concrete ways institutions, organizations, and individuals can reimagine their own approach to partnership work. We entreat RPP leaders, advocates, and participants to join us by reading this article to identify an institutional rule to undermine, an organizational norm to change, or an individual posture to take.

Theoretical Framework

To theorize both the challenges and possibilities of research-practice partnerships as instruments of educational improvement and equitable transformation we draw on an institutional logics perspective. Institutional logics are “socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality” (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). These patterns of rules, practices, assumptions, values, and beliefs are drawn from dominant institutions in society, such as the market, democracy, the professions, the family, and the bureaucratic state (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Given their central role in society, educational institutions are connected to each of these dominant institutions—they act in place of parents, they prepare students for democratic and economic life, they are staffed by professionally educated teachers and administrators, and they must comply with laws and regulations from the state and federal government.

Dimensions of Institutional Logics

Given the possibility of seeing institutional logics everywhere, it can be powerful to examine the way logics operate in parts. In their seminal text on logics, Friedland and Alford (1991) write that social theory must consider the relationships between multiple levels of analysis: the institution, the organization, and the individual. The authors note that these levels are equally important and tied to each other.

In education, there are clear connections between multiple levels of institutional logics (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2013; Bridwell-Mitchell & Sherer, 2017; Neri et al., 2019; Yurkofsky, 2021). For example, a market logic can be observed in institutional accountability systems that reward and punish schools based on standardized test scores. A market logic may also shape the ways educators interact with one another in organizations (e.g., creating data walls that compare teachers' performance, or identifying students, teachers, or subject areas that require remediation) as well as individual teachers' taken for granted assumptions (e.g., that performance on standardized tests is the ultimate measure of effective instruction or that non-tested skills matter less). Similarly, RPPs can be studied by the way they operate across these units of analysis.

Institutional Level

The institutional level alerts us to the rules, resources, and incentives shaping the environment for RPP engagement. It highlights:

- policy landscapes (e.g., institutional review boards; federal, state, and local policies/laws);
- resource availability and control (e.g., grant funding); and
- incentives structures for RPP participation among research and practice partners.

A long line of research explores the interactions of institutions—including educational entities—with their environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Lemke & Sabelli, 2008; Meyer & Rowan, 1983). RPPs require external conditions that promote these nontraditional partnerships. In fact, much of the early growth of RPPs came from funding from the Institute of Education Sciences, an arm of the United States Department of Education (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). Understanding the institutional patterns and policy conditions that support effective RPPs can guide the intense work necessary to sustain the expanding field of partnerships. From their start, institutional logics have been political (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008).

Organizational Level

The organizational level consists of the differing norms and culture that shape research-practice partnerships and their members. This level of analysis captures variation in the organizing dimensions of RPPs (Farrell et al., 2021):

- goals (e.g., broad or content specific, agenda setting power);
- conceptions of equitable processes and ends;
- composition (e.g., number of partners; inclusion of teachers, district leaders, professors, administrators);
- methods (e.g., descriptive, evaluative, collaborative design);
- duration and timing of collaborative work; and
- views of appropriate roles (e.g., researcher/practitioner responsibilities, norms on critiquing practice, approaches to charged political questions).

Scholarship on RPPs often focuses on the organizational level. Notably, Penuel et al. (2015) go beyond an understanding of research-practice relations as translational and unidirectional to organizing joint work across boundaries. Further, Farrell et al. (2019) highlight organizational challenges to the operation of productive RPPs: technical concerns such as data-sharing agreements, social dynamics like trust, communication challenges between actors with different vocabularies, and status dynamics that impact decision making. Given the focused coalition work required to change the institutional environment and the turnover of individual actors, it is necessary to explore issues of power in RPPs through the lens of organizational actors and their interactions.

Individual Level

Finally, the individual level consists of personal practices and below-the-surface assumptions that shape one's behavior even when they are not stated (Yurkofsky, 2020). Often these beliefs mirror dominant institutions in society. These person-level factors include (Wentworth et al., 2021):

- beliefs (e.g., understanding of ability, hierarchy, and pedagogy);
- identities (e.g., race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, institutional affiliation);
- competencies (e.g., research training, project management, communication); and
- individual relationships with research and practice organizations and their members.

From their initial conception, RPPs have been framed as incredibly relational and reliant on trust (Coburn et al., 2013). Traditionally, partnerships have been approached as

interpersonal rather than interorganizational, making them especially vulnerable to the transitions of actors in rapidly changing educational settings (Dhillon, 2009; Farrell et al., 2018). Although partnerships’ reliance on influential brokers makes them more fragile, it also makes it easier to improve partnerships through individual-level interventions. Thus, many efforts around RPP improvement have focused on training participants for partnership work and many measured RPP outcomes have focused on changes in individual attitudes (Conaway, 2019; Farrell et al., 2018; Wentworth et al., 2021). Considering the ways logics might be enacted by individuals is especially instructive in pressing RPP participants to consider their personal responsibilities to foster more just partnerships.

In the sections that follow, we outline our conceptual approach and then draw on the institutional logics perspective to theorize both the challenges facing RPPs and to reimagine alternative possibilities. In particular, we will show how the vision of RPPs as instruments of educational improvement and equitable transformation can conflict with the status quo of market, bureaucratic, and professional logics that operate across institutional rules and expectations, organizational interactions and norms, and individual taken-for-granted assumptions. We then sketch a vision for how RPPs might take up a social justice logic: working across multiple levels to create conditions for more equitable and transformative partnership work.

Methods

Previous scholarship demonstrates that there are many challenges facing research-practice partnerships, but few coherent explanations for why these challenges persist. Rather than embark on a comprehensive review of all of the obstacles with a documented impact on RPPs, we instead used our experience as partnership researchers to direct our conceptual overview of issues preventing the enactment of equitable RPPs, using partnerships that center equity as our guide (Vetter et al., 2022). Our approach allows us to lay out a framework that can be extended to other partnership challenges and solutions.

Status Quo in Research-Practice Partnerships

	Institutional	Organizational	Individual
Market Logic	Rigid incentive structures	Inadequate training to work in partnerships	Discouraging curiosity
Bureaucratic Logic	Burdensome compliance requirements	Uneven patterns of participation	Inadequate attention to power dynamics
Professional Logic	Researcher-led funding structures	Overlooking descriptive research	Claiming objectivity
Social Justice Logic	Learning at the boundaries of other traditions	Honoring local contexts	Intersectional analysis

Table 1. Multilevel approach to analyzing logics and RPPs.

Market Logic

Central to capitalism is the operation of flexible markets that center choice, assuming that the invisible hand will direct resources to the best products and ideas. A market logic assumes that individuals “are instrumentally rational, that they evaluate their participation in social relationships based upon the costs and benefits they impose upon them” (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 234). This logic presumes the transaction is the key unit of analysis (Thornton et al., 2012).

In education, a market logic takes for granted that parents have enough information to make the best decisions when choosing among an assortment of schools for their children, teachers increase test scores when incentivized with bonuses, and out-of-school programs that have the most participants also host the most engaging programming. We argue that this logic undermines the goal of educational equity in research-practice partnerships because markets fail to give enough attention to: institutions valuing the work of coordinating RPPs, organizations training RPP participants for the work, and individuals developing curious mindsets.

Institutional: Rigid Incentive Structures

Both research and practice partners have some incentive to participate in RPPs. For researchers, these partnerships can result in publication opportunities, grant funding, or community recognition. Meanwhile, practice organizations can benefit from the research RPPs produce to inform decisions, evaluate programs and policies, expand their conceptual understanding, and gain legitimacy for their initiatives (Penuel et al., 2017). However, researcher incentives centering outcomes do not honor the coordination costs of equitable, sustainable partnerships. In particular, the relatively fast pace of practitioners’ work might lead to difficulties aligning with slower academic publishing timelines (Farrell et al., 2018). These conflicting needs can result in partnerships that fail, buckling under the weight of labor unrecognized by institutions.

Conaway (2019) urges universities seeking to maximize research use to “reconsider the balance of how different types of output are valued by their institutions” (p. 8). She correspondingly prompts “policy and practice organizations [to] shift from [a conception of] organizations that *do* to organizations that *learn*” (p. 7), inviting institutions to move beyond a transactional market logic to an actionable belief that inclusive partnership research processes are inherently valuable.

Organizational: Inadequate Partnership Training

Within organizations, higher education publishing incentives have led most research training to neglect the skills and dispositions necessary for collaborative partnership work. More recently, scholars have noted that researchers preparing to work in partnerships should use coursework, projects, and mentorship to develop attitudes of shared responsibility and abilities including collaborative problem solving and accessible communication (Davidson et al., 2020). Historically, practice-side organizations have made many of the concessions necessary for education research (Wagner, 1997). Thus, many practitioners have some familiarity with research participation, but less experience navigating the tensions that come when partnerships are based on equity. Building the capacity to increase evidence use will require thoughtful practitioner training (Conaway, 2019; Crain-Dorough & Elder, 2021).

Despite these clear steps needed to move RPPs forward, market perspectives lead research institutions to deprioritize the development of skills not immediately connected to publication and lead overburdened practice partners to sideline research use to meet immediate needs. Institutional shifts are necessary to entirely transform the landscape for RPPs, but even under a market logic, organizations can start to move the needle by investing in training that increases the market value of partnership research (e.g., Stanford Certificate Program in Partnership Research in Education; Stanford Graduate School of Education, 2021).

Individual: Discouraging Curiosity

One of the most damaging consequences of a market logic is discouraging curiosity through a narrow focus on outcomes. Historically considered a luxury of university scholars, only well-resourced elites were given the space to theorize. Even within research communities, applied research has been prioritized over the exploration of fundamental questions (Hanley, 2005). Just as the deeper learning movement has tried to create spaces for critical thinking for youth (Noguera et al., 2015), RPPs have the opportunity to democratize inquiry by recognizing the value of process, honoring the ideas raised by all participants, leaving space to imagine futures that are not yet practical, and challenging the twenty-first century snowballing of the educational cult of efficiency (Callahan, 1964; Peurach et al., 2021; Tseng et al., 2017).

Bureaucratic Logic

Weber (1978) proposes bureaucracy to be the most efficient and equitable system of organization because people with the greatest technical knowledge will rule rather than those elevated to leadership through connections. A bureaucratic organizing logic builds on these concepts to expect that government intervention best meets the needs of citizens and serves the collective good.

Within educational contexts, a bureaucratic logic might suppose that a national curriculum would most precisely meet the academic needs of students, the government should regulate the operation of educational nonprofits, and philanthropic funding for schools is less efficient than consistent taxation. We argue that a bureaucratic logic inadequately promotes the goals of research-practice partnerships because institutional compliance does not meet community needs, organizational decision-making insufficiently includes partner populations, and individual power dynamics are not given enough attention.

Institutional: Burdensome Compliance Requirements

With good reason, Institutional Review Boards (IRB) are the standard tool for academic organizations to ensure the safety of research participants. These research processes are designed to make sure projects are ethically implemented (American Education Research Association Council, 2011). But unfortunately, compliance structures can also be used to discourage the use of less-standard partnership methods or unique forms of qualitative data. In an effort to disrupt how compliance can perpetuate marginalization and exclusion, institutions should review their IRB process. For example, Harlow and Skinner (2020), worked with their IRB to determine multiple paths to gain parental consent for childrens' participation in research at their partner museum. Additionally, RPPs have to consider partner organizations' compliance structures. For example, often school districts have procedures for protecting student data (e.g., the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), are narrowly

focused on programs in their strategic plan (Muñoz, 2016), and approach problems in ways that do not meet community needs (Turner, 2015).

Compliance systems were developed to standardize requirements across a rapidly growing number of organizations. However, bureaucratic compliance more closely represents an institutional need for regulation and an organizational need for legal protection than a community need for ethical safeguards. Instead, community monitoring can protect vulnerable populations while meeting more immediate needs.

Organizational: Uneven Patterns of Participation

Decision making within a RPP is dependent upon both who has the power to make decisions and who is even at the table when those decisions are being made. Booker et al. (2019) call out “excluding critical partners from the table” as one path to RPP failure (p. 5). Including people from groups who will be impacted by the research implementation or findings provides an opportunity to disrupt the status quo. Setting research goals, determining methods, and defining roles are all processes that can benefit from an expanded pool of decision makers. The forward-looking vision of RPPs as “intentionally organized to connect diverse forms of expertise” and thoughtfully designed to “ensure that all partners have a say in the joint work” rejects symbolic inclusion to suggest diverse participants have *real* decision making power like the power given to traditionally empowered partners (i.e., researchers and school district leaders; Farrell et al., 2021, p. iv). Meaningful access to decision making may require using new strategies (e.g., policy briefs across multiple languages, plain language discussions on the implications of various methodological approaches). Nevertheless, replacing central bureaucratic decision-making with inclusive participatory approaches holds promise for RPPs.

Individual: Inadequate Attention to Power Dynamics

Included in the updated definition of RPPs is a call to “shift power relations in the research endeavor” (Farrell et al., 2021, p. iv). A traditional bureaucratic organizing logic relies on status hierarchies that are contrary to RPP aims. Tearing down these long-standing patterns of social ordering in partnership practice requires explicit attention to interpersonal power relations. Considering power in roles is challenging since status is related to partner identity, organizational affiliation, and educational background in ever-changing ways (Coburn et al., 2008). Farrell et al. (2019) found that 25 percent of leadership team meeting segments involved role negotiation, even six years into a partnership. These findings and the tendency to return to bureaucratic norms suggest that discussions of power relations should be ongoing, led by progressive leaders committed to enacting equity as a means—not only an end—of RPPs.

Professional Logic

The turn of the twentieth-century and the rise of scientific management brought on a wave of specialization in employee roles and an increase in the number of managers needed to organize work (Chandler, 1977; Taylor, 1911). Following these advances, a professional logic relies on relational networks (Thornton et al., 2012), the filtering of personnel through norms, and “the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152).

A professional logic in education is seen in requirements for teacher credentials, out-of-school organizations valuing employee referrals, and schools mandating parent education courses. We find that centering professionalism is not enough to elevate educational justice

through research-practice partnerships because this logic promotes an institutional emphasis on research organizations controlling funding; an organizational dependence on academically appropriate, rather than community-initiated, methods; and an individual focus of objectivity.

Institutional: Researcher-Led Funding Structures

Often, institution-affiliated researchers are awarded funding that guides the focus of RPPs, fundamentally shifting the balance of funding away from practice-side partners. Righting this imbalance could involve funding agencies rotating their calls so that they are directed towards practice partners and then research partners. This realignment could help narrow the gap between research and practice communities (Farley-Ripple et al., 2018). Such variations in these calls would require shifting grant application requirements so they could be reasonably met by practitioners without excessive demands on their already constrained time. Nevertheless, decentering researchers in partnership funding is worthwhile in that it could deemphasize what has become a professionalized domain of grant writing and management (Arce-Trigatti & Spitzley, 2020).

Organizational: Overlooking Descriptive Research

Another disconnect between practitioners and researchers is how to analyze and communicate their findings. Researchers often rely on advanced statistical methods which are seen as their gold-standard (Booker et al., 2019; Klingner et al., 2013; Loeb et al., 2017; Penuel, Riedy, et al., 2020). On the other hand, school boards and the community at large value narratives and storytelling (i.e., descriptive research). Equitable RPPs must address *all* stakeholder needs. Descriptive data can be directly connected to the local context and goals, thus elevating practitioner needs as equal to researcher needs (Booker et al., 2019; Penuel, Farrell, et al., 2020). The shift to empower diverse forms of analysis requires more than just an organizational reimagining; it requires researchers to change their profession's privileging of advanced analytic strategies (Crain-Dorough & Elder, 2021).

Individual: Claiming Objectivity

Academic research has celebrated a claim of objectivity that hides the impact of implicit bias. Philosophically rooted in the Enlightenment's emphasis on scientific reasoning, positivism believes that knowledge exists outside of the self and is unchangeable once proven (Alkove & McCarty, 1992). In this tradition, claiming to find a single truth has been made a marker of the professional academic. If RPP participants believe that data are neutral and not political, marginalization and inequality can be reproduced. Further, participants who unnecessarily venerate objectivity may be operating in opposition to the equity work being done by many educational practitioners (Lenhoff et al., 2020). Instead, we recommend RPP participants take the time to develop relationships (Penuel, Farrell, et al., 2020; Penuel, Riedy, et al., 2020), determine success metrics relevant to the RPP and their respective organizations (Booker et al., 2019), and build competencies to meet the needs of their partners towards shared meaning making (Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017).

Reimagining Research-Practice Partnerships

Diamond (2021) reflects on Farrell et al.'s (2021) update to the field of research-practice partnerships with a warning that without attention to institutional histories, power asymmetries, and racialized organizational routines, RPPs will "[reproduce] the very inequities many claim to challenge" (p. 3). We take up Diamond's challenge by imagining

change that could create more equitable structures at each level of the RPP ecosystem through the introduction of a social justice logic.

Social Justice Logic

The social justice logic differs from those introduced previously as it did not emerge in the first decade of scholarship on institutional logics and is clearly based on a long lineage of progressive ideals. Karenga (1988) argues that social justice is a Black American tradition. Leaders from Anna Julia Cooper to Malcolm X have used ethical criticism of societal contradictions to press for moral and progressive social reform. Bogotch (2002) motivates a focus on social justice using Dewey's conception of education as progressive, expansive, and necessary for democratic community. Gewirtz (1998) presents a two-pronged conceptualization of social justice that has a Rawlsian distributive component (i.e., fair allocation of resources towards equality of opportunity or outcomes) and a holistic relational component (i.e., collective processes of resource allocation that level historical power imbalances). Defining social justice in education, Tuck and Yang (2018) write:

Social justice is a way to mark a distinction from the origins and habits of almost all disciplines which emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries and are rooted in colonialism and white supremacy ... People who use social justice as a signal about what their work engages with understand that inequities are produced, inequities are structured, and that things have got to change in order to achieve different educational outcomes. (p. 4-5)

In its construction, a social justice logic confronts the core assumptions of market, bureaucratic, and professional logics. While a market logic celebrates the invisible hand of markets, a social justice logic argues that oppressive structures like settler colonialism, White supremacy, and anti-Blackness are *invisibilized* to further their negative impacts. Though bureaucratic logic centralizes power through hierarchy, a social justice logic stresses "the moral use of power . . . [to] challenge structures built upon the so-called neutrality of objective reality" (Bogotch, 2002, p. 140). Lastly, whereas a professional logic relies on formalized systems of knowledge and relational networks to give authority, a social justice logic recognizes that these relationships default to reflecting the inequity of the world in which they are set.

School leaders who employ a social justice logic focus on process, build inclusive learning structures (i.e., without tracking or pull-out), emphasize the value of educator reflection and learning, and shift from blaming students, families, and communities to identifying ways educators and schools can better meet student needs (Rigby, 2014; Woulfin & Weiner, 2019). The core belief of a social justice logic in education is to abolish existing systems of unbalanced resource allocation and disempowerment to create an equitable environment. The practices we outline below suggest that social justice is a promising organizing logic for RPPs.

Institutional: Learning at the Boundaries of Other Traditions

RPPs are intended to bring diverse perspectives *and* diverse community-based methodological traditions to the table (Farrell et al., 2021; Wilson, 2021). For example, Participatory Action Research (PAR) combines both theory and practice to enable communities and researchers to act and reflect collaboratively (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

PAR rejects the notion of objectivity through researcher distance, instead connecting social movements with academic scholarship (Fine, 2013). Youth participatory action research goes even further by equipping often overlooked young people to critically question and address issues in their lives and communities (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Similarly, participatory design research envisions co-design with few distinctions between researcher, participant, theorist, and designer (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). In the same tradition, teacher solidarity co-design merges co-design and participatory research so that teachers and researchers share in “collaborative relationships that were forged in and through racially and power conscious co-participation and co-theorizing” (Philip et al., 2022, p. 72).

Participants in RPPs need not set out to reimagine their partnerships alone. Though a bureaucratic logic might imply otherwise, a social justice logic suggests research and practice leaders—not just those they lead—have much to learn (Dewey, 1910). Tapping into the wisdom of grassroots organizers, frontline activists, and longtime agitators can help remove RPPs from operating solely in the domain of academic norms. Black social justice leaders have put together activism and intellectual work, recognizing scholars shaped and were shaped by social movements (Kelley, 2002). Partnership participants attempting to advance transformative educational futures should follow their lead.

Organizational: Honoring Local Contexts

RPPs are often place-based, but rarely give enough attention to the cultural, historic, political, and economic realities of the geography where they are based. A professional logic would suggest only giving attention to context when it is relevant to larger theoretical questions, but the hyphen connecting research and practice in RPP suggests a connection that deserves respect.

Honoring local contexts could take the form of an RPP orientation workshop required for new members of the RPP. An intentionally-organized orientation could elevate the injustices and conflicts that define the partnership’s projects and goals in a specific community. This contextual introduction could elevate the voices of elders, youth, and other historically marginalized populations. Such an orientation should also include explicit discussions of race (e.g., how the race of RPP participants shapes their interactions) and the impacts of systemic racism on the community. Establishing this practice in organizations could show new entrants the value of local knowledge, fill partnership participants with a humility for the limited—though important—role of research in effecting social change, and make clear the partnership’s commitment to socially just outcomes and processes.

Beyond honoring local history, socially just RPPs should embrace different ways of knowing. A socially just RPP must ensure that when historically underrepresented participants are invited into research, they are not required to leave their unique perspectives behind (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). In other words, we have to reject diversity without inclusion. Equity conjecture mapping is a promising tool for embracing diverse ideas by bringing together participants’ definitions of equity and how equity can be promoted through design (Lee et al., 2022). A socially just RPP can empower new and experienced RPP participants to reject historical institutional constraints to create environments abundant with dignity and care (Philip et al., 2022).

Individual: Intersectional Analysis

Discussions of power, role negotiation, and authority have a small, but growing, space in the RPP literature (Coburn et al., 2008; Farrell et al., 2019, 2021). Yet, these

considerations have often failed to consider the ways historically disadvantaged identities interact to shape the way individuals experience the world (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality is not an identity (e.g., an intersectional identity as a disabled Black immigrant woman), but an analysis of ways one's identities of disadvantage connect to *power* (Sen, 2021). Individuals using a social justice logic to RPP engagement will not just seek one type of diversity in partnership participants (e.g., roles, gender, social class), but will recognize the importance of learning from the ways those identities provide different lenses through which to see research and design challenges (Penuel et al., 2022).

Equitable RPPs require a safe and collaborative environment where the norm is to call in and call out all forms of injustice towards individuals and their communities with a commitment to moving towards solidarity. In fact, rather than trying to dull the rich identities of partnership participants, differences can be used to generate exciting new ideas (Tabak, 2022). Though there will be ongoing tension in a partnership of individuals with varied life experiences, balance can be maintained through a shared commitment to a socially just partnership. Having transparent, justice-oriented individual reflection and group conversation about the impact of participants' intersectional identities can help shape an anti-racist RPP. This personal contemplation and collective dialogue should not be a one-time event but rather a recursive process that rejects the market logic's haste to revisit these important considerations time and time again.

Conclusion

Diamond's (2021) critical prompt guides our reimagining—pressing the conversation forward with limited attention to implementation challenges. Often, practical considerations lead to creative solutions collapsing into boring realities. However, the unprecedented public health measures and medical advances initiated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are evidence that with concentrated effort the previously unimaginable can come to pass. As offered by Friedland and Alford (1991), “the institutional nature of power provides specific opportunities for not only reproduction, but transformation as well” (p. 254).

We have illustrated how a transactional market logic, hierarchical bureaucratic logic, and exclusionary professional logic can perpetuate systems of injustice in RPPs, and have described what it might look like to re-imagine partnership work at the individual, organizational, and institutional level around an equity-centered social justice logic. In describing recent work on how to organize partnerships around social justice, we offer some pathways forward for collaborating partners: having explicit discussions about intersectional identities, developing organizational routines that center the value of local context, and provoking larger-scale institutional shifts in line with community-led activist traditions.

Our hope is that this framework can be a useful tool for those seeking to make partnership work more just and equitable. We can envision researchers and practitioners collaboratively drawing on this framework to make visible the values and assumptions they bring to partnership work. They might reflect on how these competing assumptions might generate (or are generating) conflict or tension at the individual and organizational level, and what the sources of these conflicts are in the broader institutional environment. Recognizing that specific problems actually come from persistent and powerful environmental and historical forces—not simply troublesome individuals or organizations—may help foster more critical and honest discussions about emerging conflicts and tensions.

Creating a world in which social justice is the foundation for all RPPs will require creative solutions and incredible resolve in the face of stubborn patterns of inequity. In the

spirit of collaborative community, we revisit our call to readers, asking each of us to take up a piece of this tremendous task. Despite the challenges ahead, cultivating educational partnerships that support emancipatory ideals is worth every effort.

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