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Chee-Kit Looi,
Joseph Polman,
Ulrike Cress, and
Peter Reimann

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Organizing Design-Based Implementation Research in Research-Practice Partnerships: A Workshop

William R. Penuel, University of Colorado Boulder, william.penuel@colorado.edu
Philip A. Bell, University of Washington, pbell@uw.edu
Alain Breuleux, McGill University, alain.breuleux@mcgill.ca
Elizabeth Charles, Dawson College, echarleswoods@gmail.com
Barry J. Fishman, University of Michigan, fishman@umich.edu
Therese Laferrière, University of Laval, Therese.Laferriere@fse.ulaval.ca
Susan McKenney, University of Twente, S.E.Mckenney@utwente.nl

Abstract: This workshop focused on organizing equitable design processes and promoting the agency of educators at different levels of systems in conducting design research inside a research-practice partnership. Members of research groups from three different regions of North America and Europe offered cross-national perspectives on designing with educational organizations and will engage participants directly in curating resources teams can use to organize research and development efforts in partnerships.

Rationale for the workshop

The learning sciences have long embraced collaborative design as a feature of design research (Brown, 1992; Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, & Schauble, 2003; Druin et al., 1999; Roschelle et al., 1999; Voogt et al., 2015). Collaborative design within research-practice partnerships presents both expanded possibilities and new challenges. Research-practice partnerships are long-term collaborations between practitioners and researchers that are organized to investigate problems of practice and solutions for improving the outcomes of educational systems (Coburn, Penuel, & Geil, 2013). On the one hand, they have the potential for broader impacts, because designs aim to impact practice in larger systems and networks (Cobb, Jackson, Smith, Sorum, & Henrick, 2013). In addition, they have potential to develop important “context theories” related to learning (Edelson, 2002), focused specifically on the conditions for broad and equitable implementation of innovations. At the same time, such partnerships demand more up-front negotiation of the problems that will become the focus of collaborative design (Penuel, Coburn, & Gallagher, 2013). In addition, they require organizing partnerships to address concerns across multiple levels of systems and settings where differences of power and inequity deserve attention (Bang, Medin, Washinawatok, & Chapman, 2010).

Workshop goals

There were three major goals pursued in the workshop, as described below.

Workshop Goal 1: To provide participants with heuristics and models for how to organize collaborative design within research-practice partnerships

A broad range of theoretical perspectives is necessary to inform collaborative design in partnerships. The workshop organizers draw on theories of curricular design (Ben-Peretz, 1990; van den Akker, 1999), social practice theory (Dreier, 2009), and cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström, 1987; Engeström & Sannino, 2010) to inform the design of learning environments. In addition, the group draws on theories of organization and leadership (e.g., Hopkins, Spillane, Jakopovic, & Heaton, 2013) to inform work to design supports for implementation and theories of participatory design (e.g., Ehn, Nilsson, & Topgaard, 2014) to structure collaborative design.

Workshop Goal 2: To share, in the context of the workshop, how these theories inform design decisions in our research, illustrating their potential value for building knowledge and developing theory in the learning sciences

Collaborative design has strong connections to the conference theme. In order to “re-design learning environments to bring about deep learning,” partnerships with educators are crucial. Teachers, informal educators, and leaders of educational organizations each inhabit places and hold keys to changing these environments. In addition, the research methods we will highlight will help us “better assess the extent to which educational institutions have shifted towards deep learning in their pedagogical approaches.” The workshop will offer practical methods for assessing implementation and effects on students that partnerships can use.

Workshop Goal 3: To provide a context for articulating what is new about these new forms of design research and also to contribute to the evolution of design research as a signature approach within the learning sciences

Because a commitment to collaborative design has been part of design research since its inception, it is important to characterize what is unique about design within long-term partnerships with educators. The workshop will therefore highlight the implications of shifting to design across levels of a system and across multiple settings and including stakeholders from multiple levels of a system in design.

Workshop structure and agenda

The structure of the workshop was organized around a learning cycle that mirrors a cycle of joint work within a research-practice partnership. It began by surfacing the ideas and perspectives of participants and leaders about the challenges and opportunities inherent in conducting collaborative design research in partnerships. Program leaders shared resources they use to address challenges and opportunities in partnerships in two different formats, whole group panel discussions and small-group mini-roundtable discussions. We then invited workshop participants to raise new questions and identify new or refined needs for engaging in partnership work. The concluding part of the workshop provided opportunities for leaders to disperse to small groups to initiate a resource curation activity that leaders from the Research+Practice Collaboratory (<http://researchandpractice.org>), a clearinghouse for resources related to partnerships, will continue after the workshop.

Table 1: Agenda for the workshop

Time	Activity	Description and Rationale
9:00	Introduction and Initial Ideas	Participants and leaders introduced themselves, their reasons for participating in the workshop, and their ideas about the challenges and opportunities inherent in DBIR within partnerships. Workshop leaders led a discussion to surface themes, differences, and contradictions among perspectives voiced.
10:15	Panel Discussion	Penuel led a panel discussion among the leaders related to several key themes that are common to our work: identifying a focus of joint work or the “germ cell” (Engestrom & Greeno, 2015) to guide work; the challenges of working across levels of a system; the roles of partners; addressing turnover and induction of new members; the need for rapid feedback; and integration of higher education institutions. The panel also addressed tensions and contradictions identified in the introductory session.
11:00	Break	
11:15	Presentation	Bell led a brief presentation on the different lines of work in partnerships.

Table 1: Agenda for the workshop (concluded).

Time	Activity	Description and Rationale
11:30	Participant-Driven Discussion	During this part of the workshop, we invited participants to share their experiences of partnerships and pose new questions and challenges related to partnerships that have arisen from the morning panel and discussion. We recorded these ideas and return to them to help organize afternoon sessions.
12:00	Lunch	
1:00	Rapid Roundtable Discussion	What we called a “rapid roundtable” discussion provided an opportunity for participants to rotate through different “stations” led by workshop presenters about key tools and resources they find useful to their work. All participants had a chance to rotate through all five stations.
2:00	Presentation	Leaders gave a brief presentation of 1-2 theoretical perspectives they find uniquely relevant to work in research-practice partnerships.
2:15	Break	
2:30	Resource Curation Activity	McKenney led an activity in which she (1) synthesized different challenges identified, with input from the group, (2) helped the group organize into smaller groups to focus on specific challenges, (3) facilitated small groups in identifying and beginning to assemble (links to) resources that could help partnerships address these challenges, and (4) led a brief report out to conclude the workshop. Subsequent to the workshop, Bell and Penuel, PIs for the R+P Collaboratory, took over curation of these resources on the Collaboratory website.

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