

What Is It Like to Do Community-Engaged Research? Lessons Learned From University Researchers' Perspectives

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Abstract

Community-engaged research calls on us to rethink ourselves as researchers and to address lopsided researcher-researched relationships. As a group of university researchers, we participated in a research-practice partnership that included a research-intensive university, an internationally recognized professional learning network, a ministry of education funder, and a school district in Alberta, Canada. Despite the long-standing, collaborative relationships between these organizations, a spin-off research partnership slid into traditional research practices that limited the project's potential. To critically reflect on these events, we engaged in eight cogenenerative dialogues and three semistructured interviews to examine key moments in the partnership more closely. Our findings highlight how limitations in our fields of view as well as significant changes at crucial points in the partnership affected our ability to engage in sustained community-engaged research. We discuss critical learnings about this partnership in particular and offer recommendations that will help future research-practice partnerships assess and sustain their collaborations in meaningful ways.

Introduction

Research activities have traditionally been characterized by lopsided relationships between researchers and those who are researched. Whether from historical (Patel, 2016; Smith, 2012), decolonial (Battiste, 2013a; Patel, 2016; Smith, 2012), epistemological (Glass & Newman, 2015), or relational perspectives (Armer et al., 2020), many researchers now recognize the need to reposition ourselves with reference to these historical relationships and researcher dispositions. Community-engaged research in particular calls on us to do so. In this article, we examine a research-practice partnership between a research-intensive university, a professional learning network (PLN), a school district partner, and a ministry of education funding partner (Friesen & Brown, 2021), focusing specifically on a spin-off research project that developed within the parent project. As Ahlberg et al. (2016) and Jagosh et al. (2015) have explained, spin-off research projects evolve from within larger research-practice partnerships because of "the trust built and maintained over time" and a desire to sustain mutually beneficial relationships (Jagosh et al., 2015, p. 6). Despite a long-standing, successful relationship between the parent project's partners (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017), the spin-off project reproduced many tropes of traditional research paradigms. In examining this partnership, we consider the principles of community-engaged

research and how they may lead to more fulsome professional learning and knowledge production in the future (Glass & Newman, 2015).

Background Literature

Perhaps unsurprisingly, research is constituted through the sociohistorical values and assumptions of those in power. These assumptions have become so tacit and unquestioned in many articulations of research and knowledge production that they are difficult to notice until they are interrupted by those who dare to do something different. As noted above, recent critical interruptions have caused us to notice the assumptions underlying research. Beyond the problematic ways in which social science research has been used to divide and categorize the world through an emphasis on rationality and logic (Connell, 2019; Patel, 2016; Smith, 2012; Tuck, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2014), the metanarrative of social science research is premised on ordered, predictable rules and control (Connell, 2019; Koro-Ljungberg, 2016; Law, 2004; Patel, 2016).

Questions arising from this body of research include: How are research participants positioned within research—in relation to cultures and values, sociohistorically, epistemically, and ethically? What assumptions about who knows and where knowledge resides underpin participants' positioning? Who gets to determine

the direction and purpose of research? How do we as researchers come to know what is important to the community we wish to work with? How do we respond to and care for community members' needs? Thinking about the communities we might work with, what is our relationship, what are our assumptions about "our" relationship with "them," and what unquestioned assumptions and dispositions do we harbor?

Even if we work with the assumption that research primarily happens in the university (Glass & Newman, 2015; Patel, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2014), the structures that emphasize individual researchers obfuscate the "collective enterprise of constructing new knowledge" (Connell, 2019, p. 19). For example, many institutional review boards and funding agencies require a singular principal investigator who takes full responsibility for the research (Glass & Newman, 2015; Patel, 2016). Similar divides appear in the ownership of knowledge in academic publishing (Connell, 2019; Limes-Taylor Henderson & Esposito, 2019; Patel, 2016) and in the unequal benefits (e.g., tenure and promotion) accrued by those identified as researchers and those who are researched, even when the goal of the research is to enact change in, with, or for communities (Limes-Taylor Henderson & Esposito, 2019; Pelias, 2004; Smith, 2012; Sparkes, 2007). Such individualistic, "we research, you participate" systems foreclose possibilities for other ways of doing research (Connell, 2019; Glass & Newman, 2015; Patel, 2016). Community-engaged research is often much messier: Research questions and processes evolve as partners offer new insights (Beni, 2021; Clark et al., 2007), stakeholders negotiate and reexamine how each team member's expertise and agency will contribute to the partnership (Percy-Smith et al., 2019), and changes in the partnership landscape mean that preconceived objectives may not always fit partners' evolving needs (O'Neill, 2016).

Prevailing systems of research often implicitly encourage researchers to hide or minimize this "messiness," risking an impression that all research fits into discrete categories that are always successful *ab initio* (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Fitzgerald et al., 2021). In contrast, community-engaged research is explicitly collaborative in its focus on relationships, trust, and mutual understanding (Glass & Newman, 2015; Williamson et al., 2016). Glass and Newman (2015) positioned community-engaged research as an ethical imperative because actively engaging

communities in research shifts who is involved in research and how that research is manifested (p. 23). In this way, community-engaged research responds to long-standing critiques that faculty "are often far removed from the world of practice" (Henrick et al., 2017, p. 1), rarely reach the communities they study, and often fail to address community concerns (Coburn et al., 2021).

There are many ways to do community-engaged research, including community-university partnerships (Williamson et al., 2016), school-university partnerships (Maheady et al., 2016), tripartite partnerships (Friesen & Brown, 2021), collaborative community-based research (Glass & Newman, 2015), community-based participatory research (Armer et al., 2020), and translational research (Abodeeb-Gentile et al., 2016), among others. These approaches rely on different theoretical frameworks, epistemologies, and metaphors (Penuel et al., 2015). A translational research framework, for example, suggests that successful research "depends on the effective translation of research into practice that has an immediate impact" (Abodeeb-Gentile et al., 2016, p. 2). Translational research sometimes assumes that knowledge exists in the form of research findings that must be "translated" and "transmitted" to the public, who in turn consume and apply this knowledge in "the real world" (Williamson et al., 2016). Penuel and colleagues (2015) have been particularly critical of such framings, arguing that "the translation metaphor and its associated images of pipelines and invention factories provide ... an impoverished way of thinking about the relation of research and practice" (p. 183). Indeed, one of the commonalities across community-engaged research frameworks is the tendency to recognize that partnerships must be relational, iterative, and ethical beyond the bare minimum of research ethics clearance (Glass & Newman, 2015).

As researchers in a faculty of education, we find ourselves drawn to research-practice partnerships as a specific form of community-engaged research (Brown, 2021b). Coburn and Penuel (2016) have described research-practice partnerships as "long-term collaborations between practitioners and researchers that are organized to investigate problems of practice and solutions for improving schools and school districts" (p. 48). Importantly, "collaboration" does not necessarily mean "partnership." Faculties may work with community partners without necessarily relinquishing control of their own teaching or research agendas (Glass & Newman,

2015; Maheady et al., 2016). True research-practice partnerships must benefit researchers, their partners, and the communities that these groups serve; community-engaged research inherently focuses on working together to advance outcomes for *all* parties (Abodeeb-Gentile et al., 2016; Brown, 2021b; Penuel & Gallagher, 2017).

Coburn and Penuel (2016) presented research-practice partnerships as “mutualistic” relationships in which participants cocreate processes and norms for working together. Penuel and colleagues (2015) similarly suggested that research-practice partnerships involve practices at and across boundaries where researchers and practitioners learn how to operate differently. Such framings directly contrast with conceptions of knowledge “translation” or the research-to-practice “pipeline” (Penuel et al., 2015). Rather than relying on scholars to generate research questions in isolation (Armer et al., 2020; Glass & Newman, 2015), research-practice partnerships involve both researchers and community stakeholders in a process of “sustained collaborative inquiry” (Coburn et al., 2021, p. 17). These distinctions between traditional research paradigms and community-engaged research are relevant to our examination of our own research-practice partnership, which we describe in the following section.

The Research-Practice Partnership

Between January and June 2016, leaders from a school district in Alberta, Canada, a PLN, and a university partnered to offer a design-based professional learning (DBPL) series (Brown et al., 2020; Friesen & Brown, 2020; Friesen & Jacobsen, 2015). Sharon recalled that the creation of this series was deeply collaborative: “We worked really closely with [three community leaders] ... we designed all of the professional learning sessions with them, and all three of them were involved in various aspects of teaching that.” The DBPL series represented one collaboration and project between these partners; however, it is important to note that the PLN has had formalized relationships with both the university and the school district since the late 1990s. After high interest in the first offering, a second cohort participated in the DBPL series during the 2017–2018 school year. Following the two series, in early 2018, a research team was assembled to ask those who participated in the DBPL series about their post-professional learning experiences implementing these concepts into their teaching practices (see McDermott et al., 2021). The research team consisted of

members from all three partner institutions. The project was funded by Alberta Education through the ministry’s Research Partnerships Program, which provides funding for research-practice partnerships between school districts and postsecondary institutions (Government of Alberta, n.d.).

In this article, we critically reflect on our experiences as university researchers working on this spin-off of the longitudinal research-practice partnership (Ahlberg et al., 2016; Jagosh et al., 2015). Such reflection is a common and crucial step of community-engaged research (Armer et al., 2020; Beni, 2021). It enables us to examine our assumptions, unpack tensions, and discuss new possibilities for improving our collective work (Beltramo, 2020; Schön, 1983). Put simply, these reflections make the transformative work of partnerships possible (Stith & Roth, 2010). In the sections that follow, we describe our theoretical framework, the methods undertaken, and the results that emerged from our analysis of our reflections. In particular, we detail the long-standing research-practice partnerships between the participating organizations and outline the confluence of events that disrupted those partnerships and led to a largely conventional research approach during the 2018 study. We discuss critical learnings about the newly assembled partnership and offer recommendations we believe will help future research-practice partnerships assess and sustain their collaborations in meaningful ways.

Theoretical Framework

Our position is that partnerships in research can help promote a shared educational responsibility among partners (Abodeeb-Gentile et al., 2016; Maheady et al., 2016). Furthermore, effective professional learning involves collaborative learning experiences and collective responsibility for improving student learning (Campbell et al., 2017; Killion, 2011) – a responsibility held not just by educators or researchers, but by stakeholders across various partnership boundaries. There are many ways of structuring working relationships within university-school partnerships and designing and delivering research-informed professional learning. Henrick and colleagues (2017) provided a five-part framework that we found useful in studying our own research-practice partnership: Such partnerships can be characterized by (a) building trust and cultivating partnership relationships, (b) conducting rigorous research to inform action,

(c) supporting the partner practice organization in achieving its goals, (d) producing knowledge that can inform educational improvement efforts more broadly, and (e) building the capacity of participating researchers, practitioners, practice organizations, and research organizations to engage in partnership work (pp. 24–25).

Building on this framework, Penuel and Gallagher (2017) developed a diagnostic rubric to help teams discuss the development of individual partnerships. This rubric describes early, middle, and maturing phases for each dimension of the research-practice partnership, as summarized in Table 1. We used the dimensions of Henrick and colleagues’ (2017) framework alongside Penuel and Gallagher’s diagnostic rubric to guide our discussions and reflections on our research-practice partnership. We posit that the research-practice partnerships framework was appropriate for this research because it explicitly attends to how partnerships and relationships develop over time, centers community partners’ goals, and attends to the different experiences and perspectives researchers, partners, and other stakeholders may

have with different kinds of partnerships (Henrick et al., 2017). Penuel and Gallagher’s rubric served as a launching point for conversations about our experiences, which led to the methods we describe in the following section.

Methods

Similar to Armer and colleagues (2020), our approach to the present article began informally. While discussing our research in April 2020, the team reviewed Henrick and colleagues’ (2017) five dimensions of effective research-practice partnerships. As Penuel and Gallagher (2017) described, such conversations can offer generative opportunities to examine how different participants view a research-practice partnership in terms of its process, impact, and maturation. Indeed, the framework acted as a critical “aha” moment for Mairi. While she served as principal investigator for the research project, Mairi was not versed in the ways research-practice partners can work together across boundaries beyond the scope of traditional research relations (Penuel et al., 2015). Barbara, who until recently had served

Table 1. Summary of the Phases of Research-Practice Partnerships Across Each Dimension (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017)

Process dimensions	Brief description: Early (E), middle (M) and maturing (MA) phases
Cultivate partnership relationships	E – Willingness to solve problems together M – Clarify roles and develop a sense of mutual benefits MA – Develop strong identity and commitment to partnership
Develop capacity to engage in partnership work	E – Have human, social, and material resources in place for short term and begin seeking funding opportunities M – Have two or more projects funded MA – Have funding success multiple times
Impact dimensions	
Impact local improvement efforts	E – Begin identifying problems and strategies M – Make use of evidence for policies and processes MA – Impact classroom outcomes and make improvements
Conduct and use rigorous and relevant research	E – Begin to develop evidence of the problem, identify data sets and analyze data M – Design and carry out research; design instruments MA – Develop research evidence and use in the educational system for continuous improvement
Inform the work of others	E – Begin to identify what new knowledge can be developed and strategies for joint work M – Adapt strategies from other partnerships MA – Share improvement strategies within professional networks of researchers, practitioners, and others based on partnership findings

as the faculty's director of partner research schools, similarly realized that while research-practice partnerships were a central part of her own research and scholarship, other colleagues involved in these partnerships did not necessarily understand the implications of being "in partnership." These joint realizations prompted further conversations, and eventually we, the authors, joined in a process of cogenerative dialogues to critically reflect on our practice and to reconceptualize the preceding research (Beltramo, 2020).

The cogenerative dialogues underpinning the present article formally began in winter 2021 when we met to discuss Henrick and colleagues' (2017) framework and our perceptions of both the earlier research-practice partnership and our reflections and realizations of one another's positionalities. As Tobin (2014) described, cogenerative dialogues are critically reflective conversations between stakeholders at different power levels with the explicit purpose of improving shared practice. Consistent with Beltramo (2020), we structured our cogenerative dialogues as recurring conversations to identify, unpack, and examine differences in our overlapping experiences. We engaged in eight such dialogues between March and July 2021, each lasting between 30 minutes and 1 hour. While the precise topic of each dialogue varied according to the insights that emerged, we were guided by questions intended to provoke collective and individual reflection (Armer et al., 2020; Beni, 2021), such as: What did it mean for us to "do" community-engaged research? What was our perspective, and how did that perspective change? What tensions did we encounter? How did the concepts of relationship shape our work? Barbara, who was most familiar with the self-assessment questions posed by Penuel and Gallagher (2017), often stepped into a facilitative role for these dialogues. This structure and focus reflected Stith and Roth's (2010) contention that cogenerative dialogues "allow the discussion ... of ethical issues for the purpose of collectively evolving and fostering change in our shared practice" (p. 363). Indeed, as Tobin (2006) highlighted, a particular strength of cogenerative dialogues is their ability to involve stakeholders with unique positionalities. Despite our shared experience as university researchers, our perspectives varied noticeably: One author is a full professor and former vice dean within the faculty, two authors were new faculty members when they began their involvement with the project, and one author was a researcher on the project who has since transitioned into the

role of doctoral student. Discussing our diverse perspectives through these dialogues allowed us to address power dynamics (Boss & Linder, 2016), develop a shared understanding of our individual and sometimes conflicting experiences (LaVan, 2005; Selkrig & Keamy, 2015), and improve our practice (Martin & Scantlebury, 2009).

Alongside our collective cogenerative dialogues, Michael conducted semistructured interviews with each of the other authors during the same period (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These interviews lasted between 40 and 80 minutes and focused on tracing the history of each author's involvement with the project, their perceptions of individual and institutional relationships, and the extent to which the project reflected Henrick and colleagues' (2017) framework for research-practice partnerships at different points in time. Interviews were conducted in line with research ethics board approval for the broader research project. Consistent with semistructured interview design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), the protocols included guiding questions calibrated to each author's role within the research-practice partnership as well as space for unanticipated follow-up. Guiding questions included: How did you first become involved in this research? How did the partnership/relationships change over time? How does (or doesn't) this project reflect the tenets of research-practice partnerships? How might this partnership shape future collaborations between these groups? These interviews provided critical insights into each author's engagement with the tenets of Henrick and colleagues' framework and helped us understand our respective positionalities during the cogenerative dialogue process. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and members of the research team kept field notes during each of our cogenerative dialogues.

We inductively analyzed the cogenerative dialogues and semistructured interviews using a standard thematic approach. We chose inductive analysis to enable findings to emerge from the data unrestricted by a priori expectations (Thomas, 2006). Analysis occurred alongside data collection, as each interview and dialogue informed the discussions that followed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, the interview with Sharon occurred early on in the data collection process and featured a strong focus on the long-standing research partnership between the PLN and the school district. Subsequent dialogues and interviews therefore included additional discussions of our understandings of

that relationship using direct phrases from this interview as a guide. Michael developed tentative themes following close readings of the data (i.e., in vivo coding of transcripts and field notes). Each author reviewed the interview transcripts, and all authors participated in discussions about each of the tentative themes. We revised these themes with the agreement of each author such that the resulting themes describe the most important insights from the original data (Thomas, 2006).

Limitations

We conceived the present article more than 2 decades into the relationship between the university, PLN, school district partner, and ministry of education. Thus, as with many publications in community-engaged research, we must guard against hindsight bias in analyzing what has transpired (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). We sought to address hindsight bias in two ways. First, in every interview and dialogue, we explicitly identified moments where our current frames and definitions differed from how we would have described those events and relationships as they were unfolding. Relatedly, we also recognized that what we shared with one another was our best recollection of complex events, some of which were years in the past. While these efforts do not remove the challenges of hindsight bias, we believe they are instructive for other researchers engaging in critical reflection on their own practice (Loughran, 2006; Schön, 1983). We also agree with Coburn and Penuel (2016) and O'Neill (2016) about the need for more scholarship examining “failed” research-practice partnerships, particularly scholarship that critically examines our “misadventures” so as to inform future spin-off partnerships. While hindsight bias is an important concern, it is difficult to reflect on shortcomings if those shortcomings have not happened yet.

Perhaps the most obvious limitation of the present article is that we exclusively speak to our perspectives as university researchers. Our diverse positionalities and our perceptions of the research-practice partnership, both as it occurred and in our reflective dialogues, inevitably shaped our experiences as partners (Beni, 2021; LaVan, 2005). We have included positionality statements for each author in the Appendix at the end of this article.

Partner perspectives are essential to community-engaged research and cogenerative dialogues (Armer et al., 2020; Brown, 2021b; Tobin, 2014), but they are beyond the scope of this manuscript for three reasons. First, through

our conversations about this work, we recognized that despite sharing a common context—we were all members of the same faculty at a research-intensive university—we had fundamentally different perceptions of this research that required reconciling (Penuel et al., 2015; Stith & Roth, 2010). Second, while all partnerships carry joint responsibility (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017), we believe most of the shortcomings in our work rested with the research team, not our partners (Tobin, 2014). This belies the traditional view that research-practice partnerships are hard simply because partners do things differently or have different priorities (Henrick et al., 2017; Penuel et al., 2015). As we will illustrate, there can be trouble in paradise separate from the challenges of crossing institutional boundaries. Finally, this project emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, a particularly challenging time for teachers and school district leaders. While we plan to engage our partners in these cogenerative dialogues moving forward, teachers and schools already faced unprecedented demands on their practice beyond the scope of this partnership. Literature on research-practice partnerships consistently emphasizes that community-engaged research must focus on practitioners’ urgent problems of practice (Henrick et al., 2017; Penuel, 2019). The spin-off partnership discussed in this article is important, but in the context of COVID-19, it was not an urgent problem of practice in schools’ daily lives. To that end, we undertook this university-perspectives-only research so that we can more effectively engage in boundary-crossing work in the future (Penuel et al., 2015).

Results: A Narrative of Partnership

Five central themes emerged across the cogenerative dialogues and individual interviews. In the following sections, we present these themes in the form of a narrative, structuring each theme as its own section. Taken together, these themes describe the history of the research-practice partnership and highlight changes that occurred during the spin-off research project. We discuss critical learnings about this partnership and the sustainability of community-engaged research more broadly. Because our cogenerative dialogues were grounded in discussions of partnership literature, particularly Henrick and colleagues’ (2017) framework, we have chosen to intersperse relevant literature throughout the narrative results rather than as a standalone “Discussion” section. We conclude our narrative by offering

recommendations and questions for future research-practice partnerships, highlighting that any discussion of community-engaged research must necessarily involve such questions situated in the context of particular stakeholders and their relationships and goals (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017).

A Long-Standing Research-Practice Partnership

One of the most important findings from our dialogues was that successful research-practice partnerships take time. Indeed, time is critical to Henrick and colleagues' (2017) framework: Partners must learn to understand and trust one another; they must engage in high-quality research, which is itself time-consuming; and they must produce results that advance partners' goals and build capacity for further collaboration. Penuel and Gallagher (2017) similarly characterized the strongest partnerships as "mature" relationships in which partners have developed "a strong identity" with one another (p. 2). Mature partnerships are those that have repeatedly secured funding for their work and had an impact on both classroom outcomes and system-level practices (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017). Given the importance of time in partnership literature, we found ourselves regularly returning to discussions of this spin-off project's timing within the broader partnership.

We broadly agreed that Penuel and Gallagher's (2017) criteria accurately described the partnership at the center of this study. Indeed, the PLN and the school jurisdiction have had a formal partnership agreement for more than 20 years. The university and PLN were concurrently involved in multiple funded projects with the district, reflecting both the district's desire to improve teacher practice and its specific willingness to work alongside these partners (Friesen & Brown, 2021). These long-standing relationships also involved work at and across boundaries (Penuel et al., 2015). For example, some PLN partners are also faculty members at the university, and the PLN and university both include former teachers and administrators from the school district.

While the PLN was founded as a separate organization, Sharon recalled that in the late 1990s the minister of education requested that the network "be located within a university so it could better serve the professional needs of the profession and also have a strong research component." The PLN maintains its own charitable status and staff and effectively serves as the "professional learning arm" of the university's faculty of education; it forms partnership agreements with school districts

across Alberta and with ministries of education across Canada and internationally. These widespread collaborations led the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to recognize the PLN as one of the most powerful learning networks in global education (OECD, n.d.). Because of this reputation and the PLN's numerous long-standing partnerships, the ministry of education repeatedly invited the PLN to apply for partner research funding.

The present project began in early 2018 after the school district approached the university and the PLN with the idea to examine how the preceding DBPL series had informed teachers' professional practice. Concurrently, the ministry of education invited university and school district partners to submit a proposal to the ministry's Research Partnerships Program (Government of Alberta, n.d.). The design and implementation of the DBPL was itself deeply collaborative and rooted in principles of ethical relationality (Donald, 2016). Sharon, for example, recalled that

designing lessons with teachers [during the DBPL] was always done collaboratively. So [a community leader] would say to a teacher, "I'm not sure that what you've designed here is actually based in ethical relationality. Let's sit down and take another look at it together."

Exchanges like these showed that expertise and knowledge did not reside only with the university facilitators; they also came from community leaders and participating teachers. Stakeholders from the PLN, university, and school district met regularly with content experts to design a professional learning series that would foster teaching practices in line with district and ministry goals. Those design meetings proceeded throughout the series' implementation, allowing researchers and district leaders to collaborate and adapt the sessions to meet teachers' emerging needs (Friesen & Jacobsen, 2015). The series also embedded explicit opportunities for teachers to apply concepts in their classrooms and day-to-day practice (Brown et al., 2020; Friesen & Jacobsen, 2015). All that to say, in addition to the involved institutions having a long-standing history of partnership, the DBPL series itself was a highly collaborative and impact-focused endeavor.

We share this history of success to highlight that even long-standing, well-funded, externally recognized partnerships with embedded and spin-

off research projects can falter if relationships are not attended to. As O'Neill (2016) contends, "One reason why longer time scales are important in understanding design is that in time *everything* fails . . . a fact not normally represented in learning sciences scholarship" (p. 500). In identifying our research-practice partnership as one with deep roots, we hope to better illustrate what it is like to do community-engaged research and, particularly, to highlight the limitations of viewing research-practice partnerships as inexorably progressing from "early" to "mature" (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017) or from "failure" to "success" (Coburn & Penuel, 2016).

New Faces and a Conventional Research Approach

Each author identified shifts—critical changes—that distinguished our spin-off research project from its parent partnership. Change is a given in research-practice partnerships, especially when located in schools (Coburn et al., 2021; Coburn & Penuel, 2016). Coburn and Penuel (2016) frame turnover in K–12 education as "endemic," necessitating the regular development of new relationships, routines, and ways of working together (p. 51). People are not the only factors subject to change: School districts and universities must also address what Glass and Newman (2015) call "the messy terrain of public policy" (p. 33). Despite the time required to develop trusting, productive collaborations (Henrick et al., 2017; Williamson et al., 2016), educators and researchers often feel pressure to react to policy changes quickly to make a difference in students' lives (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Maheady et al., 2016; Penuel et al., 2015). This dynamic may place even long-standing partnerships on uncertain terrain if too many people and policies change at once.

A compounding series of changes affected our research-practice partnership within a short span of time. Eager to support teachers in implementing recent policy changes, the school district and the university submitted a proposal to the Research Partnerships Program for a project that would examine how the DBPL series informed teachers' classroom practice. Although Barbara emphasized that the proposal was written in collaboration between the university and the school district, she also recognized that the short time between the call for proposals and the submission deadline limited the depth of that collaboration; stakeholders at the university largely took the lead in writing the proposal and articulating specific research questions (Glass & Newman, 2015; Selkrig &

Keamy, 2015). On the one hand, this approach represented an all-too-common tendency to avoid crossing the boundaries between research and practice (Penuel et al., 2015). On the other, it reflected both the school district's trust in the researchers' ability to write successful funding applications and the various demands on team members' time during the application process (Henrick et al., 2017; Penuel et al., 2015).

Shortly after the proposal was accepted, several key stakeholders changed their connections to the research-practice partnership. At the school district, the director who had been involved in the project since its inception changed roles and passed leadership of the project to another colleague. Within the research team, Sharon, then serving as the faculty's vice dean, no longer had the time to deeply engage with the partnership alongside her other duties. She recalled, "[I was] trying to do it off the side of my desk. I felt that I was not able to give it the attention that it needed." Barbara shared a similar realization: She was now heavily involved in multiple research-practice partnerships with the district and was overseeing the faculty's partner research program, so she was not able to engage deeply in the way that strong research-practice partners necessarily do (Henrick et al., 2017; Penuel & Gallagher, 2017). Thus, Mairi, a newly hired faculty member with related research interests, was invited to learn about the project and to take over as the lead researcher and principal investigator.

These changes set the stage for conducting the spin-off research project. Mairi reflected positively on her conversations with the former project leads and recalled the frenetic energy that often surrounds new research projects: "[I remember thinking,] 'Oh, we can do this, we can do this, we could do this, we could do this.' I was just full of ideas." Yet Mairi also recognized that her enthusiasm may have limited her ability to recognize the researcher-centric patterns that were emerging. For example, Mairi recalled initially declining an invitation to present at a professional conference organized by partners from the school district:

It was not on my radar. I didn't put it in my calendar, you know. I was like, "No, I'm sorry, I can't make it out of town on a Saturday, I've got children at home." ... It just wasn't something that I took seriously enough as meaningful to another partner in the research.

It was not until the partners reiterated how important the conference was to the school district that Mairi realized this was more than a scheduling issue. Beyond a simple miscommunication, this exchange also reflected partners' sometimes-disparate priorities and time scales. If a partner does not realize these differences, they may not recognize that a seemingly last-minute invitation is actually quite timely and important to partners operating in different contexts (Penuel et al., 2015). Such encounters led Mairi to wonder, "How much did I foreclose actually understanding what was being asked of me if I were to lead this project?"

Mairi's reflections recall Glass and Newman's (2015) example of the well-intended researcher excluding key community perspectives. Indeed, although one of the indicators of a successful research-practice partnership is the use of "systematic processes for collecting, organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing data" (Henrick et al., 2017, p. 9), such indicators also fall squarely within the research domain of the traditional research-to-practice pipeline (Abodeeb-Gentile et al., 2016; Penuel et al., 2015). Several other conventional decisions and assumptions arose as the research unfolded. For example, because the university-based research team interviewed members of the school district and PLN as research participants, the team established that these partners could not have access to raw data before it was de-identified. This decision aligned with research ethics guidelines (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, 2020) and was an attempt to protect participant confidentiality and limit any perceived power dynamics between those who led the DBPL series and those who experienced it (Coburn et al., 2021). It also meant, however, that only members of the research team were involved in the data collection process. This introduced a lengthy gap between the start of the research project and the point at which other partners could meaningfully engage in data sense-making.

As a large team of 14 partners and researchers, we quickly encountered the challenge of gathering everyone together to discuss the research and our connections to it (Henrick et al., 2017; Selkrig & Keamy, 2015). While subgroups of the team met regularly throughout the partnership, the full group never gathered at the same time, such that Michael knew the school district partners by name but had never met them. He recalled, "I didn't realize the project *was* a partnership in that sense of the word because I'd never met our partners. In all of my strongest partnerships I had much closer

working relationships with the key players in the community." Instead, Mairi met with different groups within the team to attempt to understand and accommodate each partner's needs. As a new scholar thrust into leading the research project, she recalled this as particularly challenging. Thus, Mairi was a gatekeeper caught in a maelstrom: While she served as principal investigator and mediated access to different partners and spaces, she regularly found herself needing to check in with each partner to ensure the research was being done in a good way (Battiste, 2013a; Donald, 2016). Unfortunately, these check-ins did not always occur prior to decisions being made, and at times, they were more a reporting of decisions than a collaboration.

Although the research-practice partnership was "successful"—the school district has repeatedly spoken positively of the project's findings to Barbara and Mairi—many of the processes between 2018 and 2020 followed a conventional research framework. Sharon recalled that several members of the PLN were "fairly surprised that our involvement seemed to be just cut off, and it seemed to be between the research team and [the school district]." It is not lost on us that the success of the long-standing research-practice partnership did not transfer to this project. We also recognize these shifts happened while an experienced faculty member, a director of partner research, and a scholar whose research lens challenges traditional paradigms were at the helm. Again, this highlights how such "misadventures" can emerge—not because the relationships, infrastructure, and expertise are not there, but because benign, comfortable assumptions can quickly unseat long-standing partnerships, especially after critical changes (Henrick et al., 2017; O'Neill, 2016; Penuel et al., 2015).

Unpacking Our Assumptions About "Partners" and "Partner Research"

Michael and Mairi both drew attention to assumptions related to the meaning of the word "partners" in different settings. Partners are an incredibly common feature of educational research (Abodeeb-Gentile et al., 2016; Coburn & Penuel, 2016). As others have written, however, having a "partner" is no guarantee of partnership (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017). Nor will all research-practice partnerships be successful simply because partners have succeeded together in the past (O'Neill, 2016). That educational researchers regularly do research on or with schools does not necessarily

mean that school-based partners have a strong connection to the research or that such research addresses issues that matter to all partners or will lead to substantive changes in practice (Henrick et al., 2017; Penuel & Gallagher, 2017). In his work with community organizations, Michael was involved in many different partnerships, but each collaboration was rooted in a different approach—not all of which reflected “partnership” as defined in the context of research-practice partnerships. Some partners have more capacity or interest to collaborate than others; some collaborations do not reach the full scope of partnership as described in the literature. Perhaps more importantly, there is no guarantee that researchers in partner-rich fields know what “partner research” means or how they might have to change to work across those boundaries (Penuel et al., 2015). Barbara shared that as director of partner research schools, she often had to explain research-practice partnerships to colleagues looking for school jurisdictions to be added to already-written research proposals. Mairi offered a similar realization: While she did not recall if anyone ever mentioned the term “partner research” in her initial conversations, she said, “If it was mentioned, it was not something that resonated or meant anything to me at the time.”

Both Barbara and Mairi described a conversation in early 2020 in which they realized this mutual gap in understanding. As Mairi recalled,

[We] eventually go to that point of, “Oh! You didn’t know what you were doing!” And I mean, I don’t think she ever said it like that, and I never felt bad about it, but [that made me think], “Oh, you know, that’s why all these people were involved.” And that’s where some of those tensions were emerging.

Mairi later explicitly connected these overlapping assumptions with Ladson-Billings’ (1995) seminal text in which well-intended teachers discount culturally relevant pedagogy because “that’s just good teaching” (p. 159). In educational research, meaningfully engaging research partners is easily dismissed as “just good research” (Battiste, 2013a; Donald, 2016; Glass & Newman, 2015; Limes-Taylor Henderson & Esposito, 2019; Patel, 2016). After all, in the era

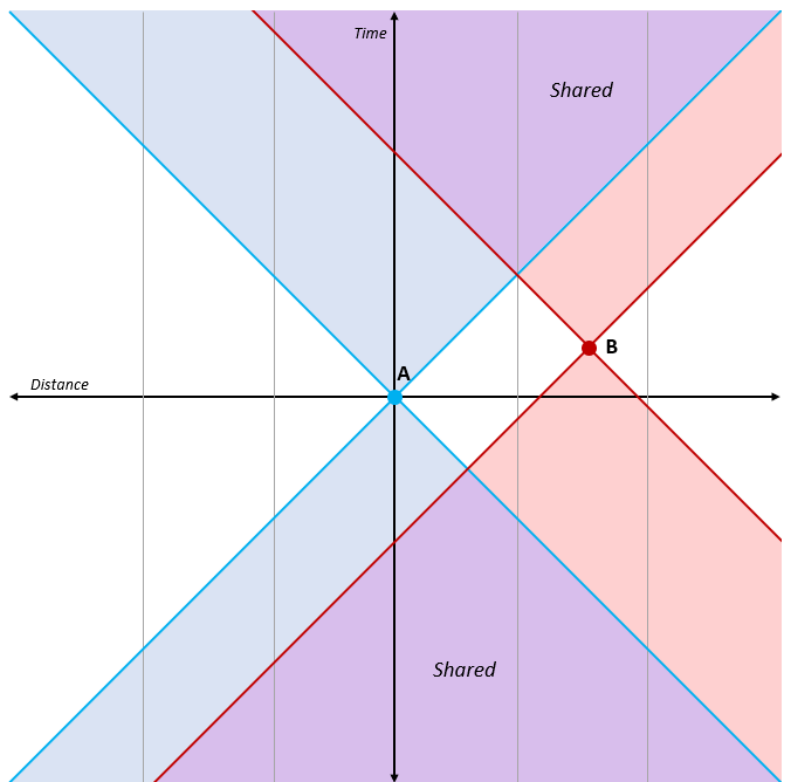
of “nothing about us without us,” what researcher working with schools would openly admit that they are not committed to working with their partners or that their research is not meaningfully impacting practice (Limes-Taylor Henderson & Esposito, 2019; Penuel & Gallagher, 2017)? Indeed, while Mairi now recognizes the consequences of our different research decisions, during the spin-off research, the project was deeply focused on building ethical relations within and across the broader team (McDermott et al., 2021). Put simply, researchers in partner-rich disciplines may not realize the difference between research-with-partners and actual research-practice partnerships.

With these ideas in mind, Michael wanted to better understand each author’s perspectives and how they overlapped and contradicted one another. He repeatedly returned to the metaphor of light cones, a concept from cosmology and astrophysics (Ord, 2021).¹ In cosmology, a light cone represents the limits of the observable/affectable universe from a specific point in space and time. While the universe is unfathomably large, a single observer can only see or affect a discrete portion of that universe based on the limit of the speed of light and whether individual photons have had sufficient time to traverse the distance between their origin (e.g., a star) and the observer (e.g., a telescope). Because of the limit of the speed of light, two observers will be able to see or affect different parts of the universe. For example, as illustrated in Figure 1, observers at points A and B can see and affect different portions of the universe. Looking to the past, while the two have access to some shared information and understanding, each has access to information that the other does not. Similarly, looking to the future, while both observers are able to affect a shared portion of the universe, each is also able to transmit information to distances that the other cannot (Ord, 2021).

The same principles can apply to research-practice partnerships. As researchers entering this project at different points in time, from different positionalities, and with different levels of power, we each perceive the partnership—our “universe”—differently. Such differences are inherent to research-practice partnerships and can be made visible when they are named and deconstructed (Armer et al., 2020; Glass & Newman, 2015; Tobin, 2014). For example,

¹. While there are many sources that discuss light cones and the observable universe, we prefer Ord’s (2021) description for its lay language and clarity related to where light cones can (and cannot) overlap.

Figure 1. Overlapping Light Cones (Fields of View) of Separate Observers



although Mairi and Barbara met many times during the research project, neither recognized how their perspectives differed from each other until their April 2020 conversation about Henrick and colleagues’ (2017) framework. Thus, though we all had access to certain shared pieces of information (the research proposal, the list of partners, the project’s design and goals for each stakeholder, the funding agreement), the remaining information that we could (or could not) access shifted how we made sense of those texts.

These differences in our fields of view—our partnership light cones—came into sharp contrast when applying Penuel and Gallagher’s (2017) diagnostic tool. Penuel and Gallagher explicitly encourage stakeholders to use their diagnostic rubric as a “basis for discussion ... to listen carefully to one another” about overlapping and contradicting perceptions (p. 1). For example, Sharon described the broader partnership as rich and mature, while Mairi rated that same dimension for the spin-off research project as “early phase” because the specific relationships she had formed were new and shifted throughout the partnership. Noting this disconnect, we wondered if there were in fact two partnerships: (a) the long-

standing collaboration between the various partner institutions and (b) a new, nested partnership between the research team and the school district. While this would neatly resolve the different ratings of the partnership, it raised a key question: Did individual partners treat the spin-off project as a “separate” partnership, especially when some stakeholders had changed but others had not?

Beyond recognizing that different stakeholders have different viewpoints (Henrick et al., 2017; Penuel & Gallagher, 2017), research-practice partners also need to explicitly deconstruct these perspectives. We must listen generously to identify not only the boundaries of what we do but also the limits to how we can perceive and make sense of shared experiences (Penuel et al., 2015; Tobin, 2014). Cogenerative dialogues served as a useful approach to these sense-making exercises. As Stith and Roth (2010) have explained, these dialogues provide “phenomenological accounts of events that all participants can agree to, identification of contradictions and agreements on how to resolve them and, as necessary, consensus on new goals and roles” (p. 139). Our fourth theme, described in the following section, directly engages with

the reconciliation of our experiences and the implications this has for sustainable research-practice partnerships.

Recentering Sustainability and Change

Following Penuel and Gallagher's (2017) recommendation, each author used the diagnostic rubric to independently rate the research-practice partnership. We then examined our common and conflicting perspectives as described above. We agree with Penuel and Gallagher's conclusion that different stakeholders need not have the same ratings of a partnership. However, we contend that this perspective must be taken further to capture the complexity of community-engaged research. Beyond stakeholders having different *perceptions* of what level the partnership operates on, the partnership itself *does* operate on more than one level depending on context and how each stakeholder's field of view limits their perspectives. In our case, the long-standing relationship between the PLN and the school district is undoubtedly mature, and some individual relations/partnerships are also mature, spanning multiple years and initiatives. Concurrently, much of this spin-off research project was in the early phases of partnership, and many individuals involved in the project described those relationships as early or beginning.

At a minimum, our experience suggests that it is possible for even mature, multidecade partnerships to include new, nested partnerships that more closely reflect Penuel and Gallagher's (2017) early phase, consistent with the widespread recognition that partnerships in education are fraught with change (Coburn et al., 2021; Coburn & Penuel, 2016; O'Neill, 2016; Penuel et al., 2015). Yet the framing of "Are we a partnership *yet*?" (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017, emphasis added) suggests a degree of linearity, as does a rubric grounded in terms of "early," "middle," and "mature" phases (p. 2). The rubric's descriptors are similarly linear, progressing from "an intention to learn" to "ongoing partnership" (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017, p. 2), from "we are seeking funding" to "we have sought and won funding" (p. 2), and from "identifying" to "impacting classroom outcomes" (p. 3). This linearity is further reinforced by the history of assessment and evaluation in education, in which rubrics are often read as featuring a unidirectional progression from low to high proficiency (Wolf & Stevens, 2007).

We also see this linearity and evaluative lens in day-to-day perceptions of research-practice partnerships. Barbara regularly meets

with colleagues who assume that any partnership must be evaluating practice rather than working alongside practitioners to create and generate something together. Evaluation itself is a nuanced field, with some types of evaluation focusing more on community engagement and collaboration than others (Alkin & Vo, 2018; O'Sullivan, 2012). A particular desire exists in education to evaluate things, measure things, and quantify success through accountability regimes (Stiggins, 2002). Although presented as a diagnostic tool, Penuel and Gallagher's (2017) rubric reads as traditional rubrics do—in a field where traditional relationships and paradigms are all too easy to slip into.

Emphasizing sustainability and change would better situate what we believe is one of the central goals of research-practice partnerships as defined by Henrick et al. (2017) and Penuel and Gallagher (2017): that research-practice partnerships are fluid systems, that they are subject to change, and that we must actively attend to those changes if we are to sustain projects through significant shifts. Beyond asking if we are a partnership *yet*, we must also ask: What kind of partnership are we now, and who are "we" in the context of the ebbs and flows of institutional change? As O'Neill (2016) emphasized, large systems inevitably change. Complications emerge, and stakeholders will have different visions as new leaders and agents come in and out of the partnership. Thus, we wonder: Is this need to reset, reframe, and reexamine inevitable, particularly when striving for ethical relationships (Donald, 2016)? And more importantly, is that reframing necessarily bad? Rather than viewing changes in a partnership's status as failures that should be quickly smoothed over, we contend that these changes are an essential part of the partnership life cycle (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Henrick et al., 2017; O'Neill, 2016).

Lessons Learned for Future Research-Practice Partnerships

In the preceding sections, we have described our experiences as university researchers involved in an imperfect, messy research-practice partnership (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016; Law, 2004). Despite a long-standing partnership and history of collaboration among the institutions involved, the spin-off research project slid into traditional research patterns, a shift brought on in part by changes to key stakeholders in the partnership and our differing perspectives of what this partnership was and how it operated. Our fifth and final theme centers around our learnings, central insights, and

questions we believe will be instructive for future research-practice partnerships. In this section, we offer five such learnings that emerged through our dialogues, interviews, and analysis.

Researchers Need Explicit Understanding: What Is Research-Practice Partnership? It should come as no surprise that in order for researchers to explicitly position themselves as partners in research (Henrick et al., 2017), they must first understand what research-practice partnerships are and how this approach implicates them as scholars. Yet, as Armer and colleagues (2020) share, even scholars actively pursuing community-engaged research may not be familiar with literature on how best to cocreate meaningful partnerships. Indeed, until Barbara and Mairi explicitly discussed what “research-practice partnerships” involved, they did not realize how differently they were interpreting the relationships between the university, the PLN, and the school district. Thus, it is not enough to say “this research is a partnership”—many collaborations involve school partners without any of the features of partnership (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). Stakeholders familiar with community-engaged research and the particulars of a given partnership should actively engage new stakeholders in examining what research-practice partnership is and how it may differ from researchers’ traditional practices. Drawing on Henrick and colleagues’ (2017) framework, we might ask:

- What do collaboration and partnership look like in my existing research agenda?
- When do different stakeholders (researchers, educators, administrators, students) have agency during the research process? Why at these times, and why not at other times?
- Who determines the research questions and methodology for a research project?
- How does that research design address significant issues in stakeholders’ practice?
- How does the research inform and affect practice after the research is complete? How is the research disseminated, and which groups actively access those findings?
- How does the research develop capacity for different stakeholders to engage in this work?

Partnership Is Not a Panacea. We strongly agree with Henrick and colleagues’ (2017) contention that research-practice partnerships are a “promising strategy for bridging the current gulf between research and practice” that can meaningfully support teachers’ practice and

enhance student learning (p. 1). Importantly however, research-practice partnerships are not the only form of community-engaged research (Abodeeb-Gentile et al., 2016; Glass & Newman, 2015; Maheady et al., 2016; Williamson et al., 2016), nor are they the only paradigms for engaging diverse knowledges and perspectives (Alkin & Vo, 2018; Battiste, 2013a; McDermott et al., 2021). Thus, researchers embarking on research-practice partnerships can also ask:

- Am I prepared to enter into a research-practice partnership as part of my scholarship?
- How do I know that this project is a good fit for a research-practice partnership?
- What kind of knowledge is being sought in this project?
- Could a research-practice partnership support each partner’s goals/desires/purposes?
- Put another way, am I doing community-engaged research because “that’s what I’m supposed to do” or because “that’s just good research” (see Ladson-Billings, 1995)?

Moving Beyond Traditional Research Paradigms Takes Ongoing Attention. As researchers, we are surrounded by traditional paradigms of what research is and how it is enacted in classroom contexts (Glass & Newman, 2015; McDermott et al., 2021; Patel, 2016; Smith, 2012). Battiste (2013b) highlights that “each of us, despite the school we attended, have been *marinated in*” these paradigms (p. 6, emphasis added). While ethics protocols are meant to protect vulnerable participants and assigning principal investigators instills accountability (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, 2020), these same practices can have unintended consequences for partners and participants alike (Limes-Taylor Henderson & Esposito, 2019; Patel, 2016). As our partnership illustrates, it is not enough to design a research-practice partnership or to be nested within a long-standing research-practice partnership. Partnerships and any spin-off research projects must be continually revisited and reexamined to assess how decisions affect stakeholders’ engagement. We would do well to consider:

- How do the ethics of partnership, shared ownership, trust, and collaboration intersect with our institutions’ research ethics board requirements?
- What does it mean to be in ethical relations with partners in these institutions? What does that look like in our context (see Donald, 2016)?

- How do we reconcile competing or conflicting priorities during the partnership?
- When we find researchers mostly focused on research and practitioners mostly focused on practice, is that an instance of high trust in one another's expertise (Henrick et al., 2017), or are we sliding into comfortable habits (see Penuel et al., 2015)?

“Mature” and “Successful” Are Not Synonyms. In research and education systems focused on measurement and quantified success (Stiggins, 2002), it is tempting to read the partnership characteristics of Penuel and Gallagher's (2017) “maturing” phase as linear indicators of success in research-practice partnerships. After all, a partnership that repeatedly secures funding and has widespread impact on classroom practice can be considered successful (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017). Yet this reading risks presenting research-practice partnerships as a Sisyphean task, particularly in contexts fraught with change (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; O'Neill, 2016). Given the diverse contexts of research-practice partnerships and the change endemic to them, it may be more useful to consider a partnership's lived curriculum, as Aoki (1993) describes in his seminal text. In so doing, we might ask:

- What does success mean in the context of this partnership? What people and practices are we hoping to affect in meaningful ways?
- How might we shift from measuring differences in degree (e.g., number of projects, number of teachers affected) to understanding differences in kind (e.g., how do these teachers or students grow in their practice)?
- How has our curricular plan (the research/grant proposal) evolved and changed over the course of our partnership? What unanticipated possibilities have emerged?

Cogenerative Dialogues Should Also Feature Partner Perspectives. As we have discussed, partner perspectives are essential to community-engaged research and cogenerative dialogues (Armer et al., 2020; Tobin, 2014). The next phase of the present project will necessarily center on engaging our partners to better understand their experiences in this process as well as their needs and goals for future partnerships. While we cannot speak for these other stakeholder groups (and in

this article, we intentionally do not), the following questions may help begin these conversations:²

- What will each partner contribute to and receive from this partnership?
- How will each partner share responsibility for developing relationships and shared purposes?
- What opportunities exist for members of the team to engage in knowledge mobilization and build research capacity?
- How will the team deal with unforeseen circumstances and adapt to changes and challenges?

Final Thoughts

As a group of university researchers, we participated in a research-practice partnership that involved our university, an internationally recognized PLN (OECD, n.d.), and a large school district in Alberta, Canada. Despite the long-standing relationships between these organizations, our spin-off research project slid into conventional research practices, necessitating critical reflection on our roles as researchers in the academy. Drawing on cogenerative dialogues and semistructured interviews between diverse members of the university-based research team (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tobin, 2014), we highlight how limitations in our fields of view and significant changes at critical points in the partnership affected our ability to engage in sustained community-engaged research. We invite readers to examine the partnerships and contexts they are engaged in and to consider the questions presented above as they move forward in this work. We particularly recommend critical, active reflection both individually and with other members of the research-practice partnership (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017; Schön, 1983), drawing on the above guiding questions. Cogenerative dialogues offer fertile ground for understanding the current state(s) of a partnership and are well established as a qualitative method for examining local issues that cut across diverse perspectives and power groups (Martin & Scantlebury, 2009; Stith & Roth, 2010). We found them particularly useful for making implicit assumptions explicit in a setting that recognized our mutual (if not always consistent or successful) goals for community-engaged research. Tobin (2014) is a highly accessible text for explaining different approaches to such dialogues.

² For an extended list of questions for cogenerative dialogues with community partners, see Brown (2021a).

We are reluctant to assert a list of “best practices” for community-engaged research, which assume that what worked (or did not work) in the context of our partnership will transfer seamlessly to others’ contexts (Davis & Sumara, 2006; Ricca, 2012; Wood & Butt, 2014). Instead, we will reiterate five lessons we have learned from our experiences participating in and reflecting on this research-practice partnership:

1. While each of us had experience working with “partners” in our research, our understandings of “partner research” varied widely. We would have greatly benefited from earlier, candid conversations about what a research-practice partnership is and how it can differ from other partnership frameworks.
2. Establishing mutual understanding also helps stakeholders decide if a research-practice partnership is appropriate for any given project. Put simply, we should be able to ask ourselves: Do I know what I am getting myself into, and is this kind of partnership a good fit for this work?
3. As Penuel and colleagues (2015) describe, working at and across boundaries is a key challenge of community-engaged research. Even though we dedicated many hours to establishing ethical relationships across the research team (Donald, 2016), the spin-off project reproduced many of the traditional research paradigms we sought to avoid. Disentangling ourselves from those comfortable, researcher-centric practices takes ongoing work (Battiste, 2013b).
4. Rather than seeing research-practice partnerships as existing on a linear path between “early” and “mature” or between “failure” and “success” (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Penuel & Gallagher, 2017), we realized that partnerships can flow between different phases of Henrick and colleagues’ (2017) framework. As a result, it is not enough to ask, “Are we a partnership yet?” (Penuel & Gallagher, 2017, p. 1). We need to be able to reflect on our partnerships as they shift over time.
5. Finally, we believe it is essential to involve all partners in such reflections and cogenerative dialogues. This paper and the (un)learning we have shared here were a necessary first step; continuing this learning alongside our partners is an obvious way forward.

We hope these experiences serve to strengthen the partnerships being taken up across the scholarly community. Such critically reflective dialogues may help to improve research, education, and practice in ways that closely reflect stakeholders’ lived experiences in doing this work.

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About the Authors

Michael Holden is a third-year doctoral student at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada. Mairi McDermott is an associate professor and chair of curriculum and learning with the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Barbara Brown is an associate professor in the learning sciences specialization and associate dean, teaching and learning, with the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Sharon Friesen is a professor and former vice dean with the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary.

Appendix: Positionality Statements

Michael Holden is a third-year doctoral student at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada. During the partnership, Michael was employed as a staff member with the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary and worked closely with faculty, students, and community partners on a variety of community-engaged initiatives, most of which were structured by formal partnership agreements and some of which included formal research components. Michael became involved in the spin-off project after Mairi began as principal investigator, and so he identifies himself as the most junior member with respect to the broader partnership. Michael was not familiar with Henrick and colleagues' (2017) framework until Barbara introduced it during a meeting before the group's first cogenerative dialogue. However, much of his work with the university and in other spaces has been closely connected to community-engaged scholarship. In particular, Michael believes that true partnerships require genuine collaboration between all stakeholders—universities, community partners, and the groups they serve—in order to have meaningful and lasting effects.

Mairi McDermott is an associate professor and chair of curriculum and learning with the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. When invited to lead the spin-off project described in this paper, Mairi was in her first year as assistant professor and interested in the project's focus because of her past and ongoing work on uncovering the affect and complexities in teaching and learning encounters. More specifically, through her work on student voice and marginalization in education and society, Mairi prioritizes seeking and eliciting the voices of those who tend not to be heard. In relation to this project, eliciting the voices of the PLN and school district illustrated one way to interrupt the knowledge hierarchy entwined in conventional approaches to research. As discussed in the paper, while Mairi intimately values partner voices, she was unaware, at the beginning, how this converged and diverged with partnership research. The cogenerative dialogues we cultivated as part of our collective reflective practice have grounded Mairi in her commitments toward decolonial, anti-racist, and social justice practices in her research.

Barbara Brown is an associate professor in the learning sciences specialization and associate dean, teaching and learning, with the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. As a former K–12 teacher and school district leader, Barbara has always been passionate about envisioning the possibilities and the future of learning in school contexts through research conducted in and with school communities. At the time of this spin-off project, Barbara was serving as director of partner research schools, a faculty initiative designed to create opportunities for partners to work together and to formalize research partnerships with school authorities and community organizations. Through her experiences as both a researcher and practitioner engaging in research-practice partnerships, Barbara values working in collaboration with schools to conduct research that can inform both theory and practice and recognizes the importance of developing and continually sustaining relationships with partners throughout all phases of a project.

Sharon Friesen is a professor and former vice dean with the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. As a former K–12 teacher and cofounder and president of a professional learning network with a 25-year track record and strong identity of ongoing research-practice partnerships, Sharon is committed to working in and with schools and districts to address and research complex problems of practice. For Sharon, an oppositional view of “theory and practice” or “theory into practice” establishes a false dichotomy for researchers and practitioners. Sharon embraces both theory and practice as twin moments of the same reality, restoring praxis to a place of privilege. Refusing to be caught in the unproductive, dichotomous pull between theory and practice opens a space for long-term collaborations and collective efforts of researchers, practitioners, community members, and Knowledge Keepers. Within such an opening, educators in the academy and the profession can challenge themselves to engage in practice, which the philosopher Alfred Schutz called wide-awakeness. Wide-awakeness is an active orientation to challenging the taken-for-grantedness of practices, ordinariness, and the normal carried out in the course of one's living and working. Sharon's orientation to collaborative and collective research-practice endeavors to affect classroom and school practices and outcomes, develop research evidence related to variability in implementation, and engage in knowledge mobilization with partners.