

# Partnering for Equity: Research Practice Partnerships and Community Contexts

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**Abstract:** Acknowledging the goals of many learning scientists to contribute to educational equity, we posit that not enough analyses consider activities of partnerships as they are situated within community contexts. In this poster, we examine six RPPs, their relationship-building practices, and embedded power dynamics. We conclude with a discussion around ways that RPPs and co-designed research projects can better attend to community contexts, voices, and needs.

## Overview

We, a group of early career scholars, examine our experiences with research-practice partnerships (RPPs) and other participatory research efforts to understand how projects situated in community contexts can work toward equity. We draw upon critical theory to define equity, and suggest that educational research that claims equity as a goal must disrupt systems of power that have historically privileged some and marginalized others (e.g., Yosso, 2005). We then examine ways that research projects can build infrastructures for equity-oriented partnerships. We posit that more analyses should consider the activities of research as it is situated in broader communities. We then look across RPP projects to examine the ways these efforts have interacted with embedded power dynamics, sociohistorical assets, systemic conflicts, and divergent visions around equity building in community spaces. We conclude by offering recommendations for building relationships that attend to the sociopolitical contexts shaping future studies.

## Major issues addressed

Research practice partnerships are long term collaborations where “researchers and system leaders share an open-ended commitment to build and sustain a working collaboration” focused on “problems of practices–key dilemmas and challenges that practitioners face” (Coburn & Penuel, 2016, p .49). An essential part of orienting RPPs towards issues of equity in education has been interrogating the power dynamics inherent in collaborations between multiple levels of stakeholders (e.g. Vakil et al., 2016). We argue that there is a need for more research that examines the interactions between RPPs and the communities in which they are situated. In order to address this gap, we examine the following questions: 1) How can RPPs build relationships within communities to address inequities embedded in education? and 2) What are the strategies researchers can use to develop new forms of RPPs that attend to issues of equity both within educational practice and within the positioning of communities?

## Projects examined

### Integrated infrastructures to support student agency in RPPs (Lee)

This study examines how RPP infrastructure (Penuel, 2019) distributed across multiple levels of the school ecology created opportunities for nondominant students to leverage community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) in designing school technology practices. We found that school structures built to support local autonomy created opportunities for researchers to engage with students in sustained partnership that privileged student goals during the design.

### Conversations at the kitchen table: Perspectives on partnerships (Stamatis & Pacheco)

In order to examine the ways that relationships within research have potential to grow liberatory and justice-oriented pedagogies in both formal and informal educational spaces (e.g., Bang & Vossoughi, 2016), we examine

our experiences building partnerships across a number of community stakeholders by leveraging personal relationships to engage stakeholders in participatory research. We then consider the ways that research can cause tension within participants lives and consider how partnership research should sometimes center refusal (Tuck & Yang, 2014).

### Partnership work is relational (Roque, Widman, & Stamatis)

We examine the ways that partnerships with several public libraries worked to attend to community histories and the power relations inherent in partnership work. We argue that equity in partnership work lies in the *how* of relationship building and present our strategies to develop relationships, discussing what aspects of these strategies contributed to the collaborative work between researchers and practitioners. Our findings illustrate the importance of relationship building with community partners as a starting point for working with families in informal spaces.

### Surveillance and re-mediation in an environmental justice partnership (Wingert)

This study is situated within a youth organizing program that was committed to designing a high school chemistry unit that centered issues of environmental justice. I examine the community context to problematize the concept of surveillance within partnership spaces. Findings show that interpreting, understanding, and removing *surveillance* may lead to more youth-driven, transformative partnership.

### Community-based participatory research practices for re-situating RPPs (Wegemer)

Designing equitable educational systems through requires consideration of power dynamics and positionality within communities (Penuel, 2019). I reflect on the potential usefulness of community-based practices for equitably re-situating an RPP within a non-dominant community.

### Collaborative practices to enhance equity in computer science education (Huang)

The aim of this RPP was to apply collaborative learning approaches to the design of learning environments to promote equity through access to computer science in middle school classrooms. This designed curriculum was intended to teach students basic programming skills through collaborative design activities in Scratch. This work suggests RPPs have potential to support educators in building content area understandings that shift policy climates.

## Conclusions

Each project examined brought to bear a deep commitment to use research as a vehicle to facilitate meaningful social change alongside community partners through community-based research methodologies. When relationships with partners and their communities are centered in RPPs, there is great potential for these projects to not only support equity but for designed interventions to be sustained. In examining our own relationship-building practices and how they have interacted with the embedded power dynamics, sociohistorical assets, systemic conflicts, and divergent visions around equity, we argue that there is a need for further theory and methodology to guide the work of emerging scholars as they take on projects to build sustainable infrastructures within equity-oriented RPPs.

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