



Beyond “Research Into Practice”

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Penuel, W., & Gallagher, D. (2017). *Creating research-practice partnerships in education*. Cambridge MA: Harvard Education Press.

Though out-of-school time (OST) programs can help youth develop their full potential, the low pay, high staff turnover, and lack of professionalization that are endemic in the field make it difficult for programs to maintain consistency and quality. Similarly, though OST programs are under pressure to improve participants’ academic outcomes, too frequently they lack the time, support, and funding they need to develop research-based interventions that can work in their program settings.

One avenue toward addressing these tensions is collaboration with a research partner, such as a university or similar institution

William Penuel and Daniel Gallagher provide a roadmap in their book *Creating Research-Practice Partnerships in Education*. Penuel, a professor of learning sciences and human development at the University of Colorado Boulder, and Gallagher, the director of career and college readiness at Seattle Public Schools, describe how true research-practice partnerships can enhance the process of educational change. Though the book focuses on partnerships between university researchers and school administrators, research-practice partnerships can also be established between research institutions and afterschool programs. The California Tinkering Afterschool Network, led by the Exploratorium with several afterschool programs in the San Francisco Bay Area, is an example.

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Research-practice partnerships are an emerging way for researchers and practitioners to work together that goes beyond “research into practice” and ordinary collaboration. In a research-practice partnership, Penuel and Gallagher stress, researchers and practitioners work hand in hand; both partners need to have an equal say in identifying and solving problems. Research-practice partnerships require trusting relationships and strong communication skills. Key features of successful partnerships (p. 9) include:

- Focus on problems of practice
- Long-term commitment
- Mutuality in the relationship
- Generation of an original analysis

After defining these basics in Chapter 1, Penuel and Gallagher go on in Chapter 2 to provide strategies for one of the defining features of research-practice partnerships: addressing questions that are of mutual concern to both parties. Chapter 3 discusses the importance of deciding whether a research-practice partnership is the best type of rela-

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tionship for the desired outcome. It also outlines how to develop the foundation for a successful partnership. Chapter 4 discusses strategies for supporting the framework: building relationships, expanding the partnership, and adding new partners. In the rest of the book, Penuel and Gallagher provide details on learning adaptability skills throughout the process and suggest techniques for sustaining partnerships and building a future.

Throughout, the authors provide details and examples from their many years of experience with research-practice partnerships, showing why partnerships can be beneficial, what challenges partnerships have faced, and how they have overcome those challenges. This book can thus be used as a guide by anyone interested in

developing a research-practice partnership. This emerging model for a mutual relationship between researchers and practitioners provides an alternative to business as usual and brings hope for real change.