

Many Bumps in the Road: The Tensions of Cross-Organizational Navigation Among Street Level Bureaucrats in a University/Public School Partnership

Shallegra Moye¹

¹ University of Pittsburgh

Cite as: Moye, S. (2024). Many Bumps in the Road: The Tensions of Cross-Organizational Navigation Among Street Level Bureaucrats in a University/Public School Partnership. *Metropolitan Universities*, 35(1), 187-193. DOI: 10.18060/28024

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#).

Guest Editors: Matthew Durlington, Ph.D., Jennifer L. Britton, and Katherine Feely, Ed.D. **Editor:** Patrick M. Green, Ed.D.

Abstract

Scholars deem university partnerships with public schools as an innovative opportunity to marry research and practice. In part because they can support developing and implementing evidence-based interventions that improve school culture, academics, and community participation. However, what is less discussed are the barriers and challenges of bringing two vastly different organizations, such as a university and public school together for partnership. Practitioners and scholars document even less about how street-level bureaucrats, those delivering programs within and across complex organizations that make up the partnership, see, experience, and navigate the barriers. The Heinz Fellows were on the ground in public schools, on behalf of the university, navigating those barriers and challenges that were a blend of unforeseen circumstances, unaccounted-for realities, and underestimation of systems “as usual.” As noted by Ahmed (2012), school systems, like other institutions, become an accumulation of historical activity. Street Level Bureaucracy theory (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977) examines how frontline workers, such as Heinz Fellows, traverse between and betwixt complex environments with little direct supervision and employ discretion and coping to accomplish program goals. Alas, hindsight is twenty-twenty. From a post-partnership lens, productive tensions, uncomfortable conversations, and a clearer path forward are advanced to navigate

the tensions of university/public school partnerships. A clearer path forward must begin with a pre-partnership assessment of each organization's strengths, limitations, and resources.

Keywords: university, public school, partnership, street-level bureaucrats

Introduction

University resources such as research capacity, funding, and professional learning for public school personnel are the critical assets found within a partnership. For the street-level bureaucrats responsible for implementing interventions, awareness of the barriers, challenges, and resources is helpful at the offset for effective collaboration. Also, there is an incalculable time, monetary, intellectual, and emotional investment made by multiple stakeholders connected to a university/public school partnership. However, to fully appreciate university/public school partnerships, one must have a critical understanding of universities as an organization and public schools as a much different type of organization. In this sense, critical is used to convey a capacity to read, write, think, and speak in ways to understand power and equity and to understand and promote justice (Hennessey, 2021).

Schools are a key institution in our society, serving students from all backgrounds and influencing children's life trajectories. They are even sometimes called equalizers of opportunity. Yet, the realities of race, racism, and economics continue to coalesce in limiting ways that predict educational outcomes. This is especially true of urban public schools, where children receive less of everything effective in education (O'Day & Smith, 2016). A tension that is so often unnamed by participants in a university/public school partnership is that public schools have not been provided with access to the design, practice, and resources needed to achieve equity goals for populations of students (Lipman, 2011; Tyack, 1974). Bishop and Noguera (2019) assert that public schools have been and continue to operate as organizations where inequality based on race, class, culture, and language is manifest and often reproduced. Challenges and barriers to educational equity most often observed and reported by Heinz Fellows were teacher turnover, principal turnover, small numbers of advanced placement courses, unevenly applied discipline policies, and uncertified teachers in core subject areas.

Interrogating organizations through a critical orientation is especially important in understanding how Heinz Fellows and other street-level bureaucrats either navigate challenges and barriers to execute their day-to-day tasks or are unable to fulfill goals. Considering how uncertain the pursuit of equity and justice can be for any organization, Heinz Fellows were particularly unprepared for the ways in which definitions, beliefs, and demonstrations of equity and justice differed drastically among the university and the public school partners. For example, Heinz Fellows received ongoing professional learning in the art of disrupting systems, organizing for social change, and autonomy. However, within the public schools where Heinz Fellows were placed, autonomy was not encouraged and could sometimes be dangerous. Additionally, inherent levels of bureaucracy within public school systems render disruption of many practices almost impossible. Organizations have different missions and different assumptions and, as a result, function in diverse ways. As such, awareness, analysis, and navigation of the distinct and unique properties of organizational structure are necessary for a collaborative effort between universities

and public schools. This article endeavors to a) highlight this under-studied phenomenon while b) contribute to the literature on cross-organizational collaborations in a way that centers equity of impact and c) encourage the use of a cross-organizational readiness assessment prior to collaboration. Pursuing an education doctorate was imperative in helping me identify, assess, and implement changes in practice. Particularly because the program I completed utilizes improvement science as its signature pedagogy and a mission committed to the pursuit of educational equity. In a practical sense, I have authored this article to help those designing, implementing, and monitoring cross-organizational collaborations better understand the positionality, limitations, and oversights of the university within university/public school partnerships.

The literature describes the university as a loosely coupled group of individuals, viewing themselves as removed and protected from shifts of power and authority that are politically and socially motivated and lacking formal procedures to accomplish tasks (Slater, 1996). Another defining characteristic of the university as an organization relates to time. In *Anatomy of a Collaboration*, Slater (1996) noted,

For the university, time is relative, and deadlines are less dependent on links to other parts of the organization. On the other hand, for public school systems, time is indicative of finances, political feasibility, and approval giving across a complex network of offices. (p. 44)

The university as an organization also operates within hierarchies, that Bonner et al. (2004) refer to as a climate of “we/they”. Heinz Fellows articulated the we/they conflict related to classification and perceived treatment of staff versus faculty and other social ordering that opposed calls to disrupt oppression. This exposes hidden conflicts and contradictions within espoused equity vision statements and slogans. This and other extant literature validate the necessity for the university to acknowledge and prepare its employees to work within public schools. For example, the university must consider day-to-day decisions street-level bureaucrats adopt to cope with the dissonance of competing goals, limitations on their agency, and, in some cases, deliberate sabotage. The university as an organization possesses unique identities that make them recognizable, legitimate their existence, and distinguish them from similar others. As identity claims become expressed as institutionalized mission statements, policies, and routines, they operate as the organization’s social context, providing its members with a common set of reference points guiding actions and activities (King et al., 2010).

On the other hand, public schools are known to be bastions of bureaucracy. Slater (1996) tells us that as organizations, public schools are inherently bureaucratic, predictable, placid, and top-heavy in reform and administration. The author goes on to assert that, as an organization, public schools are marked by legislative constraints, decoupled activities, and high responses to external demands, which render goals ambiguous. Particularly, as it relates to urban public schools, there are ongoing changes among all stakeholders, from students to administrators, that challenge

continuity in unsettling ways. Some of those challenges are chronic absenteeism, low literacy scores, teacher shortages, and ongoing departures of district superintendents. This challenge impacted the time people were willing to or could commit to the partnership and often required a constant reorientation to organizational culture.

Street-level bureaucrat theory is a dynamic purview into how frontline workers such as Heinz Fellows develop and utilize discretion and coping strategies to navigate between and between multiple organizations of a university/public school partnership. Street-level bureaucrats must regularly modify their decision-making within ever-changing environments and with limited oversight in the direct execution of their roles in the face of competing demands and limited bandwidth. Weatherley and Lipsky (1977) assert in their theory of street-level bureaucracy that complex organizations influence the behavior of frontline workers and necessitate discretion and coping as strategies to persist. One reason for the development of discretion to navigate the tensions within a university/public school partnership is that street-level bureaucrats interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs and have substantial discretion in the execution of their work (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). Because organizational conditions significantly impact the parameters of the street-level bureaucrats' choices, sometimes they do not do what is desired or warranted but rather what they can. Therefore, focusing on the individual and the organization is important and helpful for understanding how street-level bureaucrats develop and use discretion and coping to navigate cross-organizational tensions. Universities and public schools must consider day-to-day decisions street-level bureaucrats adopt to cope with dissonance resulting from the expectations of the university running headlong into the limitations of the public school. The following quotes capture the dissonance experienced by participants in the Heinz Fellows Program:

Respondent: *“Being placed in the school felt really haphazard, like you were always getting the runaround and not told everything you need to support them.”*

Thus, street-level bureaucrats exercise pragmatic improvisation that characterizes how they perceive the mutuality of goals across the university and public school, as well as their ability to implement activities to meet the goals.

Though universities and public schools are both bureaucratic organizations, they are unique cultural entities with differing structures, politics, and styles of self-maintenance. This is important for street-level bureaucrats to understand at the onset if they are to navigate the bumps in the road of cross-organizational partnership successfully. As offered by Brazer et al. (2014), understanding schools as organizations and applying an organizational perspective to the development of a partnership by anticipating, embracing, and moving through change, uncertainty, ambiguity, and changing needs best serve those on the frontline. As a practitioner of university/public school partnerships, I further posit that tensions arise and opportunities for productive conversations are missed when neither organization acknowledges the changes,

uncertainty, and ambiguity resulting from partnership.

A practical and necessary solution to address the barriers and challenges of the Heinz Fellows Program and others like it is with a cross-organizational readiness assessment. A cross-organizational readiness assessment that occurs prior to the commencement of a university/public-school partnership buffers against time limitations, changes in personnel on either side of the partnership, and myriad unforeseen circumstances. Features of a readiness assessment like those in the above tables should include indicators of the resources, time, and climate/culture. Assessment of resources reveals the availability of human and capital capacity within the public school to support, implement, and sustain the programming introduced by the university. In this way, determining and assigning roles as well as activities of street level bureaucrats within the partnership.

Background

Considering this, the university/public school partnership known as the Heinz Fellows Program was bold and innovative. It acknowledged school and learning inequities and developed cadres of education leaders who could interrogate, name, and intervene. In the absence of school funding to support academic tutoring, critical mentoring, and staff professional development, the Heinz Fellows Program placed fifteen educators across multiple schools to implement evidence-based interventions that improve school culture, academics, and community participation. A different university, funder, and school district initially developed the Heinz Fellows Program as an intervention to place Black men in classrooms as teachers. The recruitment was national, and selected participants received a nominal salary, a degree in education, and mentorship to support their practice. In 2017, the Heinz Fellows Program was reimaged as an opportunity for anyone interested in positively impacting urban public education. In its second iteration, the program experienced diversity in the race, sex, age, ethnicity, education, and sexual orientation of participants.

The second iteration of the Heinz Fellows program required candidates to have a bachelor's degree, submit an essay on the state of urban education, and attend a panel interview with prior participants and university leadership. The process did not invite or include public school partners in the interview or selection of Heinz Fellows and certainly emerges as an oversight of the university. Heinz Fellows received extensive and ongoing professional learning in topics such as instruction and learning, critical mentoring, community organizing and engagement, education history, and culturally relevant pedagogy, and university faculty provided ongoing professional development to school staff and leadership. The university designed professional learning to increase the level of classroom support Heinz Fellows could lend to students and teachers alike. The primary objectives of the Heinz Fellows Program university/public school partnership were increasing student attendance, decreasing referrals, and increasing academic

identity among students. As with other street-level bureaucrats, Heinz Fellows were autonomous in developing the strategies to accomplish these goals. However, building trust and relationships through mentorship was the foundation of all other activities undertaken by Heinz Fellows. The methods of accomplishing these goals were adaptive at best and often ambiguous, subversive, and unattainable. For example, the university trained the Heinz Fellows to operate co-teaching in classrooms to assist with the academic identity goal. However, often they volleyed between paraprofessional support, disciplinarian, and/or teacher in loco. The following excerpts capture the experience:

Respondent: *“Being placed in the school felt really haphazard, like you were always getting the runaround and not told everything you need to support them.”*

Respondent: *“The teachers seemed happy to have extra support in the classroom, but always seemed unsure about what we should/could do. Sometimes, I would be asked to lead lessons, then other times the teacher would conduct class as if I wasn’t there. I didn’t know if I had somehow did something wrong or if they were following an unknown directive from administration or the district.”*

The method designed by the university to increase school attendance was critical mentorship of students, wherein students examined the intersection of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality and associated outcomes (Weiston-Serdan, 2017). The Heinz Fellows facilitated difficult conversations around these subject matters, affirmed students' experiences and lived realities, and strengthened home/school connections. Ideally, having these actions and activities modeled for school staff would increase the likelihood of shifting culture. However, mentoring by Heinz Fellows happened outside of classrooms, in designated areas, and in one school, the building principal eliminated it. Although the university/public school partnership was very much in place by a memorandum of understanding. Previous Heinz Fellows shared the following excerpts:

Respondent: *“The administration was top-down; not adaptive leadership and teacher concerns did not seem to ever be taken into consideration. Authority never allowed to be challenged. Also, if administration didn’t like you, your position was tenuous. At any moment, you could be accused of doing something inappropriate and I did not feel empowered.”*

“We were always at the whim of the administrator. They required a resume, pre-approved building schedule (by admin), and advanced notice of time off, then would decide we couldn’t follow the pre-approved schedule and could only interact with students during their lunch period.”

Street-level bureaucrats interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs and have substantial discretion in the execution of their work (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977), which is a byproduct of complex organizations and low direct supervision. Thus, to accomplish their required tasks, street-level bureaucrats must find ways to accommodate their demands and

confront the reality of resource limitations. Traditionally, a single organization tasks street-level bureaucrats with implementing interventions. When street-level bureaucrats are tasked with implementing interventions across multiple organizations, with hierarchies such as those indicative of university/public school partnerships, productive tensions and the need for uncomfortable conversations are intensified. A theme that was central to the Heinz Fellows Program university/public school partnership. Thus, when Heinz Fellows, as street-level bureaucrats, experienced role ambiguity, conflicting priorities, and resistance to the intervention that the university and public school agreed upon, they established workarounds to meet their goals. The theory of street-level bureaucracy identifies the workarounds as discretion, the informal practices that are more diverse and broader than what managers may be aware of (Cohen & Hertz, 2020). Practitioners and scholars also understand the use of discretion in task completion as mediated by context, self-efficacy, and managerial style, which can further complicate already complex organizations. Specifically, Ash (2013) offers a compelling analysis of how discretion and coping are developed and used by street-level bureaucrats, which aligns with the experiences of Heinz Fellows, in that discretion is shaped variously by how much freedom in decision-making the agency permitted and, conversely, by the need to make decisions when agency policy or process was ambiguous. Additionally, street-level bureaucrats shape discretion in decision-making environments, such as the relative influence of managerialism and professionalism.

Methods

The methods utilized in the case study were surveys, interviews, and document analysis of journal responses. These methods represent a qualitative approach useful for determining social impact, such as that demonstrated by street-level bureaucrats. The social impact of the Heinz Fellows Program was to increase student academic identity resulting from increasing attendance and decreasing referrals. Responses to inquiry questions illuminate how the complex organization of urban public schools, competing priorities, and perceptions of the university's internal and external program goals necessitate discretion and coping (Table 2) to navigate tensions in cross-organizational collaboration. Discretion and coping were a priori codes substantiated in the data analysis of Heinz Fellows's responses. They were recognized partly due to my direct knowledge and experience within the program. A priori codes are developed before examining the current data. However, they do not limit the analysis while reflecting the view of participants in a traditional qualitative way (Elliot, 2018). As the researcher connected to the Heinz Fellows Program directly and indirectly throughout its duration, I was aware of some of the ways the experiences of Heinz Fellows would suggest categories of discretion and coping as codes, such as reinterpretation of policies and deference. Indeed, analysis of response data supported literature that finds discretion as a strategy among street-level bureaucrats in mediating the tension of attempting to accomplish organizational goals against the limitations of external environments. Discretion is also germane as a measured variable because as it relates to making

exceptions and bending the rules for equity, the task becomes more challenging and mediated by organizational conditions (Cohen, 2018). This means Heinz Fellows were encouraged to consider ways to disrupt educational inequity. However, doing so in practice required a deliberation of psychological safety, potential consequences to the program, and other yet unknown outcomes that could not always be decided when an inequity was observed or perceived. Street-level bureaucrats deliberately and unconsciously develop mechanisms to cope with role ambiguity, psychological well-being, and power differentials (Lipsky, 2010). Thus, coping became the other pertinent measure for this critical examination. Lipsky (2010) states that coping strategies involve reappraisal and distortion of the conditions of threat and work-related stresses. A refrain repeatedly captured in the responses of Heinz Fellows.

Results

The case study of the Heinz Fellows Program included a review and analysis of (1) one semi-structured individual interview with thirteen participants from all four cohorts of the program, (2) responses to four journal prompts, (3) three randomly selected check-ins (see Tables 4 and 5) from year three, and (4) meeting minutes with Heinz Fellows from cohorts one, three, and four. I was connected to the Heinz Fellows Program in year one as a school-based liaison and attended professional learning events alongside year two participants. I originally joined the year three cohort as a graduate Heinz Fellow, then transitioned into leading the program midway through year three and all of year four. I drew from street-level bureaucracy theory as a lens with which to study the Heinz Fellows as they navigated multiple complex organizations. In his seminal work on street-level bureaucrats, Lipsky (1969, 2010) argues that discretion (informal practices) and coping strategies street-level bureaucrats adopt to manage the dilemmas in their work effectively become how they accomplish the program goals set before them. Heinz Fellows regularly discussed how they would formulate alternative methods to interact with students when they were prevented from doing so in the normal course of their work.

Additionally, the organizational culture within and across the urban public schools compelled Heinz Fellows to develop techniques to salvage service and decision-making values within the limits imposed on them by the structure of their work. This included, but certainly was not limited to, leveraging advocates within the school to raise ideas, concerns, utilizing their differing levels of influence within school sites and reinterpretation of existing policies. Another key finding in the data analysis was the tension in the university's school-based goals of increasing attendance, decreasing pushout, and improving the academic identity of students amid the 195 public schools shifting goals, resources, and priorities. For instance, Heinz Fellows willingly worked beyond their requisite schedules to formulate and facilitate out-of-school time mentorship and health and wellness programs for students that increased their attendance in school, decreased pushout, and improved academic identity. It should be noted that the time Heinz Fellows spent in schools during their scheduled times was used to better understand how

to address student needs to accomplish the school-based goals, another strategy utilized to develop and implement discretion among street level bureaucrats. Regarding the development and use of coping, the findings supported feelings of dissonance of Heinz Fellows as street level bureaucrats and a bent toward equity in strategies used. Weatherley and Lipsky (1977) assert, street level bureaucrats must consistently find ways to accommodate new demands placed upon them into the work structure, while simultaneously facing the cognitive and emotional toll of public service work. Heinz Fellows as street level bureaucrats traversing university/public school partnerships were left to find practical ways of implementing innovation designed in theory. Ash (2013) found that in some organizations, street level bureaucrats were relying on problematic coping techniques, such as protecting themselves with “cognitive shields” to defend themselves from responsibility to act, blaming others, and indifference. However, Heinz Fellows as street level bureaucrats kept equity at the center of their use of development and coping because of the university’s internal goals of improving the skills, knowledge, and disposition of candidates in the Heinz Fellows Program. Frederickson (2010) argues that social equity requires judgment and that judgement, exercised as discretion and coping lives on the messy ground between organizational culture and interpretation, which shape judgments and outcomes. Some of the coping strategies elucidated in the findings for Heinz Fellows as street level bureaucrats include securing their work environment, short-circuiting bureaucratic requirements, simplifications, and routines. Analysis of interview responses and documents produced codes that rolled into larger themes of Heinz Fellows development and use of discretion and coding to accomplish the university’s school-based goals. Saldaña’s (2016) qualitative coding framework was utilized, which asserts that coding is heuristic and cyclical act of arranging data in a systematic order to develop an explanation. He additionally notes that themes are the outcome of coding, which describes more subtle or tacit processes.

Recommendation

Both the university and public schools must posture themselves as learners and partners to advance the goals of equity, sustainability, and transformation. As Larson and Nelms (2021) point out, a precursor and ongoing focus of such partnerships must be getting people from the university and public schools ready for change by way of establishing interpersonal accountability, trust, and conflict resolution. Those committed to cross-organizational collaboration, such as university/public school partnerships, must acknowledge tensions at the beginning of the partnership and make space for the uncomfortable conversations which are sure to follow. Without prior consideration, some goal orientations are sure to be unrealistic, mutually exclusive, or unrealized because of organizational power and politics. Bullough and Bough (2007) assert that shared values and vision, collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry, collaboration, promotion of group as well as individual learning, mutual trust, and respect and support among staff members are essential components of a university/public school partnership. Paramount to selecting goals, establishing service gaps and resource availability,

role identification, as well as prioritization of effort is engaging in a cross-organizational readiness assessment. Support for readiness assessment is recognized by Jurie (2000), who states that a collaborative needs assessment, mutual goal identification, conflict resolution, and procedures to sustain participation are tenets of critical organizational theory relevant to university/public school partnerships. The following cross-organizational collaborative readiness assessment captures salient questions, key roles, and other considerations that generate productive and reduce uncomfortable conversations between partners and for street level bureaucrats.

As someone still in the role of liaising university/public school partnerships for the university, I developed and adapted tools to aid each organization in thoughtful consideration about its own propensity to collaborate. I modified the assessments based on tools from the Collective Impact Forum and Butel, et al. (2018) as an outcome of the findings and in anticipation of continued cross-organizational collaboration. As the Heinz Fellows Program and my dissertation research concluded, I was distinctly aware of the cross-organizational readiness assessment as most effective when used before a collaboration begins and it is equally important to understand that a partnership can proceed regardless of the score (Table 1). Focusing on the five dimensions of cross-organizational collaboration (1) is a collaboration necessary; (2) what is the openness to collaboration; (3) what is the outcome of previous collaborations; (4) is there dedicated formal or informal leadership support; and (5) what is the plan for sustaining changes beyond collaboration; expose potential conflicts and barriers to effective partnership. The attitude, skills, and knowledge inventory (Appendix 2) & implementation perception assessment (Appendix 3) compliments the readiness assessment by helping each organization determine what specific resources and accommodations may be necessary to move forward.

TABLE 1. Cross-organizational collaborative readiness assessment

Dimension	Description	Questions	Score (Dimensions)	Likelihood of Success
			<i>A-Yet to consider</i> <i>B-Considering</i> <i>C-Developing</i> <i>D-Acting on</i> <i>E-Established</i>	<i>High, Medium,</i> <i>Low</i>
Necessity of Collaboration	Assess needs through stakeholder identification, existing efforts, and clear articulation of mutual goals	(1) What other projects are currently under way related to this issue? (2) What other organizations are involved and how? (3) Will the collaboration face resistance, from whom/where?		
Competence of Collaboration	Assess openness to collaboration and strength of internal relationships	(1) Do the participants have the skills and personal characteristics that foster/enhance trust? (2) What are the resources (human, capital, material) available to the collaboration among the partners? (3) Are communication channels open, effective, and bi-directional?		
History of Collaboration	Assess whether prior/current experience of collaboration efforts with the community/other orgs was positive or negative	(1) What structural, historical, political barriers exist? (2) Is the organization in good standing with existing community? (3) What are the key environmental conditions, initiating forces, and tactical drivers and remediations?		
Skilled and Committed Leadership	Assess leadership capacity to guide and facilitate partnership	(1) Does leadership have networks and influence to obtain resource commitments and enlist support? (2) Does leadership have a history of ability to articulate the mission and goals of the collaboration to internal and external participants and sustain legitimacy? (3) Does leadership communicate, problem solve, diagnose resistance, negotiate, and energize a group.		
Sustainability	Assess the governance, policies, and probability of consequential change	(1) Who has the power and/or influence manage accountability, modify processes, regularly monitor outcomes? (2) Do all participants attend cross-organizational professional learning activities (3) What are the shared metrics and the cadence of evaluation for improvement?		

Original Research

TABLE 2. Matrix of discretion and coping strategies used by street-level bureaucrats

Sources/Types of Discretion used by Street-Level Bureaucrats	Sources/Types of Coping used by Street-Level Bureaucrats
Routinization of tasks	Rationing of emotional, physical, intellectual capacity
Accommodations	Securing work environment
Re-interpretation of policies, procedure, and practices	Short-circuiting bureaucratic requirements
Utilization of advocates/influencers	Fostering deference to professional authority

TABLE 3. Inquiry questions

Inquiry Question	Collection Protocol	Protocol Question	Data Source
How were discretion and coping used as strategies to navigate the university/public school partnership?	Semi-structured interview	How would you describe the process of planning what activities and/or roles you would take on once embedded in the school site?	Interview responses from Heinz Fellows
	Semi-structured interview, Document analysis	How has the HFP impacted your social justice and equity orientation?	Interview responses from Heinz Fellows and artifacts
	Document Analysis	What words, phrases, actions denote incongruence in accomplishing goals that require discretion and coping?	Artifacts (notes from individual check-ins and notes from team meetings)

Conclusion

A university/public school partnership must embrace the environmental conditions, including previous collaboration efforts and organizational readiness to implement and sustain programs and activities that result from the collaboration (McNall et al., 2008). Effective, cohesive, and sustainable university/public school partnerships are guided by an assessment of the activities that will provide opportunities to establish and deepen trust across the organizations, adequate communication channels and action agenda (Williamson et al. 2016), and resources aligned to purposes (Baum, 2000).

Outcomes of cross-organizational partnerships are mediated by organizational readiness, prior collaborations and motivations, the leadership abilities of partners, institutional demands, trust, and the balance of power (McNall et al. (2009). Bonner and colleagues (Bonner et al., 2004), inform us that each organization has a formal structure and function and that these different forms of organizations provide constraints and opportunities. Thus, it is imperative that those engaging in university/public school partnerships know about each other and how their organizational behavior, then use this knowledge to increase productive tension and decrease uncomfortable conversations toward effective partnership (Brazer et al., 2014).

Acknowledging threats, challenges, and barriers through cross-organizational readiness assessment is useful in developing action plans to address and correct problems that arise throughout partnership. As noted by Williamson et al. (2016), roles, duties, and personnel evolve over the duration of collaborative projects and therefore cross-organizational partnerships benefit from integrated quality improvement and evaluation efforts that street level bureaucrats will engage in.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.
- Ash, A. (2013). A cognitive mask? Camouflaging dilemmas in street-level policy implementation to safeguard older people from abuse. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 43(1), 99–115. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23724486>
- Baum, H. S. (2000). Fantasies and realities in university-community partnerships. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 20(2), 234–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X0002000208>
- Bishop, J. P., & Noguera, P. A. (2019). The ecology of educational equity: Implications for policy. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 94(2), 122–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2019.1598108>
- Bonner, M., Koch, T., & Langmeyer, D. (2004). Organizational theory applied to school reform: A critical analysis. *School Psychology International*, 25(4), 455–471. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034304048779>
- Brazer, S. D., Kruse, S. D., & Conley, S. (2014). Organizational theory and leadership navigation. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 9(3), 254–272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775114532640>
- Bullough, R., Baugh, S. (2008). Building Professional Learning Communities Within a University—Public School Partnership. *Theory Into Practice*, 47. 286-293. 10.1080/00405840802329169.
- Butel, J. A., Banna, J. C., Novotny, R., Franck, K. L., Parker, S. P., & Stephenson, L. (2018). Validation of a Collaboration Readiness Assessment Tool for Use by Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Education (SNAP-Ed) Agencies and Partners. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 50(5), 501–505. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2017.11.002>
- Cohen, N. (2018). How culture affects street-level bureaucrats' bending the rules in the context of informal payments for health care: The Israeli Case. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 48(2), 175–187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074016665919>

Cohen, & Hertz, U. (2020). Street-level bureaucrats' social value orientation on and off duty. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 80(3), 442–453.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13190>

Collective Impact Forum (<https://collectiveimpactforum.org/resource/readiness-assessment/>)

Elliott, V. (2018). Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(11), 2580-2861.

Hennessey, A. (2021, April 19). *Criticality in the classroom*. ProjectGLAD.
<https://ntcprojectglad.com/2021/04/19/criticality-in-the-classroom/>

Jurie, J. D. (2000). Building capacity: Organizational competence and critical theory. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 13(3), 264–274.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/09534810010330913>

King, B. G., Felin, T., & Whetten, D. A. (2010). Perspective--Finding the organization in organizational theory: A meta-theory of the organization as a social actor. *Organization Science*, 21(1), 290–305. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1090.0443>

Larson, J., & Nelms, S. (2023). Collaborating for Equity in Urban Education: Comprehensive Reform in an Innovative University/School Partnership. *Urban Education (Beverly Hills, Calif.)*, 58(10), 2346–2377. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859211017976>

McNall, M. A., Reed, C. S., Brown, R. E., & Allen, A. (2009). Brokering community–university engagement. *Innovative Higher Education*, 33, 317-331.

O'Day, J.A., & Smith, M.S. (2016). *Quality and equality in American education: Systemic problems, systemic solutions*. Springer.

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Slater, J. J. (1996). *Anatomy of a collaboration: Study of a college of education/public school partnership* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315049274>

Weatherley, R., & Lipsky, M. (1977). Street-level bureaucrats and institutional innovation: Implementing special-education reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 47(2), 171–197.
<https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.47.2.v870r1v16786270x>

Weiston-Serdan, T. (2017). *Critical Mentoring: A Practical Guide* (1st ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003443872>

Williamson, H. J., Young, B.-R., Murray, N., Burton, D. L., Levin, B. L., Massey, O. T., & Baldwin, J. A. (2016). Community-university partnerships for research and practice: Application of an interactive and contextual model of collaboration. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 20(2), 55–84.

Appendix 1

Attitude, Skills, and Knowledge Inventory & Implementation Perception Assessment

Questions to consider across each organization:

- What has hindered the most successful implementation in your district/building?
- How does school or classroom organization affect student learning and development?
- What steps can be taken in your position to provide optimal conditions for effective collaboration?
- What are your views on school change?
- What is the most effective method of monitoring implementation?
- What is the most effective method of evaluating project implementation?
- What is your view on collaborating with district personnel?
- What are the barriers to successful collaboration in this organization?
- What are the similarities between the university and the school?
- What is needed to provide optimal support for implementation?
- Any additional feedback?

Appendix 2

TABLE 4. Attitude, skills, and knowledge inventory for university/public school partnership

<i>Attitudes</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>
Collaborative	Effective Communication	Organizational Development
Trustworthy	Adaptive Leadership	Equity and Justice
Humility	Liaising	Organizational Culture
Continuous Improvement	Self and full group reflection	History, Power, and Politics
Flexible	Calm under pressure, resourceful	Youth Development
Safe to fail/Take risks	Restorative Practices	Education History
Self-efficacious	Trauma-aware/Trauma-responsive	Anti-Oppression
Innovative	Policy advancement	Broader community

Appendix 3

TABLE 5. Implementation perception assessment

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Trust and mutual respect	Taking adequate time with partners and having a positive outlook about the collaboration.	
Adequate Communication	Clearly communicating expectations from the partnership, including benefits for all involved. The importance of communication reflected through sharing resources and information and ensuring an adequate frequency of communication.	
Action agenda & planning	Mutually agreeing upon the scope of the project, project conclusion, and sustainability plan.	
Respect for diversity	Respecting differences in behavioral practices, preferences, and opinions among the partners.	
Respect for organizational culture	Acknowledging differences between partners regarding their work settings, histories, and politics.	
Culture of learning	Cross-organizational learning opportunities and self-directed professional learning.	