Boundary-Spanning in School–University Partnerships

edited by

Kristien Zenkov
George Mason University

Drew Polly
UNC Charlotte

Lin Rudder
Lightridge High Schools and George Mason University

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CHAPTER 2

THOUGHT BUDDIES

How Partners in an RPP Expanded Roles and Navigated Boundaries

Valerie L. Marsh
University of Rochester

Elizabeth Conroy
University of Rochester

Jayne C. Lammers
University of Rochester

ABSTRACT

Research-Practice Partnerships (RPPs) connect universities and K–12 schools who work together to improve pedagogy and student outcomes. While RPPs have demonstrated effectiveness, they often struggle with inequitable relationships between university-based researcher partners and school-based practitioner partners, typically prioritizing researcher knowledge as more valuable than practitioner knowledge. Through an exploration of how one RPP resisted such knowledge hierarchies, this study shares findings illustrat-

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ing how three partners spanned institutional boundaries and exchanged ideas, language, and practices. Data were gathered in three phases over a four year period, using a design-based research (DBR) process, and went through an analytic induction process in which assertions were developed and tested. Data sources include researcher field notes and memos, transcripts from student interviews, RPP meeting transcripts, and email communication, and artifacts (e.g., curricular documents, instructional plans, student work). Findings reveal that partners spanned institutional boundaries by shifting and expanding their roles and co-constructing a space and structure whereby they exchanged ideas, language, and practices. Discussion contributes to the ways in which partners in an RPP can resist traditional research-practitioner status hierarchies and work towards more equitable collaborations.

Gaining attention for their effectiveness in bringing research and practice into dialogue to inform pedagogy, Research Practice Partnerships (RPPs) connect universities and K–12 schools to collaborate on research that is focused on equity goals for school communities (Farrell et al., 2022). While these partnerships have demonstrated successful outcomes for schools and students, they are not without their challenges, which coalesce around the related problems of the "research-practice gap" (when neither research nor practice inform one another) and an inequitable "insider-outsider" dynamic among partners (a disconnect between organizational structures, language, and power relations of the university and those of partnering schools; Phelps, 2019). This chapter, describing a collaboration between two university-based researchers (Valerie and Jayne) and a school-based teacher-researcher (Liz), contributes to what is known about how participants in an RPP shift roles and create space to share and develop ideas. In doing so, partners in this RPP navigated institutional boundaries—bridging gaps and resisting hierarchies that often characterize RPPs—to co-construct a trading zone (Penuel, et al., 2013) to support the project. Situated in a larger, more comprehensive university–school partnership, our RPP offers a smaller, more intimate look at how three partners span institutional boundaries while exchanging ideas, language, and practices.

When we began in 2019, we used design-based research (DBR; Barab & Squire, 2004) to design, iterate, and study a curricular unit for Liz's high school journalism course. The unit, centered on student research, writing, and advocacy, disrupted the tendency to exclude historically underserved students from a full range of curricular experiences in the service of test preparation and remediation (Morrell, 2005). Students studied local problems they cared about (Coffey, 2015), explored potential solutions, and ultimately argued for change, reimagining themselves as central, rather than peripheral, to community advocacy (Marsh et al., 2021). During the first of our three data collection phases, we identified real-time and long-term iterations to this unit which we continue to study in subsequent phases.

As we enter our fourth year of working together and begin Phase 3 of data collection, we have become focused on exploring our changing relationship. Our partnership, the school, and education worldwide continue to manage disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic. Returning to in-person teaching and learning, especially in underserved communities like the one where Liz teaches, presents new challenges as districts grapple with increased student mental health challenges, violence, teacher burnout, and decreased student motivation. In response to this changing context and our developing relationships, our RPP has adapted, and each of our roles has expanded. Throughout this time, we have sought an equitable relationship which provides space, values a mutual exchange of knowledge, and offers the possibility for transformation.

CONTEXT OF OUR PARTNERSHIP

Our two institutions began their collaboration in 2015 when Central High School (CHS) (all names are pseudonyms), the city's oldest, largest school, was facing forced closure by its State Education Department due to failing for years to reach required demonstrable improvement indicators on state assessments and other metrics. The graduation rate was 33%; there were 2,468 suspensions; and average daily attendance was 77%. CHS's student population was majority Black and Brown (88%) and economically disadvantaged (83%). In an effort to prevent CHS from closing, the district took advantage of a new reform option offered by the state in which a school forms an Educational Partnership Organization (EPO) with a "receiver." Serving as the receiver, the university entered into a five-year contract to partner with CHS with the goal of transforming it. After several extensions to that initial contract, the EPO is now in its eighth year. Thus, the CHS-EPO functions as an RPP within which our smaller RPP is nested.

Within the first year of the partnership, the university created a research center to support and document the collaborative effort at the CHS-EPO. This research center serves as a hub and connector between the university and CHS, facilitating movement across institutional boundaries. During the early years of the partnership, Valerie, the assistant director of the center and a professor in the university's education school's ELA teacher preparation program, crossed institutional boundaries and led a professional learning circle for her students (teacher candidates) and teachers at CHS. Liz, who has taught at CHS for eighteen years (as of 2023), participated. Valerie and Liz formed a relationship rooted in conversations about student learning and agency in English classrooms.

A few years later, when Valerie and Jayne, the director of the university's English Education program, learned of Liz's idea to design an advocacy-focused

research project, they asked how they could support her. For Liz, partnering on curriculum design was a novel experience, and initially she saw it as an opportunity to share resources and ideas. Together, we designed, implemented, and studied the Five Steps to Advocacy research unit in both sections of Liz's journalism class. The school's new mission, which prioritized "advocating for self and others," aligned with our literacies of power (Morrell, 2005) approach to repositioning students as change-makers during this unit.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In recent years, RPPs have shown effectiveness for improving achievement, equity, teaching, and learning (Farrell et al., 2022). Yet, a disconnect between the cultures of the university and the partnering schools involved in RPPs can work against productive, equitable collaborations (Phelps, 2019). Universities and K–12 schools differ in their organizational structures, discourse practices, and power relations (Brookhart & Loadman, 1990)—differences that need to be acknowledged and challenged in an RPP. Historically, school-based partners have approached these collaborations with skepticism about whether university researchers' intentions extend beyond their own self-interest (Larson & Moses, 2018; Marsh et al. 2022). A status hierarchy—positioning researchers as knowledge producers and teachers as in need of researchers' knowledge—works against trust building (Peel, et al., 2002).

However, when approaching RPPs with humility and acknowledgement of existing hierarchies, partners can develop shared understandings over time. Effective collaborations can create "trading zones" (Galison, 1997; Penuel et al., 2013, p. 238)—social spaces within which partners can exchange and form new cultural ideas, norms, practices, and terminology. Trading zones also facilitate partners' flexible movement across the boundaries that typically demarcate their respective sites of practice. In seeking such "mutualistic RPPs" (Penuel et al., 2013) that challenge status hierarchies, partners can engage in genuine dialogue, share joint ownership, and approach the partnership with an "openness to being transformed by the collaboration" (Phelps, 2019, p. 12). RPPs that create structures, adopt practices, and use tools that help them facilitate boundary-spanning (Farrell et al., 2022) provide opportunities for partners to innovate in the face of challenges and grow from their experiences (Glazer & Peurach, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

Our RPP entered into a design-based research process (DBR) (Barab & Squire, 2004; Reinking & Bradley, 2008), facilitating our inquiry about Liz's

unit through an interventionist approach to conducting research in naturalistic education settings and allowing us to iterate both the research and the curriculum in the process. We have been collecting data in three phases (see Table 2.1). During Phase 1, we used DBR to identify unit-level pedagogical goals for students to: (a) research solutions to local or hyperlocal issues that affected their communities and (b) advocated for change by producing and sharing written and digital artifacts. In Phase 2, we continued DBR to study real-time and long-term unit iterations and began to shift some of our attention to our expanding roles within the changing context of schooling. During Phases 2 and 3, data collection was moved online in response to the pandemic and continues to explore questions about the nature of RPPs.

We adjusted our research questions as we progressed through the phases of our study. To guide data collection for Phase 1, we asked: "How does an RPP provide opportunities for a teacher to iterate a senior research unit to meet her pedagogical goal to create a curricular unit that aims to amplify the voices of historically marginalized youth?." The analysis we present in this chapter is guided by our Phase 2 questions: "What conditions support the RPP to adapt and flex over time? How do participants in the RPP shift roles and navigate boundaries over time?."

TABLE 2.1 Data Collection Activities and Sources

Phase	Research Question	Data collection	Data source
Phase 1	How does an RPP provide opportunity for a teacher to iterate a senior research unit to meet her pedagogical goal to create a curricular unit that aims to amplify the voices of historically marginalized youth?	Participant observation	Field notes
		Student interviews	Audio recordings, transcripts
		Weekly planning meetings	Audio recordings, transcripts
Phases 1 & 2	How does an RPP provide opportunity for a teacher to iterate a senior research unit to meet her pedagogical goal to create a curricular unit that aims to amplify the voices of historically marginalized youth? What conditions support the RPP to adapt and flex over time? How do participants in the RPP shift roles and navigate boundaries over time?	Artifact collection	Curricular documents, instructional plans, student work
		Weekly Zoom conference planning meetings (ZC)	Video recordings, transcripts
		Email correspondance	Email transcripts
		Researcher memoing	Researcher memos
		Pre-unit conferencing (PC)	Video recordings, transcripts
		Final reflective conversations (FC)	Video recordings, transcripts

DATA ANALYSIS

We are developing and testing assertions based upon repeated readings of the data corpus (Erickson, 1986). With our understandings of RPPs providing sensitizing concepts (e.g., *"boundary-spanning"*) (Blumer, 1954), Valerie and Liz made initial assertions and then returned to the data to confirm and disconfirm evidence, revising, strengthening, and/or rejecting assertions before sharing them with Jayne for further refinement. An example of an initial assertion we made during Phase 1 was: "Researchers offer broader perspectives on the project that complement the teacher's day-to-day management of the unit." When we applied this assertion to the entire data corpus (Phases 1 & 2), we found it did not account for the robust evidence of the bidirectional relationship we had formed in which researchers and the teacher contributed and exchanged broader ideas related to theory and research. In other words, Liz's role was not confined to the "day-to-day management of the unit." Here's an excerpt from one of Liz's researcher memos where she reflected on an interview she conducted with one of her students and her emerging thinking about relevant theories to inform her work:

> I will consider this curriculum unit in terms of Self-determination Theory and Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogies. The information gathered from this interview will allow me to make some assertions and ultimately iterate the unit for deeper meaning and connectedness. (Researcher memo, 06.22.2022)

This excerpt signifies other accruing data that no longer supported the assertion as it was originally conceived. Therefore, we revised the assertion to read: "Partners co-constructed a trading zone where they exchanged ideas, language, and practices." We then reread the data corpus, testing the validity of this assertion, and found that this revised assertion captured the bidirectional nature of our relationship and also incorporated language from RPP research which highlights one of the challenges to RPPs—mutualistic relationships.

FINDINGS

Two relevant assertions about our RPP have survived the process described above:

1. Partners' changing roles and activities facilitated boundary-spanning.
2. Partners co-constructed a trading zone where they exchanged ideas, language, and practices.

Shifting and Expanding Roles Facilitate Boundary Spanning (Assertion 1)

At the beginning of our partnership, each of our roles were distinct and tied to our institutional affiliations (see Table 2.2). CHS's general perception of the university was one of skepticism. CHS teachers and staff were both weary from cycles of failed reform and wary that the university was more interested in CHS as a site for research, rather than as a true partner in school change (Marsh et al., 2022). Likewise, Liz admitted that she too held some of the same perceptions of doubt as her CHS colleagues. As university-affiliated partners, Valerie and Jayne entered the RPP with an openness to Liz's ideas about the curriculum but fully expecting to be

TABLE 2.2 Institutionally Defined Roles Impacting the RPP

	Valerie	Liz	Jayne
Phase 1			
RPP Roles	Principal investigator of study (PI), Thought buddy resource for teacher	Primary unit designer and instructor, Study participant and collaborator	Co-PI, Thought buddy resource for teacher
Institutional Titles	University Professor of ELA Education + Research Center leader focused on urban education change	CHS English Teacher	University Professor + Director of ELA Teacher Preparation Program
Phase 2			
RPP Roles	Principal investigator of study (PI), Thought buddy	Primary unit designer and instructor, Co-PI, Thought buddy	Co-PI, Thought buddy
Institutional Titles	University Professor + Research Center Leader + Pipeline Program Director + Liz's research apprentice instructor	CHS teacher + University doctoral student + teacher leader (CRP) + research apprentice	University Professor + Director of ELA Teacher Preparation Program + Liz's advisor and course instructor
Phase 3			
Institutional Titles	University Professor + Director of ELA Teacher Preparation Program + Research Center Leader + Pipeline Program Director	CHS teacher + University doctoral student + teacher leader (CRP)	On leave from University + Director of Learning Design, Edmentum
RPP Roles	PI, Thought Buddy	Co-PI, Thought Buddy	Co-PI, Thought Buddy

responsible for designing and implementing the research, as per our institutional roles. While we did not discuss these responsibilities at the time, we now all realize that Valerie and Jayne were mindful of not confirming CHS's skepticism, and thus built on the prior relationship between Valerie and Liz while also planning a longer term engagement beyond being together for only one instructional unit.

In the ensuing years, as our institutional roles have changed, so too have our roles and activities within the RPP (e.g., Liz becoming a Co-PI) (see Table 2.3). While we each are still accountable to our institutional roles and related activities, we are also engaged in changing roles and new activities. We draw upon all roles and activities to span boundaries.

Significantly, Liz crossed the school-university boundary by enrolling as a university doctoral student, thus developing research interests and relevant theories. As a student, Liz also became enculturated to the norms and practices of the university setting while continuing to teach every day in the CHS school setting. Moving across institutional boundaries, Liz applied what she was learning about research and theory to her teaching and incorporated some of these ideas into our collaboration while simultaneously bringing the language, norms, and practices of her school setting to bear on her doctoral work and our study. At the close of Phase 2 data collection, Liz reflected on how her thinking was changing, thus blurring her perceived boundaries around her roles within our RPP.

> I always had this very healthy respect for people who knew more stuff than me. But I do feel like, as we're starting to speak the same language—you [Valerie and Jayne] kind of think in researcher terms, and I'm thinking in teacher terms—and now that I'm starting to think in both terms, it kind of levels the thinking field. (FC, 06.20.2022)

In this reflection, Liz acknowledged her belief that her research partners "know more" than her, which challenged her to feel a sense of equity among us. This belief falls in line with the well-documented and counterproductive status hierarchy between university-based and PK–12 school-based partners (Phelps, 2019). Yet, Liz also indicated that this dynamic was changing. Not only has she stepped into the role of doctoral student, she became Valeries's research apprentice and Jayne became her teacher and advisor—new roles for everyone.

But beyond the institutional roles we each fulfill are the activities or the moves we made as we interacted with each other (Table 2.2). These too have shifted and expanded, thus facilitating boundary-spanning.

With an awareness of status hierarchies and an intention to work against them in our RPP, Valerie and Jayne stepped back from assumed leadership activities somewhat, as Liz became more central in the design and analysis

TABLE 2.3 Researcher Activities Within the RPP

	Author 1	Author 2	Author 3
Activities Phase 1	Sets research agenda, serves as thought buddy resource for Liz, leads data collection and analysis, lead writer, contributes broader perspectives that compliment Liz's day-to-day management of unit (Phase 1 assertion), transcribes meetings	Brings valuable local, specialized knowledge of content, relationships and experience as a school community member; designs of unit, teaches Valeries and Jayne about CHS's culture, initiates research activities within her classroom; uses research language; reads and analyzes research articles	Serves as thought buddy resource for teacher, collects data, co-leads data collection and analysis, co-writes, contributes broader perspectives that compliment Liz's day-to-day management of unit
Activities Today (It's really Phase 2)	Deliberately, explicitly rings Liz's knowledge to the forefront of our collaboration; affirms, revoices, asks questions to elicit thinking, reassures, empathizes, and supports during COVID disruptions; signals Liz to lead; amplifies Liz's research participation; tracks trends/threads in data and phase to phase iterations and from meeting to meeting; introduces/ incorporates theory; offers help with planning (e.g., motivation survey); suggests teaching practices, resources; challenges Liz to consider new ideas; coaches Liz in her researcher role; co-writes research reports	Introduces unit iterations; describes self with researcher language; brings questions group, introduces CSP theory; uses language of theory; seeks input on students with regard to motivation; develops new unit; initiates her own process for writing research memos; transcribes interviews; uses university courses to explore CSP and motivation with her students (e.g., motivation survey,); recognizes the need to be flexible amid COVID disruptions/using RPP to help with flexibility; asks for "thought buddy time"; introduces "artifacts of practice" to RPP; leads meetings; thinks out loud; reflects on what works well; co-writes research reports	Contributes to thought buddy meetings, deliberating invites Liz's perspectives and inquires into those conversations; guides design of Liz's research apprenticeship, co-writes research reports

activities of the partnership. Likewise, Valerie and Jayne also stepped into activities which invited, affirmed (ZC 06.09.2022), and encouraged Liz's movement into research (email correspondence 01.24.2022; PC, 2021; FC, 2022), as well as activities that signified and amplified her expertise (ZC, 05.24.2022; 06.09.2022; FC, 2022). In the following excerpt from our final reflective conference at the close of Phase 2, Valerie and Liz discussed how important and challenging it was for Liz to think of herself as a valuable knowledge source in our partnership.

> **Valerie:** What I want to emphasize is that you bring knowledge that we don't have. And I want to make sure you get that. Like, we can't do this without you and your knowledge. Not just your students. *Your* knowledge. Your knowledge of how to plan units, how to work in the school culture, your knowledge of the systems and structures, your knowledge as a classroom teacher who's been a teacher way longer than Jayne and I were ever classroom teachers, even if you never became a doc student, and you never learned research. That's the part I think we need to work on is prioritizing that value so that you recognize it.
>
> **Liz:** It's because teachers are used to—you know—their knowledge isn't used to being . . . we're not used to having our knowledge respected as something that people care about [smiles] . . . But you're right. I don't know that [teacher knowledge] is something that people widely recognize as valuable. It's been internalized. I don't know. (FC, 2022)

These types of exchanges among us were frequent, where Valerie and Jayne deliberately invited and articulated the value of Liz's knowledge and perspective (ZC, 05.24.2022; 06.09.2022; FC, 2022). And in this excerpt, Liz shared that her experience as a teacher challenged her to believe us. We found that as our RPP continued to develop, and Liz ventured further and further across the boundary separating our institutions, that Valerie and Jayne's roles increasingly involved supporting (PC, 2021; Pre-unit C, 03.24.2022; ZC, 03.31.2022; ZC, 05.10.2022; FC 2022), affirming (ZC 06.09.2022), and reminding Liz of her contribution to our partnership (ZC, 05.24.2022; 06.09.2022; FC, 2022).

One of the more prominent boundary-spanning activities we've observed was Liz's engagement with theory to understand our research and her teaching. We believe this incorporation of theory into Liz's thinking and practice was a consequence of and informed by her changing role as doctoral student. In one of our RPP meetings during Phase 2 when students and teachers had returned to in-person learning following 18 months

of remote learning, Liz observed a decrease in her students' motivation in class. Valerie introduced Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2009) for guidance; Liz was also developing an interest in Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014; New York Department of Education, 2018). Based on our conversations and her noticings, Liz decided on two major iterations to the unit: (a) moving implementation to the middle of the year (rather than at the end when grades often "don't matter" to seniors) and (b) adding an expectation that students enact the advocacy they had researched and proposed, rather than writing a proposal without enacting it. She discussed these changes in the context of theoretical ideas:

> I'm thinking it ... would ideally foster both extrinsic [motivation]—because of their grades—and intrinsic motivation because it would enhance their relatedness, autonomy, and competence, which are the three of pillars of SDT [self-determination theory]. ... They have more of a connectedness to how to petition, protest, and enact change, which is also in the literature about the "civic engagement gap" that Bettina Love and Miera Levinson talk about as an equity issue. (Pre-unit conference, 2023)

In this excerpt, Liz used the language of research, specifically Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2009) as well as Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Pedagogy (CR-SP; New York Department of Education, 2018) to think through her pedagogical choices. Liz prioritized tenets of CR-SP in the unit, emphasizing student voice and choice and offering avenues for students to amplify and sustain their advocacy efforts for impactful and lasting change. Additionally, student motivation surfaced frequently in our discussions of the unit and SDT served as a guide to make instructional choices to help foster intrinsic motivation. These—among other—pedagogical choices were directly influenced by Liz's boundary-spanning from CHS to university as she became increasingly vigilant to connect research with her own practice.

Our changing roles and shared language around research and theory has facilitated our exchange of ideas as well as an expansion of Liz's thinking. She continues to think like a teacher but has started to "think in researcher terms," allowing her to inhabit both mindsets and blur previously seemingly bounded roles.

Partners Co-Constructed a Trading Zone Where They Exchanged Ideas, Language, and Practices (Assertion 2)

As partners who come from different institutional communities, we sought to create a trading zone—a hybrid space where we could discuss and exchange ideas and create our own norms. Our trading zone emerged within a structure that we established—regular, weekly meetings with the

initial goal to support Liz's design and redesign of a curricular unit of study. The meetings (indicated in the data as "ZC," "PC," and "FC") were a time and space we designated for thinking together, where each partner traded in the currency of our respective institutions. While the goal of curricular support had become backgrounded during the years of the partnership, additional goals developed to support Liz as she took on new roles as a researcher and dealt with unprecedented challenges emerging during and since the pandemic. Thus, our meetings came to serve broader purposes and our conversations traversed boundaries as we traded ideas in support of both the curricular iterations and the ongoing study.

In our co-constructed trading zone, Liz offered local, school-based knowledge, language, and practices (ZC 04.29.2022; ZC 05.10.2022; ZC 05.24.2022) and later, the knowledge that she was developing during her doctoral studies (ZC 04.29.2022; ZC 05.10.2022; ZC 05.19.2022, FC 2022). She was able to trade her expertise about CHS's school culture (ZC 05.32.2022), her curriculum (IC or Pre-Unit, 2022; 05.10.202), and what is was like to teach in a high school during COVID (ZC, 04.07.2022, ZC 04.14.2022; ZC 06.19.2022; FC 2022).

Valerie and Jayne traded in the currency of the university world, primarily research knowledge, language, and practices, such as tracking trends/threads in data, phase to phase iterations to curriculum, and developments from meeting to meeting (Pre-unit C, 03.24.2022, 03.31.2022; 04.07.2022; 04.14.2022; 04.29, 2022; 05.19.2022, 05.24.2022). As the challenges of student motivation emerged, Valerie also traded in the currency of her knowledge of theory into our conversations (ZC, 04.14.2022; ZC 05.10.2022, ZC, 05.19.2022; ZC, 05.24.2022). Each partner brought their understanding to the collective space of our trading zone.

In conceptualizing our relationship as "thought buddies" we co-constructed our own terminology, structure, and expectations for our RPP. In one of these meetings, Liz shared how she perceived our collaboration as a "space to think":

> I'm noticing that I do really appreciate this space to think through how I have to flex, especially given things that happened that are out of my control or within my control, or you know, how things change. I do appreciate having the space to think—think through what are the best moves right now. (ZC, 03.31.2022)

Liz alludes to the two school years that had been most disrupted by COVID and the consequential demand on teachers to be flexible and adapt. Confronted with the challenge to move all instruction to fully remote, it was no small feat to "digitize" the curriculum. Some lessons did not easily lend themselves to an online version, and gauging student motivation became a persistent struggle. Our RPP time helped with this recalibration in order

for Liz to think through remote ways to accomplish the goals of the unit. Valerie and Jayne were valuable thought partners, as they were intimately familiar with the unit, more so even than Liz's CHS colleagues at this point.

By calling ourselves "thought buddies," we neither borrowed language or structural hierarchy from the university context nor from the school context. We began to think beyond and blur institutional boundaries. Liz often brought the group a problem of practice during our meetings and asked for "thought buddy time."

Recently, Liz opened one of our meetings deliberating on a pedagogical decision on how to begin the Five Steps to Advocacy unit this year. She wondered whether to start by introducing concepts and models or by inviting students to jump right into research by doing a collaborative, abbreviated version of the project. If the latter, the class would collectively explore the assignment by researching a local issue—food deserts—with Liz's guidance. Here is an abridged version of the conversation:

Liz: [Asks for thought buddy time to figure out what would work best,] "I'm not sure which way works better. Any thoughts . . . buddies?"
[A conversation ensues where Liz shares her thoughts about the advantages and disadvantages of each iteration.]

Jayne: [Asks questions to further elicit Liz's thinking.] "For what purpose are you thinking about the need to do any kind of a model unit with them?"

Liz: [Responds, continuing to flesh out her thinking: She believes that this would be an opportunity for students to engage in the "messy" work of learning something new, but with her guidance.]

Valerie: [Responds by revoicing]: "So, it sounds like in answer to Jayne's question, you're saying you want a common frame of reference to start from," [and encouraging]: "I like that idea a lot. I particularly liked your words of 'exploratory and messy'. It's such a good way to learn, you know?"

Liz: [Playing out a simulation in her mind, says]: "And then when they are really thinking about their own problems [for their individual research], then they can read it with that lens of, *Oh I know what I have to do. I know what the process is gonna be like, and now I can really think about matching up which method is going to make the most sense for my problem.*" (PC, 03.24.2023)

These types of exchanges came to connote "thought buddy" activity, when the three of us could interact in a hybrid space—not tied to the norms,

language, or practices of either of our institutions—but borrowing from each, and forming some of our own.

DISCUSSION

We aim to show and discuss ways a small team of practice partners, working within the context of a comprehensive university–school RPP, used knowledge, language, and practices to co-construct a trading zone that facilitated each of our movements across the boundaries that often limit university–school partnerships. While Liz moved most frequently and fluidly across institutional and professional boundaries, Valerie and Jayne adapted their roles to support Liz's additional roles, as well as her teaching, which had to adjust in the wake of remote learning and COVID-related disruptions to schooling. Our trading zone became a place and a time when we were able to "innovate in the face of challenges and grow from [our] experiences" (Glazer & Peurach, 2013 as cited in Farrell et al., 2022, p. 2), developing curricular innovations that adapted to the demands of teaching during a disruptive period. Over time, we "[found our] way into" (Penuel et al., 2013, p. 239) new roles that allowed all partners to develop new understandings about each other's institutional contexts and began to trade in new practices, norms, and language, thus narrowing the research-practice gap.

Resisting Traditional RPP Hierarchies

While university-based partners typically take on roles as curriculum and research designers, and school-based partners assume roles as implementers, we sought to resist this hierarchy. Our trading zone opened up when Valerie and Jayne rejected the more typical role of dictating curricular design and focused instead on what Liz needed from her "thought buddies" in order to iterate curriculum. As our trading zone became established, Valerie and Jayne offered not only curricular design support, but emotional encouragement amidst COVID disruptions, and also the support for Liz to cross the boundary into the university, where she chose to pursue her own questions about responsive pedagogies and school transformation.

With her new mindset of "thinking in researcher terms," Liz approached her practice through a more analytical lens. She was able to address problems of practice—whether in terms of curricular improvement or COVID-related challenges—through a research-based orientation, and the RPP created valuable space to debrief and exchange ideas. This perspective shift allowed her to more examine "what's going on" in the classroom from an additional perspective and re-situate her solutions in terms of theory

and new methods. According to Penuel and colleagues (2013), we were engaged in the work of "co-design" when "the roles feel unfamiliar, and the norms and procedures of inducting each partner into the work have to be established" (p. 239). As Liz ventured furthest into new and unfamiliar territory of research and doctoral work, Valerie and Jayne took on the roles of inducting her into the practices of research. Perhaps counter to the assumed expectations of what researchers do and what teachers do in an RPP, we found that a key role for researchers who aim to create mutualistic partnerships involves following the lead of the school-based partner to signal if and when to trade. In these ways, we disrupted the insider-outsider gap that often limits RPPs.

Guiding Smaller RPPs

As researchers continue to evolve the methodology of RPPs in service of solving the urgent pedagogical problems facing today's classrooms, teachers, and learners, we see the need for more explicit guidance about how to span institutional boundaries and create more mutualistic RPPs. As a relatively small, three-person partnership, our study provides details about individual roles and activities, adding perspective to what is known about RPPs. To help facilitate researchers' and teachers' movement into unfamiliar roles, we recommend using some time at the beginning of a partnership to build shared understandings of each others' contexts. Researchers need to approach the partnership with a commitment to mutuality with the teacher, providing space and time for the teacher to exchange her knowledge and expertise and to take initiative in a supported way. They need to spend time in the local classroom/school context, opening themselves up to the practices and ideas from their teacher partners. Partnerships can benefit from collectively reading and discussing RPP theory and examples, to facilitate a shared understanding of what's possible and to help participants talk about how they want to disrupt the hierarchies and boundaries inherent in their institutional roles. In doing so, RPPs will narrow the research-practice gap and challenge the insider-outsider dynamic, providing space and time to think together and innovate for school change.

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