

## Preface

This book is intended to be a practical guide to help researchers and educational leaders in schools, districts, and community organizations form long-term collaborations with one another. The focus is on a particular kind of collaboration, *research-practice partnerships* (RPPs). RPPs are long-term collaborations between practitioners and researchers that are organized to investigate problems of practice and solutions for improving educational systems.

Now is an opportune time for a book on this topic for two reasons. First, there is an increased interest among policy makers, researchers, and educators today in the promise of research-practice partnerships. They see partnerships as ways to bring evidence to bear on educational decision making and as an approach to creating usable, effective innovations. Thus, the hunger for evidence and for strategies to overcome challenges of partnerships is higher than ever in recent educational history. Second, there is now both a growing body of scholarship on and direct experience of partnerships from which we can draw to support claims about how best to organize partnerships effectively.

This book is grounded in both scholarship and the wisdom of practice. We rely on narratives as a tool to bring to life the dynamics of partnership, especially narratives that draw on our own experiences as leaders of RPPs. Each of us brings a long history of involvement with partnerships, but from the different positions of researcher (Bill) and educator (Dan). At the same time, the reason we have written this book together is that we share certain

perspectives on the value of partnerships and enjoy working together. We also see partnerships as a way for us to be engaged in work that the other person does that we love to have a part in: for Bill, that's leading professional development and building teachers' capacity to work together for change, and for Dan, it's being part of educational research on curricular innovations and scaling educational change efforts. Also, for the past three years, we have co-led workshops for researchers and educators about partnerships, helping them learn more about the nature of partnership work and develop the skills and dispositions we think are necessary for this kind of work.

Bill started out his career in educational research working in the central office at Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools in the mid-1990s. His entry into education research coincided with early efforts by scientists learning to scale up innovations in math, science, and writing in the school district. It was an exciting effort, but a school board controversy led to the demise of these efforts, which were led locally by Vanderbilt researchers John Bransford, Susan Goldman, and Jim Pellegrino. For Bill, the experience was formative in that it underscored how valuable it could be for researchers to engage collaboratively at the district level to expand access to powerful learning innovations to all children, as well as just how vulnerable such efforts could be to political pressures and dynamics.

Since that time, Bill has spent his career in a nonprofit research organization (SRI International) and in a university (University of Colorado Boulder). His research has expanded beyond evaluation to the design and implementation of innovations in science, mathematics, and literacy for children in preschools, middle schools, high schools, and afterschool programs for youth of all ages. Since 2007, he has partnered with the Denver Public Schools, supporting their math and science teams. The examples in the book draw extensively from this partnership, as well as earlier efforts involving design work with school districts and groups of teachers looking to have systemwide impacts on teaching and learning in mathematics and science education.

For his part, Dan started out in research, and landed eventually in a leadership position in a major urban school district, the Seattle Public Schools. He began as a lab scientist in molecular biology and physiology in Colorado and Seattle, but his desire to serve and have a bigger impact on the

world led him to pursue a teaching career. He taught high school science in the Bellevue Public Schools in Washington, and he eventually became an instructional coach and curriculum developer in that school district. In those roles at Bellevue, he sought education research to inform his work with teachers and began to reach out to researchers like Charles W. (Andy) Anderson of Michigan State University, who was developing curriculum and assessments and also looking for places to test out his materials. Dan's continued engagement with researchers and gracious, informal mentors like Anderson and Philip Bell of the University of Washington honed his ability to form and sustain RPPs. Ultimately, Dan became a co-principal investigator on multiple large scale-up grants with Anderson funded by the National Science Foundation. He has also initiated and led two Math-Science Partnership grants from the state of Washington as the principal investigator. By choosing to position himself with fellow practitioners in school districts and partner with researchers in universities, Dan aims to bring the two communities together to improve experiences for students. Recently, to further deepen his knowledge and skills as a systems-level educational leader, he began to pursue an EdD at the University of Washington. These experiences give him a unique perspective on living inside multiple RPPs from the district role. Dan is now Director of Career and College Readiness in Seattle Public Schools.

From these brief descriptions, we hope readers will get a better sense of where we are coming from and why we are passionate about partnerships. At the same time, we know that the vast majority of our experience in partnerships locates us in one corner of the partnership world, namely partnerships between district central offices and university researchers working in the areas of mathematics and science. We have sought to describe the activities of partnerships focused on other issues and composed of different types of organizations—for instance, those involving research nonprofits and community organizations—by drawing on others' experiences.

We also recognize that our perspectives come from relatively privileged places within our institutions and within the broader society. We are leaders within large organizations, and our work has been well resourced by the external funding we've received. We are also two white men in a society that affords us a certain power to act that people of other racial backgrounds and

gender identities might not have. Throughout the book, we have brought in other voices from partnerships led by people from nondominant backgrounds to expand the perspectives we give from our own experience. Still, we know that our own position within society limits what we can say with confidence here. We hope ours is one among many books on partnerships in the coming years, and that there will be more scholarship in this area by scholars of color to expand what it means to be in partnership.

For both of us, the content of the book reflects the core of our work as individuals in our respective organizations. For Bill, it represents a synthesis of ideas about how to work in partnership as a researcher developed across two decades of joint projects with school districts and community organizations. For Dan, writing about partnership is a way to help him clarify and articulate the strategies he's developed over the years for working productively with researchers. Individually and together, we're always grateful that people seem interested enough to stick around and engage with us on the topic of partnerships. We hope that readers will find in this book something that is both interesting and practical, something that rings true even if the experiences we describe are unfamiliar. Most of all, we hope it inspires you to go out and start a research-practice partnership.