

What are Research-Practice Partnerships in education?

The Jacobs Foundation worked with a small team of Research and Social Entrepreneurship Fellows to better understand the current state of practice in education Research-Practice Partnerships (RPPs) and to document and share the lessons learned.

As part of this work, the Foundation worked with a small team of Fellows to learn more about the main barriers and success factors to implementing evidence-informed practices through RPPs.

The aim was to glean valuable insights that can guide the foundation's future investments and serve as inspiration for others working to generate and translate evidence to inform policy and practice to bring practitioners and researchers closer together in a structured partnership.

Research-Practice Partnerships: Why learning together works

In the middle of the current learning crisis, children need education stakeholders to rapidly codify and scale evidence-informed practices to positively impact learning. To make certain we codify and scale the best education practices, we need evidence of both what works, and what works in the classroom.

One potential approach to effectively and efficiently combine these two elements is to develop Research-Practice Partnerships (RPP). RPPs bring researchers and practitioners together to problem solve and generate evidence. RPPs are established in other disciplines but are relatively new in education.

Traditional evidence-generation can have limitations

Traditional evidence-generating methods separate researchers and educators into two isolated and independent actors. Researchers generate evidence which, in principle, education practitioners pick up and translate into classroom practice. As even the best quality research needs to be translated into classroom practice, this separate, more traditional, approach can impose several inherent implementation limitations.

Finding evidence to translate into practice, for example, takes time, effort and relies on education practitioners having the inclination and capacity to search, access, translate and then adopt research findings. Practitioners are further expected to seek out evidence in addition to their teaching duties.

Even the most well-intentioned practitioners have limited capacity as the education system does prioritize, train or develop a culture that supports them adopting evidence-informed practice.

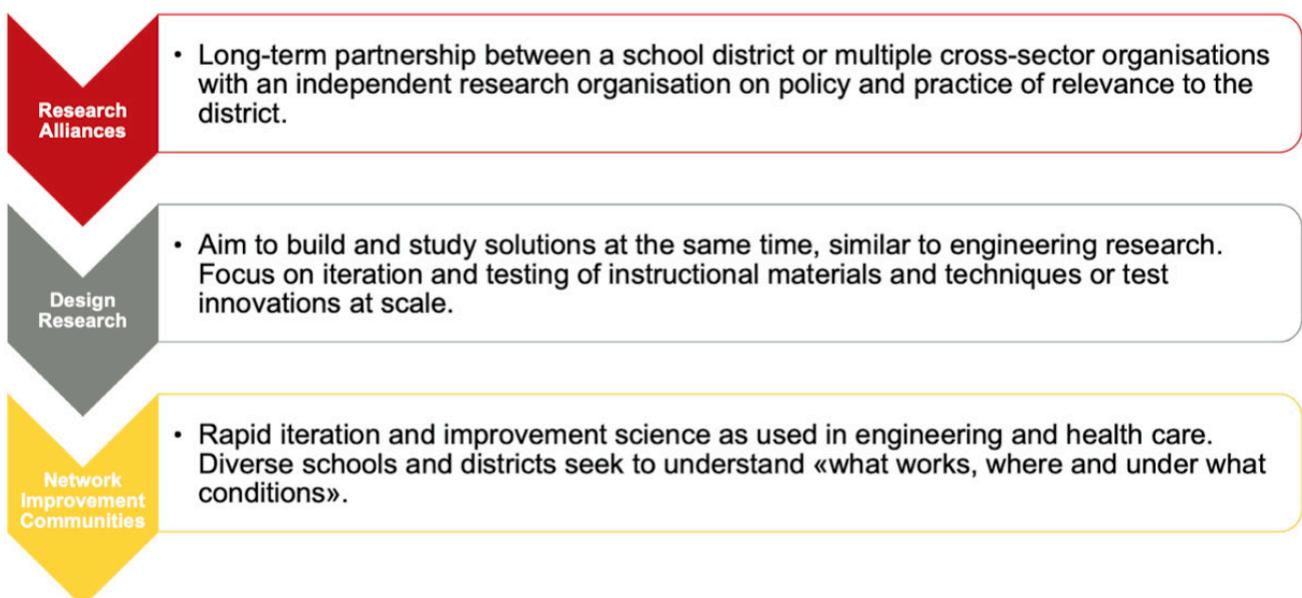
Another limitation can be that research is sometimes limited by the time, relevance, and resources researchers have to invest in solving a particular problem. For example, practitioners may have insights and ideas for more evidence and need to wait for new research topics to be identified and completed. Research can also be interesting and meaningful from a theoretical perspective, but extraneous from a classroom perspective. Finally research budget cycles may mean evidence is only generated for a limited period of time.

Systemic barriers can also limit the translation process. Many educators do not have access to research, and need a level of research literacy to understand how the research can be translated into practice. In reverse, educators do not have the mechanisms with which to share their insights with researchers to inform their work.

RPPs: Researchers and practitioners work together

One way to address these problems is to bring researchers and education practitioners to work together in the form of an RPP. Key characteristics of RPPs in education include a long-term focus on a practice problem, a commitment to mutualism, an intentional building of strategies to foster collaboration and a goal to produce original analysis.

The exact form within which researchers and practitioners work together can differ according to goals and circumstances, but there are three main types of RPPs: Research Alliances, Design Research and Network Improvement Communities.



RPPs are a challenging and complex relationship between multiple partners. A number of key elements need to be aligned including goals, capabilities, capacity, good fit and funding. In further LEAP research a number of key lessons, broad and stakeholder specific recommendations have been identified.

This article draws on the findings documented in the LEAP Report “Learning from Research-Practice Partnerships (RPPs): criteria for and examples of effective RPPs, and the lessons they hold for Funders, Facilitators and Brokers” authored by Lia Commissar, Jamie Jirout, Sehr Tejpar, and Nick Valenzia (LEAP Core Team Lead).