

Uncertain Terrain: Tensions in the Implementation of Collaborative Educational Research



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School Board- University Partnerships

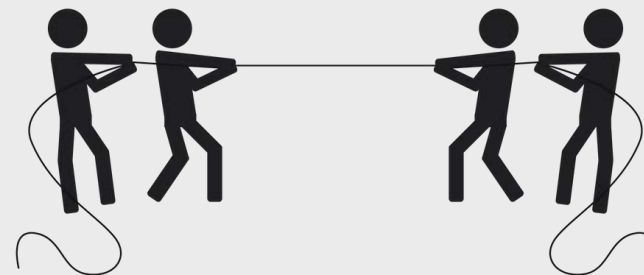
- **Advocated widely & complex** (Henrick, Munoz, & Cobb, 2016; Lopez Turley & Stevens, 2015)
- Factors enhancing their potential for success include:
 - Establishing **trusting relationships** and working towards **common mutually beneficial goals** (Lopez Turley & Stevens, 2015)
 - Developing **in-depth understandings** of the school-board and university **contexts**, and the **complexities** of each (Henrick et al, 2016)
- In a similar vein, teaching teachers involves learning to deal with complex contexts, developing relationships, and being responsive to unpredictable dilemmas & situations that arise (Loughran, 2006)

Tensions in Teaching Teachers

(Berry, 2008)

Six Interconnected, Interrelated Tensions

1. Telling & Promoting Growth through Active Learning
2. Planning & Being Flexibly Responsive
3. Confidence & Uncertainty
4. Action & Intent
5. Safety & Challenge
6. Valuing & Reconstructing Perspectives

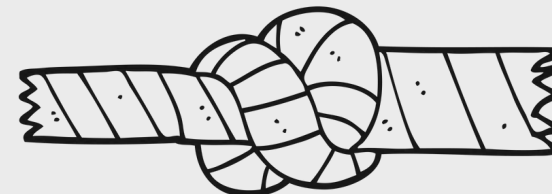


Tensions in Teaching Teachers

(Berry, 2008)

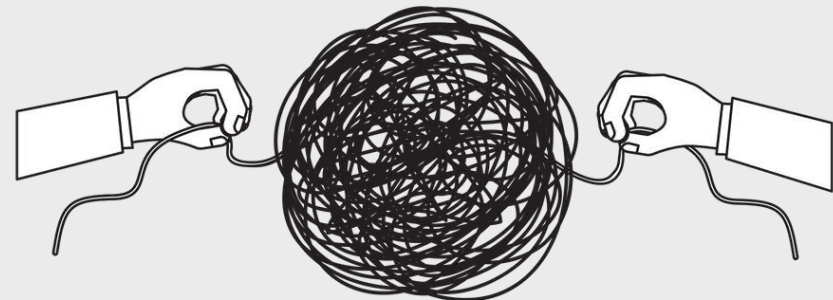
Six Interconnected, Interrelated Tensions

- Berry (2008) suggested that these six tensions, which must all be negotiated, provided a framework to enhance understandings of the issues that define teacher educators' practices
- This framework as a lens to understand the dilemmas encountered by educational researchers in their work with school board partners, has not been examined



Context

- Two Educational Researchers with a long-term, collaborative research relationship
- Each with long-standing school-board partnerships
- “4A” recipients who persevered & after 4 years of “4A”, were awarded funding for their proposed 4-year study of literacy coaching developed in partnership with school board personnel



Proposed Research Program

Literacy Coaching Project –
School Board A

Small
Group
Sessions

Individualized
Classroom
Coaching

School Board Coaches

Teachers

Literacy Coaching Project –
School Board B

Small
Group
Sessions

Individualized
Classroom
Coaching

School Board Coaches

Teachers

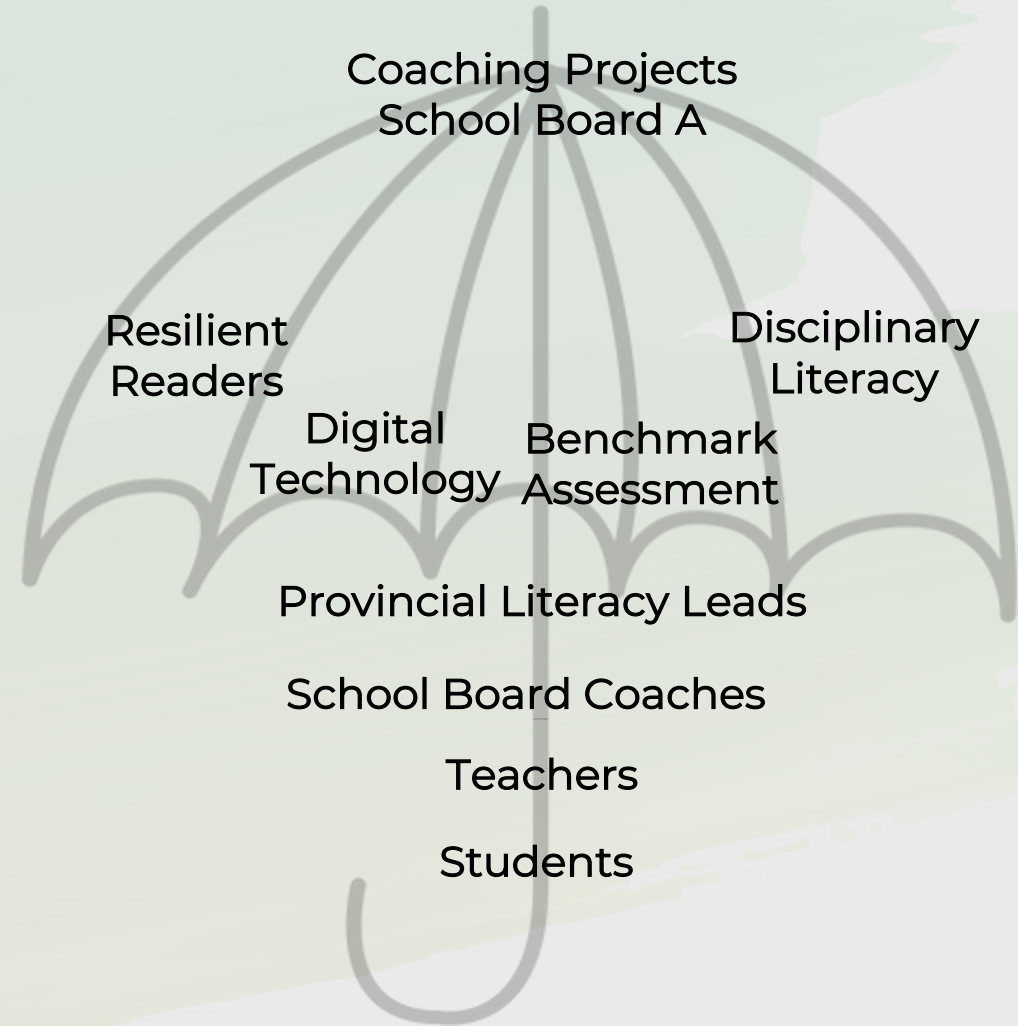


The tides are turning



Implemented Program

- 4-Year Funded project
- Currently in Year 3
- Four different PD/Coaching projects in one school board
- Interconnected levels & participants including MOE PLLs



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Research Methods

- Qualitative Case Study (Yin, 2012)
- S-STEP Participants: 2 Educational Researchers

Research Question

- What issues and dilemmas arose in the implementation of this long-term funded research program?

Project Context

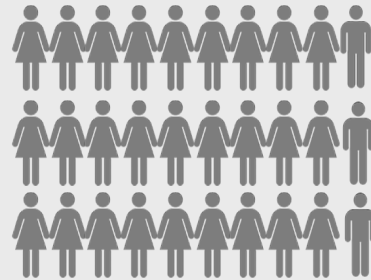
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Two school years of professional learning projects (2016-17 & 2017-18)



Teachers took part in small group PD sessions and/or individualized coaching

Participants



30 Teachers



3 School Board Coaches



3 Provincial Literacy Leads



2 Educational Researchers

Data



- Fieldnotes
- Email Communication
- Funding Proposals



- Artifacts



- Reflective Conversations
- Interviews

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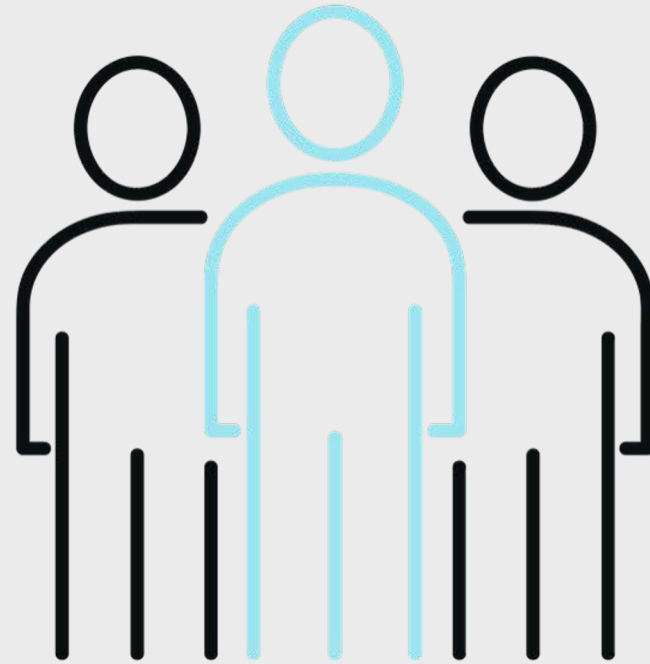
Data Analysis

- Coding & Categorizing (Creswell, 2012)
- Inductive coding (Creswell, 2012) using the framework of Tensions (Berry, 2008)

Tensions in School-Board & University Educational Research Partnerships

1. **Telling and Growth:** Deciding when to facilitate growth through active learning and when to “tell” research partners/participants information
2. **Confidence and Uncertainty:** Remaining confident while also aware of the uncertainty of the evolving foci and direction of school-board partnerships
3. **Actions and Intent:** Dichotomies that may exist between researchers’ actions and school board partners/participants’ perceptions of their intents
4. **Safety and Challenge:** Moving beyond safety and embracing the challenges of school-board/university research partnerships
5. **Valuing and Reconstructing:** Valuing while supporting school-board partners/participants’ abilities to reconstruct their perceptions
6. **Planning and Being Responsive:** Balancing planned directions or experiences with being responsive to unanticipated situations as they arise

Which tensions
are revealed
in your
excerpts?



Tensions make things more interesting

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Arlene: ...in the spring; we had such enthusiasm from the former superintendent....And it's just a shame that he retired... his replacement basically just gave it to their research department and they have stonewalled it since...I just think it's not high on their list... although they said mid October and they said that they review applications in order of when they are received. We know that the former superintendent said they would review ours... he will present it and he will garner support. And he thinks this is exactly what they need, again, it comes down to what is relevant to them. So he saw how it fit within their model for coaching PD...and basically said that he would help it get through...now it's his replacement's call and his call is that he doesn't know anything about this...That [ethics] application was delivered in August. It was supposed to be reviewed by the middle of October; we are now at the end of December. And we've been told it's going to be January before they look at it...

Tiffany: It shows the importance of relationships,...You can't just come from the outside and swoop into a school board...the former superintendent...he just saw the relevance...this was going to fill a niche and it was an answer to his problem and he thought it was a perfect fit and he was so keen

Arlene: It's just like School Board C.....there's no co-ordination because it was the ministry that said go to Board C, they would be a perfect fit...yet because of the projects and other things coming down from the ministry the school board says no.

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Tiffany: I don't know if I'm feeling okay, I'm just resigned to the whole thing because it's so disjointed. So I don't take it personally because I feel like I have no control.

Arlene: I think that makes it feel uncomfortable because we had such a plan... we had so much interest from so many boards and I could see it all playing out the way we proposed it. And now I can't see where it's going...if I look at our five-year plan- the first year was to collect base line data, and then to use that to develop professional learning or collaborative inquiry groups for these coaches. But I don't see where we're going to [do that].

Tiffany: I think it's worse than we thought because we don't have full access [in board A because of labour disputes]. I'm optimistic that they will still be open to what we want to do in Year 2.

~Transcript, Researcher's Meeting Dec 19, 2016

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Tiffany: And they were going to coach, right? That was your intention.

Coach: That sort of fell apart. So, I don't know if we're going to go back to that or, or what. We'll see.

Tiffany: Those decisions have to be made soon though, don't they? Here it is the middle of June. I'm not [pressuring], I'm just remarking on it.

Coach: Well I don't know, there's no release money for ESL so, I did this all through a code grant. There's no word on whether or not these code grants are going to be available yet.

~Transcript, Coach Interview June 13, 2017

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Arlene: I think he [former superintendent] would be quite surprised to see two years later that we've gone nowhere ...and I do think that there's a perception of researchers evaluating something rather than documenting

Tiffany: Yeah we're outsiders...University too, which is even more threatening

Arlene: ...if you think about trying to get it from their perspective, as a teacher, you know, as a consultant with the board, it was stressed that you should use evidence-based practices, that you should share research that supported these practices, that you should evaluate your teaching methods...and that was the role of research. So I think even though we have highlighted and explained and outlined that our initial role is to observe...they still...their perception of what research does and what research means is really one of it evaluating rather than observing

Tiffany: It precedes us, right? It's bigger than us.

~Transcript Researcher's Meeting April 8, 2018

Moving Target



As a function of this
self-study, our language
changed; this promoted
productive discourse about
our dilemmas...



Arlene: And again, that's safety and challenge, ...am I willing to move beyond safety and accept the challenge of saying to them "there's a lack of accountability..."

Tiffany: You're confident, you know what needs to happen and you know what works.

Arlene: I am confident but... as a partner I don't think I'm willing to move beyond the safety of having this partnership where at least they're allowing us access and accepting the challenge of saying what I really think.

Tiffany: You and I are very vulnerable.... Because so much has gone into building that relationship and now I see some of these areas for improvement. And do I stay safe? Or do I accept the challenge?

Arlene: Of mentioning those and again, confidence and uncertainty too. We're confident with the existing relationship but we know that it's uncertain terrain...that it could all blow up tomorrow and so, do you move beyond safety and say what you know from research-based evidence, needs to happen to enhance capacity building and real capacity building and real implementation of change?

~Transcript Researcher's Meeting June 27, 2018

Conclusions & Significance

- We illustrated the complexities of attempting to be responsive to unpredictable situations, most of which were attributable to the continuously evolving priorities, personnel, needs, and interests of our school board partners
- Our experiences illustrate that Berry's (2008) tensions provided clarity in defining and enabling us to engage in discourse about our dilemmas of researchers who endeavoured to work collaboratively with school board partners
- Enhanced understanding of Berry's six tensions supported our abilities to navigate and discuss them and may enable others to negotiate dilemmas that arise in their research efforts in collaboration with school board partners.





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