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School family and community collaboration in managing experiential activities in private primary schools

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Abstract---Managing experiential activities requires schools to coordinate educational responsibilities with the knowledge and resources of families and community organizations. This article examines how collaboration can sustain pupils' participation when partners have unequal resources and different expectations. A conceptual synthesis of collaborative governance, network organization, relational trust and children's participation is used to develop four mechanisms: communicating educational purposes through concrete learning tasks, defining decision rights, providing accessible channels for concerns, and separating core learning opportunities from optional contributions. The analysis shows why participation counts and satisfaction reports alone provide an incomplete basis for evaluating partnerships. Attention must also be given to who influences decisions, how disagreements are resolved and which pupils undertake substantive work. Four propositions connect these mechanisms to partnership practice and provide a basis for empirical investigation. The discussion considers the implications for private primary schools, where professional responsibilities may intersect with parental expectations and dependence on external resources. The framework contributes an account of collaboration that links educational purpose with authority, trust and access. Its applicability across different school contexts remains a question for empirical research.

Keywords---experiential activities, private primary schools, collaborative governance, relational trust, student participation, educational equity.



1 Introduction

The educational value of experiential activities depends on the work pupils undertake. Planning, funding and positive family responses are important, but they provide limited evidence of children's opportunities to investigate questions, make choices and reconsider their ideas. When adults select the questions, complete demanding tasks and determine the final product, pupils may have little influence over the experience. Managing experiential activities therefore requires attention to the distribution of educational decisions as well as the organization of events.

School partnerships bring together participants with different responsibilities and expectations. Teachers interpret the curriculum and assess pupils' learning needs. Families contribute knowledge of individual children and expectations about educational provision. Community organizations provide expertise, access and local connections while pursuing their own institutional purposes. Collaboration requires arrangements through which these contributions can support a coherent learning task and differences can be addressed before they disrupt participation.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) distinguish parental involvement with schools from engagement with children's learning. This distinction is important for experiential activities: attending an event or supplying materials provides a different form of contribution from supporting a child's investigation and discussion. Boonk et al. (2018), reviewing parental involvement indicators, identify reading at home, educational expectations, communication about school and encouragement as promising correlates of achievement. These findings support attention to the form and purpose of family contributions when designing partnerships.

Private primary schools vary in ownership, resources, fees, leadership arrangements and community connections. Some maintain extensive professional networks; others depend on a small group of families or providers. Such variation affects the resources available for experiential activities and the school's ability to negotiate their use. A central governance problem arises when professional judgments about learning intersect with the preferences of paying families or organizations controlling resources that are difficult to replace.

Partnership quality depends on participants' ability to contribute relevant knowledge and influence decisions within their responsibilities. Meeting attendance and partner numbers capture the extent of involvement, but reveal less about its substance. Consultation may have little effect on a final decision, and formal leadership may coexist with dependence on a sponsor. Authority, trust and access are therefore necessary dimensions of an analysis of collaboration.

This article examines how school, family and community collaboration can sustain educational purpose and pupils' participation under conditions of unequal resources. It develops four mechanisms and associated propositions concerning the relationship between partnership governance and learning

opportunities. The contribution is an explanatory framework for examining how decisions are made and whose participation they enable.

2 Conceptual approach and scope

The study adopts a conceptual approach that combines foundational work on governance, trust and educational experience with research syntheses on parental involvement and pupil participation. The sources address complementary questions concerning institutional coordination, family engagement in learning and children's influence over school decisions. The analysis distinguishes evidence about academic achievement and general school participation from the theoretical extension developed here for experiential activities in private primary schools. Source selection is purposive and does not constitute a systematic review.

Ansell and Gash (2008) provide a foundation for considering joint action across institutional boundaries, while Provan and Kenis (2008) direct attention to the location of coordinating authority. Applied to school partnerships, these perspectives raise questions about how participants negotiate purposes and allocate responsibilities. Their use here involves theoretical adaptation from governance settings to educational relationships.

Bryk and Schneider's (2002) work on trust in schools supports attention to relational conditions in educational improvement. Lundy's (2007) critique of the language of pupil voice directs attention to the gap between inviting expression and enabling participation. Dewey (1938) supplies the educational reference point: experience must be considered in relation to its educational significance.

The unit of analysis is the partnership surrounding a defined experiential project, such as a local inquiry or community activity. The synthesis proceeds by identifying the educational decisions involved, examining the authority and resources of participants, and specifying the arrangements through which their interaction may affect pupils' learning opportunities. The resulting mechanisms are developed into propositions for subsequent empirical examination.

3 The partnership as a setting for educational decisions

3.1 Educational purpose across institutional boundaries

Partners need enough shared understanding to act together, but complete agreement about every purpose is unlikely. A local organization may value public engagement, a family may value confidence in speaking and a teacher may prioritize questioning and evidence. Collaboration can accommodate these differences if the learning task remains intelligible and the limits of each contribution are clear. The management problem is therefore one of translation: making educational purposes actionable for people who do not share teachers' professional vocabulary.

A statement such as "develop responsibility" provides little practical guidance to a community volunteer. A more useful description identifies what children will decide, what they will undertake themselves and when adults should intervene.

For example, pupils might choose which observations to record and explain why those observations matter, while adults manage access to a site. This division allows partners to contribute without taking over the intellectual work. It also gives teachers a basis for challenging an attractive activity that offers insufficient participation.

Dewey's (1938) account of educational experience places the significance of an activity in its contribution to learning. For partnership management, this directs attention to the opportunities pupils receive to observe, act and reconsider their understanding. Evaluation consequently needs evidence about pupils' engagement with a task alongside information about the delivery of the event.

3.2 Authority without exclusion

A partnership needs decisions about curriculum, staffing, expenditure, scheduling, access and the use of children's work. Treating all of these decisions as either wholly shared or wholly controlled by the school conceals meaningful differences. Some require professional judgment, some require negotiation between organizations and some can be opened to pupils. The relevant question is which participants should influence a particular decision and who remains accountable for it.

Provan and Kenis (2008) place the organization of coordinating authority at the centre of network governance. In school partnerships, coordination involves maintaining responsibility for the project while drawing on knowledge held by families and community organizations. School leadership can retain educational accountability and still provide meaningful opportunities for partners to inform decisions. The practical issue is how authority is exercised and which information enters the decision process.

This distinction is especially useful when a disagreement arises. A parent may suggest replacing an accessible local task with an expensive excursion. The school can explain how the original task supports the learning purpose and consider alternatives without treating financial willingness as an entitlement to determine the curriculum. Conversely, retaining professional authority should not allow teachers to ignore family information about access barriers or children's needs. Accountability requires reasons that can be understood and questioned.

3.3 Trust and the ability to raise concerns

Partnerships require participants to rely on actions they cannot continuously observe. Families depend on teachers' judgments, teachers require accurate information from families and partners, and host organizations expect appropriate preparation of pupils. Bryk and Schneider's (2002) analysis of relational trust establishes the importance of social relationships for school improvement. In experiential activities, trust is particularly relevant when participants need to disclose difficulties or question an arrangement.

One expression of trust is the ability to raise a concern without anticipating humiliation or damage to the relationship. Concerns about a presentation, an additional contribution or a child's difficulty can reveal barriers that routine satisfaction reports overlook. The educational importance of this information

depends on whether it reaches someone able to respond and whether the response respects the participant who raised it.

High satisfaction and low complaint counts are ambiguous indicators. They may reflect effective collaboration, but they may also reflect silence. Managers therefore need to examine how concerns are received and resolved. A disagreement recorded early and addressed constructively may indicate a healthier relationship than apparent consensus that prevents participants from speaking.

4 Four mechanisms of educational collaboration

4.1 Translation of purposes into participation opportunities

The first mechanism connects a broad educational intention to the actions available to each participant. A concise project brief can identify the inquiry question, pupils' choices, expected adult contributions and possible evidence of learning. Its purpose is to make the educational design negotiable in concrete terms. A partner can then explain that a proposed visit offers observation but little opportunity for interaction, allowing the teacher to redesign the task before implementation.

Translation also allows community and family knowledge to inform educational design. Local knowledge may expose assumptions about an inquiry topic, while information from families may reveal that a home task requires unavailable resources. Teachers can use these contributions to adjust the task while retaining responsibility for its educational purpose. A schedule or promotional description alone gives partners little basis for making such contributions.

The wider evidence also cautions against treating parental involvement as a single activity. Castro et al. (2015) synthesize studies spanning kindergarten, primary and secondary education, while Kim (2022) integrates previous meta-analyses of school-age pupils. Kim reports a positive overall association with achievement, with differences across forms of involvement. These syntheses justify distinguishing the educational functions of family participation, but do not establish that the mechanisms proposed here improve outcomes in private primary school experiential activities.

4.2 Explicit decision rights and reason giving

The second mechanism specifies who proposes, who must be consulted and who decides. These roles need not be identical across decisions. Pupils might propose questions; teachers determine whether a task is suitable; a host organization negotiates practical access; school leaders approve expenditure within the school's arrangements. A written allocation is useful only if participants understand how to challenge a decision or request reconsideration.

Giving reasons makes decisions open to scrutiny. When leaders reject a suggestion, explaining the educational or practical basis enables participants to understand the choice and propose a feasible alternative. This practice connects accountability with participation and makes informal influence easier to identify.

Its importance is likely to increase when a contributor controls a resource that the school has limited capacity to replace.

4.3 Protected channels for disagreement

The third mechanism creates ways to report concerns that do not depend on public confrontation. Families may prefer a private conversation about cost; pupils may find a short discussion with a familiar teacher more usable than a formal feedback form. Partners may need a separate review in which practical problems can be discussed without an audience. Multiple channels are justified when they respond to different barriers, rather than duplicate the same reporting requirement.

An accessible feedback channel requires a clear response process. Participants need to know who will consider a concern and how an outcome will be communicated. Acknowledgement, explanation and appropriate adjustment demonstrate that feedback has entered the decision process, even when the original preference cannot be accommodated. Collecting comments without responding provides little basis for sustained trust.

4.4 Separation of contributions from learning entitlement

The fourth mechanism prevents optional contributions from determining access to core learning opportunities. Contributions include money, professional expertise, transport, time and social connections. Their unequal distribution creates a design problem even when all participants act in good faith. An activity that requires a parent to attend during working hours may privilege some children without imposing a formal financial charge.

Equitable design begins by identifying the essential learning opportunity and securing a feasible route for every pupil. Optional enhancements should preserve pupils' access to investigation, interpretation and presentation. Where resource arrangements restrict that access, the task or its funding needs reconsideration. This principle concerns the design of opportunities and leaves the effects of specific funding arrangements open to empirical investigation.

Influence within consultation also requires attention. Occupational expertise, confidence and personal connections can affect whose views receive consideration. Individual invitations, opportunities to contribute outside meetings and recognition of everyday knowledge can broaden the information available to teachers. The aim is to ensure that decisions draw on relevant knowledge from families whose circumstances and opportunities to participate differ.

5 Children as participants in partnership governance

Lundy's (2007) critique of pupil voice draws attention to the limitations of inviting expression without considering its influence. In primary school partnerships, participation requires choices that children can understand, accessible ways to communicate and an explanation of the resulting decision. Reviewing what follows a pupil's contribution is therefore essential to evaluating the quality of participation.

Mager and Nowak (2012) review empirical research on pupils' participation in school decision making and report moderate evidence of benefits in several personal, relational and school dimensions. Their review provides a basis for examining participation as an educational process with potentially different outcomes. In experiential activities, this directs attention to the decisions pupils can influence and the support they receive, alongside the products they complete. Children can influence questions, working methods, roles, presentation formats and interpretations of their experience. Their influence is bounded by age, context and adult responsibilities. They should not be asked to negotiate budgets or resolve disagreements among institutions. Nor should they bear responsibility for decisions about their safety. Meaningful participation concerns choices for which pupils can receive adequate support and understandable explanations.

For example, children might compare two manageable inquiry questions and discuss what information each would require. A teacher could reject an inaccessible location while retaining the children's question and finding another way to investigate it. Explaining this adjustment demonstrates that the contribution was considered. Simply announcing that the original choice is impossible would provide less information about the relationship between participation and responsibility.

Participation also requires ways to express disagreement and accommodate different forms of contribution. Drawing, recording observations, paired explanation and discussion can offer alternatives to public presentation when they meet the learning purpose. Teachers need to judge these options in relation to the task and individual pupils' needs. A range of participation formats can help preserve substantive involvement without imposing an identical performance on every child.

6 Propositions and directions for empirical research

Proposition 1. Shared understanding of the learning task increases the likelihood that partners' contributions support pupils' substantive participation. This relationship can be examined through project briefs, partner accounts and observations of adult intervention. Persistent adult takeover despite a shared understanding would indicate the importance of additional conditions, including facilitation skills and the time available for pupils to work independently.

Proposition 2. Explicit decision rights, supported by accessible reasons, limit the influence of resource dependence on educational choices. Examination of disputed decisions can identify whose preferences prevailed, the reasons offered and the alternatives available. A difference between formal responsibilities and actual influence would reveal the limits of role descriptions in a partnership shaped by unequal bargaining power.

Proposition 3. Accessible channels for raising concerns increase the availability of information about participation barriers when participants trust the response process. Evidence should concern the timing, specificity and resolution of concerns, together with the representation of different groups. Complaint counts

alone are insufficient because low reporting may indicate either satisfactory arrangements or reluctance to speak.

Proposition 4. Separating optional contributions from core learning opportunities reduces the dependence of pupils' substantive roles on family resources. Observations can examine who formulates questions, uses materials, interprets evidence and presents conclusions. Analysis needs to distinguish choices related to preferences or support needs from restrictions associated with payment, parental attendance or social connections.

A comparative qualitative study could investigate these propositions across schools with different resource conditions and partnership arrangements. Following a defined project from its initial proposal to review would permit examination of decisions as they occur. Project documents, observations and adult interviews could be combined with age-appropriate pupil conversations. Research involving children would need appropriate ethical review and consent procedures.

Analysis could trace decisions rather than rely solely on retrospective satisfaction. For each consequential decision, researchers would identify the initial proposal, participants consulted, reasons offered, final choice and implications for pupils. Contradictory accounts would be retained as evidence of different perspectives. A provider's report of flexibility, for example, could be compared with teachers' descriptions of constraints and observations of the activity itself.

Such a study would assess the plausibility of the mechanisms and the conditions affecting their operation. Longer-term research would be required to examine whether changes in partnership arrangements precede changes in pupils' learning opportunities. Measures of perceived influence, confidence in raising concerns and access to substantive roles would also require development and validation for different respondent groups.

7 Discussion and limitations

The framework links partnership governance to the educational work pupils are able to undertake. Resource provision and event delivery remain important, but their value depends on how they support learning tasks. Reviewing who shapes a decision, how concerns are addressed and which pupils receive substantive roles adds an educational dimension to reports of attendance and satisfaction.

The argument also suggests that disagreement should be interpreted carefully. Some disagreements arise because participants have incompatible expectations; others reveal valuable information about access, tasks or children's interests. An attempt to eliminate disagreement may silence information needed for improvement. Conversely, unstructured disagreement can consume time and damage relationships. The management task is to provide a legitimate route from concern to reasoned decision.

There are limits to theoretical transfer. The governance literature used here addresses settings that differ from primary education, while the trust research

concerns a particular school context. The synthesis therefore cannot establish that the same relationships operate in every private school. Its contribution is a set of questions and provisional mechanisms that can be examined and revised through research.

School ownership, teachers' employment conditions and providers' bargaining power may affect the operation of all four mechanisms. Family resources also extend beyond income to time, confidence and social connections. Future research needs to examine these conditions alongside the framework, including cases in which formally inclusive arrangements sustain unequal influence.

8 Conclusion

Managing experiential activities involves coordinating educational decisions across relationships with unequal authority and resources. The analysis identifies four mechanisms through which collaboration may support pupils' participation: communicating purposes through learning tasks, clarifying decision rights, enabling concerns to be raised and protecting core opportunities from dependence on optional contributions. Together, these mechanisms connect school accountability with the knowledge and involvement of families, community partners and pupils.

The framework provides a basis for examining partnership practice through decisions and their consequences for children's work. Its explanatory value requires investigation across different school contexts. For school leaders, the central implication is to evaluate collaboration through the learning opportunities it makes available and the quality of the processes through which those opportunities are negotiated.

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