

Leader Improvisation: Drivers for Rural Partnership Sustainability

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FRASER - Building Enduring Partnerships

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Often with limited resources, those working for rural education change must innovate in order to overcome complex challenges. Innovation, in this sense, emerges from within through under-recognized, organic processes that involve a fair amount of improvisation. Yet, rural improvisation as a source of innovation is often overlooked or hidden (Corbett, 2013). This study explores improvisation within a rural research-practice partnership (RPP), drawing on Greenwood's (2019) six adapted practices for place consciousness, to present a more nuanced understanding of how the drivers of improvisation may matter for partnership sustainability. Using a mini-ethnographic case study approach (Fusch et al., 2017) with an emphasis on participant discourse, leader improvisation was explored in a rural RPP between April-November 2020. This approach was necessary because exploring improvisation has ill-defined boundaries and is complex, which requires the need to gain an in-depth understanding through multiple data sources (Yin, 2018). Several data sources were collected, including formal and informal interviews, participant observation (Spradley, 1980), low inference field notes, and archival documents. Findings indicate that these leaders' improvisation was driven by scarcity, urgency, and shared identity. Improvisation associated with scarcity and urgency emerged from complexities associated with the politics of place as partner leaders confronted external conflict. As one leader stated, "We have to act. We don't have time to think about if it [a tent classroom] will work when the snow comes." However, shared identity-oriented improvisation seemed to provide "spacious enough" entry points for place-conscious reflection and action that may matter for building enduring partnerships.