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SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS IN AUSTRALIA : TENTATIVE BEGINNINGS

1. INTRODUCTION

Barber (2001) claims that there will be a revolution in schooling over the next decade, attributable largely to the impact of globalisation. Initial improvements in providing support for students, ensuring access to information about best practice, demanding appropriate accountability, and intervening when necessary, will be followed by more far-reaching transformations involving expansion in the provision of technology, an overhauling of the teaching profession, and the establishment of world performance benchmarks.

Commentators agree that highly efficient education systems comprise a high degree of school autonomy; the demonstration of best practice; and the capacity to introduce innovation in the face of change. Apart from these educational imperatives, there is a need for the society to value education.

Throughout the 1990s, there has been an increasing emphasis in North America, Europe and Australia for universities to work collaboratively with schools, and this trend is likely to accelerate with the growing impact of globalisation, and the demands for more efficient schooling. There is a growing recognition that universities are able to provide the professional expertise that schools require.

It is not surprising that most school university partnership initiatives in Australia involve the teacher education faculties of universities. Collaboration between schools and teacher education institutions has the potential to improve learning outcomes for school students; enhance the education of prospective teachers; and promote professional development for both practising teachers and academics. As the title of this article indicates, the relationship between schools and teacher education has not involved the structural changes that it has in the UK or USA. The significant increase in school governance in Australia over the last decade involving more autonomy for schools in management, professional development and staff appointments, supplemented by more government support, has not involved the intervention or support for teacher education that exists in the UK.

There is however a pervasive theme in the international teacher education literature arguing the need for robust school and university partnerships. As early as

1994, Goodlad (1994) commented facetiously that the advocacy of school and university partnerships was de rigueur: not to have one could be dangerous to your health. The same claim is becoming more relevant in Australia as teachers and teacher educators collaborate to narrow the gap between schools and universities, particularly in the education of prospective teachers. There is also a note of caution about partnerships in the Australian literature (Peters, 2002; Grundy, Robison & Tomazos, 2001; Smedley, 2001), which typically focuses on cultural and structural differences between schools and universities. Smith (2000) warns against school university partnerships being regarded as a panacea, indicating that partnerships should not delude teacher educators into believing that the current criticisms of teacher education have been addressed.

Until the 1990s, the only significant expression of partnership involved a loose form of de facto relationship under which schools assisted teacher educators in implementing the practicum component of teacher education programs. Smedley (2001, p.189) suggests that these two sites for teacher education (the university and school) were equated with 'theory' and 'practice' and "retained their separate guises". Academics provided the theory from their own research, knowledge of the literature, and their own classroom experiences; and schoolteachers coordinated the practice in schools. The two settings are increasingly being drawn together as is the integration of theory and practice. There have also been further forays in recent years, most notably those involving joint participation in school based research, and shared planning for teaching, and assessment of prospective teachers.

The Ramsey Review (Quality Matters)(2000) has arguably given further impetus to partnership initiatives in its recommendations about the role of the Institute of Teachers. Partnerships between schools and universities is described in the role of the Institute as fostering collaboration in the development of criteria, processes and procedures for the accreditation of those schools providing professional experience for student teachers, and the definition of respective roles in the induction of teachers. Apart from these more formal, or institutionalised recommendations, the review is not explicit as to how schools and universities should collaborate. This article provides a brief overview of school and university partnership practice in Australia; identifies what the partners seek; and discusses the dimensions and constraints of partnerships.

2. PARTNERSHIP COMPARISONS

School and university partnerships have been slow to evolve in Australia for 'structural' reasons. In the UK the 1987 Education Reform Bill prompted the restructuring of teacher education, and promoted partnerships between schools and universities in both pre and in-service teacher education. Schools have been given more autonomy in site-based management and in determining priorities and the allocation of resources. More significantly, they have been given a voice in determining teacher education programs, and the power to recruit universities to assist in implementing their own programs. Teacher education students spend a relatively lengthy period of time undertaking their training in schools.

In the US, the focus of partnerships involves professional development schools, which exemplify an even greater degree of relationship between school and university. While there are numerous models, the California University model is typical whereby professional development schools are affiliated with the university, and a management team of schoolteachers and academics collaboratively develop programs. Strategies include team teaching (teachers and lecturers); daily professional development on site; university courses taught by academics and teachers; a resident university supervisor at each school; and the training of cooperating teachers (see Sandholtz & Finan, 1998).

The bulk of partnership literature centres on professional development schools, and the more recent of that literature focuses on the participants, the dynamics of the schools, and how their impact can be evaluated.

In relation to the impact of professional development schools on participants, there are studies on school teachers, particularly those focusing on leadership and empowerment (Gonzales & Lambert, 2001; Lecos, Cassella, Evans, Leahy, Liess & Lucas, 2000; Walling & Lewis, 2000); principals (Foster, Loving & Shumate, 2000); pre-service teachers (Burley, Yearwood, Elwood-Salinas, Martin & Allen, 2001); school students (Sandholtz & Dadlez, 2000) and university staff (Tom). This latter article is salutary as it investigates the destabilising effects of partnerships on academics.

Partnerships are often examined in terms of the dynamics of collaboration (Himel, Hall, Henderson & Floyd, 2000; Schack, 1999; Walker, 1999) and more generally in terms of partnership development. El-Amin, Cristol & Hammond (1999) describe the process of developing a professional development school as analogous to that of building a house. The title of Teitel's (1998) article, comprising the metaphors of divorce, separation and open marriage, denote what follows: a detailing of partnerships that disintegrate and reconfigure to include new partners. The professional development school literature also examines issues of evaluation in terms of its impact on teachers and academics, and student learning (Knight, Wiseman and Cooner, 2000); in terms of the need for credible, systematic documentation of professional development school impacts (Teitel, 2001).

3. PARTNERSHIP PRACTICE

In the absence of significant government intervention and restructuring to accommodate collaboration, partnership initiatives in Australia have been more modest. The most enduring expression in Australia since the mid 90s has been the Innovative Links project initiated by the national schools network to investigate ways in which teacher educators in universities might provide professional development for school teachers, The project involved a consortium of 14 Australian universities working with over 100 government and non-government schools across Australia. The project was organised around roundtables whereby teachers engaged in school research with the assistance of an 'academic associate' from the host university. Each Roundtable was guided by a steering committee consisting of up to

three academic associates, two representatives from the affiliated schools, one representative from the principals of those schools, and members from the education department, union and NSN (Yeatman & Sachs, 1995). Schools participated voluntarily, and their research was context-based, school-initiated and school led.

Grundy et al. (2001, p.205) indicate a uniqueness about this new form of partnership in that academic research in schools "has tended either to exploit the knowledge of teachers for the benefit of the academic's career, or to vilify teachers by presenting their work as . . . entrenched in mediocrity". It was into this potentially hostile context that the Innovative links project was introduced. Academics were necessarily committed to facilitating action research within the school setting through a process of collaboration.

The project demonstrated that teachers could conduct research in their schools that led to meaningful change and enhanced teacher professionalism (see Sachs, 1997; Yeatman, 1996).

The work of Johnson, Johnson, Le Cornu, Madder and Peters (1999) and Peters (2002, 1997) built on that of the Innovative Links Project in developing collaborative initiatives between the University of South Australia and schools. Peter's (2002) evaluation of the Innovative Links Project in South Australia involving six schools and seven academics revealed that for the academics, the project expectations proved to be problematic as they were based on invalid assumptions about the prevailing school and university conditions.

- some academics had little knowledge of the substantive area the school wished to investigate, even though effort had been made to match participants ;
- some academics had little knowledge or experience of action research, and therefore lacked the capacity to introduce teachers to the process ;
- some academics were aware of a credibility problem (the need to win acceptance from school teachers) ;
- academics were committed to principles of collaboration and shared decision making, yet found that schools expected them to act as 'experts'
- academics were committed to reform through rigorous action research, but many teachers saw the process as one involving the solution to immediate problems.

Subsequent projects in South Australia have drawn on these findings on collaborative ventures. In the Middle years of Schooling Authentic Assessment Project, there has been substantial funding to release academics and to enable project administration. More specific ways of working together were also articulated, with materials development being the main focus of collaboration. The School-Based Research and Reform project, funded by the department of Education, Training and employment (DETE) didn't require academics to work as partners. They were funded to work as consultants to plan and facilitate roundtable meetings for participants. The purpose of these meetings, according to Peters (2002, p. 239) was "providing participants with opportunities for sharing, critical reflection and professional development".

Apart from partnership initiatives involving universities assisting schools in action research or change projects, the majority of partnerships involve reciprocal relationships by which the universities provide professional development, and the

schools assist in the education of respective teachers. One such example is a project developed by Deakin University (Victoria) in which final year teacher education students worked in local primary schools in self-selected teams of three or four to complete a school-based curriculum project. The schools invited to participate were asked to nominate curriculum development projects relevant to their needs, and were in turn given information about the student's interest and expertise. The program involved campus based lectures and school-based workshops in which students met with teachers,

The project aims reflect the broad nature of the vision: to benefit students in developing curriculum in a school setting; to benefit academics in understanding current school developments; and to benefit teachers in understanding teacher education programs. Sealey, Robson & Hutchins (1997, p.87) summarise the benefits:

> The partnership was one in which a shared vision for student teacher learning was worked out in two separate locations: in the classroom and in the university. We found that effective learning occurred when teachers (and university teachers) provided time for discussion with student teachers, provided regular feedback and provided appropriate levels of support.

The Teacher Renewal Through Partnerships Program (Perry, Komesaroff & Kavanagh, 2002) is another partnership initiative based at Deakin and Melbourne Universities and funded by the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria. It involves university facilitators meeting with school teams as critical friends and mentors in the development of school projects. In this three-year project beginning in 2001, facilitators meet together within and across universities, and school teams meet in clusters.

Brady (2000) reports on a variety of partnership initiatives between the University of Technology Sydney and a local primary school that include a variety of research, teaching, professional development and support/enrichment activities:

- academics promoting action research according to the Innovative Links model by which projects are school-based and school-driven;
- academics and teachers team teaching (or cooperatively teaching) teacher education students on the school site;
- teachers teaching teacher education students on campus;
- teacher education students mentoring on a one-to-one basis school students who are challenged in specific learning areas;
- teachers, academics, teacher education students participating in community based professional development on educational issues like assessment, reporting or classroom management;
- teacher education students providing support for the school in assisting at athletics and swimming carnivals, and drama students performing concerts;
- an increasing diversity of practicum experiences enabling students to negotiate areas of practice with the school.

School and university partnerships are no longer rare in Australia. Many education faculties in universities have them. Merritt and Campbell (1999) report on the developing partnership between the University of Sydney and Kurri Kurri High school; and Woodward and Sinclair Gaffey (1995) relate the ongoing partnerships at the University of Western Sydney (Macarthur) involving in-school experiences, teachers as tutors, teachers as students, and joint research projects. Other proposals for partnership links include the secondment of teachers to universities as either clinical staff or part time lecturers; the appointment of researchers-in-residence in schools (often part time); seminars shared for teachers and academics; and joint advisory boards.

However, while partnerships may have become more common, they remain structurally constrained.

4. PARTNERSHIP NEEDS

A global world requires more effective schooling, and this can be achieved by promoting the quality of teachers; enhancing the training of respective teachers in universities; and improving the learning of school students. One pervasive theme in the partnership literature relates to the different cultures of schools and universities, and the need for a shared vision. So what do the respective partners want? As early as 1992, Rudduck (1992, p.160), speaking as an academic, commented:

> We have to recognise that what teachers as partners in the enterprise of training can offer is practice-based knowledge rooted in sustained experience of a particular setting. What higher education tutors can offer is an analytic perspective that is fed by observation in a range of classrooms and sharpened by the evidence of research.

While written about the English context over a decade ago, the same applies now in Australia and elsewhere. As Smedley (2001, p.191) comments, "there is general agreement that the education of the student teacher is enhanced through the successful functioning of the triadic partnerships, supported by a cohesive school/tertiary network". In a commitment to quality teaching, academics acknowledge the wisdom of working more closely with schools in the provision of learning experiences for their students. Such a belief is reflected in the development of internships for final year teacher education students involving increased time for planning, teaching, observation, reflection, and involvement in the culture of the school.

To ascertain the support of schools for school university partnership initiatives, Brady (2002) surveyed all 1800 state primary school principals in NSW on 25 different partnership activities between schools and universities. The items were grouped into six broad sections: supervision and mentoring, teaching, research, professional development, shared planning, and school support and enrichment. The choice of principals as respondents rather than teachers, was based on several considerations: the principal's power in determining and implementing policy; the greater knowledge of the principal about partnership activities; and the influence of the principal as transformational leader in changing the culture of the school. The preamble to the 25 items asked principals to indicate support for the listed

partnership activities on a five point Likert scale 'given an ideal resourcing base.' Among the unsolicited comments expressing excitement about potential partnerships, this requirement of responding to the ideal rather than the real also provoked comment, typified by:

> What support would you give assuming an ideal resourcing base. This is the key. (We're) tired of being expected to do more with less. Teachers are currently overwhelmed with the expectations of their role. It would be very difficult to implement this new strategy without adequate time and reward-based strategies.

The main finding was the uniformly strong support for school and university partnership initiatives. When means were determined for the 25 items from 'full support (m=1.0) to 'no support' (m= 5.0), they ranged from 1.3 to 2.2. Numerous respondents gave a rating of 1.0 (full support) for all 25 items. In the broad sections identified, the sequence of most to least support was school enrichment and support, professional development, shared teaching, and research. It was difficult to rank the other two categories, as they comprised a range of means.

The high support for school enrichment and support was not surprising, particularly given the examples provided, viz student teachers performing drama for school students and helping at swimming carnivals. These activities directly benefit the school and are not invasive. The relatively low ratings (though still expressing strong support) for research in schools are arguably an expression of invasiveness.

Typical unsolicited comment, expressing enthusiasm, included "I can only applaud the above philosophy"; "great stuff"; "this sounds wonderful"; "when can we start"; "I would love to be involved in any such activities which boost the professionalism of our teachers"; and:

> I believe that the sooner teachers can become involved in, committed to and aware of the total school/teaching environment the better. Teachers seem best placed to support the in-school training of their colleagues. The more collegiality, shared responsibility and practical support teachers, lecturers, schools and universities can provide the better.

There were no significant differences in the views of principals according to their age, school type or their distance from a university (some schools in NSW are several hundred kilometres from the nearest university).

5. PARTNERSHIP DIMENSIONS

Various writers heave specified conditions for effective collaborative school university partnerships. Some of the conditions include:

- the need for democratic partnership and the avoidance of relationships that favour one source of expertise over another Gore, 1995; McCullough & Fidler, 1994)
- the need for trust among partners (Grundy et al., 2001; Smedley, 2001; Gore, 1995)
- the need for credibility (Grundy et al., 2001; Grundy, 1999)
- the need to recognise the interests and features of each partner (MACQT, 1998 Fidler, 1994; Whitehead et al., 1994)

- the need to acknowledge problems associated with limits on rewards and recognition of individuals engaged (Berry & Catoe, 1994; Goodlad, 1994).

In her evaluation of the Innovative Links Project, Grundy et al., (2001) comments on two conditions: credibility and trust/rapport. Her brief discussion of credibility relates more to the participant's feelings about their own credibility, rather than credibility evaluated by another. For teachers, as well as their credibility as practitioners, their academic credibility in having something to offer the partnership was perceived by them to be important. Academics, while believing they have credibility in terms of expert knowledge, were keen to break down their image as gurus and to "develop their credibility through having some expertise to offer on the basis of their own responsiveness" (p. 214). Goodlad (1994), while arguing the need for the breaking down of the image of the academic as guru, also believed that the partnership should acknowledge hierarchical relationships when expertise is at a premium. Trust and rapport are also necessary conditions for partnerships. In the Innovative Links Project, rapport was deemed essential in the academic role of facilitating the research relationship, and enabling teachers to maintain their control over the project. Beyond the specified conditions, there are obviously further elements in effective partnerships. The need for effective communication between all participants is foremost. The project of Sealey et al., (1997) at Deakin University found that communication between teachers and academics was problematic throughout the project. He argued the need for regular communications between university and school to ensure that university expectations are being met. As many partnership activities, apart from the individual supervision of students, involve working in teams, training in the skills of planning, communication and even conflict resolution would enhance group operation.

Brady (2000) suggests a further list of elements that are more a guide to process in forming partnerships than necessary conditions:

- develop a vision by clearly articulating shared goals;
- create and describe a range of strategies to ensure that there is scope for all interested participants to be involved;
- ensure the commitment of leadership at the highest levels;
- make the process official(formalising the process in writing may be psychologically or symbolically significant);
- develop an administrative structure;
- ascertain ways of acknowledging staff contribution.

6. PARTNERSHIP CONSRAINTS

The greatest constraint to the effective operation of school and university partnerships involves the different working cultures of the respective partners. Universities value scholarship and research that is often demonstrated in books and refereed journal articles, which are often the product of rigorous data analysis and critical examination over months or years. Relatively recent funding changes in universities have increased the importance of developing research profiles.

Conversely, schools value practical solutions to immediate problems. This critical or reflective orientation of academics, and practical or action orientation of teachers is often characterised as a theory-practice dichotomy. While these different working orientations may not produce mistrust, as some commentators claim, they may be a potential barrier to understanding.

Schools operate in a hierarchical fashion with decisions regarding all school programs being made by executive staff. System policy directives and executive decisions are 'passed down' to teachers. Grundy et al., (2001) reporting on the Innovative Links Project, found that principals or other executive staff initially assumed the responsibility for determining the school's project.

In universities, the type of involvement required by partnerships is not formally recognised as teaching or research, and therefore has no status in workload allocation. The development of partnerships cannot continue to rely on the goodwill of academics (or teachers): there needs to be recognition of the legitimacy of this work. In their analysis of partnerships, Grundy et al., (2001) used the metaphor of 'interruptions' to describe a challenge to the established order, claiming that the major and generic interruption involved 'taken for granted' relationships. Smedley's (2001) examination of partnership concerns, often 'interruptions', is classified as organisation, division of labour, time constraints and apprenticeship orientation. This classification is used in the following discussion of constraints.

Organisational constraints on partnerships are ubiquitous. The frequent presence of student teachers in schools poses organisational difficulties for teachers in having to arrange teaching practice, supervise, and adapt their own teaching program accordingly. There is also the related constraint of academics having to adapt their campus teaching to allow opportunities for student practice. The pool of teachers available to supervise the teaching of teacher education students or to engage in other partnership activities may also be limited, as the teachers with greater experience and expertise may already be heavily involved in administration or curriculum development. While teacher- training universities may have the luxury of access to innovative schools, they are not able to nominate, or conversely blacklist teachers with whom they wish their students to work, or not work. The traditional practice employed by principals in selecting supervising teachers for teacher education students is to call for volunteers. A related problem is the reluctance of some parents to accept a non-qualified or student teacher teaching their child.

Partnerships have created the need for a new division of labour involving the redefinition of roles. As previously indicated, the literature underlines the need for democratic partnerships; interdependence and recognition of what each brings to the partnership; and trust and rapport. As there have been no significant structural changes in Australia, teachers and academics have not been required to start afresh; with the advent of partnerships, the changes to their working roles have been accommodated to their existing work roles. Nonetheless, partnerships require teachers to shift from a relatively separatist role in which they move from teaching their own class, and work with same stage teachers, to one involving supervision and collaboration. In recent years there has been a growing emphasis on mentoring

which arguably foreshadows a movement from the triadic partnership of teacher, academic and student teacher, to the dyadic role of teacher and student teacher.

Possibly the greatest constraint threatening the success of partnership development is time. In the absence of structural change and support, partnerships still rely on the additional time given by both teachers and academics. Both parties would acknowledge that their primary responsibility is to their own students. Work demands in Australian schools have increased markedly, particularly with relatively new accountabilities involving teaching and assessing by outcomes, and a variety of system policies and 'perspectives' to be included in curricula. Similarly, work demands have increased in universities, notably through the increase in research required. Making a commitment to two masters may mean feeling that you please neither. Quite apart from the work required in partnerships, significant time is needed to establish them. They do not emerge from the stroke of a pen.

A final barrier to school and university partnerships involves the different forms of learning that the teacher education student gains from the school and university respectively. As the student's time in schools dramatically increases (as has been the case in the UK), there is a resultant concern about the 'technical' orientation of schools as opposed to the critical orientation of universities. The limited time spent in schools by Australian teacher education students should not pose a problem to the breadth of their learning and the requisite integration of theory and practice.

7. CONCLUSION

In an increasingly global world, children need to be educated with the skills and values required to function effectively. Such an education requires a community approach to schooling in which all stakeholders are dynamically involved in promoting student learning. Arguably a major stakeholder in schooling who is capable of making a real difference is the education faculty of universities. Robust school university partnerships can improve the learning of school students; promote teacher education; and provide professional development for practising teachers. While school and university partnerships are less well developed in Australia than in the UK or USA, there are valuable expressions of practice. The Innovative Links Project and its current expansions have demonstrated that teachers can initiate and drive school-relevant research projects, thus finally putting to rest the residual claim reported by Stenhouse as early as 1975 that teachers cannot articulate what they do; that subjectivity in the research role condemns them to bias; and that they are theoretically naïve. Shared or team teaching of teacher education students at schools, an increase in time spent in schools, and a greater diversity of school experiences, is helping teacher education students achieve a better integration of theory and practice, and at the same time is providing teachers with a stronger understanding of teacher education programs. A variety of partnership initiatives like those reported by Brady (2000) including research, teaching, community based professional development, mentoring, and school support are promoting awareness of the scope of possible partnership initiatives.

However, for these desirable partnership activities to flourish, there needs to be structural provision to support collaboration. This may include administrative support and release from the normal workload, finance for additional resources, and time to plan strategic outcomes and activities. In the current context, partnerships rely on donated time, and frequently founder when leadership changes or working roles are redefined in the school, university, or system. Some staff in faculties of education throughout Australia feel that they are tinkering with partnerships: they see the educational value of different forms of partnership but are constrained by the separateness of schools and universities, and by their own university work allocation. Cultural differences between schools and universities need to be progressively identified and taken into account when planning. Such planning should involve a consideration of the different values associated with theory and practice, and how they can be best integrated. Finally, the personal beliefs, values and skills of all participants needs to be acknowledged as a starting point for negotiating expectations and developing partnership processes. This sharing should lead to ends that enhance the professional development of each partnership participant.

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