

# Chapter 10

## Concluding Thoughts and Future Considerations on Innovation in School-University Partnerships in Initial Teacher Education



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### 10.1 Drawing Together the Key Themes of the Book

As perception and perspective of what is valued and seen as important to the stakeholders within the partnership is often what drives a partnership, understanding the needs of each stakeholder is paramount. Interestingly, school-university partnerships often have multiple and varied stakeholder groups from backgrounds that are diverse, with only one connecting priority—education. The who, what, where, when and how of “education” within each unique partnership is often as diverse as the stakeholders themselves. Problematizing this further is that when policy or funding bodies are incentivising school-university partnerships, they can often be defined by a set of expectations or objectives, reducing the partnership to problem solving. Additionally, this resulting accountability can “shut down generative and constructive critique” (Mockler, 2013, p. 288) and influence the ways in which the partnership sustains, evolves and innovates. When considering forming school-university partnerships that are supported or enhanced by government policy and funding, understanding requirements for the funding body becomes increasingly important. What is expected by the funding body and what is valued by each partner needs to be understood and reflected within the partnership. Mechanisms also need to be in place within the partnerships to allow for growth, creativity and innovation which would otherwise be limited by rigid structures.

Within initial teacher education across Australian providers, school-university partnerships have now become an important program level standard which must be

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met in order to gain accreditation. What we have seen in practice is that partnerships have traditionally been focussed solely on generating placements and this, by and large, has meant that the university initiates the relationship with the school often playing a less significant role. What this collection has demonstrated is that school-university partnerships have the capacity to be much more than a source of teacher placement experiences. School-university partnerships do have the capacity to generate mutually beneficial outcomes, where partners share, learn and grow together and independently. Examples of partnerships building new knowledge and new capabilities that are shared beyond the partnership itself can be achieved.

An enduring aim of school-university partnerships is bridging the theory/practice divide or the “nexus between theory and practice” (Bernay, 2020, p. 305). However, what has emerged is a new formation of partnership design highlighting a range of community of practice examples. These include the development of shared understandings and learning situated within the partnership and across multiple stakeholder groups (Chapter 2; Chapter 3; Chapter 8), which can influence policymakers around what constitutes effective partnerships. In addition to the sharing of practices, individual visibility, status and identity formation within the context of the partnership was also explored (Chapter 2; Chapter 9). It is evident within the Australian examples of school-university partnership models within this collection that each design approach extends from the transactional nature of locating placements and supporting pre-service teachers in their work within classroom contexts, to various approaches of professional learning within the partnerships themselves involving school-based teachers and leaders and university academics.

A continuing yet often allusive aspect within these communities of practice is the role and responsibility of each stakeholder in addition to co-collaboration and co-construction of partnerships between every impacted stakeholder group (Bernay, 2020). Despite best efforts to engage all stakeholder groups in a mutually beneficial and reciprocal design of partnerships, this is an ongoing battle for school-university partnerships. What is important to remember and what has been consistently visible within many of the chapters within this collection is the underlying need for relationships and relational ways of being. Educational contexts and most associated funding bodies, whether government bodies or industry, are people-centric, socially informed with an emphasis on human interactions. Perhaps the tensions and challenges of bridging, building and burgeoning partnerships are the backgrounds, perspectives and lived experiences of the multiple stakeholders (Bernay et al., 2020). In saying this, the perceived benefit can be both a blessing and a curse.

## **10.2 Future Considerations on Innovation in School-University Partnerships**

Contemporary approaches to the continued improvement of school-university partnerships are the strategic placement of stakeholder feedback, surveys and insights

that continue to flesh out what the imperatives are from multiple perspectives, thus fostering relational approaches. It is heartening to see that commonly known aspects of successful partnerships are widespread amongst key stakeholder groups (Bernay et al., 2020). Whilst policy makers remain focused on the sustainability of partnerships, the examples emerging in this collection are focused on transformation within and through the work of the partnership itself. At the centre of these transformational partnerships is the agency, responsiveness and awareness of the university and the schools in the partnerships, utilising their collective knowledge and contributing to future-focused knowledge development (Bernay et al., 2020). Ultimately, all partnerships strive for this design and what can be limiting is the genesis of the partnership, particularly with policy funding, which often has a “pre-ordained focus” (Mokler, 2013, p. 287) that does not necessarily respond to the needs of the stakeholders that are brought together by the funding.

Amongst the innovations shared within this collection, we have seen a push away from rigid structures and prescriptive reporting, and a shift towards practices that can transform understandings, learning and practices within and across each partnership setting. Researchers and policymakers have long advocated the importance of school-university partnerships in improving initial teacher education and bridging the research theory nexus. Identifying what constitutes successful partnerships remains at the forefront for all stakeholders. The ability to find common ground, innovate and identify the evolving needs of each partner is essential. Furthermore demonstrating a willingness to work towards a shared vision and a commitment to educational transformation through creative approaches to sharing learning. Sustainability is important, however, should not drive partnerships as needs vary and the focus of each partnership will need to shift. Hence, the greater driver should centre around the impact of the partnership and its ability to transform education. Successful partnerships should continue to evolve, recognising the contextually specific needs of all stakeholders. Policy supporting the development of partnerships should recognise that all partnerships are unique and are constantly evolving. Therefore, the role of policy should be to support and promote innovation and not stifle it which limits responsiveness to context.

Finally, this collection has illuminated the investment in school-university partnerships that exceeds policy requirements or program needs. Despite the challenges that face educational organisations, including the pandemic, these partnerships have endured and their collective creativity has brought about transformational change. The dedication and commitment shared by this group of authors are testament to the power of innovative school-university partnerships in initial teacher education.

## References

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