Chapter 9
Perspectives from Academia and School Leadership Boundary Crossing Roles in One Alliance School-University Partnership

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Abstract Designing effective structures around school-university partnerships is a highly interpretive area of research. Across Australia, a broad range of school-university partnerships exist and are based around a range of different factors. The focus of this chapter is on a specific school-university partnership model, based on activity theory, called an Alliance. This chapter draws upon reflections from Academic Mentors who are university-based actors and a principal, all in boundary crossing roles from the Ashwood Alliance. Reflections explore the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic who are involved in the partnership and boundary crossing within one Alliance. Reflections have been constructed as separate cases for analysis. The cases ultimately outlined the ways in which the individuals in these boundary crossing roles viewed their identity, notions of disruption and considerations of innovative and sustainable school-university partnership design.

9.1 Background

Developed in 2013, Deakin University's Alliance model, with clusters of 8–12 geographically close schools and four academics (a Site Director and three Academic Mentors), "was designed to support high quality collaboration between the University and the partnering Alliance schools" (Toe et al., 2020, p. 105). Presently, the Alliance school-university partnerships receive partial funding through the Teaching Academies of Professional Practice from the Victorian Department of Education. These funds ensure the allocation of the boundary crossing role of the Alliance Site Directors. This chapter focuses on the Ashwood Alliance, consisting of ten

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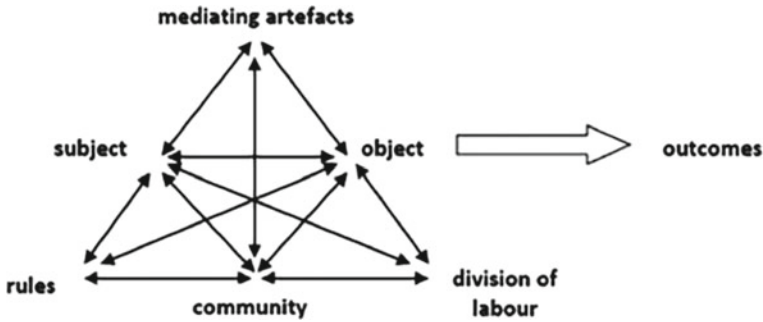Ashwood High School, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

Fig. 9.1 CHAT triangle of activity (Engeström, 1999)

schools and supporting pre-service teachers (PSTs) from undergraduate and Master of Teaching programmes in initial teacher education (ITE). Experiences from the PSTs perspectives in the Ashwood Alliance are well documented in Bradbury et al. (2020); this chapter outlines the experiences of Academic Mentors and Principal in boundary crossing roles.

The Alliance model was based on Engeström's (1999) main theoretical model of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) and the triangle of activity. The triangle illustrates the components of a system and the interactions that occur within the system (see Fig. 9.1). Engeström summarises activity theory through the aid of five principles: as a unit of analysis, multivoicedness, historicity, contradictions and expansive cycles. This conceptual framework is useful for informing social problems that typically require effective collaboration between multiple human activity systems.

Within the triangle of activity, there is no component specific to "an individual" (Veresov, 2020, p. 181); it is instead a "subject" and an "object" which are connected through "actions mediated by cultural artefacts" (p. 181). The CHAT triangle outlines a theory of the subject being "connected to community through rules" (p. 181). This chapter considers the demands and expectations on these boundary crossing roles as well as the opportunities for leveraging what we know about these roles in order to strengthen school partnerships, enhance pre-service teacher education and engage with the needs of partnering schools.

As far back as 2007, the Top of the Class report (Fawns et al., 2007) positioned recommendations for partnerships in education. The importance of improving school-university partnerships has since gained increasing attention (Darling-Hammond, 2016). More recently, the 2018 Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (TEMAG, 2018) report reforms indicated and advocated the development and strengthening of "high quality school-university partnerships" (p.7). High quality can look and feel different depending on which stakeholder is gaining from the shared inquiry and activity. Current accreditation legislation denotes that ITE programmes should have formalised partnerships with school sites in relation to professional experience contexts. This includes transactional elements

such as clear roles, responsibilities and assessment protocols (AITSL, 2020). In specific contexts, school-university partnerships have thrived. We document the way in which a partnership model can operate beyond the transactional and create positive educational impacts that extend the contextual shared boundaries for partners. The following reflective questions began the conversations relating to the Ashwood Alliance partnership:

- What do stakeholders need and how do they benefit?
- What are the imperatives of our partnerships and practice?

Understanding the benefits and the challenges for each stakeholder can require a protocol that is fair for those willing to commit and embrace working together. The essential ethical conventions of partnerships assume that each partner recognises the social practice and ways of sharing knowledge (Eckersley et al., 2011, p. 14). Gathering relevant data from within the partnership can generate analysis to evaluate, evidence and present new knowledge on the effectiveness of the partnerships. In doing so, goals and outcomes are clear and shared as a basis of constructive partnership. This chapter explores the background experiences and practices of two boundary crossing roles and describes practical and specific details that ensure dimensions of mutual and shared possibilities stemming from having these boundary crossing roles. We also highlight some mutual goals and impact of learning in the form of case studies and reflection on some recent partnership practice. What matters and how benefits and challenges are met and measured are also considered in the methodology to indicate possible implications sustaining partnerships.

9.2 Supporting Literature

The following section outlines the supporting literature to foreground the cases and subsequent thematic analysis. Within our exploration of school-university partnerships, discussions pertaining to the essential working parts of the partnership uncovered the need for the development and sustainability of a community of practice. Additionally, the importance of boundary crossing roles such as the Academic Mentor and school-based leadership in the Ashwood Alliance school-university partnership model was explored.

9.2.1 Communities of Practice

When identifying the purpose and practice within a school-university partnership, the notion of learning community is often discussed. This concept is based around the idea of the "social nature of human learning" (Leung, 2020, p. 2) specifically, with a shared interest engaging with one another in social activities in order to develop shared resources (Leung, 2020). CoP not only illuminates the importance of the

collaboration and social interaction in the overall Alliance approach, but this theory also uncovers implications for stakeholder roles and engagement across both the university and school settings.

Educational theorists and researchers have long focused on the importance of cognitive constructs including pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (e.g. Shulman, 1986, 1987) but also on individual critical reflection. More recently, development of PCK but also reflective practice has moved into more of a shared space via communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Shulman and Shulman (2004) describe "teacher learning communities" (p. 259) where "learning from experience through reflecting" (p. 264) is critical. They describe the community as essential for "deliberation, collaboration, reciprocal scaffolding, and distributing expertise" (p. 265) in the preparation of teachers in ITE and development of accomplished teachers.

Recent innovations and changes that have taken place in the way in which schools and universities work together require reflection, particularly that of the boundary crossing positions that the Academic Mentors and principals of partner schools embody. Wenger (1998) discusses the social ecology of identity, constructed from the ways in which "participation or non-participation" (p. 170) within the community and the individual is invested. Therefore, an individual's identity forms a tension between investment, belonging and the negotiation of the "meanings that matter" (Wenger, 1998, p. 170) in specific contexts resulting in a dual process: the first being identification and the second, negotiability. These combine to form the social ecology of identity within CoP (Wenger, 1998).

9.2.2   Boundary Crossing Roles in School-University Partnerships

The literature that explores school-university partnerships often outlines how the partnerships are successful in action; however, the evidence of enduring sustainable partnerships is less prevalent (Manton et al., 2020). Manton et al. suggest that this approach to reporting on partnership effectiveness, highlighting and showcasing the successes of the partnerships may not be addressing "destabilising factors that contribute to…short-lived partnerships" (p. 2). The role of relationships is seen as an essential component in forming partnerships between various systems such as schools and universities, and within school-university partnerships, there are multiple stakeholder groups that are involved in these relational aspects (Manton et al., 2020).

There are numerous sources of research regarding teacher educators in boundary crossing roles, within partnerships that span schools and universities (Martin et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2014; Williams, 2014). This research often highlights the tensions and challenges inherent in identity formation, belonging and purpose in these roles. Martin et al. (2011) describe the teacher educator boundary crossing roles as being hybrid in nature, charged with fostering relationships, negotiating and mediating

while working in school-based contexts. Integral to the construction of the partnerships that they explored was to understand the complexities of the contexts they were working within and working towards building strong foundations of relationships (Martin et al., 2011). Martin et al. suggest "ongoing experience and reflective practices" (p. 309), both individually and collectively, continue to provide insight into the development of these roles.

The role of the principal in a school-university partnership boundary crossing role is often seen as unique and critical (Sanders, 2018). Principals occupy practical, symbolic and facilitation roles in order to build and maintain collaborative partnerships (Sanders, 2018). Sanders (2018) suggests that provisions for principals undertaking such roles may require ongoing PD that focuses on "building interpersonal relationship and organisational conditions" (p. 24) critical to developing and sustaining boundary crossing, collaborative partnerships.

It is this perception of fundamental importance of these boundary crossing roles that generated the research within this chapter, and due to the differences in the backgrounds and length of times in these roles, reflection and developing cases for each contributing author were deemed as an essential approach to collecting the data.

9.3 Research Design

9.3.1 Qualitative Case Study

A qualitative approach (Miles et al., 2014) was taken in order to best capture the richness of the phenomenon of interest, namely the Ashwood Alliance. An inductive approach whereby codes and themes emerge from the data rather than them being a priority (Miles et al., 2014, p. 238). Qualitative case-study methodology was applied within this chapter (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Case writing is the appropriate methodology for this research as the contributing data relating to the cases are "intrinsically bounded" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 39) by their role within the Ashwood Alliance.

All authors were situated in positions of leadership, working internally to plan, implement and support the partnership, and each accordingly has reflective "cases" (Shulman, 1992) upon their experiences within the partnership. Cases ensure evidence-based critical inquiry of partners and opportunity for collaborative research leading to "new enabling structures which span the boundaries of school and university" (Eckersley et al., 2011, p. 91). Each case included each author describing their experiences of first joining the Ashwood Alliance, reflecting on how they were working presently in the boundary crossing role and their future thoughts relating to the partnership. Each experience varied due to the amount of time the authors had been involved within the partnership. Developing multiple cases from similar positions or stance enhanced the opportunity to compare the experiences of the phenomenon of interest and future development. The nature of the method stems from the Freirean

notion of critical praxis where the continuing process of praxis assists groups and communities in developing a "critical consciousness" (Arnold et al., 2012, p. 281) for shared educational viewpoints and understandings. Further to the development of the subsequent cases, each author's reflection was individually analysed by each author and then discussed by the group for further investigation and critical reflection. While engaging in these discussions, the authors deliberated on dilemmas and best practices and the telling of "unwelcome truths" (Mockler, 2015, p. 128) were revealed.

9.4 The Cases

9.4.1 Jill's Case: A Mathematics Teacher Educator New to the Ashwood Alliance

I understood the partnership to foreground closer opportunities to support Deakin University PSTs by creating an alliance between a specific group of schools, some academic staff and a dedicated [0.5] Deakin University staff member to facilitate the group and work closely with the PSTs. The schools are selected partly because of their geographic closeness. Similarly, this Ashwood Alliance is located close to the campus where the Deakin staff participants are located. In the background, the Alliance provides opportunities for the university and school staff to meet regularly. This provides opportunities to develop shared understandings, expand and strengthen relationships and better understand the lived experiences of each. The four yearly meetings also allow schools to discuss any issue or topic they care to raise. Attendees are typically the Principal or Assistant Principal and the PST coordinator so that does channel our focus somewhat. As an academic who had just transferred to Deakin University from another university in Melbourne, some of my experiences will blur with my developing understanding of the ways things at Deakin University operate. I was expecting to spend time in the Alliance schools. Initially, this would have been for the Assessment Circles. That would have allowed me to meet additional school staff and no doubt have led to opportunities to work with the schools in a variety of ways. However, the worldwide pandemic saw the university and schools pivot to online/remote learning from March 2020 and for significant amounts of time since then. As such, I have not visited any school—other than virtually during meetings associated with the Ashwood Alliance. I felt and still do—to some extent an outsider in the Alliance. My time at Deakin University and in the Alliance has most often involved working from home. Hence, my experience at Deakin University has been far from usual. In addition, I am not teaching any units with embedded placements as are the other two academics involved. In fact, the students in my secondary mathematics methods units are enrolled in several courses (e.g. BH&PE, MTeach (Secondary)) and several different placement units depending on how far though their course they have progressed.

Finally, as a mathematics education academic, who has worked extensively with both future and current teachers of mathematics, I bring a very different perspective. My perspective of what learners need is very much through the lens of mathematics education. My focus is firmly on the development of mathematical pedagogical knowledge. My hope is that the Alliance increasingly allows us to support Deakin University PSTs as they transition from future teachers, via teaching placements and associated activities in Alliance schools, to [mathematics] teacher ready graduates. While Deakin University mathematics teacher preparation units for PSTs are underpinned by evidence-based practices and the "wisdom of practice" (Shulman, 1987) of this mathematics educator, it is not until the PST is located inside the school classroom, that some key aspects of learning in practice can be truly appreciated. As the Deakin University academic staff involved in the Alliances have not met together, I am unaware of the similarities and differences between what the Ashwood Alliance does and what other alliances do. The main challenge for me—in addition to those faced by all of us in the current world situation—is the lack of opportunities to draw on my expertise as a mathematics educator and "share" some of this with any of the teachers in our alliance schools. I understand the Alliance Directors and the Director of Professional Experience meet regularly, appreciate the importance of having independence, but regret the lack of opportunities to possibly have our horizons expanded.

9.4.2 Julie's Case: Long-Term Academic Mentor and Partnership Advocate

This case considers future possibilities inherent in Alliances and the unique opportunity for innovative school-university partnership design. When joining the Alliance as an academic, I assumed it may operate in a similar way to my previous university partnership experiences. Soon after joining an Alliance in 2018, I felt a little "adrift". The model included 10 partner schools, a Site Director (from the university) and leading Principal to lead protocols and activities. There was also a requirement to attend with PSTs and staff "Assessment Circles". From my perspective, this seemed a large and well-planned context in which I was to work and prompted some early questions: How was I to work with 10 schools? Who was I to work with and how were relationships established? What did the work look like? Previously, I had generally worked autonomously on projects with PSTs and schools. During the first year, I was establishing my role, and I came to realise that Alliances relied heavily on the Site Director (SD) and a leading Principal within the Alliance. These were partnership members that had a leading position to develop the Alliance. They were committed and energetic in planning and encouraged all schools to attend meetings and Alliance activities. I attended Alliance meetings too, with the school leaders/staff and the leading Principal and SD. Although not all schools attended meetings, the schools placed many of the PSTs with teachers (Mentor Teachers) and the results

were good. I made some good relationships but seldom connected with all schools and principals.

The PSTs present at the Assessment Circles (AC) and school staff from the placement school and academics attend these presentations. This consists of critical and rigorous professional conversations led by PSTs which enables the school staff and academics to interrogate the planning, teaching and learning of the PSTs located at the school. However, I now feel that the PSTs and the university are the winners in this model. Although there have been changes in Site Directors and ways of working, the AC activities have continued within the programme and Alliance. Reflecting on the Alliance experience, my inquiry is now centred on the nature of inclusivity within partnerships, the needs of schools and ways of working with PSTs. What is a productive and sustainable partnership Alliance model? Who benefits? What are the benefits? Who drives? Effective partnerships rely on an equitable and relational model. On reflection, there have been varying models of partnership activities I have chosen to plan, design and implement with valuable assistance and shared vision from MTs and school staff within this Alliance model. These projects have been positioned ethically and shared by stakeholders. So, for me, there are challenges of being in an Alliance partnership. Sustainability rests on the acceptance that not all partners choose to engage without agency, or knowing that there can be a mutual benefit for all.

9.4.3   Brett's Case: Principal Class Working in Alignment with the Alliance

Commencing in 2016, the Ashwood Alliance, part of Deakin University's Melbourne Academy of the Teaching Academies for Professional Practice (ITE draft 2020), disrupted the routine practices of Ashwood High School and was an integral part of the school reform agenda. As founding principal of the Ashwood Alliance, my approach was to tailor the programmes and practices of the Ashwood Alliance to transform the school. This meant collaborating with the Site Director and university colleagues, engaging directly in the conceptualisation of partnership activities, distributing leadership roles to my school's leading teachers and building the capacity of teachers and pre-service teachers (PSTs). The experience has shown me that many participant stakeholders within the Alliance, in addition to the Site Director, have performed the boundary spanning role. It could be argued that the participants who did most of the work and had the highest stakes in boundary spanning were in fact the PSTs. Within the first year of the partnership, improvements in the school culture and positive climate for learning were apparent. It was important to ensure that the activities of the school-university partnership had a positive impact upon the school's transformation and improvement, reflected in improved student attitudes, aspirations and outcomes.

It was challenging to accommodate the university's plans and procedures within the culture, structures and practices of the school—acknowledging that my school is located within an education system with complex and non-negotiable priorities, policies and procedures. Venturing into the partnership required me to incorporate teacher education into the structured teaching and learning discourses of the school. My focus on cultural leadership occurred through networking with other school leaders and partner organisations to assist in promoting and sustaining the Alliance; fostering collegiate support for the Site Director and partnership; simultaneously lifting the profile of the school in the education community. By maintaining visible and shared leadership for the Alliance, commitment has been secured from participants that evolved into a set of sustained communities of practice across our network of schools. This has contributed to a strong culture of inquiry across the Ashwood Alliance community of staff, with a shared focus on improved student learning outcomes. Through collaborative practitioner research, Alliance participants have continued to investigate ways in which the university can work together with the network of primary and secondary schools to improve teaching and learning practices across years 5 to 7, including the possibility of a school network approach to teacher education; strengthening transition processes, with a focus on student well-being, voice and agency across primary and secondary schools. The Alliance, which has become an integral part of the school, has demonstrated that a school-university partnership can enable all stakeholders who participate to learn: primarily, the students through the developing contributions of PSTs; the PSTs as they work in authentically demanding practice; school leaders and teacher educators as they work together to achieve common goals; and the teachers whose professional understandings and practices are developed through taking on the primary responsibility of mentoring the PSTs. Participation in the Alliance has brought about ongoing evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning, leading to strategies focused on continuous improvement.

9.5   Unpacking the Cases

9.5.1   The Identity Formation in Boundary Crossing Roles Within School-University Partnerships

Both reflections from Jill and Julie uncovered thoughts pertaining to their identity within the Ashwood Alliance. When reflecting on their first experience within the Ashwood Alliance, Jill and Julie discussed how they entered into the role simultaneously transferring to Deakin from other universities. Both had little to no knowledge of the Alliance schools. Julie mentioned feeling "a little 'adrift'" and wondered "How was I to work with 10 schools? Who was I to work with and how were relationships established? What did the work look like?". Jill was similarly apprehensive towards engaging with ten unknown schools. From her reflections, Jill seemed to envision

forming her identity through building relationships inside these schools. As this was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, Jill's feeling of identity as an Academic Mentor was also disrupted noting, "As such I have not visited any school - other than virtually during meetings associated with the Ashwood Alliance. I felt, and still do - to some extent an outsider in the Alliance". Jill also mentioned her method area of mathematics and that working "extensively with both future and current teachers of mathematics" came with a different perspective. Detached from the PSTs, other Academic Mentors, the schools and also devout of knowledge of what other Alliances were doing, Jill reflected on the "lack of opportunities to draw on my expertise as a mathematics educator and 'share' some of this with any of the teachers in our alliance schools".

Julie had transitioned from an experienced autonomous supervisor of PST school visits, to doing similar work, except now within a partnership of many stakeholders. In her transition, Julie formed some relationships, but connections to most schools and Principals did not occur; as time progressed, Julie began to inquire into the more nuanced aspects of the ways of working with the school-university partnership:

> Reflecting on the Alliance experience, my inquiry is now centred on the nature of inclusivity within partnerships, the needs of schools and ways of working with PSTs. What is a productive and sustainable partnership Alliance model? Who benefits? What are the benefits? Who drives? (Julie).

It was clear there was a sense of detachment due to "newness" to the Ashwood Alliance within the cases which were exacerbated by the pandemic. Jill reflected that due to the pandemic and not being physically in the schools it was challenging to identify with the Alliance at times. However, the regularity of the virtual Ashwood Alliance meetings aided Jill by supporting deepening relationships between Academic Mentors on the one hand and the other Ashwood Alliance stakeholders on the other. Each meeting progressed the groups to move a step closer to common understanding and shared visions. In Julie's ongoing experience within the Ashwood Alliance, the Site Directors are the only pulse, and Ashwood has benefited from a Principal fully committed to exploring these partnerships:

> During the first year, I was establishing my role, and I came to realise that Alliances relied heavily on the Site Director (SD) and a leading Principal within the Alliance. These were partnership members that had a leading position to develop the Alliance. They were committed and energetic in planning and encouraged all schools to attend meetings and Alliance activities. (Julie)

Brett's identity within the Ashwood Alliance connected to his essential skills as a secondary school principal, also aligning as the founding principal of the Ashwood Alliance stating how his "approach was to tailor the programs and practices of the Ashwood Alliance to transform the school". Brett appeared to align his leadership style when reflecting upon the critical design and delivery components of a school-university partnership like that of the Alliance model:

> Venturing into the partnership, required me to incorporate teacher education into the structured teaching and learning discourses of the school. My focus on cultural leadership occurred through networking with other school leaders and partner organisations to assist in promoting

and sustaining the Alliance, fostering collegiate support for the Site-Director and partnership; simultaneously lifting the profile of the school in the education community. (Brett)

All three reflective cases touched upon the various stakeholders in boundary crossing roles. Although the Academic Mentors did work across both the university and the school context, Jill reflected in relation to the physical presence in the schools; there was a "Lack of opportunity to learn about and from other partners. Without crossing the boundaries". Additionally, it was noted that there was an independence in the role, but without having a physical presence, had missed the opportunity to have their "horizons expanded". Brett reflected that the stakeholders who "did most of the work and had the highest stakes in boundary crossing were in fact the PSTs" with Julie supporting this sentiment by mentioning how the PSTs seemed to gain more benefits than other stakeholders in the Ashwood Alliance. For Brett, the identification and recognition that all participants had "boundary spanning" roles were apparent.

9.5.2 Disruption—Leading to Improved Practice

Charged with significant school improvement demands at that time, Brett was able to disrupt what had been the norm and harness the newly formed Ashwood Alliance with the intent to make it part of the school's embedded teaching and learning approach. Brett's reflections highlight the notion of disruption leading to change, stating that the new partnership had become "an integral part of the school reform agenda" despite associated policy-related challenges:

> It was challenging to accommodate the university's plans and procedures within the culture, structures and practices of the school; acknowledging that my school is located within an education system with complex and non-negotiable priorities, policies and procedures. (Brett)

Much of Brett's case highlighted the influence, impact and positioning of the multiple stakeholders, the impact of the Ashwood Alliance on the growth and development of the school, as well as the potential for up-skilling and capacity building with the staff at the school. As principal, he enabled the ushering in of a school-university partnership and created a sizable space for it to populate. This was exemplified in Brett's case where he identifies how "The Alliance, which has become an integral part of the school, has demonstrated that a school– university partnership can enable all stakeholders who participate to learn". This also led to the "positive impact upon the school's transformation" and improvement as shown through stakeholder responses from mentors through to the leadership team. The disruption Brett details generated a positive outcome for his school.

There was specific mention of a major disruption linked to the COVID-19 pandemic where the university and/or the schools were working in remote and flexible contexts. Individual reflection within Jill's case uncovers questioning of positioning and purpose due to the distance created from the schools within the Ashwood

Alliance. "As such I have not visited any school - other than virtually during meetings associated with the Ashwood Alliance. I felt, and still do - to some extent an outsider in the Alliance". Interestingly, within Julie's reflections of pre-pandemic partnership work, similar sentiments relating to distance were reflected upon:

> Although not all schools attended meetings, the schools placed many of the PSTs with teachers (Mentor Teachers) and the results were good. I made some good relationships but seldom connected with all schools and principals. (Jill)

All participants expressed implicit or explicit plans forged from disruption and evolving into a future-focused approach. Both Jill and Brett aspired to bring more of their expertise into the Ashwood Alliance. For Jill, this was more future oriented, whereas for Julie this included a return to past innovations that were no longer being enacted. Brett's vision was a continuation and broadening of potential for the partnerships to influence:

> primary and secondary [Ashwood Alliance] schools to improve teaching and learning practices across Years 5 to 7; including the possibility of a school network approach to teacher education; strengthening transition processes, with a focus on student wellbeing, voice and agency across primary and secondary schools. (Brett)

Brett's reflections showed that participation within the Ashwood Alliance had not only fostered "collegiate support" from the university, but that the Alliance had "evolved into a set of communities of practice" across the network of schools that currently exist within the Alliance and that the partnership had "contributed to a strong culture of inquiry across the Ashwood Alliance community of staff, with a shared focus on improved student learning outcomes".

The use of boundary objects was discussed in all the cases. Specifically, Julie made mention of the Ashwood Alliance meetings which provided the stakeholders with a forum to discuss any issue or topic or partnership opportunity:

> In the background, the Alliance provides opportunities for the University and School staff to meet regularly. This provides opportunities to develop shared understandings, expand and strengthen relationships and better understand the lived experiences of each. (Julie)

Jill noted that along with those boundary objects of Assessment Circles and stakeholder meetings, the norms and responsibilities of the Ashwood Alliance were important to keep in mind in addition to meeting with Academic Mentors "involved in the Alliances" as they had not met together, in addition to exploring the "similarities and differences between what the Ashwood Alliance does and what other alliances do".

9.5.3 Transformation and Innovation Within the Ashwood Alliance

Reflections across the three cases identified the boundary crossing roles as being of high importance in the current and future design of the partnership. Brett's reflection noted that being in one of the Principal boundary crossing roles, "collaborating

with…university colleagues, engaging directly in the conceptualisation of partnership activities, distributing leadership roles to my school's leading teachers, and building the capacity of teachers and pre-service teachers" were all paramount to the transformation of his school.

From Brett's perspective, the Ashwood Alliance had learning opportunities at the centre. These learning opportunities extended to PSTs, mentors and leadership, enabling "all stakeholders who participate to learn…and..work together to achieve common goals". Often, this was centred around the integrated nature of the partnership and the emergent stakeholder needs stating that "The integration of practitioner research into the work of partnership participants, invested the change process with the possibility of sustained educational innovation". In order to achieve this vision, both boundary crossing roles and practitioners, from Brett's perspective, needed to have strong communication and collegiate ties this could then lead to potential improvement in practice where he states, "This meant collaborating with the Site Director and university colleagues, engaging directly in the conceptualisation of partnership activities, distributing leadership roles to my school's leading teachers, and building the capacity of teachers and PSTs".

Similarly, Julie's reflections link the boundary crossing roles to both relational aspects and learning imperatives. Sustainability for Julie included learning about each school in the partnership, ensuring that there was a shared investment, and that stakeholder voice and agency were not only considered but an understanding that mutual benefit will be attained:

> So, for me, there are challenges of being in an Alliance partnership. The sustainability rests on the acceptance that, not all partners choose to engage without agency, or knowing that there can be a mutual benefit for all (Julie).

Future-focused reflections were further developed in Brett's case as links were drawn between the partnership work, improving practice and knowledge and creating a culture of meaningful inquiry. Brett emphasised the need for schools to support PSTs and partners as they work in authentically work together to achieve common goals by stating "It was important to ensure that the activities of the school-university partnership had a positive impact upon the school's transformation and improvement, reflected in improved student attitudes, aspirations and outcomes".

Evidenced within the three reflections was an emergent need to ensure that the activities of the school-university partnership had a positive impact upon the school's and the university's transformation and improvement and if successful, can be reflected in the impact of "improvement strategies to distribute teaching and leadership capacity, impacting positively on the viability and sustainability of the Alliance" (Brett). Julie found from this Ashwood Alliance experience that buy-in from schools was the key to substantive and transformative progression. Jill's ambitions for innovation and transformation are grounded in pedagogical development relative to her background in mathematics. Jill's perspective was that the Alliance was an opportunity to develop PST capabilities as they neared graduation and that extended through her involvement, believing the partnership opportunities provide

an avenue "to develop shared understandings, expand and strengthen relationships and better understand the lived experiences of each".

9.6 Discussion

9.6.1 The Importance and Impact of Boundary Crossing and Boundary Objects

In many of the reflective cases, disruption as a result of taking on a boundary crossing role in the Ashwood Alliance for the authors of this chapter had resulted in growth, opportunity and "renegotiation of their identities" (Chaaban et al., 2021, p. 8). This constitutes a deep commitment to future imagining within the partnership and stems from a position of hope (Lindroth & Sinevaara-Niskanen, 2019). Moving on from these renegotiations is the establishing of the possibility of improving expectations and "greater equality in the future" (p. 644) for all boundary crossing roles in this space. Imagining beyond current processes and disruption engenders transformational interest and common effort. Where the notion of imagination, transformation and renegotiation was identified within the cases, further development of possibilities within the Ashwood Alliance can be considered.

For the Academic Mentors within the context of this chapter, school-university partnerships form a significant component of their work. In the current work allocation model or WAM for Academic Mentors, 45 hours per year are allocated to significant contributions to external partnerships—in this case, the Ashwood Alliance school-university partnership. In much of the literature relating to school-university partnerships, these roles are seen as being crucial to the work of the partnership (Manton et al., 2020). Leung suggests that boundaries should be viewed as a "potential for learning" (2020, p. 3) rather than an obstacle as on either side, common aims and concerns can be found (Leung, 2020). For principals such as Brett in a pivotal boundary crossing role, eliciting a sense of purpose and alignment with the school mission and vision was paramount for the embedding of the potential offerings of the partnership to be in the school's lived experience. Brett's approach to embodying his boundary crossing role is indicative of the Australian Professional Standards for Principals (AITSL, 2015) and relates to Professional Practice Standard 5. This Standard outlines the importance of engaging and working with the community in order to create mutually supportive, collaborative and trusting relationships with the community to ensure engagement in the life of the school (AITSL, 2015). Feeling as though the individual is part of the partnership was a strong theme that emerged throughout the cases. The identity of those in the boundary crossing roles prior to coming into the partnership was often challenged and questioned. This then resulted in reflections relating to possibilities and growth not only for their own development, but also for the additional stakeholders within the partnership. This was seen within all three cases where discussions around their own position and contributions, as well

as the possibilities for growth in the leadership team, teachers and the PSTs, were discussed and reflected upon.

9.6.2 Future Design Considerations for the Ashwood Alliance

This chapter explored how a school principal in performing a boundary crossing role created a cohesive culture, enabling PSTs to play a central part in teaching and learning programmes, and impacting the learning of their students. The boundary crossing roles explored within this chapter are often identified within the planning and implementation of a school-university partnership, and as Sanders (2018) suggests, the ways in which these roles are embodied do not come with a rule book. And arguably, they should not, as often contexts within the partnership themselves are varied and require adaptation that may impact an individual's identity and ways of working.

The two boundary crossing roles required the authors to span two or more diverse and often contrasting domains, facilitating a number of relationships across the schools and mediating two or more sets of desired outcomes (Guile & Young, 2003). For Brett, through the altered relationship practices of the Ashwood Alliance, the practices of the partnership became an integral part of the school as well as its educational discourse about teacher education and the incorporation of this language into key documentation (e.g. the School's Strategic Plan, Annual Implementation Plan (AIP), my Performance and Development Plan (PDP) and those of the teaching staff). The inception of the partnership between the university and the partner school was an integral part of Brett's school reform agenda. The experience has shown that being part of the Ashwood Alliance has made explicit reference to the expanded opportunities found in integrating the discourse of teacher education to support educational change at the school.

Boundary crossing objects (Engestrom et al., 1995) in the Ashwood Alliance worked as anchors in the ways of working and growth of responsibilities and shared purpose between the Academic Mentors and other Alliance stakeholders. These boundary crossing objects included "Assessment Circles" and "Alliance meetings" and are currently a consistent and continuing factor of the Ashwood Alliance model. The running of Assessment Circles within the Ashwood Alliance allows for "critical and rigorous professional conversations led by PSTs" with occasional participation from school staff and Academic Mentors. As noted in the reflections within this chapter, "the PSTs and the university are the winners in this model" which poses potential design and delivery considerations for the partnership to become more inclusive of all stakeholders within the Ashwood Alliance.

Distance and newness to a partnership can influence the sense of identity for boundary crossing roles stakeholders, particularly that of the Academic Mentor. If

the "norm" is to visit and be physically present in schools in order to create relationships and draw upon expertise, the distance may cause a chasm and potentially impact the development of relationships. Additionally, key boundary crossing roles such as Site Directors and leading principals in the partnership may appear as a gatekeeper for information and ways of working. Implications of how communication can be streamlined, targeted and transmitted in a timely and relevant way may be of consideration for further sustainability for both the partnership and the boundary crossing roles. This may also impact the sense of shared identity for all the stakeholders involved.

Evidenced within this chapter, the third boundary crossing role that is identified by all three authors is that of the pre-service teacher. Each reflection began the conversation regarding equity and benefits of the Ashwood Alliance, including that of direct links back to activity theory relating to division of labour, notions of community and the associated rules and protocols. Aspects of consideration and mutual respect for all involved and those that can conceptualise and assist, including those seeking shared boundaries, are important factors for the future considerations of the partnership. The Ashwood Alliance has advanced practices that nurture knowledge relationships. Through their membership of a community of practice, participants across the Alliance are part of a persistent, sustained social network of individuals who share social capital (Field, 2008; Fullan, 1993). This includes a knowledge base, set of beliefs, values, history and experiences focused on a common practice and/or mutual enterprise (Barab & Duffy, 2000). Through these interactions within a shared community of practice, boundary spanning encounters resulted in a shift in understanding relating to teaching, learning and leadership (Printy, 2008).

9.7   Limitations

As this is a snapshot of one Alliance, the findings can only be applied to the current context of the Ashwood Alliance. Additional Academic Mentor reflections of their past, present and future experiences within other Alliances may provide further insight into the themes uncovered within this chapter and perhaps uncover and address other contextualised themes. Without case studies from fellow Ashwood Alliance principals, it cannot be stated that they too accessed the Alliance for school reform, and nothing that has happened in the ensuing five years that would reveal they had.

9.8   Conclusion

Where initial participation in the Ashwood Alliance brought about disruption for those in the boundary crossing roles, ongoing participation resulted in identity formation, evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning and led to strategies focused on continuous improvement. The boundary crossing role of the principal in this

chapter was integral in publicly supporting the partnership in order to strengthen the university's engagement, building trust and cooperation across the system. For the Academic Mentors in this chapter, transformation of their identity as teacher educators and a willingness to foster learning, engagement and imagine future possibilities was evident throughout both cases. This passion, commitment and identification with other participant expertise worked to sustain the community of practice. As the community of practice generates new knowledge through inquiry and collaboration, it re-enforces and renews itself. Moving forward, it is encouraging to see that the authors in these boundary crossing roles within this chapter will continue to be vested in the school-university partnership as current results have seen refinements and improvements made to distribute teaching and leadership capacity, impacting positively on the viability and sustainability of this growth. As collaborators in the Ashwood Alliance, through the use of observations and reflection, there are clear benefits of bringing the university into the school and the school into the university.

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