ARTICLE

Three Models of Effective School–University Partnerships

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Abstract

The Ministry of Education in New Zealand in 2013 provided funding for universities to develop and implement initial teacher education programmes with innovative school–university partnerships to promote the success of graduates. To enhance the success of this new programme, four teacher educators reviewed the literature on school–university partnerships. The authors investigated critiques of and successful strategies for partnerships to develop three models to be trialled by primary school partners and the university staff involved in the pilot programme. Model A represents the traditional practicum partnership whereas models B and C look at partnership as a professional learning community. These models are explained and the findings from discussions throughout the initial implementation of the programme to determine aspects conducive to success for student teachers in each context are outlined. Questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups provided school and university staff members the opportunity to analyse the models as well as benefits and challenges of such a relationship. From this analysis, the four teacher educator/researchers concluded that working as a professional learning community with student teachers, teachers and university lecturers provided a strong foundation for partnership. School and university staff members valued working together as professional development for all partners, as a potential avenue for joint research, and as a platform to enhance student teacher's preparedness for their first classroom.

Keywords School–university partnership · Initial teacher education · Partnership models · Professional learning community

Introduction

The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2013) identified the need for initial teacher education programmes that considered new and innovative school–university partnerships to improve a beginning teacher's ability to teach in their own

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classrooms. The Ministry of Education (2013) request for proposals for innovative 1-year initial teacher education programmes focused on enhancing graduate teachers' abilities to raise achievement for 'priority learners', which at that time, referred to Māori, Pacific and special needs students. This approach to enhanced school–university partnerships was later echoed in the Teaching Council in New Zealand new requirements for all initial teacher education programmes (Teaching Council 2019). The specific requirement reads:

> Programme design and delivery must be based on authentic consultation and partnership with relevant key partners. There must be a plan to show how authentic partnerships with key partners (with mutual benefits that are explicit and interdependent, structured, and with a shared responsibility for success) will be strengthened and expanded over the following two to three years (Teaching Council 2019, p. 10)

The expectation for school–university partnerships has expanded as a result of the success of these innovative programmes which were developed in 2013–2014. Certainly, the international trend and focus on school–university partnerships in initial teacher education has further prompted the Teaching Council to include this as a requirement for all initial teacher education programmes (Sutherland et al. 2005; Darling-Hammond 2006b; Zeichner 2010; Timperley 2011).

Working in school–university partnership provides a range of challenges such as unpacking pre-conceived ideas about roles of teacher educators, working in new contexts, managing multiple relationships and other tensions within these complex relationships (Martin et al. 2011). Snow-Gerono (2008) highlights a particular complexity in these school–university partnerships reflected in the focus being on the university's agenda and veteran teachers in schools therefore feeling their opinions are discounted. The structure of university programmes is often perceived by veteran teachers as woefully inadequate for preparing beginning teachers for the classroom. Veteran teachers and many school principals believe that an apprentice-ship model under the guidance of a veteran teacher would be preferable, so these issues and perceptions of partnerships need to be kept in mind and addressed as new, exemplary programmes are developed.

Guidelines for these exemplary programmes in 2013 were provided, but not specific strategies to address the complexities of school–university partnerships or how to enhance the achievement of 'priority learners' to improve a beginning teacher's ability to perform in the classroom. This lack of guidance prompted the four university teacher educators implementing the Master of Teaching and Learning programme at Auckland University of Technology, as an innovative initial teacher education programme approved by the Ministry of Education, to investigate the literature on school–university partnerships to develop a model appropriate to the New Zealand context and more specifically to a range of different school contexts. The four teacher educators aimed to link the knowledge and expertise of teachers in schools with that of academics at the university to enhance graduate teachers' classroom preparedness. The original Auckland University of Technology concept proposal outlined the purpose of the partnerships:

[To] work in authentic partnership with selected schools in Auckland City, to create a community of practice, drawing on the expertise and experience of mentor teachers and principals in schools and the research and specialist knowledge of mentor lecturers in the university, co-constructing teaching and learning programmes with student teachers in professional contexts (Lewis 2013, p. 4).

In 2014 the School of Education at Auckland University of Technology invited principals and one other staff member from six primary schools to join in determining the key components of the school–university partnerships. The objective was to identify what school leaders and university staff valued in a school–university partnership. In 2016 four additional schools joined the programme and offered their insights into what would work best for partnership in their individual contexts. The partnership within the Master of Teaching and Learning programme was developed with the initial six primary schools to enhance the outcomes for student teachers by increasing time in schools, delivering curriculum workshops together and designing university papers and other programme components together. In addition, a university lecturer would work in the schools 1 day per week to support the student teachers' progress, to share current research in education, and to address any challenges within the partnership relationship.

The four teacher educators formed a research team to analyse essential features of the partnership relationships that would most likely result in improving the chances of student teachers to be ready for their first teaching position. The teacher educators initiated the research by asking themselves this research question: what are the essential elements of partnership that support the classroom practice of pre-service teachers. The literature was researched to explore what might already be considered important as strategies for models of partnership between schools and universities. In undertaking the literature review on partnerships and strategies, it was considered important to focus on partnership frameworks that produce maximum mutual and independent benefit for all involved in the partnership: student teachers, schoolteachers and teacher educators.

Following the literature review, three models were developed from key concepts identified in a synthesis of the literature. During the initial implementation of the partnerships, questionnaires were developed for the teacher educators and school staff members to critique the models and to identify critical features for each context. School staff members were interviewed to gain feedback related to specific aspects of partnership that were considered essential for the success of the programme, and to uncover biases related to partnerships whilst university staff members engaged with the same topics in focus groups throughout the first year of implementation to further refine the partnerships.

This article first explores the theoretical concepts outlined in the literature for developing successful school–university partnerships. The three partnership models derived from the literature are described. Next, there is a discussion of what was learned about the models from interviews, questionnaires, focus groups and initial implementation. In the conclusion, the authors outline how this might

be useful for teacher educators in the future who are developing partnerships for their initial teacher education programmes.

Theoretical Unpacking of Concepts

Research over the past 20 years outlines elements of an effective school–university partnership model, with a focus on one essential critical feature: student teachers' teaching practice improves mostly through a practicum/apprentice model, and particularly when delivered through school–university partnerships (Darling-Hammond 2006a, b; Le Cornu and Ewing 2008; Kruger et al. 2009; Schulz and Hall 2004). The value of the apprenticeship model underpinned by a school–university partnership was confirmed in a range of New Zealand studies (Grudnoff and Williams 2010; Harlow et al. 2013; Timperley and Robinson 2002). In these studies, essential features of partnership were identified which focused the development of potential models of school–university partnership for initial teacher education.

In a study based in the United States, Darling-Hammond (2006a) stresses the importance of teacher education programmes' relationships with schools that involve pre-planning, close interaction, and dialogue on the application of theory to practice that reflects a shared understanding and common knowledge. She adds that a critical feature is the promotion of continual joint focused practitioner inquiry (2006a). A partnership can produce useful results if each partner recognises and values the other's different perspectives and prior knowledge, allowing themselves to focus together on the improvement of teaching practices for the professional learning community. This collaborative inquiry approach within the partnership increases the likelihood of robust and worthwhile research that will, in turn, improve student teacher outcomes. Schulz and Hall (2004) confirm the importance of collaborative inquiry for partnerships, as posited by Sirotnik and Goodlad (1988) in their research on school–university partnerships that became a required part of initial teacher education in Britain from 1992.

Collaborative inquiry in partnerships becomes possible when there is a marriage of different ways of thinking, experiences, habitus through negotiation and open dialogue (Davies et al. 2007). However, Hora and Millar (2001) conclude that to achieve collaborative inquiry and successful partnerships, there is not a one size fits all model. Rather, through meaningful interaction, collaboration, and regular discussion of the benefits and celebration of successes of partnerships, new learning opportunities occur. These authors also add that chances of realising joint goals are increased when new relationships are allowed to develop, boundaries are crossed by each partner into the 'territory' of the other, and a new shared space is created.

Each partner brings unique understandings to create new shared knowledge in the 'third space' (Gilbert 2005). This third space concept could be applied to how partnerships may create a new space that is neither the school's space nor the university's space. But a new shared space of learning. Berger and Johnston (2015) suggest that third space/collaborative inquiry, through partnerships, is a complex new way of thinking, requiring considered time and effort to trial new ideas. They further state that for the partnership environment to flourish partners should be encouraged to be

comfortable with 'failing fast' together, because learning from failure can produces even better results.

The three fundamentals derived from the literature review for any partnership to be successful (including school–university partnerships) are: trust, mutuality (that the partnership provides more than working alone), and reciprocity (value is seen in the contribution of all partners) (Kruger et al. 2009). With these three elements in place, planning how the partnership will unfold together becomes the crucial next step for an authentic partnership (Burn and Mutton 2015). The research team suggestion would be to extend this notion of partnership to the importance of a school–university/student teacher partnership which has been an essential feature of the Master of Teaching and Learning.

To summarise, essential concepts to understand in relation to school–university partnerships include non-hierarchical relationships in which there is an understanding of the different roles and goals of participants. Also, there needs to be a new third space, where collaboration and joint planning occur. It is in that space that projects are implemented for teachers and student teachers to engage in innovative practice and experimentation to meet the learning needs of individual children or priority learners. In a New Zealand context, Grudnoff et al. (2016) emphasise the importance of working in this third space through developing relationships and role transformation in which the school and university have compatible roles in the practicum experience rethinking the balance between theory and practice. This partnership has resonance with the partnership outlined in the Treaty of Waitangi between Māori and the Crown in establishing a joint working relationship, (Hayward and Wheen 2004), and therefore it is important throughout any discussion of partnership to include the voice of all parties but particularly the voice of Māori teachers, teacher educators and students in co-constructing a partnership model.

The research team critically analysed the literature and obtained some initial guidance from it, to answer the research question: what are the essential elements of a partnership relationship that promotes positive outcomes for student teacher. From this analysis, three model prototypes were developed to be reviewed by school–university partners. The research was initiated to promote professional collaborative learning in a third space shared by student teachers, teachers in schools and university teacher educators, to develop innovative models of school–university partnership for initial teacher education.

The Three Partnership Models

Three school–university partnership models were derived from the literature review as discussion pieces.

Models of Partnership

Model A (Teacher Training)

Student teachers are 'trained' to be teachers in this practicum partnership. The imperative is on replicating *correct* practices for the technical aspects of teaching in a traditional model (Tuli and File 2009). The university outlines education theory to student teachers in lectures, reinforced by placement in schools to experience exactly 'what teachers do'. Historically in New Zealand, learning to teach follows a pathway of ceremonial rituals and obtaining sacred knowledge to develop a prescribed teacher identity (Ball 2009). "The 'truths' passed on to them during their rite of passage are expected to be implemented by them during their teaching experience. This is an integral part of all practica" (Ball 2009, p. 301). The purpose of the partnership is to enhance and improve the field experience; to connect the theory presented at university with the reality of the classroom (Bull et al. 2016; Zeichner 2010). Student teachers learn *how* to teach, not why particular practices work, nor how to adapt them for the diverse learning needs of children. As can be seen in Fig. 1, Model A, relationships are not interactive but often one way and student teacher voice is limited.

The university relies on the partner schools to provide the *training* student teachers need from *experienced* teachers (Darling-Hammond 2006a). Student teachers focus on the practice of teaching; the 'practicum'. Donnelly (2004) noted the importance of practicum and the variability of the quality and therefore greater guidelines and control needed calling for a "unified set of standards" (p. 12) in a report to Parliament. The report highlights the role of 'coaching' student teachers in the complexities of the classroom.

Model A is a behaviourist model of learning, where student teachers observe and 'copy' what the experienced teachers have demonstrated. Praise and critique follow, which then reinforces or improves the student teachers' practices (Duchesne et al. 2013). When student teachers are on practicum, the university focuses on congenial school partner relationships (Bull et al. 2016). The schools themselves benefit from having additional adult supervision in the classroom,
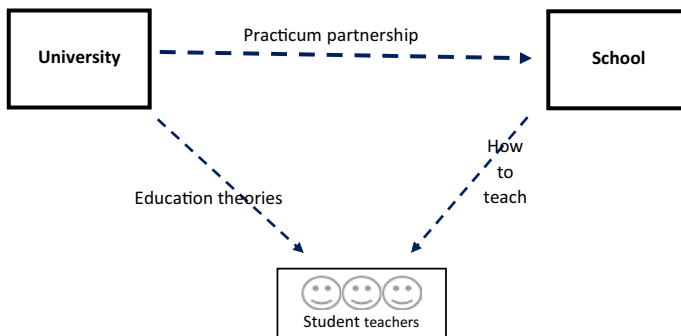

Fig. 1 Model A (teacher training)

modelling what they want in a teacher, and developing dependable future employees.

Model B (Induction into the Professional Community of Practice)

Student teachers are apprentices in the classroom who follow a pathway of inquiry into the practice of teaching, resulting in improved student teacher performance and therefore learning outcomes for children (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009). Student teachers are inducted into the profession through a 'community of practice' partnership that enables them to continually grow and improve their teaching knowledge and skills (Bull et al. 2016), as seen in Fig. 2. The student teacher reflects upon their practice and trials new strategies to enhance their pedagogy. Partnerships between schools and universities provide the link between theory and practice, offer learning opportunities for student teachers, and enable a two-way exchange of learning and knowledge between school staff members and university lecturers that results in mutual professional renewal and innovation (Schulz and Hall 2004).

This mutual learning environment can be described as "hybrid spaces" (third spaces) where the expertise of each partner is valued and generates improvement and reform (Zeichner 2010); requiring a new, collaborative role between teachers and teacher educators. Student teacher participation in this collaborative space cannot lead to transformation without teacher educators shifting to a mindset of joint control, encouraging and embracing dialogue, and not engaging with presumptions in order that student teacher voice is heard, and student teachers feel empowered to enact change (Fielding 2004). Student teachers, teachers and university lecturers engage in reflection and critique together, resulting in new research and evidence on more effective teaching practices (Bull et al. 2016).
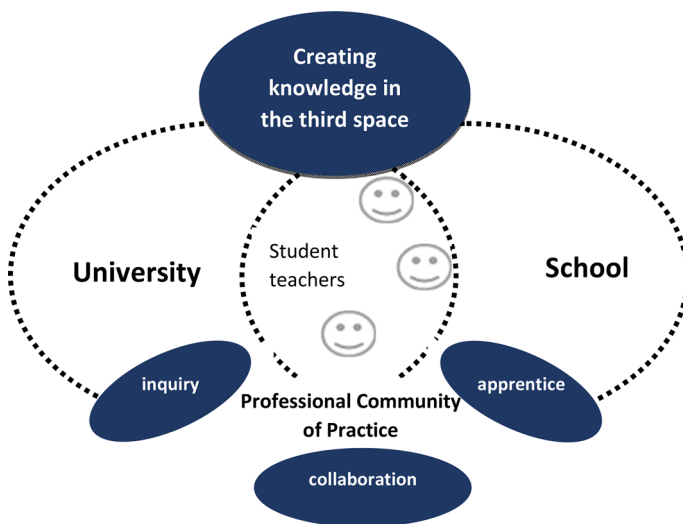

Fig. 2 Model B (professional community of practice)

Importantly, student teachers are considered equal members in a community of practice, and their research and experience are recognised as beneficial for the entire school community. Benefits for schools might include potential new professional learning and teaching practices for teachers. Universities benefit from the school being a laboratory for new innovations.

Model C (Transformational Learning Community: Teaching for Today and the Unknown Future Requires Change)

Student teachers are part of a wider 'learning community' partnership. This model suggests that current teaching practices, in schools and in universities, do not generate thinking and knowledge creation for children or student teachers to thrive in today's world. Complicating this, the future is an unknown landscape, and partnerships should not be confined to university educators and school-based practitioners, [Model A], but should be extended into the wider, real world. Working together with local communities takes everyone (school and university staff members and student teachers and others) in the 'learning community' beyond the physical *space* and allows them to think more broadly about how to collaborate, who owns knowledge, and how best to create new and different understandings of working together in a shared world. Figure 3 illustrates the range of relationships and resulting benefits for Model C.

Learning communities focus on *change*; to reinvent schools for transformational learning for children, student teachers, teachers, university lecturers and the wider community. Partnerships require collaboration that promotes opportunities to challenge each other's ideas (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Collaborative partnership, involving a wide range of people in new ways is what teachers, student teachers and teacher educators need to learn to do in learning communities. This model goes beyond the more limited expectations of communities of practice [Model B] that focus on classroom learning. Learning communities focus on the need for *change*: new solutions, new roles and new ways of working together. Disagreement, debate and different perspectives between partners are common, yet are the best environment within which to develop the teaching practices needed for the future through joint action research (Price and Vali 2005). The discoveries made also benefit the wider community, where complex local problems may be addressed. Student teacher voice is as essential as the voice of university and school staff in this partnership model to promote positive change for the future (Price and Vali 2005).

Questions from other members within the partnership focus on new possibilities for thinking about learning and teaching, grounded in the reality of local communities and their problems. Classroom teachers and university teacher educators' model professional inquiry and collegial dialogue to student teachers. The diversity of the group provides opportunities to encounter new ways of thinking that lead to new knowledge and provide a catalyst for positive change (Marquardt and Waddill 2004; Berger and Johnston 2015). All partners benefit from contributing to and being able to use their new knowledge and understanding actively in this future-oriented model.
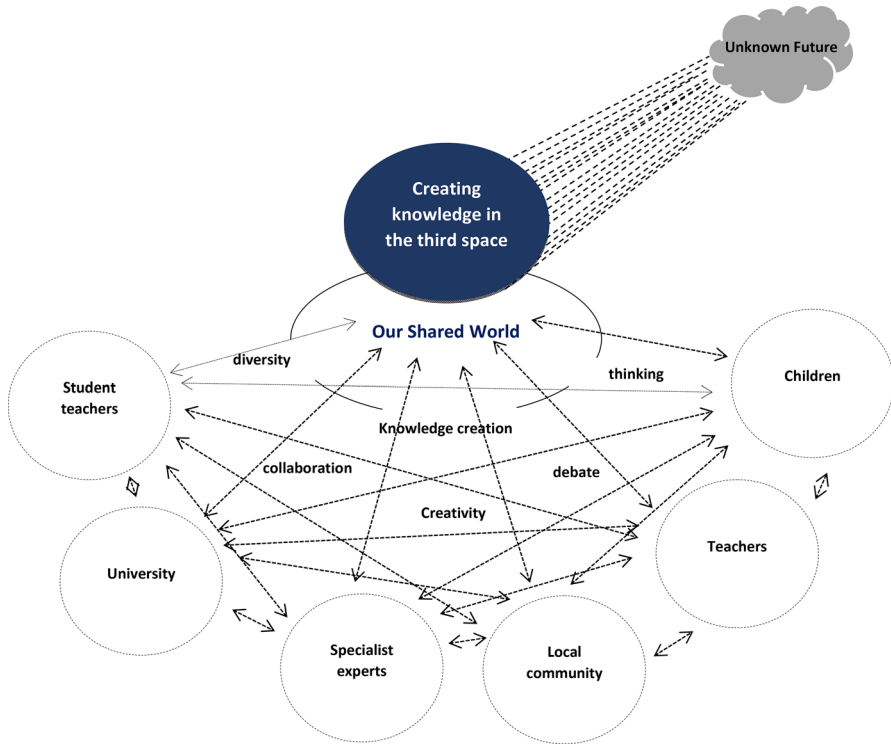
Fig. 3 Model C (transformational learning community)

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was enacted through a series of steps. Ethics approval was obtained from the university for all data collection instruments. Participants signed informed consent forms to participate in the research. The research team agreed to maintain confidentiality and created a supportive environment in which each member of the team felt safe to share all ideas, perspectives and conclusions.

After the models were developed in 2015, they were used as 'thought-pieces' to assist the four research team members, and school staff members to complete questionnaires about the three models and the characteristics of effective partnerships, designed by an independent colleague not involved in this Master of Teaching and Learning programme. Questions focused on the roles within the partnership and how they would/could be different from a 'traditional' school–university partnership focused strictly on student teachers arriving in schools for a practicum with limited university input or support similar to Model A. Participants were asked about any problems, difficulties or benefits that a partnership might present. The questionnaire was initially completed by the four teacher educators and the programme leader at the university, and subsequently by the principals and one teacher at six partnership schools.

Interviews were conducted with the six principals and adjunct lecturers (school staff members with time allowance to work with student teachers outside the class-room) to ascertain further information about the partnership models. Questions included consideration of the ability to promote student teacher confidence in their own teaching within these partnerships.

Focus groups were then conducted, by the colleague who had designed the questionnaire, with the four teacher educators and the programme leader to unpack themes revealed in the questionnaires and to specifically address the possibilities for the three models that had been developed from the literature within individual schools contexts to be enacted in the Master of Teaching and Learning programme. Themes explored from the questionnaire included necessary skills for teacher educators in the partnership, the expectations of the university as compared to the work-load allocation given, the challenge of working with teachers in schools when the teacher educators did not have 'the' answer, sharing power, the 'separateness' of universities and schools, collaboration and sharing of opinions and talents rather than the need to be in charge, and having to be a 'conduit' for discussions.

Analysis was completed from July 2016 to August 2017 through a series of pro-fessional learning community meetings of the four initial teacher educators who also kept journals of their experiences to promote discussion in the professional learning community. Topics that arose from the focus groups were discussed in the profes-sional learning community with individual teacher educators sharing their analysis and reflections from their journals. From these discussions, new strategies were tri-alled in partnership schools and the key learnings summarised which are discussed below.

What Did We Learn?

The literature recognises the complicated nature of partnerships, outlines the effec-tive characteristics of partnerships, and describes models for discussion. School–uni-versity partnerships can be constrained by complexity. Each member of a partner-ship brings their own previous lived experiences and perspectives, and each school context differs.

An initial review of Models A, B and C in relation to the partner schools found that Model A relates most closely to traditional initial teacher education, in which the programme and the resulting partnership revolves around the student teacher practicum and the technical skills to be gained by the student teacher during that process. Models B and C move beyond the traditional approach. In Model B, the central principle is that individuals become a member of a community of practice. In Model C the university joins with the school and the wider community to seek opportunities to address the challenges of the future. Each individual involved can critique a wide range of perspectives and ideas, shifting the focus to a broader com-munity of practice where the goal is the development of the entire community, to distinguish from Model B which only focuses on the school environment. Le Cornu and Ewing (2008) concur with this contrast between Model A and Models B and C suggesting that the more recent and successful school–university partnership models

extend beyond traditional skills-based teaching approaches, and reflecting on teaching practices, to a shared focus on co-construction of knowledge for deeper engagement. This model utilises the wider community's perspective and aspirations as the drivers of future-oriented education programmes in which students develop skills, knowledge and dispositions to live in the unknown future. Gilbert (2012, p. 7) notes, "it is networked expertise … the network *enables* connected groups to take ideas further than any individual could. The knowledge they create is 'in' the collaborative space, not individual heads."

It has been observed elsewhere that communities of practice [Model B] have been successful for student pre-service teachers as they are given the opportunity to engage beyond practicum and participate fully in the school community (Sutherland et al. 2005). Engagement with a community of teachers provides specific opportunities to apply theory to practice and reflect on the co-created knowledge through lived experiences, beyond practicum, to gain not only technical skills but the practical wisdom of teachers (Field and Latta 2001). Model C extends the benefits of Model B beyond the school environment and incorporates involvement of the wider community.

Review of the Models with School and University Partners

The next sections outline what we learned about partnerships from the interviews, questionnaires and focus groups.

Responses from the school staff members and teacher educators in the questionnaires, indicated that the term 'partnership' had no clearly defined meaning for either partner, and there was general confusion about specific tasks that could be engaged in together. The questionnaires revealed agreement about the essential characteristics of effective partnerships that are also identified in the literature, namely: acceptance of and incorporation of different expertise and perspectives; close interaction and dialogue; variance by context; the value of working through conflicts; blend of theory and practice, being proactive and open-minded. Many agreed on the importance of moving from the traditional partnership model A, where schools look after the 'practical' and the university focuses on 'theory', to models where the focus is on improving outcomes for student teachers by trying new strategies collaboratively (models B and C).

Adjunct lecturers indicated in the interviews and the four teacher educators in the focus groups that teachers and teacher educators themselves gained new knowledge, so the benefits accrued not just to student teachers. In the interviews and focus groups, all partners valued the 'elevated' role of the *adjunct lecturer* who participated in the development of the teacher education programme including student teacher assignments and discovered a passion for mentoring student teachers. It was also noted that all members of the partnership had equal status in the development of new strategies and thus achieved a truly collegial experience. The expanded role of the *adjunct lecturer* is a major plus in a new model of initial teacher education partnership providing more direct involvement of the school (Grudnoff et al. 2016).

Recognition of the value of Model B was evidenced, as schools reported the shared belief that student teacher progress was a collaborative responsibility for the school and the university 'community of practice'. Specific examples cited by school partners included their involvement in designing the curriculum and assessments for university papers as well as the selection of student teacher candidates for practicum. The research team members valued school staff being involved in the discussions, which enhanced the quality of curriculum content for university papers and the criteria by which the student teachers' assignments were assessed. School staff members valued potential opportunities to attend workshops by university lecturers to be supported to continue to be current with new ideas.

Agreement was noted in that the Auckland University of Technology model is closest to Model B, with aspects of the traditional Model A focus on technical skills development. One of the teacher educators was particularly interested in implementing the Model C approach, which created tension between student teachers and the university lecturers because most of the student teachers involved preferred a step by step (Model A) approach so they could feel immediate, short term, success. In order to provide mutual collaboration within Model A, student teachers and teachers in schools work together with university teacher educators to determine each component of the step by step approach. Some partner schools preferred to focus on Model A; viewing this partnership as an extended practicum. University lecturers realised the importance of being open to all the perspectives, ideas and strategies used in each partner school. Although partners from the school and the university, were all positive about the experience, challenges were recognised: (1) moving beyond the traditional Model A takes time because school–university personnel need time to plan together and develop stronger relationships, and (2) changing personnel in the partnership (school and university) is disruptive, as is (3) when new partner schools are added in after initial partnership groups are formed.

An important aspect of partnerships that emerged from the focus groups with teacher educators involved relationships. The importance of relationships is echoed by the research of Grudnoff et al. (2016) who noted that this empowers school leaders to make decisions and have a better mutual understanding of expectations. All the partnerships in the Master of Teaching and Learning programme evolved from previously established relationships involving members of the university research team and the school communities. University educators based in the schools worked more closely with schoolteachers and student teachers than ever before.

The consensus amongst the teacher educators and adjunct lecturers, from the interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires, is that the characteristics of Model B were evident in the new initial teacher education programme. Aspirations to move towards a more sustainable model for the future [Model C] were evident, but elements of the traditional Model A were still manifest and important; for example, the ability to mimic the classroom practices of effective teachers.

Engaging the partnership in a professional learning community for evaluation of the partnership models was a very effective strategy that significantly enhanced the partnership relationships. The dynamics between the different partners, though established previously, were strengthened. On reflection, the research team felt that the new partnerships evolving with each school may reflect a shared power learning

ideology as depicted by Carpenter (2010, p. 95), 'with your food basket and my food basket, [t]he people will thrive', where each participant brings their own worldview into the learning environment.

Implications for Teacher Educators' Future Practice

Mutual trust was paramount and was demonstrated throughout by all partners in this research. Meetings and relationships between school principals, schoolteachers, university staff, and student teachers reflected strong mutual trust. How this trust develops, and the subsequent realisation of shared goals, is influenced by the model of partnership. The model of partnership used also influences the goals of the partnership, which will vary for each school context.

Also, lowering the divide between school and university teachers opened significant mutual opportunities because each learned from the other. Cross-boundary collaboration is noteworthy: two of the teachers from partnership schools lectured at the university; university lecturers engaged in practice in schools one day per week, and teachers from partnership schools delivered curriculum workshops with teacher educators for all the student teachers in the programme. Mutually agreed expectations provided a solid foundation where individuals felt like equal members of a team. School and university staff members valued exposure to new ideas, blending theory and practice, prompting changes to thinking, practice and interactions. This led to overall satisfaction with the partnership. School and university partners were able to respond to each other's needs and learned through resolving conflicts as they arose.

Having more adults with different roles and different perspectives in the school community greatly enhanced the experience for everyone. The process of learning together is a valued result of this teacher education programme and the related research, improving all partners' professional knowledge and practice. By navigating through this partnership together, all partners enhanced their research skills and their teaching strategies. The strengthened partnership within the school community enabled schools to get to know each student teacher better resulting in significant numbers of graduates being hired in partner schools.

The school–university partnerships established could develop into research networks as well. In so doing, it is possible that this school–university partnership may move towards a Model C approach, working together with schools and the wider community to address areas of joint research interest. Possible research opportunities might include reviewing strategies to support student teachers in meeting the needs of diverse learners such as priority learners (the original focus of the Ministry of Education's request for innovative initial teacher education programmes), the roles of teacher educators in this new type of school–university partnership or developing a template for practitioner-based inquiry to improve teaching practice to improve learners' ability to address community challenges.

Partnerships need to be flexible and engage a 'people-focused' approach, with strategies adapted for each individual partnership context. Though the current partnership exemplified a professional community of practice (Model B) beyond the traditional practicum partnership (Model A), engaging in a Model C approach provides

an innovative direction for the future of initial teacher education to contribute to the sustainability and transformational benefits for the learning community. Partnerships that employ characteristics identified in this study with a vision to addressing local and global challenges (as in Model C), open possibilities for the interchange of different perspectives and ideas. New kinds of partnership require each partner (schools, student teachers, university) to engage differently, think differently, and adopt new concepts or ideas to be successful.

Final Thoughts

Although some insights into essential elements of a school–university partnership are outlined from the researcher/teacher educators' and school staff perspectives, the voice of all other members of the partnership particularly, student teachers' views need to be captured to paint a complete picture. In addition, further exploration of the lived experiences of all the school partners might give further insights into effective characteristics of partnerships. The lived experiences of partners could also shed light on specific activities and strategies for other teacher educators to engage with that might enhance student teachers' preparedness for their first teaching position.

Finally, Maphalala (2013) outlines the value of gaining new insights together in a professional learning community as a form of professional development. In this partnership review and discussion, professional development for both partners resulted from answering the research questions was grounded in true collaboration; sharing ideas in a social environment to promote the construction of new learning by each member of the collaborative inquiry (Duchesne et al. 2013). This co-constructive approach, adopting a humanistic perspective, was a productive way for the university staff involved in this study to evaluate their own pedagogical practices (Locke 2016) within a model of school–university partnership.

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