



A School/University Partnership Changed My ‘Being’ as a Teacher Educator

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Abstract

In 2014, the Ministry of Education in New Zealand funded innovative initial teacher education programmes using school/university partnerships to improve achievement for priority learners. My ‘being’ as a teacher educator would need to become a member of a professional learning community with student teachers and teachers in schools rather than solely a lecturer in a university classroom. Using a phenomenological theoretical foundation for a practitioner-based research methodology, I reveal my their lived experiences of this new role trialling a range of strategies for enhancing school/university partnerships to support student teachers’ confidence to meet the needs of diverse learners as preparation for their first year of teaching. Through a personal/professional reflective process, new strategies emerged: lesson study, an evolving list of teaching practices to unpack and the use of practitioner-based inquiry for student teachers. In the discussion, observations are made about the partnership and particularly the role of the university lecturer. A significant finding was that as an initial teacher educator, I needed to adopt the dispositions for student teachers, such as adaptability and flexibility, articulated in the graduate profile for the programme to enhance the professional learning community partnership. All members of the professional learning community partnership valued the three-way partnership between the student teacher, school and university in which every contribution was valued, new strategies could be trialled and reviewed, resulting in opportunities to learn from the different perspectives to engage children in their learning.

Keywords School-university partnership · Initial teacher education · Professional learning community · New innovations for teacher education

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Introduction

In 2013 the New Zealand Ministry of Education requested applications for exemplary postgraduate initial teacher education programmes, in which school/university partnerships worked to address the need for "teachers entering the profession ... to have the knowledge and adaptive expertise to work effectively with an increasingly diverse student population..." (Ministry of Education 2013, p. 3). In a New Zealand context, 'diverse learners' refers particularly to Māori and Pacific students. Therefore, throughout this article, when referring to diverse learners, Māori and Pacific learners are a major focus (Education Review Office 2016). The Ministry of Education (2013) proposal called for programmes that include high quality practicum experiences grounded in partnerships between schools and universities.

The Teaching Council of New Zealand (2019) later reinforced the importance of school/university partnerships in their new requirements that all initial teacher education programmes focus on the assessment of each student teacher's adaptive expertise in the classroom through meeting the Standards for the Profession (Teaching Council of New Zealand 2019) with support from the partnership of the school/university staff members. Hammerness et al. (2005) believe adaptive expertise emanates from the teacher's knowledge base, and the ability to tailor teaching to address the realities of the teaching context and the learner's needs. Creative, innovative and flexible teaching practice, accompanied by the knowledge of why they are teaching in a particular way are key characteristics of the 'adaptive expert' teacher (Darling-Hammond and Branford 2005; Darling-Hammond 2006; De-Arment et al. 2013).

Timperley (2013) outlines key considerations for teachers for developing adaptive expertise to promote learner development. Firstly, understanding the learner and their current knowledge base and needs initiates the process. Next, evidence-informed teaching strategies to meet those needs plus the ability to analyse how those strategies are being used in the classroom is critical. The adaptive expert teacher then reflects on the children's progress as a result of implementing those strategies, and finally determines what he/she as a teacher needs to learn from that experience to enable their teaching practice to promote student learning. "Teachers are conceived of as responsive and adaptive experts for whom the engagement, learning, and well-being of all students is the basis of their professional identity" (Timperley 2013, p. 4).

Teachers demonstrate adaptive expertise through a wide range of dispositions. Adaptive expertise follows on from a well-developed professional identity, confidence, and robust self-efficacy. From that strong foundation, the adaptive expert teacher displays the ability to change the lesson as needed by observing levels of variation in student engagement, understanding the complexity of learning which involves the interaction of home, school and community, and additionally, analysing a range of factors that influence a learner's development (Timperley 2013). In a different context, these adaptive expert dispositions are reflected in effective literacy practice teaching, as outlined by the Ministry of Education (2006) characterised as knowledge of the learner, knowledge of how to learn in that learning area (e.g. literacy), and deliberate acts of teaching.

Auckland University of Technology developed a one-year postgraduate Master of Teaching and Learning initial teacher education programme, approved by the Ministry of Education, focusing on school/university partnerships to develop adaptive expertise for student teachers in working with diverse learners (Lewis 2014). A range of literature on partnerships was considered to develop three models for review by the prospective partners: university and school staff members (Bernay et al. 2020) to determine aspects of partnership critical for implementation. Bernay et al. (2020) outline the three models:

- (1) Model A is a more traditional approach, where university lecturers teach theory and student teacher imitate the practice of their assigned teacher in the school.
- (2) Model B involves a professional learning community, where school and university staff work alongside student teachers to address the needs of individual learners in their classrooms through inducting the student teacher into the profession.
- (3) Model C entails a transformational learning community, where new strategies are needed for preparing learners for an unknown future, with a focus on change for not only the school but the wider community (Bernay et al. 2020).

Although Model C was preferred by many members of the Master of Teaching and Learning Team, Model B was considered a more realistic description of what was possible to implement. Model B outlines key features essential for this new innovative programme to promote the development of adaptive expertise for student teachers such as the emphasis on a professional learning community of teachers, student teachers and university staff (Bernay et al. 2020). The professional learning community in the Master of Teaching and Learning programme included the individual student teacher, other student teachers, classroom teachers, a deputy principal and university staff members. These individuals establish and maintain an environment of mutual respect and collaboration. The key purpose of the professional learning community is to find the nexus between theory and practice to enhance transformation not only for the student teachers but also for classroom teachers and university lecturers (mentor lecturers) (Bernay et al. 2020). In this partnership model, student teachers review their teaching skills in the professional learning community by engaging with new strategies and reflecting on their implementation (Fielding 2004).

The partnership model was initially implemented in the original six partner schools in 2015, and through 2016–2019 an additional five schools joined the partnership. Student teachers attended classes at the university two days per week and engaged in practicum in schools 2 days per week. On the fifth day, student teachers had a study day or attended curriculum development workshops in partner schools for half of the year and engaged in continuous full weeks of practicum for the other half of the year. A mentor lecturer from the university worked in the partner school one day per week as part of this professional learning community.

The literature guided the formulation of the partnership between the schools and the university. Key elements of a successful school/university partnership

include trust, an understanding that partners gain more from working together than from working separately, and that everyone's contribution is valued (Kruger et al. 2009). Authentic partnership comes from enacting mutual trust, sharing ideas that are then developed together, trialled, and evaluated to promote success (Burn and Mutton 2015). In a New Zealand context, Timperley and Robinson (2002) note that the purpose of school/university partnerships is "working together and learning from one another" (p. 42). Successful outcomes come from joining together to trial new strategies for improving practice for student teachers (Timperley and Robinson 2002). Grudnoff et al. (2016), when evaluating new models of partnership in initial teacher education in New Zealand, discuss the importance of the *third space* in which multiple discourses are utilised to promote collaboration and innovation. Gilbert (2005) defines the *third space* as neither the school's space nor the university's space; rather a separate place for new shared learning that could not occur without either partner's participation.

In each school, a professional learning community was established to strengthen the partnership with one teacher educator (mentor lecturer) from the university, one deputy principal from the School, all student teachers, and all the teachers hosting student teachers in their classrooms. The role of the mentor lecturer in the programme at Auckland University of Technology, is defined as being "directly responsible for the student experience in the classroom and will act as a mentor for the student teacher with professional responsibilities for their growth and development" (Lewis 2014, Appendix G). Key tasks for the mentor lecturer include coaching the student teacher's professional growth, assisting with the development of goals and action steps for student teachers, modelling effective teaching practices, providing frequent oral and written formative feedback, and engaging in regular triadic meetings with the student teachers and the classroom teacher (Lewis 2014).

In adopting this new partnership approach, mentor lecturers need to have a very clear picture of their role within the professional learning community. The author engaged in practitioner-based research to examine his new role as a teacher educator. When embarking on this research journey, key questions emerged:

- (1) What is the lived experience of teacher educators/university lecturers as a mentor lecturer in these newly enacted partnerships?

This question led to several sub questions:

- (a) What are the new roles for teacher educators (who are also university lecturers) in a school/university partnership?
- (b) What strategies within the partnership are beneficial to support student teachers' confidence in developing adaptive expertise, to meet the needs of diverse learners?
- (c) What are key attributes and dispositions for teacher educators in this Master of Teaching and Learning programme?

Methodology

This research was undertaken using a theoretical foundation of phenomenology to review the lived experience of a university educator as a mentor lecturer in a new initial teacher education programme. A practitioner-based methodology was used to explore answers to the research questions. A reflective journal was kept as a data collection tool and conclusions from those entries were verified and validated by checking with other members of the professional learning community: other teacher educators in the programme, school staff members and student teachers, as well as the monitor from the Teaching Council of New Zealand who reviews the programme annually.

Theoretical Foundation for the Practitioner-Based Research Process

The lived experience of the researcher as teacher educator/mentor lecturer was analysed through a phenomenological lens to gain new understandings of the role of teacher educators in a school/university partnership and potential strategies for promoting student teacher adaptive expertise. Through phenomenology, focused observation on a lived experience allows explanation of a phenomenon (Husserl 1976/1985; Heidegger 1953/1996) such as the role of a teacher educator. Phenomenology provides the opportunity to draw insights from a lived experience to gain new understandings (Gadamer 1967/1976). The way of coming to know (epistemological perspectives) emanates from observation of the experience, through a process of perceptions and memories of the phenomenon (Husserl 1913/1982), which provide insights into ‘being as’ (Heidegger 1953/1996) a mentor lecturer.

Researchers analyse and reflect upon lived experiences in a phenomenological study to draw conclusions, through qualitative inquiry, about a research question (Heidegger 1975/1992). The essential characteristic of a qualitative study rests on the “understanding that individuals’ interpretations of the world around them has to come from inside” (Cohen et al. 2007). While, quantitative research produces definite results, contemplative thinking in a qualitative design opens more possibilities (Heidegger 1975/1992). And, most relevant to this study, qualitative inquiry allows researchers to acknowledge personal behaviour, actions, and interpretations which are influenced by the context within which each participant works (Ary et al. 2002). Rather than a quantitative, positivist approach, the qualitative phenomenological observation allows interpretation of the lived experience to draw conclusions through a richer, more descriptive view to come to answer the research questions. Thus, through the review of a lived experience, conclusions can be drawn about the phenomenon of the role of a teacher educator in promoting adaptive expertise for student teachers in this new innovative school/university partnership. This, in turn, suggests particular practices for teacher educators in this Master of Teaching and Learning programme which may resonate with other teacher educators.

Methodology

A practitioner-based research model is appropriate for this research as it opens up exploration of the actions of the researcher's 'being' in their practice of working in partnership with schools in supporting student teacher development. In practitioner-based inquiry, teachers (initial teacher educators) themselves do the research, instead of handing that role to detached observers. Rather than being passive participants, the researcher actively focuses on issues and problems related to his/her own practice (Robinson and Lai 2006). Weinbaum et al. (2004) note that sustained inquiry through problem solving and testing of new ideas/strategies provides an opportunity to examine professional practice. Hayler (2011) discusses the importance of self-reflection on one's experiences over time, with the intended purpose of personal and professional transformation to be 'better' teacher educators.

Weinbaum et al (2004) draw attention to the idea that practitioner-based research is not straightforward or linear; where you simply ask a question, gather evidence, try it, and declare results. It is helpful to have a fluid process (Sinnema and Aitken 2011): a "cycle of problem solving, data gathering and analysis and action" (p. 35). Many iterations of potential solutions need to be reviewed, discussed, and trialled before possible solutions are found (Berger and Johnston 2015). The key is working together to determine what is valued, in the professional context, that will have a profound impact on future practice (Weinbaum et al. 2004). A range of sources of information, including personal practice, and evidence-based best practice, need to be synthesised to determine what to try, followed by consideration of impacts, and finally drawing conclusions for future practice (Sinnema and Aitken 2011). In this case, a range of strategies to support the development of adaptive expertise were trialled and evaluated. The use of these strategies provided a foundation to observe the lived experience of the mentor lecturer/teacher educator in the professional learning community.

The professional learning community provides an opportunity to critique co-constructed new ideas, then trial new innovations and analyse for effectiveness in partnership schools (Berger and Johnston 2015). The innovations, trialled in short-term projects, need to align with the programme vision (school/university partnership), have clear boundaries, consider multiple perspectives and be specific and pragmatic (Snowden and Boone 2007). Short-term projects can be designed to quickly produce data to analyse for the best evidence-based solutions for student teacher success, particularly with diverse learners, and effective partnerships (Snowden and Boone 2007).

Data Collection

From January 2016–December 2018, a reflective journal was kept by the mentor lecturer/researcher to analyse experiences in the partner schools and the universities. Entries were written following teaching demonstrations by the mentor lecturer in schools, professional learning community meetings, one-on-one conversations with

individual student teachers, and meetings with other members of the teacher educator team at the university.

Presentations on the progress of the Master of Teaching and Learning programme were given at meetings with partner school representatives, at reviews by the programme monitor from the Teaching Council, and at research conferences. Questions raised at these presentations prompted further reflective journal entries. These entries were then analysed by the researcher to find key themes for continued programme implementation and strategies that had been particularly successful. The analysis and resulting conclusions were shared with, reviewed by, and verified by other teacher educators, student teachers, school staff members and the programme monitor to check for validity and reliability.

A major limitation of this study is that its entire focus is on the teacher educator's view rather than taking a more holistic overview including school staff members and student teachers. Thus, the findings and conclusions are limited to the viewpoint of one researcher. The university ethics committee provided ethics approval for this research project.

Findings from The Lived Experience

Three key findings emerged from an analysis of the researcher's reflective journal that might answer the research questions. Firstly, a lesson study innovation strategy provided opportunities for student teachers to develop adaptive expertise to support diverse learners. Secondly, an evolving list of teaching practices derived from all members of the partnership for student teachers to practice proved to be a useful stepping stone to developing adaptive expertise. Thirdly, was the need for mentor lecturers as well as student teachers to engage in *Teaching as Inquiry*, the prescribed method of reviewing one's own teaching practice recommended by the Ministry of Education (2007).

Lesson Study

In the *lesson study* innovation, Hudson's (2013) five-factor model was adapted along with a process undertaken by Locke (2016). The model consists of "personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling and feedback" (Hudson 2013, p. 773). To enact *lesson study* in the partner schools, teacher educators, student teachers and teachers in schools worked in partnership, whereby teacher educators or classroom teachers modelled lessons with specific teaching strategies that aligned with each individual student teacher's needs. This reflective diary entry reflects the researcher's experience of modelling a lesson which was then discussed with the student teachers, who felt the lesson demonstration was very helpful for improving their own practice.

Teaching a modified version of the writing lesson this week for each student teacher gave me the opportunity to demonstrate specific teaching practices for working with a range of diverse learners. In each class not only did I have to

modify the activities but throughout the lesson I was adjusting expectations to support the learners. It was interesting to see how student A needed additional one-on-one help from me after the whole group introduction and that students B, C, and D were talking throughout the independent writing time but completed the task successfully. The learners definitely enjoyed the carrots and hummus.

Reflective Diary Entry, May 2016.

Following a lesson modelled by the mentor lecturer, student teachers designed and taught lessons using these strategies, adapting them to their own personal teaching style. Each professional learning community took the opportunity to deconstruct the lessons modelled by partner school staff members or teacher educators, and the lessons student teachers designed, in order to receive feedback about their teaching. Engaging in this practice, teacher educators found they were able to provide student teachers, with a range of strategies and give robust feedback to enhance their teaching, alongside feedback from classroom teachers known as professional learning mentors. University lecturers also valued working together with school staff members in modelling effective classroom strategies. Student teachers benefitted by enhancing their own practice using these models, and there was a realisation of the potential for student teachers, teachers, and university lecturers to co-construct future innovations for teaching practice. The lessons taught by student teachers provided an opportunity to identify student teachers' strengths and areas where further work was needed.

The following reflective diary entry highlighted the value of the experience of the lesson study after observing student teachers practice and discussing their reflections in the professional learning community meeting.

It was gratifying to see the student teachers teach their lessons using the learning intention/success criteria model I had demonstrated. The student teachers at XXX school have really learned the key elements of a lesson and how to give ongoing feedback to learners. Their teachers and I have modelled this several times and all of them have incorporated it into their teaching. Although this school has a wide range of diverse learners, all the children have been responding positively to the student teachers and completing tasks and projects.

Reflective Diary Entry, June 2016.

Evolving List of Teaching Practices

The 'evolving list of teaching practice strategies' innovation involved discussing current topics in education, paralleling Shulman's (2005) concept of signature pedagogies that provide student teachers an opportunity to 'be' like an educator. The list was considered to be 'evolving' because student teachers, professional learning mentors, and university lecturers in each partner school added to the list at any time, to address specific concerns that student teachers had about their own practice.

Other items on the list were added following lecturer observations of student teachers in action.

The evolving list was developed with student teachers because they felt that when they had their first practicum there were some very basic practices or ways to respond to children that they had no clue where to begin. I was very reluctant to give them specific strategies, but it was clear from their frustration that they needed to have something to draw from. Therefore, we worked on time management, how to manage a temper tantrum, what to do when children are interrupting in class or hitting others etc. I stressed to the student teachers that there are a range of approaches and that observing their class teacher was the best way to learn, but they really wanted this security blanket.

Reflective Diary Entry, February 2017.

The lived experience of the ‘evolving list’ indicated that when student teachers developed and shared their own signature pedagogies, colleague student teachers, teachers in the school and teacher educators all gained new knowledge for potential transformation of practice. Thus, teacher educators experienced being an equal partner rather than a dispenser of knowledge in the professional learning community. Within the context of each partner school, the ‘evolving’ list and the subsequent discussion about items on the list, provided the student teachers with more assurance in their professional practice as they trialled the strategies on the ‘evolving’ list.

Student Teacher A was very happy to have the evolving list of teaching practices as a guide. She had been so frustrated that she was doing the ‘wrong’ thing or making mistakes with the children and that was going to have a long-lasting effect. During the student teaching practicum, she came to the realisation that there are a range of different ways to work with the children particularly in managing their behaviour and that the evolving list provided a start, but she was developing her own strategies. The evolving list proved to be fruitful as a security blanket to begin with and then student teachers developed their own strategies, learned from their class teachers and began the journey to adaptive expertise.

Reflective Diary Entry, June 2017.

Teaching as Inquiry is for all Members of the Partnership

Student teachers in the Master of Teaching and Learning programme are required to set goals to improve their teaching practice. As part of that process, they must assess the needs of a group of children in mathematics and determine appropriate strategies to support their learning. The assignment requires them to use the teaching as inquiry method as outlined in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education 2007). The graduate profile disposition related to this assessment states: “An adaptive expert who confidently uses data and seeks research evidence to make decisions about learning and teaching interventions when restrictive factors are identified in learning contexts with priority learners, and consequently

reflects and evaluates through teaching as inquiry feedback loops” (Master of Teaching and Learning Graduate Profile 2014, see Appendix A; Lewis, 2014).

The key steps outlined in the New Zealand Curriculum include: Teaching Inquiry, Learning Inquiry and Focusing Inquiry in which the teacher addresses key questions such as: What strategies (evidence-based) are most likely to help my students learn this? What happened as a result of the teaching, and what are the implications for future teaching? What is important (and therefore worth spending time on), given where my students are at? (Ministry of Education 2007, p. 35). Since inception, this has been a very useful assignment leading students to engage in their own personal research inquiry to address a specific need for a group of learners on their second practicum. This research is presented at a forum for all the university and school staff members and their families.

After the research presentations this year the Programme Monitor from the Teaching Council commented on how much the students had learned from their inquiries for their future teaching practice. It was evident that students had taken the opportunity to develop resources and strategies to support their diverse learners but that were also transferrable to other classroom contexts.

Reflective Diary Entry, November 2016.

The mentor lecturers on the Master of Teaching and Learning programme had been conducting research on the nature of the partnerships in the programme (Bernay et al. 2020). The findings from that research had been presented at the British Educational Research Conference in Brighton, England in September 2017 and to partner schools in February 2018. During these presentations, it became clear that the research about the strategies trialled with student teachers to develop their adaptive expertise such as *lesson study* and the *evolving list of teaching strategies* had been analysed using a ‘teaching as inquiry’ format to determine best practices for diverse learners of student teachers.

I could not believe what happened during the presentation of our research to the partner schools. As I was presenting the information, I had a light bulb moment. The success of our new partnership models and new strategies for assisting student teachers to develop adaptive expertise had been analysed through the Teaching as Inquiry cycle but I had not even noticed what we were doing. We were modelling good research practice for the students and sharing what we had learned but not equating it to the model.

Reflective Entry, February 2017.

The process of doing research into what was working for the partnership model and the strategies for assisting the development of adaptive expertise had unintentionally incorporated the Teaching as Inquiry model. It was decided that future research could be done in the same way to analyse the success of specific strategies for developing adaptive expertise. University lecturers using this approach in their research also would serve as a model for student teachers who would be conducting their own Teaching as Inquiry projects for class assignments.

Although the student teachers benefitted from the three strategies outlined above, supporting them to be more confident in their ability to meet the needs of diverse learners, further research is needed. The voices of the student teachers and the teachers in the schools need to be reviewed to further validate the value of these strategies and to determine other strategies that might also be successful.

The findings from the reflective diary entries bring to light some of the lived experiences of the researcher, which were reviewed by the professional learning community and highlighted successful strategies for working with student teachers (research subquestion b.). But, the researcher also needed to consider the questions related to the role of the mentor lecturer and how that changed his role as ‘being’ a teacher educator (research subquestion a.) and from that discussion, research subquestion c: What are key attributes and dispositions for teacher educators in this Master of Teaching and Learning programme?

Discussion-What was Learned About the Role of the Mentor Lecturer and Implications for Future Practice

What are the new roles for teacher educators (who are also university lecturers) in a school/university partnership? How is the new role of mentor lecturer different? What are key attributes and dispositions for teacher educators in this Master of Teaching and Learning programme? What was learned from the researcher’s lived experience, which is echoed in the literature, indicates that mentor lecturers are not the dispensers of knowledge in this new partnership but are, rather, one voice in a professional learning community in which all voices, including those of school staff members and student teachers are equally valid. Additionally, as teacher educators, flexibility and adaptability are key personal attributes needed to provide guidance and support to student teachers as each unique partnership context required different responses from the mentor lecturer; sometimes modelling teaching strategies, sometimes providing feedback, and sometimes participating in a professional learning community listening to others and sharing ideas in the *third space*.

Zeichner (2010) refers to the importance of “non-hierarchical interplay between academic, practitioner, and community expertise ... [this] new epistemology for teacher education will create expanded learning opportunities for prospective teachers that will prepare them to be successful in enacting complex teaching practices” (p. 89). With an agreed focus, such as improving student teacher outcomes, the challenges of different pedagogical approaches can be addressed openly and even viewed as a way of negotiating new experiences and creating new knowledge (Gilbert 2005). Partner school staff members appreciated their voices being heard when determining what characteristics and practices demonstrate a student teacher is confident to meet the needs of diverse learners, and in assessing the student teacher’s progress.

Key elements of a successful school/university partnership include trust, an understanding that partners gain more from working together than from working separately, and that everyone’s contribution is valued (Kruger et al. 2009). Authentic partnership comes from enacting this mutual trust, sharing ideas that are then

developed together, trialled, and evaluated to promote success (Burn and Mutton 2015). In the lived experience of the Master of Teaching and Learning, interaction between student teachers, classroom teachers, and university staff was much greater, contributing to a socialisation process and presumably enabling student teachers to feel more a part of the profession and therefore more prepared for it.

One of the overarching goals of the Master of Teaching and Learning programme is to develop a programme which enables graduates to enter the profession feeling more confident in their ability to manage their teaching role. The implementation of the programme provided an opportunity to show that developing student teachers' pedagogical and content knowledge is one aspect of their role as a teacher, however it is equally important, graduates to feel as if they are a part of the profession, and are not simply being invited in on a trial basis. A process of socialisation (Zeichner and Gore 1989) allows student teachers to feel that they are a part of the profession and ready to begin their own careers which student teachers appreciated, enhanced by the opportunity to spend extended periods of time in one school.

The new roles within the partnership model (specifically the school staff members as 'adjunct lecturer' and the university staff members as 'mentor lecturer') mean that there is a much greater overlap between the university and school contexts. Student teachers are able to be a part of learning conversations that involve both school and university staff, helping to break down the separation between the two environments. The lived experience showed the researcher that these conversations mean that student teachers have a model or template of how to conduct and take on a more active role in professional conversations, and over time they are able to take a greater role as they grew in knowledge, experience, and confidence. The greater time spent by the university lecturer in the school context with student teachers was also of significant benefit in terms of the university lecturers' understanding of their students.

Exploring 'Quality' in this Research Design

Bray et al. (2000) ask three questions when evaluating a qualitative study such as this, to increase the likelihood that the findings will be meaningful to readers:

- (1) How do we know what we think we know?
- (2) How do we know we are not deceiving ourselves?
- (3) On what basis should [the readers of our research] accept our assertions or claims to know? (p. 104).

These questions guided the reflective process along with two additional questions: are the conclusions drawn supported by our experiences? Did the researcher avoid succumbing to introspection?

Robust feedback sessions and ongoing discussions at University team meetings over the three years of this research about actions, conclusions and next steps were designed to improve the value of the conclusions drawn (Baumfield et al. 2013); allowing for a devil's advocate stance (Guba and Lincoln 1981) to continually

consider multiple perspectives, and thus enhance the validity of the findings and the discussion. The multiple views expressed throughout the research served as a cross-check, while critique and discussion provided credibility (Guba and Lincoln 1981).

On completion of this research, it became evident that there was strong alignment between the individual qualities and characteristics included in the Graduate Profile (see Appendix), the role of the mentor lecturer and related dispositions, and what works best to maintain strong partnerships. Understanding this helped provide answers to the subquestion: what are key attributes and dispositions for mentor lecturers? Some of those personal/professional qualities are: “a resilient and ethical professional”, “a critical and creative thinker, who can engage in deep learning... to build new knowledge”, “a critical inquirer”; someone who can “self-regulate to meet new challenges, yet is collaborative and collegial”, one who is “relational and respectful...evident in collaborative communities of practice”; and has “a sense of self-efficacy and agency” (Lewis 2014, p. 5). A key theme that emerged in the researcher’s reflections is that the professional practice of each member of the partnership is enhanced through these new innovative practices. Involvement in this community of learners improved the teaching practice of the lecturers as suggested by Roberts (2006).

The researcher came to realise that the Graduate Profile also acts as an outline of a list of personal/professional qualities for initial teacher educators/mentor lecturers to be successful in the Master of Teaching and Learning programme. This idea was validated by the partner school members in a meeting in November 2018.

As we were discussing the practicum assessment criteria, I suddenly realised that everyone in the meeting was thinking creatively offering suggestions for different types of activities that student teachers could demonstrate to meet the expected criteria. In addition, everyone felt safe enough to have their ideas critiqued and professional critique was offered. The new knowledge derived from this meeting would be useful for our programme delivery, assessment, and evaluation. Everyone related to each other as if we had been colleagues, and even friends, for many years. One of the school representatives noted that ‘not only has this programme supported students to develop into outstanding beginning teachers, but I have learned so much as well. I have truly valued learning from everyone: the students, the XXX staff members and my new colleagues from other schools.’ I replied immediately: ‘we are demonstrating the graduate profile criteria ourselves.’ Everyone in the room agreed. I could not help but think that this truly was successful partnership in action and that we were living out model B, moving towards model C.

Reflective Diary Entry, November 2018.

The members of the Master of Teaching and Learning partnership therefore concur with Roberts (2006), that the partnership improved our own practice and with Wenger (2007) that there is much value to the community of practice in the authentic participation of all partners including the peripheral participation of apprentices (student teachers). Furthermore, this partnership programme and project demonstrates the vital nature of student teacher input and considers it to be *essential* not *peripheral*. Additional research is needed to include the perspectives of student

teachers and school staff; also integral members of the partnership. The dynamics of the relationships between school-based teachers, student teachers and university staff contributed greatly to the success of the partnership, to jointly developing and implementing strategies and to the actual research, and the critique of the analysis of this research.

The findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed here are not necessarily generalisable, because the positive results and benefits experienced are unique to the context of the project. However, the benefits may well be transferrable to other teacher education programmes and contexts. The conclusions drawn from the professional learning community that developed as part of this study are personal/professional perspectives, based on the lived experiences, attitudes and beliefs. This work has not yet been assessed against students' performance on practicum or assessments, nor have student teachers' opinions been evaluated. Additionally, more research needs to be conducted into the trialled strategies for preparedness of student teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners to more conclusively determine effectiveness by including the voices of student teachers, and by observing graduate student teachers during their first year of teaching. The conclusions drawn will therefore change over time due to the temporal, changeable nature of personal and collective perceptions of lived experiences.

Final Thoughts

In expressing the lived experience through this research study, I have been able to review my 'being' as a teacher educator in a school/university partnership. Traditionally, partnerships tended to focus on university lecturers (teacher educators) as the source of knowledge, with tasks designed by the university then being replicated in schools. New ways of thinking about initial teacher education have evolved from co-constructing in partnership with school staff members, university lecturers and student teachers working together. The use of practitioner-based inquiry methodology highlighted the trialling of new strategies through short term interventions in different contexts in each partner school. These joint ventures reflect a critical aspect of these new partnerships as collaborative professional learning communities creating new knowledge together in the *third space*, as opposed to conventional school/university partnerships. New knowledge of strategies for initial teacher educators that promote student teacher success with diverse learners were generated through reviewing the lived experience of this partnership. Using the 'teaching as inquiry' framework for practitioner-based inquiry, demonstrates the potential for this strategy to be used again for further research within the professional learning community, school/university partnership.

Appendix

Master of Teaching and Learning (Primary) Graduate Profile XXX University.

- 1 A resilient and ethical professional, with deep understanding of the social, cultural, economic and political influences on education, expressed through a commitment to inclusion and social justice.
- 2 A critical and creative thinker who can engage in deep learning, analyse, articulate and apply key theoretical principles of education to practice contexts, to build new knowledge and intellectual capabilities of all learners.
- 3 A critical inquirer who assumes a reflexive stance towards practice and is able to report on research findings as a contribution to the education community.
- 4 Playful, passionate and purposeful, creating learning opportunities for creative problem-solving and innovation through knowledge-building discourses in third spaces for twenty-first century learning, utilizing technology as appropriate.
- 5 Able to initiate, work autonomously and collaboratively, assume responsibility and accept accountability for academic and professional learning. Is able to self-regulate to meet new challenges yet is collaborative and collegial.
- 6 Grounded in professional practice which draws upon a sound knowledge base, relevant pedagogical content knowledge and effective assessment options to ensure that learning and teaching environments are sensitively constructed.
- 7 An adaptive expert who confidently uses data and seeks research evidence to make decisions about learning and teaching interventions when restrictive factors are identified in learning contexts with priority learners, and consequently reflects and evaluates through teaching as inquiry feedback loops.
- 8 Able to demonstrate commitment to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* and biculturalism through respect for *Te Reo Māori me ōna tikanga*, demonstrated through appropriate pedagogies for Māori learners.
- 9 Relational and respectful, with highly developed interpersonal skills and integrity, evident in collaborative communities of practice, strong professional relationships with children and their whānau, displaying sensitivity in intercultural competencies, particularly those of *Tātaiako* and expressed through an understanding of language and custom of indigenous and immigrant groups in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- 10 Presenting a strong teacher identity and holding to a personal teaching philosophy which can be articulated and defended, and which is demonstrated through professional practice, a sense of self-efficacy and agency.

(Leiwis, 2014)

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