Paper 1

University-School Connections: Giving Voice to the Student Experience

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Abstract
University-school connections (partnerships) have had an historical place in Australia, England and the United States of America since Dewey in 1904; however, there is increasing acknowledgement of the value of connections that vary from the traditional versions of professional experiences (practicum and internship). In this paper, I draw on two sources of data, a literature review and focus group interviews both of which were collected for a larger research project titled University-School Connections (USCs): Complex Connections. Plentiful evidence, over time, of the research effort spent on USCs is available, with the bulk of studies indicating the high value of USCs to stakeholders, (individually and collectively: pre-service teacher education students, teachers, schools, and by extension school students, academics, higher education institutions and systems operating within the profession and beyond). Alongside of this evidence of 'value' sits, at times, an urgent call for adaptations to the style and an increase in the frequency of university-school connections. The focus is on four areas in this paper. Firstly, the terminology used by researchers to describe USCs is explored and it is argued that the use of the word partnership isn't the most appropriate choice. Partnerships, according to research, happen via collaboration, are mutually beneficial, with partners having some autonomy, thus resulting in the creation of a common culture. These ingredients however do not necessarily constitute a recipe for a successful or enduring partnership. Wenger (1998:168) claims that collaboration and the forming of a common culture can involve challenges such as 'conflict and cordiality, competitiveness and co-operation. Sachs (2003) tackles the difficult problem of defining partnerships based on either collaboration or co-operation. I argue that the use of the term partnership for co-operative/ collaborative and /or third culture arrangements between schools and universities is a misnomer and in some way contributes to the cause of disharmony, dissatisfaction and lack of endurance of some partnerships. Secondly, there is a brief historical perspective of the journey of USCs and thirdly an outline of more recent developments in USCs touching on both a national and international perspective where there has been a systematic push for universities, students, graduates, government and community to make meaningful connections is presented. Indeed many Australian university strategic plans encourage the development of collaborative partnerships and internationally a push for increased connections between schools and their communities is evident in the research literature. Lastly, to give student voice to USCs data from focus group interviews of pre-service teachers involved in a university-school connection, the LiNKS Program is drawn on. This paper is a contribution to the theme of student voice at the ECE conference.

Introduction

The term partnership in the literature is based upon the understanding and expectation that a partnership will have an air of permanence and stability, that stakeholders will be equal, that outcomes will benefit all parties equally and that no one stakeholder will hold an hierarchical position over another. Given this understanding there is no paucity of research on university teacher education and school partnerships (hereafter referred to as university-school connections [USC]); the opposite is the case. A vast array of literature on university-school connections is available with a variety of foci. This variety can be clustered into the following broad themes: problems in pre-service teacher education partnerships, power relationships invested in partnerships, ownership of partnerships, teacher professional development partnerships, partnerships designed for revitalization of the teaching profession and improvements to school based practice via school based enquiry and action research partnerships. This paper is focused on USCs that are non-assessed components of pre-service teacher education (not practicum and internship which are assessed) and the associated complexities.

One, I examine the terminology used by researchers to describe such USCs where I argue that the use of the word partnership is not the most appropriate choice. Two, I provide a brief historical perspective, from the beginning of the 20th century, of USCs illustrating that complexities were evident throughout. Three, I look at more recent developments in USCs touching on a national and international perspective where there has been

a push for universities, students, graduates, government and community to make meaningful connections. Four, to give student voice to USCs I draw on data from focus group interviews of pre-service teachers involved in a university-school connection. This USC, the LiNKS Program, was formed with the explicit purpose of enabling pre-service teachers to connect with local schools to augment their current exposure to professional experience (ie. assessed practicum and internship) by providing opportunities for non-assessed professional experiences. This provision enabled the immersion of the pre-service teachers in opportunities to engage with and reflect on real schools in real contexts where the theoretical and practical aspects of university courses can be connected to genuine realities. Student J found that indeed the opportunities for reflection were real 'LiNKS makes you question, it makes you think, it makes you reflect on what you are learning.'

The LiNKS Program is an Australian Higher Education Institution (NSW University of Newcastle, Central Coast Campus) initiative designed for augmenting pre-service teacher education assessed professional experiences. 798 (Semester 2, 2008) undergraduate pre-service teacher education students (PST) are linked to a school, rather than an individual mentoring teacher within the school, (in addition to mandated professional experience days,) for six out of eight semesters of their 4 year degree program. The PSTs are required to visit their LiNKS school at mutually convenient times to provide negotiated assistance to school students and teachers. This connection with schools allows the PSTs increased participation in school "community" life. In return, as a gesture of reciprocity, the school provides a place for non-assessed field experiences where the PST is able to complete course related assignment tasks, engage in observations, teach small and large groups and reflect on their own and teachers' practice. PSTs are able to give voice to this experience through data gathered during a study for a larger research project, the title of which is University-School Connections (USCs): Complex Connections. Data was gathered during a review of the literature on university-school connections and also from analysed transcripts from five pre-service teacher LiNKS Program focus groups.

Partnership- not the most appropriate term.

Use of the word partnership that presumes permanence, stability, equality amongst stakeholders and is seen as a panacea of myriad partnership problems is not the most appropriate choice to describe many connections between universities and schools that are engaged in pre-service teacher education. Using the term partnership to describe co-operative and/or collaborative arrangements between schools and universities may be 'familiar to everyone' (Stephens & Boldt, 2004) as it is such a commonly used descriptive term however I contend that it is a misnomer and in some way contributes to the cause of disharmony, dissatisfaction and lack of endurance of some partnerships. Much is expected of this word and therefore I offer an alternative approach to understanding these relations.

Partnerships Constructed as Collaboratives and or Co-operatives

The term 'partnership' is often described in the literature as 'collaboration' and is based upon notions of equality. Clark (cited in Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988) defined partnerships as 'deliberately designed, collaborative arrangements between different institutions working together to advance self interest and solve common problems.' Goodlad, (1988) wrote of the benefits of 'symbiotic partnerships' where partners with differing expertise collaborate for the common good. Digby, Gartin, & Murdick (1993) write of collaborations between university and schools as explicit agreements between people who engage in meetings to set and achieve goals. They then call these ongoing meetings 'university-school partnerships'. Having such a simplistic view of partnerships by calling them meetings does little more than constitute such partnerships as mere gatherings, yet, the meeting is but one element amongst the many complexities involved in a true partnership.

A more useful definition of connections between universities and school is proposed by Sachs, (1997) when she writes of partnerships as the forming of 'a two way model of reciprocity with each party having something significant to contribute'. Such partnerships are based upon notions of equality where all stakeholders have equal rights, are treated similarly and all are valued equally. Dallmer (2004) supports the notion of partnerships as collaborative relationships where no hierarchy exists among participants with decision making as a democratic process. However, the reality experienced in such collaborative partnerships can be quite

different with hierarchical structures emerging, unequal power relationships and a lack of reciprocity developing, explicit agreements breaking down and the surfacing of unbalanced advancement of self-interest by one party over the other. (Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, & Doone, 2006; Bartholomew & Sandholtz, 2009; Shinners, 2006)

Sachs (1997) has acknowledged these problems by suggesting that where the basic premise of a partnership is the provision of skills through expertise, the term cooperative partnerships rather than collaborative partnerships may be a more apt description. In Sach's definition of co-operative partnerships it is expected that the 'power relationship between the parties' is likely to be unequal. Despite an acknowledgment that unequal power relations may exist from the commencement of some partnerships, inequality does not augur well for stakeholders who believe in the egalitarian principles of engagement, which the term partnership implies. Any focus on power relations veils the key purpose of collaborative or co-operative partnerships which is the establishment of ways of working together and defining key purposes for doing so. Duffy, (cited in Million & Vare, 1997) suggests collaborative partnerships should allow for problem solving that encourages partners to 'grow into their roles as egalitarian participants' yet many partnerships lack endurance due specifically to the lack of ongoing egalitarian principles, outcomes and an acknowledgment that these are difficult to uphold. When the spirit of reciprocity breaks down, often because one party considers the other party's contributions are lacking and when explicit agreements are changed and set goals moved some stakeholders become passive compliant, others become resistors, yet others engage in vigorous non-egalitarian leadership (Goodlad, 1993). These well documented problems (Allsopp, et al., 2006; Bartholomew & Sandholtz, 2009; Ledoux & McHenry, 2008; Peters, 2002) arise for collaborative and/or cooperative partnerships, even when they are constructed on symbiotic principles requiring stakeholders to work together to advance self-interest and solve common problems for the common good. Many risk faltering, changing or ceasing altogether.

Dallmar (2004) proposes that partnerships based upon hierarchical structures could lead to alternative conceptions of partnerships. This proposition for alternative constructions and conceptualization of partnerships is worthy of serious consideration. Dallmar (2004) suggest that it is time that the common understanding of stakeholders that 'equity and collaboration across the board are necessary for school-university partnerships' is challenged. This view supports my contention that the word partnership is not apposite and could indeed be a constraining factor in the design, establishment and endurance of university-school partnerships and in some way contributes to the cause of disharmony, dissatisfaction and lack of endurance of many of these so called partnerships.

Partnerships as Third or Common Cultures

Liaison between the two distinctive cultures of university teacher education institutions and schools, to the point where a third or common culture emerges can be a possible solution to the partnership complexities. This is what Prater and Sileo (2002) are referring to when they state that 'the two bodies need to blend and create a third culture'. I contend that once a liaison has morphed into a third or common culture it becomes an entity in and of itself and so no longer constitutes a partnership based upon notions of equality and reciprocity. Others, on the contrary, suggest that a partnership is maintained even though a third or common culture has emerged. Schlechty and Whitford (cited in Goodlad, 1988) suggest partnerships can be mutually owned yet sufficiently autonomous and designed to create a common culture with unique norms and values.

When stakeholders deem that their collaborative/cooperative has merged into a third or common culture, and according to my contention that as a result a partnership no longer exists, then one might therefore expect to find that typical partnership problems don't exist in a third culture. This is not what Bullough, Birrell, Young, Clark, Erikson, Earle (1999) found. While agreeing that the literature is 'replete with calls to blend university and school culture into a third culture…' they add the cautionary phrase 'the problem [of university pre-service teacher education-school partnerships] is widely recognized and its complexity underappreciated; few institutions appear to have succeeded in resolving it'(p. 387). In examples such as this, where the merged cultures remain operating under the premises of a partnership, I argue that a third culture, essentially, has not been formed. This argument subsequently provides an explanation for why the perceived third cultures often

fail as they are constructed similarly to collaborative /cooperative partnerships and fail for the same reasons such as lack of collaboration, development of hierarchical structures, unequal benefits, lack of autonomy, non-egalitarian principles and outcomes, declining reciprocity, changing of explicit agreements and moving and changing goals (Goodlad, 1993). These issues lead to disharmony, dissatisfaction and the lack of endurance.

Connections an Appropriate Term

Just as the term partnership implies an air of permanence and stability, with equal outcomes for and amongst stakeholders and with no one stakeholder holding an hierarchical position over another, the term connection provides an alternative, less constrained label for such liaisons. This alternative label allows for liaisons that are distinct to partnerships in subtle ways. Connection allows for more capricious liaisons based upon particular understandings such as: unpredictable endurance, variable outcomes, inconsistency, and flexible hierarchical structures. At the fundamental level it is understood that involvement by stakeholders will fluctuate over time according to the purposes and engagement with particular tasks. The following student voices exhibit how inconsistency of engagement is possible and deemed acceptable in the LiNKS Program.

> *Student M Voice: First year was a lot of observation, and that was fine for me, then I actually had a bit of a decent relationship with the teacher, I had a baby in second year and lots of stuff on so I'd go and do five hours and then go and do five hours and then I've done my ten. If I there was something that I could help out with then I'd do that, but otherwise I stop at ten, because of the time constraints. Third year was good I actually went a few more times and started developing a relationship with a class and I really enjoyed that and found it good cause I'd be out in the community and students would recognise me that was something that was interesting to learn that you are always a role model not just when you are at school.*

> *Student J Voice: The first year was observation, second year a got a bit more stuck into it and third year was really good that was when I hooked up with a Support Teacher Learning Assistance (STLA) and I learned an awful lot, she was really good at reading groups, had had a lot of experience and she also taught gifted and talented for a long time, now we don't really touch much on that in uni, so that was quite interesting to hear her views on that.*

As exemplified by student voices, some stakeholders will connect fully, some intermittently and other sporadically while some will choose not to connect at all. Some will choose to initially connect then fade out and others will connect over time, yet others will connect, disconnect and reconnect. The LiNKS program is based upon such theoretical assumptions and as Lieberman (2000) argues the value of networks, or less formal partnerships such as connections, is that the stakeholders commit to an idea and have a sense of shared purpose devoted to information sharing and reciprocal support. The purpose then of the connection, for example as in the LiNKS Program, is the augmentation of the typical assessed professional experiences with non- assessed, less formal opportunities to engage with and reflect on genuine schooling practices. A connection therefore implies a less formal arrangement between parties. With USC based on such premises I contend that pre-service teacher education university courses that are connected to schools are better positioned to effectively prepare pre-service teachers to be both, equipped with the opportunity to build pre-graduation cultural capital that carries credence within schools before graduation (Bourdieu, 1985). In addition I suggest that they will be better prepared to be responsive to rapidly changing societal and educational contexts experienced in the schools in which they are likely to commence their professional careers (Million & Vare, 1997; Ramsey, 2000; Sachs, 1997). Evidence of this is provided by student voice M when she states that:

> *'without the LiNKS program they [pre-service teachers] don't get out into schools until their third year and just drop out because they have no idea what it is like to be in a primary school setting from a teaching perspective so I found that as soon as I started Links and saw what it was like, like seeing all the behind the scenes teaching things , it gives you a greater understanding of all the things that you need to do when you are a teacher, so I see that the Links program is creating awareness for beginning teachers and teaching them about what we need to do.'*

Stephens and Boldt (2004) begin to move the focus away from equality in partnerships when they write of the rhetoric of partnerships as being 'familiar to everyone'(p.1) and as such it is the goal of the partnership that is

important, not the definition, or the 'what is or isn't ' [this partnership?]. Stephens and Boldt argue that the goal of university-school partnerships is 'the simultaneous renewal of colleges (universities) of education and of K-12 schools' (p.1). They claim it is the detail of how such partnerships are formed and maintained rather than 'what is the definition of partnerships' that is important. Despite the importance of considering, 'how has/should the connection been/be formed?' I contend that it is the 'why has/should the connection been/be formed?' that is the unstated and unconsidered element in Stephens and Boldt's work that is of crucial importance. Investigating the 'why has/should the connection been/be formed?' may possibly be the first crucial step in the instigation of such connections and I contend that it is the 'why' that constitutes whether a partnership is the apposite model or if indeed a connection is a more appropriate style of association. Dallmer's work (2004) supports my thinking by suggesting that stakeholders currently held belief that not only equality but 'equity and collaboration are essential for schools and universities to work together(p. 687)' should be tested.

As a USC, the LiNKS Program has helped to test stakeholder beliefs that equality, equity and collaboration are essential components in a successful liaison. Equality and equity were not tabled or discussed when the program was first conceptualized nor have these terms surfaced in five years. Consequently the LiNKS program connection enabled a move away from the typical partnership foci of equality and equity enabling a focus on the how to and why when schools and universities connect to better prepare pre-service teachers. Sachs' (1997) explanation of co-operative partnerships is useful as a guiding principle for establishing connections, where she claims that the provision of skills through expertise is the basic premise with often unequal power relationships being expected. There is consistent evidence that the use of the term partnership based upon the notion of equality for co-operative / collaborative arrangements between schools and universities is a misnomer and in some way contributes to the cause of disharmony, dissatisfaction and lack of endurance of some partnerships. I prefer to term university-school partnerships as university-school connections (USCs); connections where stakeholders [people], places and things are sometimes physically, mentally and logically joined for particular reasons. Connections furthermore implies a less formal arrangement while acknowledging that all stakeholders have differing and fluctuating capacities in the realms of expertise, motivation and commitment levels. Consequently, equality is rarely possible or expected as a guiding principle in a connection.

Historical Journey of USCs: Complexities Evident

Internationally USCs are not recent phenomena. In Australia, England and the United States of America (US) for example, an interest in partnerships hasn't waned over the past century and so they appear as dynamic entities in a constant state of flux, undergoing review, renewal and therefore evolving. They tend to be topical and contentious, with quite diverse contextual factors contributing to their formation, maintenance and endurance or lack thereof and are often very complex. The research indicates that the same complexities evident in the early 20th century have been present over the years and continue in many of today's partnerships. Consequently it is timely that the notion of a partnership as the most appropriate form of liaison in pre-service teacher education be challenged.

Complexities Evident in USC 1900-1990s

From the early 1900s in the US, Dewey cited in Goodlad (1993) encouraged university-school partnerships that involved emergence in 'matured experience' where student teachers were immersed in classrooms alongside practising teachers of 'matured experience' and not isolated in training institutions. His claim was that student teachers would then emerge as better prepared teachers as they had been engaged in both theoretical and practical studies. The theory - practice link was also being explored in England with an innovative programme at the University of Leicester Training Department. Their original teacher education program, traditionally dominated by college (university) lectures, was restructured so that students spent four days a week in supervised classroom practice (Board of Education, 1934, cited in Vick, 2006). In this case the school became the main site of both the 'practical' work of learning to teach and for identifying theoretical issues that might inform classroom practice. During the period from 1948-1964 both school and college (university) staff in Adelaide, Australia, collaborated in giving demonstration lessons to teacher education students (Adelaide Teachers' College, 1948-1964 cited in Vick, 2006). Over this period of time Vick (2006) points to plentiful evidence 'that partnerships, whether at an institutional or an individual level, were not easy

to maintain, and that in practice the supervision of the practicum very commonly fell well short of anything that could reasonably be described as genuine partnership.'(p.9). Logistical difficulties, large numbers of students, increasing workloads for college(university) staff and reduced time lecturers could spend in schools collaborating with teachers, all proved to be complexities not anticipated at the commencement of these partnerships. Today complexities remain in USCs such as the LiNKS Program but interestingly they are of a different nature and tend to focus on teacher reluctance or resistance as exemplified by the following student voices.

> *Student C Voice: Some teachers that I have talked to have really appreciated my sort of newer knowledge however, I've come up against quite a bit of resistance because teachers are just feeling, you don't know anything, you don't have anything to teach us.*

> *Student D Voice: Yeah to be honest with you I think that some teachers purely don't want other people to come into their classrooms and observe their teaching practice because they probably know that it is not the best but I think they just feel quite a bit of judgment like just as if they're being watched and sometimes when I've come in to teach lessons a couple of the classes have been really receptive and welcoming but other classes have just sort of seen it as a disruption to their regular activities.*

Connecting The Expertise From The Universities To That In The Schools

Harold Rugg in 1952 (cited in Goodlad, 1988) in the US furthered the connection of theory to practice via collaboration beginning with a focus on university faculties when he suggested that liberal arts and teacher education be linked in order to improve teacher education student outcomes. The Russian launch of Sputnik 1 on October 4th, 1957 aided Rugg's push for university collaboration with schools by creating a crisis of confidence in US education programs. This perceived crisis resulted in government centred initiatives designed to foster a new generation of scientists and mathematicians. This partnership initiative was promoted as the panacea and encouraged professors to leave their offices and labs to form teaching partnerships with schools. The US success in being the first to have human beings walk on the moon could be used as evidence indicating success of these partnerships; however the university-school partnership model was but one of many interacting players in this achievement. In 1958 (Patterson, Michelli & Pacheco, 1999), a US conference provided a forum for representatives from all areas of education (kindergarten to graduate school) to discuss two issues: firstly the absence of co-operation between scholars in the disciplines and their colleagues in teacher education, supporting Rugg's push, and secondly, the failure of both of the above groups to become involved in schools. Barnes (cited in Patterson, Michelli & Pacheco, 1999) found evidence that the two key issues under discussion in 1958 were not resolved and were still present into the 1970s with "appallingly few instances of substantial school-university co-operation". Recurrent problems increased the complexities involved in partnerships.

From A Focus On Pre-Service Teacher Education Partnerships To A Focus On The Professional Development Of Teachers.

Goodlad (Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988), the seminal author and researcher in the field in the 1970s, commenced ethnographic research on university-school partnerships which was followed by the work of the US Holmes Group and National Network for Educational Renewal (Holmes Group, 1990). Both groups were concerned with making attempts to move away from demonstration or laboratory schools to more community centred university-school connections (Patterson, Michelli, & Pacheco, 1999). From the late 1970s through to the 1990s, Goodlad (1993) focused his research efforts on methods to change and improve the liaison process between universities and schools acknowledging that teacher education reform was connected to social and economic reform and could be driven by school renewal and well educated teachers. As a result his work didn't focus on pre-service teacher education but on USCs as opportunities for professional development and then by extension, pre-service teacher education. Throughout this period of professional development partnerships Patterson et al. (1999) along with Bullough and Gitlin (2001) found that university-school partnerships rarely blended successfully and Prater & Sileo (2002) observed that 'both parties must have a shared vision and a clear understanding of their individual and collective roles and responsibilities' in order for

successful partnerships to emerge. Interestingly, the altered partnership focus from pre-service teacher education to professional development of teachers did not alter or alleviate the recurring problems and complexities that plagued the partnerships. This implies that the focus or intention of the partnership was not the cause of the complexities and problems. The complexities that partnerships experienced therefore can be attributed to the one unchanging variable, the actual partnership. Connections, providing less formal arrangements for stakeholders, may provide a step towards alleviating some of the complexities.

More Recent Developments in USC

The literature indicates that contemporary developments in USC such as systemic support, endurance or lack thereof and sense of urgency are in fact not recent. These developments have been highlighted in the USC literature over the years however a more recent perspective is offered here.

Support for USCs

Systemically there is a push for universities, students, graduates, government and community to make meaningful USCs. As an illustration Ramsey (2000) in Quality matters: Revitalising Teaching: Critical times, Critical Choices: Report of the review of teacher education, Australia made key recommendations for initial teacher training, which were that:

- initial teacher training should be reconnected with schools;

- professional experience should be at the centre of initial teacher education;

- the academic disciplines should be reconnected with teacher education;

- there should be an improvement in the quality and effectiveness of school-based induction;

- Universities should be effectively preparing, present and future educational leaders, to be highly responsive to rapidly changing societal and educational contexts.

These recommendations could not be implemented without USCs. Another recent systemic push from the (Australian) NSW accrediting body, the Institute of Teachers (2004) required that 'from 1 October 2004 all people wishing to start teaching in a primary or secondary school in New South Wales are required to be accredited'. Aspects of this accreditation process require connections between universities and schools so that pre-service teachers' capacity for professional practice can be assessed. Additionally the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training Ministerial Discussion Paper, Higher Education at the Crossroads (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002) further supports the formation of USCs for pre-service teachers when it asserts that one of the purposes of higher education is to enable individuals to adapt and learn at local, regional and national levels. These examples of systemic and governmental push for connections are supported by many university strategic plans which encourage the development of connections with the wider community including schools. For instance the importance of connections to the University of Newcastle, Australia is made clear in their Strategic Plan Priority 4 "We will foster partnerships that enrich and develop our communities in mutually beneficial ways".(2007, pp. 7-12). Student B found that not only she but the school benefited enormously from her participation in this connection which was validated by an offer of employment

> *Student B Voice: Well basically all of us that have been approached by our LINKS school asking for our casual numbers for 4th term, that is just awesome.*

One major purpose of the University of Wisconsin- Madison program is to prepare teachers who can be successful in culturally diverse urban schools (2009), the University of Nottingham emphasises 'practical school-based training supported by a thorough introduction to current educational theory'(2009) and the Manchester Metropolitan University undertakes to provide employment-focused and work-based learning opportunities' (2009). In relation to pre-service teacher education these examples indicate serious undertakings to engage in connections between universities and schools. Student A has highlighted how from

his/her perspective the LiNKS program is successfully engaging universities and schools in worthwhile connections.

> *Student A Voice: LiNKS is to put into practice what we are learning at university and in our degree. I think in our course based tasks we can actually do that by putting theory into practice and I think the LINKS programme too is also getting us out into the wider community and out into schools and connecting with teachers and making contacts and being able to draw upon those contacts when we need them.*

Endurance or Lack Thereof

Convincing evidence of endurance in more recently formed non-assessed USCs is not found. Myriad researchers (Russell & Chapman, 2000; Sachs, 2003a; Seddon, Clemans, & Billett, 2005; Smith & Edelen-Smith, 2002; Yinger & Nolen, 2003) have cited similar issues hindering the endurance of non-assessed USCs such as disharmony and dissatisfaction that continue to present as ongoing challenges. Pat Thomson's research (cited in Sachs, 1997) indicates that the work conducted on USCs by universities and schools, is diminished by the theory/practice binary. This binary is perceived by many to mean that students learn about teaching in the university and they learn how to do teaching in the school. Thomson (cited in Sachs, 1997) argues that this binary, where the university and the school are each responsible for differing parts of the whole, doesn't allow for acknowledgement that any practice is 'saturated' with theory, and any theory is based upon practice. Thompson then, (cited in Sachs, 1997)with support from Johnson, Peters & Williams (1999) suggests that that the gap between the two are and will continue to be very difficult to bridge, but gives hope by indicating that there are continued efforts to try to make USCs work. This continued effort is evidenced by research conducted by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change , University of Richmond, Virginia, US which documented more than 1,200 partnerships between schools and universities (Dugery & Knowles, 2003). These 1,200 partnerships indicate that liaisons between universities and schools are a given part of the university-school culture. Vick (2006) suggests that the deep seated problems in teacher education-school partnerships require that universities and schools 'forge genuinely new ways to address some of the endemic problems in teacher education' such as high recent graduate teacher attrition rates and for this to occur the 'nature of professional-practical learning' will need to be reconceptualised.(p. 2) Student M indicated that the LiNKS Program may indeed be a new way to forge a genuinely attempt at addressing high recent graduate teacher attrition rates.

> *Student M Voice: I've got quite a few friends that are at different universities and they don't have the LINKS program and they don't get out into schools until like their third year, and they just drop out because they have no idea what it is like to be in a primary school setting like from a teaching perspective so I found that as soon as I started LINKS and as soon as I saw what it was like, like seeing all the behind the scenes teaching things, it gives you a greater understanding of the things that you need to do when you are a teacher, I see that the LINKS program is creating awareness for beginning teachers and teaching them about what we need to do.*

Moving away from the concept of a partnership to a connection such as the LiNKS program may help to reconceptualise theoretical-practical learning in ways that are mutually beneficial to all stakeholders.

A Sense of Urgency

Barnes (cited in Goodlad, 1999) in the 1960s and 1970s stressed a sense of urgency as he undertook studies of USCs that revealed 'appallingly few instances of substantial school-university co-operation' in teacher education. In 1986 the USA Carnegie Commission (cited in Patterson, et al., 1999), reported on the urgent need to make schools centres of 'progress, productivity and prosperity' (p.83). As early as 1987, reformers were asserting that as difficult as partnerships are to create and sustain, quality teaching and learning require collaboration for optimum effectiveness. (Comer, 1987) in connecting the theory and practice binary. Darling Hammond's work offered meaningful contributions here when she identified the elements of 'extraordinary teacher education programs' as involving extended on-school experiences coupled with common knowledge and shared beliefs between schools and universities (Darling-Hammond, 1989, 1996, 1997, 1999). Darling-

Hammond asserts that if there is not a USC based on shared belief and common purpose then the program must be less than extraordinary- ordinary in fact. Patterson et al. (1999) refers to the paper titled 'What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future' written by a National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, to highlight the once again urgent need for improved teaching [and by extension teacher training] in the nation's schools. His point is emphasized by his use of highly emotive language 'there has been no previous time in history when success, indeed the survival, of nations and people has been so tightly tied to their ability to learn' (p. 86). Throughout the 1990s the literature on USCs is continuing the urgent request for transformation in USCs as exemplified by Maheady, Mallette & Harper (1996), and Munby and Hutchison (1998), where they request teacher education programs to be grounded in school practices. Field (1993)reports on the increasing calls, in the United Kingdom, for closer collaboration between universities and schools while in Australia similar calls were being made (Department of Employment Education and Training, 1989; Wiltshire, McMeniman, & Tolhurst, 1994).

Quality of the Teacher is Important

Hatwood-Futrell, (cited in Patterson, et al., 1999) contributes her point of view to the sense of urgency cautioning that the nation will not being prepared for 'cataclysmic challenges... and teacher educators...' needing to 'find more effective ways to prepare teachers to teach future generations' (p. 95). Rowe (2003) argues that a students' ability to learn is significantly affected by the 'quality of teaching and learning provision'. Student J found that it is USCs where pre-service teachers are provided the opportunities for immersion in the culture of schools; schools that provide real contexts for theory and practice to operate simultaneously, essential for the development of a quality teacher.

> *Student J Voice: I then I hooked up in my third year with the STLA because I thought I'm doing special needs and I really wanted to get to grips with it, running records so I really got in with this girl and she was very good and she spent a lot of time with me, a year I had with her and she was fantastic, but that was because she was an educator and felt that it was her role to then teach me, whereas some teachers still don't feel like that.*

Can Quality Of Teacher Be Assured In A USC?

Jenkins, Pateman, & Black's (2002) research has supported the view that pre-service teachers active involvement in school classrooms early in their preparation programs is accepted practice and contributes to the development of teacher quality. However in the LiNKS USC the quality of the teachers that the PST engages with is not assessed or measured yet valuable learning can, and does, occur. Student E has used an example of non-exemplary practice to reflect on further developing her teaching philosophy.

> *Student E Voice: I've just seen what I really don't want to be. I've seen the type of teaching practices that I don't want to implement in my classroom, the children aren't engaged and they sort of put down the children in front of other students, I haven't really seen a supportive environment.*

The use of emotive terms from researchers in the field, such as urgency, appalling, cataclysmic and extraordinary heralds a concern amongst stakeholders about the lack of worthy and enduring pre-service teacher connections between universities and schools. It is time to problematise university-school partnerships and use the ideas this creates to embark on establishing connections to improve learning outcomes for pre-service teachers and ultimately the students they teach.

Problematising Partnership

Internationally the call for urgent improvements to USC is supported by the work of Ulichny and Schoener (1996), Butin (2003) Groundwater-Smith and Dadds (2004), Stephens & Boldt (2004) and Ledoux & McHenry(2008) who while providing strong support for USC, suggest that the skills of a teacher must be more encompassing than simply learning tried and true approaches to classroom tasks at the feet of an academic mentor. Garner (2000) calls for focused educational research to inform USCs and Kahne and McLaughlin (2001) suggest the need to develop a broader conception of what learning is and where it takes place, to focus on what enables school community connections as opportunities to learn. Therefore, a focus on identifying the enabling factors for learning in partnerships and a move away from a trouble shooting

focus on challenges may help to problematise current views of pre-service teacher partnerships between universities and schools.

Dallmer (2004) suggests that the challenges faced by partnerships such as emergence of hierarchical structures, development of unequal power relationships, a lack of reciprocity, break down of explicit agreements and unbalanced advancement of self-interest by one party over the other, be constituted as drivers of change for USC. For these drivers to succeed the current belief amongst stakeholders, as unearthed by Dallmar (2004), that 'equity and collaboration… are necessary for school-university partnership change' (p. 687) must be challenged. Her research has prompted a rethink about what she terms 'contrived collaboration'(p. 687) in partnerships which moves forward the argument that the current concept of partnerships need to be problematised and therefore challenged.

Vick (2006) suggests that reconceptualisation of the nature of professional-practical learning has to occur in a way 'that troubles the theory-practice binary'. (p. 2) The theory–practice binary is further complicated by imperatives imposed by systems. Imperatives, in the guise of policies, according to Bartholomew & Sandholtz (2009, p. 165) 'by their nature must be uniform, operational through bureaucratic command, and implemented in a standardized fashion to produce easily measurable results'. System enforced uniformity, accountability and a requirement to adhere to standardized policies can add significant layers of complexity to partnerships as there is no one size that fits all. Systemic push prompted Bartholomew & Sandholtz (2009) to challenge the current version of partnerships by suggesting that 'partners who see accountability measures as problematic to their work must find ways to recast institutional common ground…' (p. 165). This is yet another call to problematise those partnerships where stakeholders have expectations that: partnerships will have an air of permanence and stability, that stakeholders will be equal, that outcomes will benefit all parties equally and that no one stakeholder will hold an hierarchical position over another.

Once again the term connection is offered as an alternative, less constrained label for such liaisons. This alternative label allows for the formation of more capricious relationships based upon particular understandings such as: unpredictable endurance, variable outcomes, instability, flexible hierarchical structures, all of which fluctuate over time dependent upon the incumbent stakeholders, the purposes and engagement with particular tasks and allows the two crucial questions 'why should this connection be formed' and 'how should this connection be formed' to take place of prominence.

Conclusion

It is time in the current education calendar to truly problematise university-school partnerships that are based on notions of permanence and stability, equality amongst stakeholders, outcomes benefiting all parties equally and with no stakeholder holding an hierarchical position over another. Once problematised, it will be possible to reconceptualise partnerships as connections which are liberated from the confines that often bind partnerships. This will allow the utilization, evaluation and amendment of the myriad ideas stakeholders propose so that university-school connections can be established and maintained with learning outcomes for PST and ultimately the students they teach that are highly valuable and valued. Pragmatically, this can be achieved by the asking of two crucial questions of the connection: 1. Purpose 'why should this connection be formed and maintained?' and 2. Conceptually 'how should this connection be formed?'

A connection as a concept will not be the panacea for all the problems and complexities occurring when universities and schools combine. What it does have to capacity to offer, due to its guiding principles of unpredictable endurance, variable outcomes, instability, flexible hierarchical structures and stakeholder commitment, is a less constrained model promoting positive movement forward in university-school liaisons than that currently provided by partnerships.

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