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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on data from a preliminary study of the literature for a larger research project, the focus of which was university-school connections (USCs) involving pre-service teacher education and Australian primary schools. There is no scarcity of data or research effort on USCs with the majority of studies indicating the value of USCs to stakeholders (pre-service students, teachers, schools, academics and systems operating within the profession). There is a tendency for the education profession to sustain the conversations surrounding USCs many of which are concerned with the same issues studied over time since Dewey in 1904. This sustainability of interest is coupled with, at times, an urgent call for increased connections to be made between the university system and schools. The focus of this paper is three-fold. Firstly, it explores the terminology used by researchers when describing USCs and argues that use of the word partnership is not the most appropriate choice, secondly, it gives an historical perspective of the progression of USCs and thirdly, it moves forward to more recent developments in USCs. It concludes with a number of research questions that the author is currently working on that have emerged during the review of the literature and argues that closer attention to the endurance of USCs and how this is articulated is required.

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Setting the Scene

For a substantial period in Australia's tertiary teacher education history, beginning with Dewey in 1904, university-school connections (USCs) have played a significant role in the education of teacher graduates, most notably through teacher professional experience placements and supervision. There is much anecdotal and research evidence (Ministerial Advisory Council on the Quality of Teaching, 1999) in support of the argument that pre-service teachers reap value from time involved in USCs and that benefits are likely to be forthcoming if additional time is spent in schools. This extra time can be constructed in a variety of ways such as additional practicum or as alternative placements/connections dependent upon the needs of the stakeholders (pre-service students, teachers, schools, academics and systems operating within the profession). Historically USCs were concerned with enabling pre-service teachers to spend time in schools. Continuing through the nineties, until the present, this concern is still considered important by the Ministerial Advisory Council on the Quality of Teaching (1999) and more recently by Ramsey (2000), in his report on the review commissioned by the then New South Wales (NSW) Minister for Education, "Quality Matters: Revitalising Teaching: Critical Times, Critical Choices". One of the five principles guiding this Review was "...preparing quality teachers is the responsibility of the whole university, school systems and the profession, not only teacher educators" (p. 16), thus Ramsey acknowledges that a responsibility exists between universities, schools and the profession for the training of pre-service teachers. This continuing importance placed upon USCs may well be the driving force behind the retention, by schools and universities, of these connections. However over the past 20 years USCs have been concerned, not just with pre-service teacher education connections with schools, but also with additional purposes and focuses, for example recognition and acknowledgement of the importance of cultural distinctions between stakeholders to an engagement of partnerships for the purposes of teacher professional development. Such a USC was the "Innovative Links Project" (ILP) (Peters, 1997), which incorporated an action based research methodology focusing on the professional development of school teachers.

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The importance of USCs is widely reported in the literature yet many USC initiatives fail to endure (Yinger & Nolen, 2003). Factors contributing to the endurance of USCs, in terms of failure, are frequently noted by researchers. In her work (Peters, 1998) identifies some of these issues: the need for ongoing mediation; the need for supportive executive in both universities and schools; teachers' negative perceptions of their role in pre-service teacher education; unclear and infrequent channels of communication; lack of positive, supportive leadership; perceived and/or real power imbalances, lack of ongoing funding and differing cultures between schools and universities. It appears that endurance of professional experiences, such as practicum and internship, is assured due to their mandatory inclusion in teacher education programs, however endurance of non-mandated connections that are distinct from practicum and internship, is not necessarily assured. Any could fail due to the above reasons .

Those USCs that are not based on mandated practicums and internships, such as the ILP, do not appear to endure over many years or find their way into teacher education programs, yet the worth of such USCs has been consistently justified. Yinger and Nolan (2003) found that the benefits of USCs were far-reaching and hence very important inclusions in teacher education. Lingard and Renshaw (1997) in a submission to the Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy stated a number of broad principles, one of which related to and was supportive of USCs: "Productive university/school partnerships are essential to effective teacher education and to building a professional culture and research base for teachers" (p. 2). Indeed, recent developments in teacher education have stressed the significance of USCs, the role of educational research in teacher education, and the development of practitioner-researchers who utilise action research approaches to improve their practice. The issue of the endurance of USCs raises a number of questions that will be explored in subsequent papers, these include: Is success of USCs determined by a mandated approach? Is success measured by the endurance of USCs or by alternative criteria? If so, what might this criteria be and is the criteria for measuring success consistent for all USCs?

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Methodological Approaches

In a review of the literature qualitative researchers (Calabrese, 2006; Jasman, Payne, Grundy, & Del Borrello, 1998; Jenkins, Pateman, & Black, 2002; Maloney & Campbell-Evans, 1998; Moran, Long, & Nettle, 2000; Peters, 1999; Prater & Sileo, 2002; Russell & Chapman, 2000; Sachs, 2003a; Shinnars, 2006; Smith & Edelen-Smith, 2002) used a variety of methodological approaches to collect data on diverse USC research queries, such as; Teachers Perceptions of University Teacher Educators; Collaborative Practicum and University Lecturers Learning from Classroom Teachers and Partnerships and Shared understandings, in the quest to understand and improve USCs. Calabrese (2006) explored the relationships between universities and schools using an appreciative inquiry theory, Peter's (1999) study on the ILP was based on action research methodology, Moran et al. (2000) conducted field based studies as did Maloney and Campbell-Evans (1998), and Jasman et al.(1998) were involved in a reflective self-deliberation and enquiry study. Russell and Chapman (2000) drew from the interpretive paradigm and used a case study approach. Shinnars' (2006) study explored, via qualitative questionnaire, how university and public school partnerships are structured with a focus on partners' contributions and leadership roles. Smith and Edelen-Smith (2002) used survey-based research on a university special education collaboration with schools; Prater and Sileo (2002), used questionnaires as the basis of their study; and Jenkins et al. (2002) conducted a field based study using in-depth interview.

The methodological approaches taken by researchers of USCs, as noted above, indicate that over time and using diverse qualitative (in this paper) methodologies, various data collection techniques and a variety of sources, a significant contribution to the research knowledge base on USCs has been made. Methodological triangulation according to Mathison (1988), has the potential to enhance validity and trustworthiness of research so that a range of different descriptions of understanding, each contextually distinct and relevant, are presented and rendered sensible by the researcher. Guba and Lincoln (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) claim that the most valid studies are those that rely on several research designs which reduces threats in as many strong ways as possible. The research to date

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has involved a variety of methodologies, various data collection techniques using a variety of sources all of which have contributed to increasing the validity of such educational research.

Terminology: Definition and uses within USCs

Partnership: Not the Most Appropriate Term

USCs take a variety of forms within the pre-service teacher education sector but what they are and how they are defined in the literature, often differs. Varied definitions, coupled with diverse descriptions are utilised to suit the multiplicity of purposes and focuses of USCs. The literature commonly refers to USCs as university-school partnerships (USP). My decision to use the term *connection* rather than *partnership* is deliberate in order to remove the focus from the notion of equality, that often accompanies the term partnership, to a focus on the *how to*, when schools and universities connect, firstly to better prepare pre-service teachers and secondly to engage in professional development with in-service teachers.

There is no paucity of information on USCs, perhaps the opposite could be said. A vast array of literature is available although researchers differ in emphasis, or focus, when designing, defining and describing USCs. By way of example:

1. The ILP (Peters, 1999) was designed distinctively for in-service teachers and not pre-service teachers. The focus in this instance leaned strongly towards using USCs as a means of delivering *professional development* to practising teachers using an action research methodology.
2. Catelli (2006) offers that schools and universities have the opportunity to *close the achievement gap* with the focus on an “ethical obligation to act as partners in meeting this challenge” (p.183).
3. Jenkins et al. (2002) write of USC as being opportunities for the promotion of *mentoring skills* with the focus on the development of social and communication skills for teachers wanting to work with university students.

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Each of these examples has a focus designed to suit the context and as such each USC is distinctly different from the other and importantly, different to the mandated professional experiences provided as universities and schools connect. USCs that are not part of a teacher education program have the potential to provide new, exciting, diverse and additional experiences.

University

University-school partnership, has been, from the 1980s, a commonly used phrase to define myriad associations between universities and schools. Australian, British and European writers tend to use the English term *university*, although there are exceptions with some universities being called Institutions of Higher Education (Smith & Edelen-Smith, 2002) while in the United States (US) the term *college* is frequently used alongside, and often, as a replacement for *university*. As such, it is not unusual in the literature to refer to college-school partnerships (cited in Million & Vare, 1997).

School

The term *school* is best understood based upon contextual factors. Schools are called *schools* worldwide, although at times in the US, the word *college*, can be used to mean Kindergarten to Year 12 schools. More succinctly, schools can be contextualised by describing them as either: pre-school, primary school, middle school, high/comprehensive school or senior colleges in Australia and Great Britain, and much of Europe and Asia. In the US the terms used are similar: pre or nursery school, elementary school, junior high school and senior high school.

Partnerships as Collaborations

The term *partnership* is frequently referred to in the literature as the nominal version of *collaborations*. Clark (cited in Goodlad, 1988) defined partnerships as “deliberately designed, collaborative arrangements between different institutions working together to advance self interest and solve common problems”. Goodlad (1988) speaks of the benefits of “symbiotic partnerships” where partners with differing expertise come together for the common good. Duffy (cited in Million & Vare, 1997) suggests

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partnerships tackle problems that allow the partners to “grow into their roles as egalitarian participants” (p.1). Schlechty and Whitford (1989) suggest partnerships are mutually owned yet sufficiently autonomous to create a common culture with unique norms and values. Prater and Sileo (2002) discussed the work of Schlechty and Whitford and also Bullough, Birrell, Young, Clark, Erikson and Earle, and agree when they state that “the two bodies need to blend and create a third culture” (p. 333). Digby, Gartin and Murdick (Digby, Gartin, & Murdick, 1993) begin by writing of collaborations between university and schools as explicit agreements between people who engage in meetings to set and achieve goals. They then term these ongoing meetings as “university/public school partnerships”. Partnerships, according to the above researchers, 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 success or endurance, as Wenger (1998) claims, collaboration can involve challenges such as conflict and cordiality, competitiveness and co-operation.

Partnerships beyond Collaboration

Sachs (2004) takes the term *partnerships* one step further and tackles the difficult problem of defining *partnerships* based on either collaboration or co-operation. The purpose of collaborative partnerships, according to Sachs, is “a two way model of reciprocity with each party having something significant to contribute” and co-operative partnerships as, where the provision of skills through expertise is the basic premise with often the “power relationship between the parties being unequal”. It is at this point that I suggest the use of the term *partnership* for co-operative and/or 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. According to Rosaen and Hoekwater (1990), successful implementation of partnerships is hindered, as teachers accustomed to egalitarian principles of work in school settings often receive differential treatment in some partnerships with universities. Gore (1995) sheds light on disharmony and dissatisfaction when he cautions that “partnerships between schools and education faculties must be carefully formed and

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nurtured [as] partnerships or alliances between schools and universities do not guarantee reform” (p. 32) and require substantial institutional support such as resources, motives and commitment.

Stephens and Boldt (2004) 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: Stephens and Boldt’s goal being “the simultaneous renewal of colleges of education and of K-12 schools” (p.1). It is timely that these researchers have set aside the argument about whether universities and schools have collaborated or co-operated as partners, when they suggest that it is the stated goals of USCs that are important, not whether egalitarian partnerships have been formed. Bullough, Birrell, Young, Clark, Erickson, Earle, Campbell, Hansen and Egan (1999) agree that the literature is “replete with calls to blend universities and schools into a third culture” however they add the cautionary phrase “though few institutions appear to have succeeded...” (p. 387). The term *partnership* is problematic as it assumes equality yet many partnerships in practice are anything but equal.

Distinctiveness of Connections

Research to date indicates that it is the stakeholders who are responsible, though not necessarily equally so, for the distinctiveness of each particular USC. For example the ILP, with the focus on teacher professional development via action research (Sachs, 1997), is distinct to Hayes and Kelly (2000), Million (1997), Ramsey (2000) and Sachs (1997) who focus on the notion of “power in a collaboration of university-based researchers and public school teachers” (Sachs, 1997, p. 451). However, what appears to be common in understanding amongst researchers is that USCs are for the most part, conceptually designed groupings aiming for viable communication channels with the intention of development of common understandings amongst the stakeholders. The distinctiveness of each USC is where debate about the *how to make this connection work* rather than the, *what is this connection* arises. *How to* best conceptually design the USC, *how to* keep stakeholders informed and involved, and *how to* aim for endurance of the USC.

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So what are University-School Connections?

Although USCs are variously described and defined by myriad researchers, Sachs' (1997) explanation is a useful starting point in providing a definition of USCs that moves beyond the limitation of egalitarian partnerships. She contends that a co-operative partnership, where expertise of stakeholders is accepted, often with the power relationships between the parties being unequal, as constituting a USC. Further, synthesizing views presented by previously cited researchers, it can be concluded that USCs are deliberately designed programs, by stakeholders offering differing expertise, who have *connected* in a variety of ways to improve the quality and effectiveness of school-based induction for pre-service and in-service teachers. Such *connections* would ideally have the function of equipping pre-service and in-service teachers with the opportunity to build cultural capital within schools (cited in Patterson, Michelli, & Pacheco, 1999) enabling them to be highly responsive to rapidly changing societal and educational contexts (cited in Patterson et al., 1999).

Historical Context

From the early 1900s, Dewey (cited in Goodlad, 1999) encouraged emergence in “matured experience” for those in attendance at schools and colleges of education where student teachers spent time immersed in classrooms. Out of this immersion alongside practising teachers of ‘matured experience’, the student teachers would emerge as better prepared to become teachers. Harold Rugg in 1952 (cited in Goodlad, 1988) furthered the spirit of collaboration when he suggested that liberal arts and education be linked in order to improve teacher education. In 1958 (Patterson et al., 1999) a US conference provided a forum for representatives from all areas of education (kindergarten to graduate school). Two focus issues were discussed: firstly the absence of co-operation between scholars in the disciplines and their colleagues in teacher education, and secondly, the failure of both of the above groups to become involved in schools.

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Barnes (cited in Patterson et al., 1999) in the 1960s and 1970s stressed a sense of urgency as he began to study USCs that revealed “appallingly few instances of substantial school-university co-operation”. The emergence of emotive language heralds an emerging concern voiced by Barnes on the lack of collaboration not only between universities and schools but also between the disciplines within universities.

Increased Focus on University-School Connections

Goodlad, the seminal author and researcher in the field in the 1970s, assisted by 1988 reference Sirotnik, (Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988) commenced research in the 1970s which arose out of the work of the Holmes Group in the US. The Holmes Group was concerned with making attempts to move away from demonstration or laboratory schools to more widely spread USCs in an effort to encourage institutions to join together in coalitions . Goodlad recognised in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s and 1990s that much needed to be changed and hence improved in the liaison process between universities and schools. His work primarily focused on USCs as opportunities for professional development and teacher education by the formation of pedagogical centres. Patterson et al. (1999), Bullough and Gitlin (2001) and Hooley and Moore (2005) argued that USCs have rarely blended successfully and provided observations on why, such as: school settings varying in suitability, requirement of a significant stakeholder time investment and prohibitive costs. Kennedy (1990) cautions that difficulties exist in connections due in part to the classroom ethic of autonomy by the teacher who is challenged to share this learning space and their power.

In 1986 the US Carnegie Commission (Darling-Hammond, 1989, 1996, 1997, 1999), reported on the urgent need to make schools centres of “progress, productivity and prosperity” (Darling-Hammond, 1989)(p.83) with connections to universities. As early as 1987, reformers were asserting that as difficult as community partnerships are to create and sustain, quality teaching and learning require community collaboration (cited in Patterson et al., 1999). Darling Hammond’s work (cited in Patterson et al., 1999) offered meaningful contributions here when she identified the elements of exceptional teacher education programs as involving extended on-school experiences coupled with common

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knowledge and shared beliefs between schools and universities. Patterson et al. (Patterson et al., 1999) referred to a paper by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, where again an urgent need for improved teaching and teacher education, is emphasized, "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). Goodlad (Patterson et al., 1999) in his after word of this book wrote "Everyone wants to transform teacher education. Most agree that transformation can only occur when teacher educators and K-12 practitioners join together". Hatwood-Futrell (cited in Maheady, Mallette, & Harper, 1996), contributes her point of view to the sense of urgency that was first mentioned by Barnes (cited in Munby & Hutchison, 1998) of the nation not being prepared for "cataclysmic challenges... and teacher educators... [needing to] find more effective ways to prepare teachers to teach future generations" (p. 95). Imig (cited in Patterson et al., 1999) argues that ways to build bridges between teacher education and partner schools is required in order to improve teacher education and teaching. Historically, consistent arguments for ways to connect teacher education to schools, aimed at improving teacher education, been presented. From 1958 to 1999, there is a strong sense of emotion evident as researchers call for urgent improvements and transformations to the connections between universities and schools.

Transformations

In the 1990s examples of research literature continue the *urgent* request for improvements and transformation in USCs, as exemplified by Maheady et al. (1996) and Munby and Hutchison (1998). They argue for teacher education programs to be grounded in school practices. Field (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 (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 1996).

During this 1990s urgent request for transformations and improvements to USC, a number of different purposes and focuses for them, other than preparation of pre-service teachers, were coming into being. USCs were being designed with a variety of conceptual themes, such as: power relationships invested in USCs, ownership of USCs, teacher

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professional development, calls for revitalization of the teaching profession and improvements to practice via school-based enquiry and action research. These emergent focuses or conceptual themes underpinning the *how to* of USCs further exemplify the complexity of USCs and firmly begin to move the focus beyond connections designed only for pre-service teaching. Bullough and Prater and Sileo (cited in Maheady, 1997) cautioned that rarely have partnerships been successful due to issues previously referred to, such as: school settings varying in suitability, requirement of a significant stakeholder time investment, prohibitive costs and an ethic of autonomy by the teacher. The expansion of focuses for USCs was likely to increase complexity of connections and therefore make success and endurance an ongoing challenge.

Who is in Charge?

In Australia, the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (NPQLT) was a Federal government initiative resulting in two major projects, the National Schools Network (NSN) and the National Professional Development Project (NPDP) which funded the ILP (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 1996). These projects were an attempt, fuelled by political and social forces, to break down the previously perceived power and ownership struggles of USCs. As a result, an interest in teacher professional development, revitalization of the teaching profession, the implementation of school based enquiry and action research was energized. A distinct move away from USCs for the sole purpose of pre-service teacher training and an acknowledgement that conversations about who held the power in connections were needed. Hayes and Kelly (2000), in an attempt to form a USC, found that inappropriately a transgression of institutional boundaries “that demarcate the world of university-based researchers and public school teachers occurred”. Furthermore, the play of power was not viewed in “structural terms of dominance and subordination”, but as circulating throughout the relationship and manifesting itself “in various, often unstated ways... ultimately mitigating against the development of a collaborative relationship” (p. 451).

Hayes and Kelly’s (2000) work touches on the historical roots of USCs highlighting the fact that universities have traditionally enjoyed the power in USCs and explores how this

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has been a contributor to the lack of endurance and success of USCs. Perry, Komesaroff and Kavanagh (2002) cite the work of Kliebard (1986) and Clift, Houston and Pugach (1990) who support this notion that universities traditionally have the privilege of leading educational reform. Perry et al. (2002) point out that in such university-school binaries, although the power traditionally rested with the university, the ownership or the *how to*, usually remained with the schools, a cause for ongoing tension. The ongoing struggle with power and ownership in USCs indicates a lack of resolution that continues today. Progress, however is being made: Central Queensland University introduced a new teacher education degree, taken by a small cohort of students, that had a much stronger connection with the teaching profession than previous degree programs. The LiNKS Program at the University of Newcastle, Ourimbah Campus, which commenced in 2004, is another such connection where strong university-school ties continue to be maintained with a cohort of students in excess of 1000 (Brown, Williams, & Reynolds, 2007). Such programs indicate examples of not just universities taking charge but of stakeholders who have connected to create USCs that are dynamic in nature with diverse purposes and focuses.

By the twenty-first century, the connection between universities and schools appears to be one of acceptance and “taken for granted” as the norm, as exhibited by Jenkins’ et al. (Jenkins et al., 2002) whose research has supported the view that “pre-service teachers’ active involvement in school classrooms early in their preparation programs” (p. 360) is acknowledged. This is a substantial move forward from the 1950s, where the focus was not on USCs but more on institutionalized teacher education. The Australian Ministerial Council on the Quality of Teaching (Ministerial Advisory Council on the Quality of Teaching, 1999) moved between the past and the future when it argued that partnerships offered a great deal of potential in the 1970s and that as a result a renewed and continuing interest in connections between universities and schools emerged to be carried over into the twenty-first century. Their assessment reads as if USCs were absent for some time between the 1970s and the late 1990s, which was not the case. Documented accounts of the history of USCs, cited in this paper, indicate that interest in connections has never waned. USCs appear to be dynamic entities in a constant state of flux, which

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have been constantly renewing and evolving. They tend to be topical and contentious, with quite diverse contextual factors contributing to their formation, maintenance success and endurance.

Recent Developments

USCs, a readily accepted practice in the field, remain topical, particularly the issues of *what is* and the *how to*. Goodlad (1988) devoted time to the discussion of the obstacles that prevented reform some 20 years previously, and suggested that very few sustainable symbiotic partnerships existed. The Ramsey Report (2000) made key recommendations for initial teacher training:

- 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.

Ramsey's (2000) claims that pre-service teacher education should be reconnected with schools with professional experience at the centre of this are puzzling, as all literature reviewed to date affirms that teacher training and schools have not been disconnected over the decades, with professional practice in schools having been a core element of initial teacher education. Professional practice, in the guise of mandated practicum and internship, is an essential component of every teaching degree as Martin, Smith and Phillips (2005) state "innovative university-community partnerships are alive and well and flourishing on the campuses of many universities" (p. 13). Nonetheless, what Ramsey (Ramsey, 2000) has highlighted is an aspect of USCs, the *how to* make connections work. He may indeed be referring to: *how to* best conceptually design the USC, *how to* keep stakeholders informed and involved and *how to* aim for endurance and success of the

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USC, when he recommends reconnecting teacher education with schools and placing professional experience central to initial teacher education .

Lack of Endurance

Myriad present day researchers have cited similar issues to Goodlad's obstacles to reform in the 1970s and 1980s and Ramsey's (2000) recommendations (Boardman, 2003; Brown et al., 2007; Cameron, ; Fishler & Firestone, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Harrison, 1998; Hooley & O'Brien, 1997; Peters, 1997; Reynolds, Brown, & Williams, 2007; Sachs, 2003b; Turner, 2006; Williams, Reynolds, & Brown, 2007). Thomson's (2000) research indicates that the work conducted on USCs by universities and schools, is diminished by the theory/practice binary, where it is perceived by many, that students *learn about* teaching in the university and they learn *how to do* teaching in the school. Thomson argues that this binary where the university and the school are each responsible for differing parts of the whole does not allow for acknowledgement that any practice is saturate with theory, and any theory is based upon practice. She then, with support from Johnson, Peters and Williams (1999) suggests 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.

The above researchers indicate that, like research findings from the 1970s, significant issues hindering endurance and success of non-degree-program-based USCs exist and present as ongoing challenges. Australian and International academic and teacher researchers are working on the challenges of forming and maintaining USCs. This research is evidenced by frequent international and national conference presentations, the publication of conference proceedings, and the inclusion of articles in both peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed journals . Research by these researchers, as an example, indicates a strong continued momentum of interest in USCs at academic, practitioner and systemic levels.

Systemic Support for USCs

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In Australia, there is a systematic push for universities, students, graduates, government and community to make meaningful connections. Recently, the NSW Institute of Teachers (2006) accrediting body, required that “from 1 October 2004 all people wishing to start teaching in a primary school or a secondary school in New South Wales are required to be accredited” (p. 1). The accreditation process involves newly graduated teachers’ and in-service teachers’ professional capacity being assessed against a set of Professional Teaching Standards (NSW Institute of Teachers, 2004) at increasingly more sophisticated levels. Elements 6 and 7 particularly apply to USCs. Element 6, “Teachers continually improve their professional knowledge and practice” (p. 12), gives weighted credit to professional development, much of which involves connections formed between schools and universities. Element 7, “Teachers are actively engaged members of their profession and the wider community” (p. 14), encompasses in-service teachers’ role in mentoring pre-service teachers during USCs, such as professional experience. Accomplishment of this element provides recognition, legitimization and confirmation of the value of mentoring pre-service teachers in the eyes of the NSW Institute of Teaching. Such legitimization can only help to nurture continuing and future USCs and provide in-service teachers with added incentive to agree to mentor pre-service teachers.

Many Australian university strategic plans encourage the development of collaborative partnerships as does the DEST Ministerial Discussion Paper, “Higher Education at the Crossroads” (Department of Education Science and Training, 2002) which asserts that one of the purposes of higher education is to enable individuals to adapt and learn at local, regional and national levels. Research by Wilbur and Lambert (1990), Ladwig (1991), Dugery and Knowles (2003), Ulichny and Schoener (1996), Brown et.al.(2007), Reynolds et al. (2007) and Williams et al. (2007) provides evidence that the need for strong local, and national, systemic and governmental support for USCs remain topical.

Internationally a push for increased connections between schools and their communities is evident with the work of Groundwater-Smith and Dadds (2004). Their work, and that of Ulichny and Schoener (1996), have for a decade, been supportive of an increase in connections. Their research suggested that the skills of a teacher must be more

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encompassing than simply learning 'tried and true' approaches to classroom tasks, at the feet of an academic mentor. Research conducted by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, University of Richmond, London (Dugery & Knowles, 2003), documented more than 1,200 partnerships between schools and universities. In Texas, US, Kahne and McLaughlin (cited in Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002), suggested the need to develop a broader conception of what learning is and where it takes place, to focus on what enables school community connections for opportunities to learn. They claimed there is a need to reconsider traditional relationships between researchers and practitioners in order to expand knowledge. In the UK, Garner (2000) took these ideas and called for focused educational research, which would inform USCs. These researchers represent the strong international support for increased, improved and new styled USCs supported by rigorous research.

Conclusion

That USCs require a significant time and energy commitment by stakeholders, as they are formed, facilitated and maintained is clearly supported by the research. Martin et al.(2005) maintain that USC research is still at the embryonic stage with much needing to be done which support my contention that it is at the forefront of practitioner, academic and systemic thought as pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development is reconceptualised and transformed. Systemic support is a key indicator of likely success, as is academic and practitioner interest. Who holds the power in each USC remains a contentious issue exacerbated by the use of the word partnership to describe what is frequently, not a partnership.

Throughout its history, USCs in Australia and internationally have been an important and commonly mandated requirement in the guise of professional experience practicum and internship. Most non-mandated, yet valuable, USCs continue to be formed indicating resilience by stakeholders in the face of significant challenges. The challenges facing non-degree-program-based USCs have been researched many times over, continually generating further research questions: Should all USCs in pre-service teacher training be

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mandated? What are the implications for all stakeholders if non-degree program USCs were to be mandated? Is success of USCs determined by a mandated approach? Do USCs actually measure or evaluate their success or failure? Is success measured by the endurance of USCs or is success measured by alternative criteria? If so what might this criteria be and is the criteria for measuring success consistent for all USCs?

In order to answer these questions, closer attention and continued research on the *how to* of USCs, for differing contexts, is the direction to take in order to move the research forward: *how to* best conceptually design USCs for diverse contexts; *how to* keep stakeholders informed, involved and supported by a solid research and base; *how to* encourage stakeholders to move away from the need to hold the power in connections; *how to* aim for synergy, communication, endurance and success of USCs.

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