Neo-liberal Accreditation agendas: Challenges and Opportunities for Professional Experience

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Over the past decade in Australia a neoliberal political climate has delivered to both universities and schools increasing pressures concerning the accountabilities and prescriptions associated with professional standards frameworks and articulated by state regulatory bodies such as the NSW Institute of Teachers. The field of professional experience within teacher education has not been immune to such pressures. In light of what could be termed an accountability agenda, this paper analyses one arena of challenge and opportunity arising from more explicit accountabilities in teacher education around partnerships that aspire to link universities and schools in relation to professional experience programs. In doing so it draws on the work of Lave and Wegner (1991) as well as Engeström's (1999) Activity System model to consider some of the complexities involved when those working within professional experience seek to develop partnerships that aim to facilitate what is commonly termed "communities of learning". Inevitable shifts in power relations, challenges and resistances, as well as new identities emerge when professional experience is focussed more strongly towards social co-participation and when concurrent attention is directed to the professional learning needs of student teachers and those of practising teachers.

Within teacher education, the field of professional experience presents opportunities as well as challenges in terms of the necessary joint work required of universities and schools in the support of school-based professional learning of pre-service teachers. A particular challenge for universities is the incorporation of appropriate systems of acknowledgment, benefit and reward for the professional work undertaken by the school-based supervising and mentor teachers within these programs. For increasingly pressured school sectors the extent to which they can commit to the development of the next generation of teachers and specifically the support of professional experience programs appears increasingly vulnerable. The mandating of increased numbers of professional experience days within teacher education programs and awards combined with high levels of enrolments into teacher education across institutions has exerted growing pressure on teachers and schools to support professional experience programs. Additionally, the past decade has seen increased focus on the forms and practices associated with professional experience within teacher education from governments, both state and federal and other institutional bodies (Ramsey 2000, NSW Institute of Teachers 2005, Dept. of Education, Science & Technology 2007 and House of Representatives 2007). Within a climate of such pressure, it could be proposed that universities, instead of continuing to rely on the altruism of the profession and the limited attractiveness of low levels of supervisory payments to teachers, may need to reconceptualise professional

experience programs in ways that offer increased rewards directed towards the professional needs of the teachers themselves.

This paper will argue that whilst pressure is being exerted on all educational institutions through the strengthening accountability and accreditation agendas of neoliberalism, paradoxically, it is also this climate that is providing opportunities for reconceptualising the support and reward structures for teachers working within teacher education programs.. Such shifts could involve facilitating the development within the school of a learning community or a community of practice cohering around professional experience placements. There are two binding factors which would support and sustain such learning communities, and in both it will be argued that the university's academic/Tertiary Mentor working in the school can take a significant role. The first of these is the common responsibility of universities and schools towards the development of quality beginning teachers with the associated need to facilitate and support quality professional experience learning. The second is the increasing insistence of common concerns and compliance requirements arising from the accreditation processes and measures such as instituted through the NSWIT. Universities, schools, teachers and pre-service teachers are increasingly required to align their practices and professional learning against a common rubric of professional standards and to undertake similar mapping, portfolio and mentoring processes to conform to multilayered accountability measures. Teachers are increasingly required to attend to their own professional accreditation requirements and to engage in the work of supporting their peers in this process. This is increasingly an added pressure within teachers' professional lives and has significant resource implications for schools. Universities are well placed to offer support and mentoring here. Additionally, it is equally important to support the development in teachers (and student teachers) of a capacity to critically read and at times stand outside the agendas of such bodies as the NSW Institute of Teachers and other accreditation agencies.

Connell (2008) in examining teachers' work with respect to standards frameworks and accreditation agendas talks of the need for "meta-competences" which include for example a capacity to attend to *the relations* between competences. 'Some fundamental questions about teaching concern what might be called "meta-competences", i.e. capacities to balance, choose among and deploy specific competences'. (p.14). Further Connell in arguing that neoliberal ideology has diminished the 'collective agency of workers' (p.9) and thus teachers, proposes that such work is importantly 'collective as much as it is individual' and supports teachers in being reflective about their work. It is important to find spaces to collectively interrogate the institutionally sanctioned versions of the 'good' teacher and 'good' leader, and to understand the political intent driving such educational agendas. This is work in which universities are well placed to make a contribution. It opens a new set of possibilities for those academics who work with both pre-service and in-service teachers in schools, and opportunities for new collaborative alignments. Mutually supportive partnerships between schools and universities and between teachers and academics when articulated through learning communities have the potential to turn the pressures of neoliberal accountability into productive professional learning opportunities.

Neoliberalism and Teacher Education

A brief examination of recent government policy documents and directives relevant to teacher education, at both state and national levels, reveals a particular focus directed towards the forms of relationship that link teacher education institutions (TEIs) with teacher practitioners and their sites of practice. The recent House of Representatives Report on the Inquiry into Teacher Education, *Top of the Class*, cites teacher education as flawed through "the lack of investment in building partnerships that would bridge the gap between theory and practice, particularly for the practicum" (2007, p.xxi). A key recommendation of this Report is to "establish a National Teacher Education Partnership Fund, for the purpose of establishing collaborative approaches to practicum, research, induction and professional development" (p.xvi). In the former Coalition Government's 2007 Federal Budget this recommendation was reconceptualised through explicitly linking specific professional experience funding to universities' capacity to meet mandatory requirements as outlined within a specific Budget Item: *Realising Our Potential - Improving the Practical Component of Teacher Education (IPCTE)* (DEST, 2007). Through a significant budget allocation of $77 million to be delivered over a 4 year period, additional funds were offered in 2008 to all teacher education institutions able to present evidence against defied criteria concerning quantity and quality within professional experience programs. Included in reporting requirements for TEI to access ICPTE funding is the need to outline ways in which partnerships and relationships with schools "improve quality assurance and enhancement of the practical component".

Harvey defines neoliberalism as a "theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights , free markets and free trade" (2005, p.2). Practices aligned with neoliberalism return responsibility to the individual, for example to establish, document and maintain professional status, and yet maintain centralised control articulated through the auditing practices they formulate and to which they confirm accountability to the market and the client. Heightened significance of the market in education, the highlighting of client (commonly student and parent) choice and competition aligned with accountability measures linked to centralised professional competence specification, can all be claimed as expressions of neoliberal "governmentality" (Foucault 1983, p.221). Foucault employed the notion of "governmentality" to include "modes of action more or less considered and calculated, that are destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense is to structure the possible field of action of others" (Foucault, 1983, p.221). Thus governmentality here is seen as having as much to do with the constitution and fashioning of individuals and groups as with political structures.

With the focus moved towards the constitution of individuals and groups, it could be claimed that within the conjunction of neoliberalism and governmentality, and in particular a focus on accountability, "people [teachers and academics] are reconfigured as productive economic entrepreneurs of their own lives" (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p.248). As such, particular versions of the "good" teacher and "good" teacher educator are being insistently constituted. Within such a perspective centralised systems of control, specification, measurement and accountability can be seen as being deployed through

such professional bodies as the New South Wale Institute of Teachers with its Professional Teaching Standards Framework (New South Wales Institute of Teachers 2005) and articulated through its processes of accreditation. Similar structures and processes are in place across all Australian states, with movement to national standards also on the Federal government's agenda.

Connell, citing Compton and Weiner (2008), claims that neoliberal policies have not only refashioned the worker as an 'entrepreneurial individual' but have also tried to 'eliminate the collective agency of workers expressed through unions (2008, p.9). With respect to audit cultures in teaching, 'Standards documents define the object of registration and evaluation as an individual teacher'. Yet much of teaching and schools can be more accurately seen as 'collective labour'. Thus within the current discourse around partnerships, it is important to discern ways in which neoliberal imperatives can be refashioned to consolidate forms of teachers' work that are credibly collegial and collaborative.

A Look at Partnerships
It is of interest that within a strengthening neoliberal climate that there is a more insistent rhetoric around partnerships. Teacher education has long assumed the necessity of dual sites of professional learning, that of the tertiary institution and that of the work-place, commonly schools. Within this model, educators in both sites are assumed to have the expertise to guide student teachers in productive integration between the specific bodies of knowledge and practice that characterise each of these educational domains. Much of the rhetoric aligned to neoliberal influences and relevant to this dual responsibility to pre-service Professional Experience is expressed in terms of "partnerships".

 Within a report that was influential in the establishment of the NSW Institute of Teachers, Ramsey (2000, p.63) advocated "a high level of practical partnership between the supervising teachers and university lecturers" as a key consideration underpinning professional experience in teacher education. Subsequently, the NSW Institute of Teachers in their course accreditation documentation required from teacher education institutions asks for 'Evidence of a Quality Program' via 'advice on how the professional experience program has been negotiated by the teacher education institution in partnership with schools and other educational settings' (NSWIT, 2008). Additionally, DEEWR (Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations, formerly DEST) through their IPCTE funding model requires institutions to account for the forms and quality of "relationships and partnerships" as part of the accountabilities associated with this additional funding stream targeting professional experience into universities since 2008. Whilst not proposing that productive relationships between schools and universities around professional experience programs are not extremely important, the concern here is within a climate of increasingly centralised control of education in all its guises, there is a danger that what counts as "partnership" and collaborative relationship will be more prescriptively specified, measured and refashioned. At present much of the rhetoric around the notion of "partnership" lacks detail and carries assumptions of non problematic and productive outcomes. Thus it could be argued that at this time it is important for universities and schools to be proactive in fashioning diverse and locally

appropriate ways to work together and to collaboratively combine to find mutually beneficial relationships rather than those that may be bureaucratically imposed and prescribed.

The political intent associated with the advocacy of "partnership" benefits from a degree of critical scrutiny. It could be argued that it is the present mix of neoliberal and neoconservative politics in Australia that is applying pressure increasingly to reconfigure teacher education and professional experience within frames of neoliberal governance (Seddon, Billett & Clemans 2004), central to which are particular assumptions concerning the productivity of "partnerships". It is of interest that in a UK context, discourses of "partnership" have been seen as part of a New Right agenda. Such perspectives would claim that incorporation of collaborative and participatory practices is being employed to soften the market/competitive/ economic/individualistic edge of neoliberalism as well as the social orientation of collectivism:

> Within these discourses partnerships function as a magic concept: a concept that because it links with other notions such as 'networks', 'cooperation' and 'trust', sounds modern, neutral, pragmatic and positive (Cardini, 2006, p.396).

Such a critical perspective would claim that in presenting partnerships unproblematically as superior forms of social organisation, attention is being diverted away from a necessary consideration of the more complex and contradictory aspects of partnerships as working relationships (ibid, p.395). Additionally, what could be seen as softer terminology may be employed to moderate the political control articulated through the strengthening of standards and accreditation structures. A partnership discourse could be employed to mitigate against the more individualistic focus of accreditation. Advocacy of "partnerships" could also be employed as a mechanism for shifting the focus of teacher education from universities towards the school sector. One of the elements of "crisis" argued for in the Report of the Review into Teacher Education New South Wales (Ramsey 2000) focussed on the perceived disconnection of universities from schools, as a key factor supporting claims of university inadequacy within teacher education:

> Universities and employers will have to develop new structures of teacher education in which university teacher educators are able to engage with schools and the work of the teaching profession, just as much as schools and teachers are able to engage with them (Ramsey 2000, p.38).

Claims that disconnection can be remedied by the establishment of partnerships can serve to gloss over the complex work of negotiating and establishing the legitimacy of different fields of knowledge and practice across universities and schools as well as productively linking them. Additionally, the concept of partnership can carry such a persuasive tone of collaborative advantage and unproblematic connection, that raising critical questions can be seen as engagement in unproductive scepticism. Yet such critical thinking is important. The pervasiveness of the term "partnership" in recent policy relevant to teacher education, as well as the apparently unproblematic way in which the concept is employed, should be sufficient to invite caution. However, a critical stance towards the

discourse of partnerships should not be taken as contrary to the need for teacher educators
to explore productive ways in which universities and schools as well as academics and
teachers can join collaboratively in the enterprise of supporting the development of
beginning teachers. Thus additionally, this paper aims to discuss possibilities for credible
intersections between student teachers' professional learning and that of practising
teachers as a productive and more specific way of articulating the concept of
"partnership".

Neoliberal pressures impacting on the field of Professional Experience
The greatest challenge facing universities around their professional experience programs
is accessing sufficient high quality school-based placements, this issue largely arising
from the limited supply of teachers willing and able to take on this additional professional
work. For some teachers involved in professional experience programs, their work in the
supervision and mentoring of student teachers within this present accreditation climate is
demanding uncomfortably higher levels of professional expertise and accountability than
in the past. In New South Wales all professional experience programs are required quite
explicitly to be structured, guided and assessed in response to the Institute of Teachers
Professional Standards for the Graduate Teacher. Across the seven Elements and 46
Aspects of this framework, student teachers need to be given the opportunity to
demonstrate competence largely within school settings and to be appropriately and
explicitly assessed and reported upon. From conversations with teachers, their work
within this accreditation agenda is delivering a higher level of accountability and
professional work pressure than in the past.

From a more positive perspective, some teachers feel more fully supported and guided in
their supervision when drawing on the Professional Standards framework with its more
explicit articulations of "good" teaching practice and the "good" teacher. The
Professional Standards framework is seen by such practitioners as offering useful and
explicit descriptors expressed in a common language that is relevant not only to the
student teacher's practice but also to the teacher's own professional practice.
Additionally, emerging opportunities for teachers to document their work as educators of
pre-service teachers as a means of establishing their professional competence at the
higher accreditation levels of Accomplishment and Leadership offer the potential for
teachers to link their own accreditation needs more strongly to their work in professional
experience programs.

However, increased bureaucratic scrutiny directed towards the work of schools and
teachers is undoubtedly contributing to significant work intensification. Concurrently the
political climate is calling for schools to be more market savvy and responsive. In school
contexts, governmentality has been linked to the rise in public accountability of school
performance and learning outcomes for students. When combined with a policy of
increased parent choice in schooling, the result is mounting pressure placed on schools
and teachers. The performance of schools, teachers and students is being more insistently
calibrated, measured and publicly reported on against externally determined and
moderated assessment tools and testing regimes. There is anecdotal evidence that the
pervasive climate of accountability is working in some schools to divert attention from

broader responsibilities of the teaching profession, including support for the development of new generations of teachers.

Revisiting Partnerships

Given this set of challenges and opportunities pertinent to the field of professional experience, it is important to reconsider productive forms of relationship and partnership linking universities and schools. However, the following words of Cardini sound a pertinent warning:

> Although theoretical definitions present partnerships as a cluster of symmetrical and complementary sector partners, in practice partnerships tend to show asymmetrical and unbalanced relationships between different members;...and…although the theoretical concept of partnership is directly linked to the idea of social and community participation, in practice partnerships seem to be the instrument to implement top down central policies   (Cardini, 2006, p.398).

Given the strengthening agenda to prescribe policy and practice from centralised structures, including the forms of relationship within teacher education, Cardini's words are pertinent. If relationships and partnerships are to be forged in locally appropriate ways, universities and schools need to be proactively and creatively involved in their development.

Huxham and Vangen (2000) claim that the essence of a partnership is encapsulated within the notion of "collaborative advantage". In seeking to highlight the tendency for "collaborative advantage" to lapse into "collaborative inertia", they cite three elements of particular significance to the form and function of any collaborative intent: "These three elements can be organised around three themes: (i) resources and aims; (ii) language and culture; and (iii) trust and power" (p.293). Each of these themes is of significance when relationships between universities and schools around professional experience are considered. With respect to resources for example, issues of limited teacher time, crowded staffrooms as well as low levels of supervisory payments to teachers are all reported as elements which may mitigate against their willingness to support Professional Experience programs. In considering aims, sadly for universities, the major aim often reduces to that of just securing sufficient numbers of school placements for student teachers. This can be at the expense of attention to more significant aims concerning the quality of student teacher learning outcomes. However, for some teachers operating in response to different priorities, the main aim of their involvement in professional experience can become focussed on "gate-keeping" for the profession. Thus, whilst the final aim within professional experience for both groups of educators might seem the same - the production of quality graduate teachers to enter the profession - at times there can be divergence with respect to more immediate imperatives guiding professional experience programs.

 With respect to "language and culture", the distinct discursive practices of universities and schools, including the articulation of differing bodies of knowledge and practice, are often simplified to the rhetoric of theory / practice divide. Yet intersections between

language and culture are also articulated within the discursive work associated with the constitution of the professional identities of teachers and academics. Foucault's (1977) contribution to examining the nexus between identity and discourse would place power as the third partner in this dynamic. Thus additionally, issues of trust and power provide an insistent backdrop to relations between universities and school and between academics and teachers. Here concerns over claims with respect to authority and legitimacy, hierarchies and disciplinary practices, often serve to provide bulwarks against change and fuel fear concerning diminishment of institutional and individual control. Trust between those universities and schools that aim to work in collaborative ways is crucial. It can be a fragile aspect of such relationships and needs to be consolidated through adequate time and resource allocation, open communication and longstanding commitment to the maintenance of relationships.

If, as Cardini (2006) asserts, symmetry is a significant consideration in the success or otherwise of collaboration and partnerships, then modes of exchange and differentials with respect to value and reward, as played out across the relationships between teacher educators and teachers and between universities and schools, need to be carefully considered and perhaps reconceptualised. Symmetry with respect to relationships requires attention to issues of mutual respect, mutual benefit and mutually agreed forms and levels of participation. Significantly the rhetoric of "learning communities" can convey a stronger sense of such mutual endeavour, connection and shared reward. Thus reconceptualising professional experience in terms of the social structure of learning communities may be a productive way to work towards greater symmetry of relationships.

Learning Communities
For Lave and Wegner (1991), the terms "learning community" and "community of practice" acknowledge a view of learning which is situated not so much in the individual but arising through certain forms of social co-participation (p.14). The focus is not on the individual performing individual acts in a socio-cultural setting but towards the productive unit of analysis being the community itself. A significant consideration concerning learning including professional learning for teachers shifts then towards consideration of the kinds of social engagements that provide the proper contexts for such learning. If professional experience as a context is conceptualised in terms of a learning community, all participants, student teachers, teachers and university mentors, can be positioned as potential learners. When conceptualising productive forms of learning communities, Lave and Wegner developed an analytical perspective they term "legitimate peripheral participation" (p.29). "'Legitimate peripheral participation" provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice" (ibid.). Given the fact that the field of professional experience is a learning context populated by novices and experts, the work of Lave and Wegner is useful. Of significance is the co-learning aspect encapsulated in this perspective. As outlined by W.F Hanks in the Forward to their book:

> Learning is a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind. This means, among other things, that it is mediated by

differences of perspective among co-participants. It is the community, or at least those participating in the learning context, who "learn" under this definition. Learning is, as it were, distributed among co-participants, not a one-person act (Hanks in Lave & Wegner, 1991, p.15).

Professional experience or the practicum is commonly structured around a hierarchical view of the supervisory relationship, one that frequently positions the student teacher as sole learner, guided by the teacher as expert. This dynamic fits well with a view of teacher "becoming" that assumes the unidirectional transmission of expert knowledge and practice to the student teacher. Lave and Wegner (1991) in no way discount the importance to the novice of immersion within a learning community and engagement in productive relations with those members seen as "masters". However, for these theorists "legitimate peripherality" in terms of a learning community encompasses for all participants, newcomers and the old-timers, access to various positions and experiences and allows for multiple learning trajectories. Thus implicit in this conceptualisation of a learning community is respect for and valuing of what is termed the "constructively naïve perspective", that of the novice (ibid.). Also implicit is a belief that novices and experts can productively, concurrently and reciprocally learn together. If everyone's perspective is considered, "everyone can to some degree be considered a 'newcomer' to the future of a changing community" (ibid.). This view of a learning community assumes a co-learning environment, implying unfettered participation at multiple levels. Yet, inevitably for any such community "its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning (i.e., for legitimate peripheral participation)" (ibid. p.98). As Lave and Wegner themselves indicate:

> Granting legitimate participation to newcomers with their own viewpoints introduces into any community of practice all the tensions of the continuity-displacement contradiction. These may be muted, though not extinguished, by differences of power between old-timers and newcomers (ibid. p.116).

Perhaps more than 'muting', the participation of newcomers can in fact be destabilised and even 'silenced' by power relations within the community. Thus despite Lave and Wegner's apparent acknowledgment of the significance of power relations, it has been claimed that their theory of legitimate peripheral participation is based on a certain democratic idealism and does not sufficiently acknowledge social complexity in learning and development.

The Activity Theorist Yrjö Engeström (1999) like Lave and Wegner takes the community of practice as the central concept with respect to learning. However, within his Activity Theory model, the community is placed in interactional relationships that seek to represent the complex dialectic between the subjective and the systemic views. It thus aims to counter a simplistic view of learning when seen as a one-way movement from a periphery occupied by novices, to a centre inhabited by experienced masters of a given practice. With respect to Lave and Wegner's concept of learning community Engeström states:

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> What seems to be missing is movement outward and in unexpected
> directions: questioning of authority, criticism, innovation, initiation of
> change. Instability and inner contradictions of practice are all but missing
> (Engeström in Engeström, Miettinen & Punamäki 1999, p.12).

The complexity of relations that Engeström poses here is highly relevant to the work of
developing a useful model in which schools/teachers and universities work together in
collaborative practices or aspirational partnerships associated with professional
experience. Any such model needs to acknowledge the dynamic tensions and
complexities that commonly arise within such relationships. Thus addressing issues
within relationships of instability, contradiction and power differentials is a necessary
step for moving beyond simplistic generalisations and optimistic advocacy of
"partnerships" in teacher education. It is not that partnerships and learning communities
are not structures that offer productive approaches to collaborative work, it is that in
reality they function as part of broader and more complex socio-cultural contexts. In
setting up and maintaining productive partnerships these contextual influences need
particular attention.

Engeström (1999) has proposed Activity Theory as a framework that allows
representation of dynamic complexity with the focus being a more productive unit of
analysis of the social relations of learning beyond that of community: the broader unit of
the "activity system" (Engeström 1999, p.31). In this model the community is placed
relative to and responsive to elements which arise within the dynamics associated with
power differentials and subject positions as well as discursive and regulative practices.
Thus when applied to professional experience, Engeström's model provides a way of
representing not only the complexity of professional experience but also the ways in
which what might count as "community" will inevitably intersect with other elements in
the system. It is thus a productive model through which to understand how community
and partnerships at times encounter difficulty and resistance. It also provides an analytic
framework for the work of reconceptualising community that takes account of the
intersecting complexities arising from relations of power, discourse and identity.

The following diagram represents Professional Experience as an Activity System
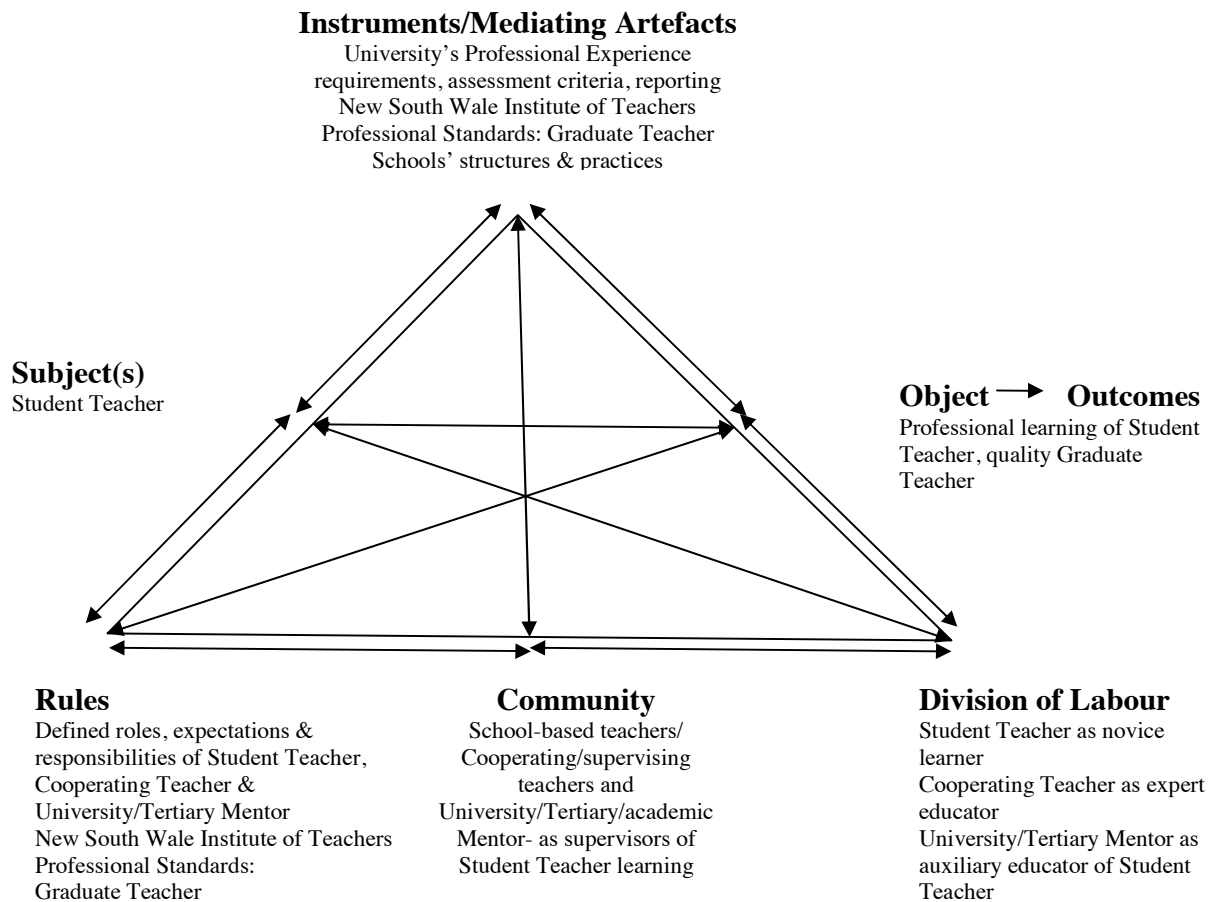structured in terms of traditional supervisory relationships.

Instruments/Mediating Artefacts
University's Professional Experience
requirements, assessment criteria, reporting
New South Wale Institute of Teachers
Professional Standards: Graduate Teacher
Schools' structures & practices

Subject(s)
Student Teacher

Object → Outcomes
Professional learning of Student
Teacher, quality Graduate
Teacher

Rules
Defined roles, expectations &
responsibilities of Student Teacher,
Cooperating Teacher &
University/Tertiary Mentor
New South Wale Institute of Teachers
Professional Standards:
Graduate Teacher

Community
School-based teachers/
Cooperating/supervising
teachers and
University/Tertiary/academic
Mentor- as supervisors of
Student Teacher learning

Division of Labour
Student Teacher as novice
learner
Cooperating Teacher as expert
educator
University/Tertiary Mentor as
auxiliary educator of Student
Teacher

Figure 1. Professional Experience as an Activity System (after Engeström (1999).

Key components of this model are:
- The "community" is depicted as focussed solely on supervision of the student teacher's professional learning provided by both school Cooperating Teachers and university Tertiary Mentors. The purpose of the community is facilitation of student teacher learning.
- "Instruments" and "rules" are presented as defined by the university and aligned with institutionally sanctioned standards and accreditation measures for the Graduate Teacher.
- There is a hierarchical "division of labour", with the supervising teacher as "expert", Tertiary Mentor as auxiliary educator in the school setting and student teacher as sole learner.

For many teacher education institutions this model encapsulates common practice approaches to professional experience and thus provides a "base-line" Activity System

representation of professional experience and its relationships against which any changes can be mapped. Any shift in the form and function of the "community" element when placed within an Activity System, requires consideration of new interactions and responses within the linked elements and vice versa. As in a biological ecosystem change in any one element needs to be seen as reverberating dynamically across all linked elements, eliciting responses as well as resistances. Thus specifically, questions such as how and by whom the "rules" are established and enforced, what limitations are inherent in the "mediating artefacts" and in what ways the "division of labour" influences and or limits the learning process in any system model are significant to what forms of community are possible. Thus for example to reconceptualise community as a "learning community" the Activity System model indicates where shifts can occur or need to occur in all other elements of the system.

Professional Experience: A Reconceptualised Activity System
It is important to consider the forms of learning community encapsulating professional experience that could be productive given the present neoliberal climate. This paper proposes that one approach for universities challenged by the need to strengthen professional experience links with schools is the development of new relationships with the school sector that more effectively focus on the professional learning of teachers themselves albeit within current resource limitations. Given the intensification of teachers' work, if universities seek to involve more teachers consistently in teacher education and in particular within professional experience programs, productive overlaps need to be found between the teachers' own on-going professional learning needs as classroom educators and contributions they might make to the development of student teachers.

Neoliberalism has delivered to teachers increasing pressure to engage with and document their own professional work and learning against accreditation standards. A similar pressure is being exerted on universities and student teachers, with course accreditation and Graduate Teacher status linked to the same basic set of professional teaching standards. When teachers are involved in working with pre-service teachers, that supervisory work is guided and assessed against this common set of professional teaching standards. Thus increasingly, there is a common set of protocols, a common framework of teacher competence, albeit moderated for particular career stages, providing a linking rubric relevant to both pre-service and in-service professional work and learning. As such the various manifestations of the accreditation agenda are providing opportunities to explicitly relate a teacher's work with pre-service teachers to their own professional learning, as measured and documented against the common rubric of professional teaching standards. Thus it is within the shared pressures arising from the insistence of the accreditation agenda that opportunities exist for new forms of learning community including structures around multiple learning relationships and trajectories. If professional experience is reconceptualised in terms of a learning community in which both pre-service and in-service teachers are co-learners with respect to requirements arising from the accreditation context, such change and its implications become clearer when mapped as a new iteration of Engeström's Activity System.
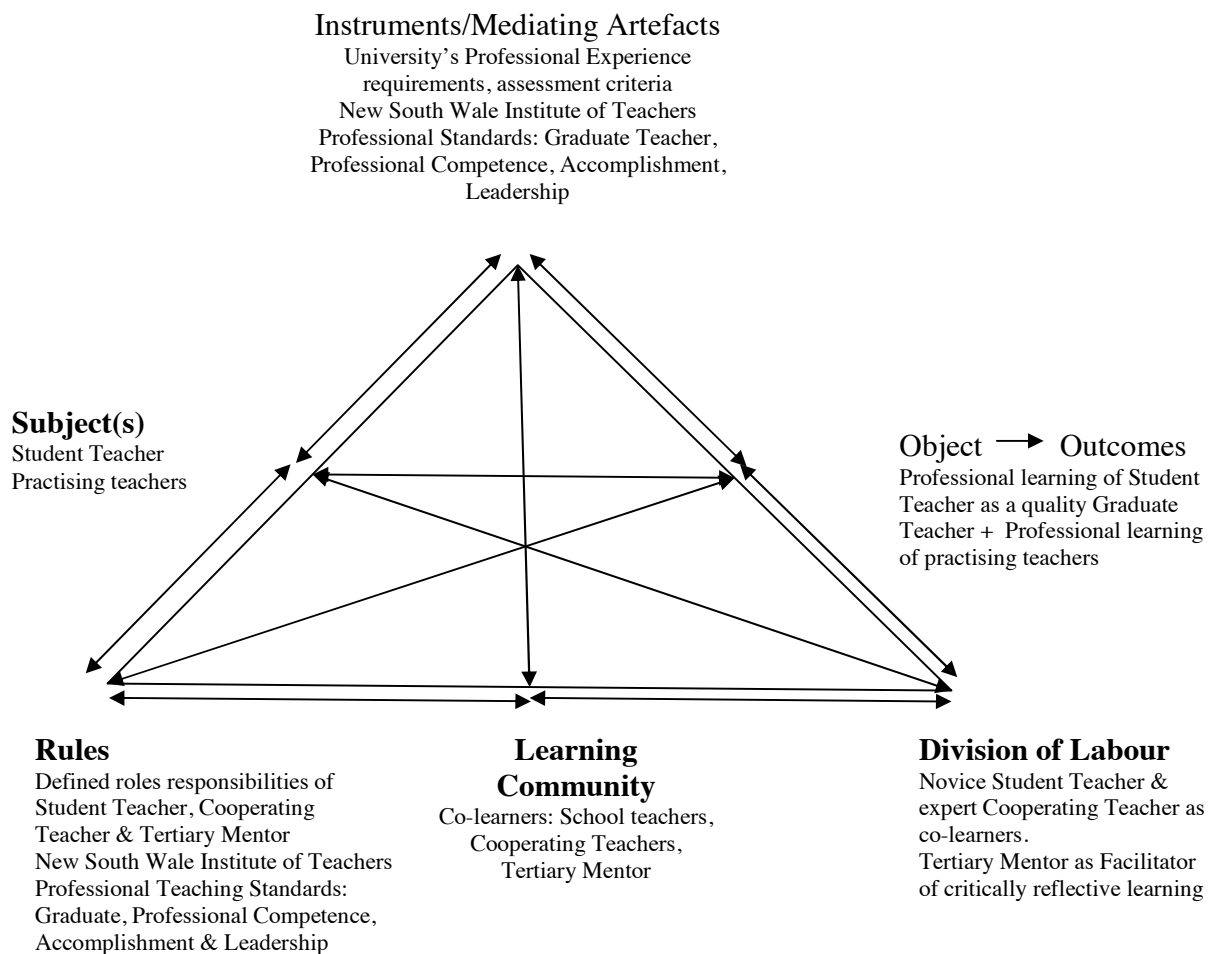
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Teacher + Professional learning
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Rules
Defined roles responsibilities of
Student Teacher, Cooperating
Teacher & Tertiary Mentor
New South Wale Institute of Teachers
Professional Teaching Standards:
Graduate, Professional Competence,
Accomplishment & Leadership

**Learning
Community**
Co-learners: School teachers,
Cooperating Teachers,
Tertiary Mentor

Division of Labour
Novice Student Teacher &
expert Cooperating Teacher as
co-learners.
Tertiary Mentor as Facilitator
of critically reflective learning

Figure 2. Professional Experience Activity System (after Engeström, 1999).within a
Learning Community as an

Key components in this model are:

- The "subject" position is occupied by both pre-service and in-service teachers as
learners.
- "Outcomes" would broaden to professional learning for all participants and
attainment of professional learning and accreditation consistent with all teaching
developmental stages.
- "Community" including its emergent partnerships, is reconceptualised in terms
of a "learning community" encompassing student teachers, supervising teachers
and Tertiary Mentors as co-learners.
- In terms of "division of labour" the Tertiary Mentor's role would shift from that
of an additional supervisor of the student teacher to facilitating critical reflection
and learning for both student teachers and practising teachers. Rather than

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hierarchical with expert to novice learning flow, all participants are positioned as learners.

- The "mediating artefacts" and "rules" broaden from those articulated strongly through the New South Wale Institute of Teachers Graduate Teacher Standards to the standards framework as a whole, providing guidance for the development and professional learning of teachers at all career stages.

Conclusion

In proposing a shift towards a learning community approach to professional experience a specific form of partnership between universities and schools is being advocated. Key to the functioning of this community and its emergent partnerships is a commitment from universities to contribute effectively to the professional learning agendas of schools in exchange for teachers' support within professional experience programs. In shifting the role of the universities' Tertiary Mentor from academic supervisor (at times ambiguously of both student teacher and Cooperating Teacher) to one focussed on facilitating learning for both student teachers and teachers, a new socio-cultural context may be created around professional experience. The shared accreditation and accountability protocols articulated through such instruments as the professional standards frameworks provide common ground for such collaborative work. It is also ground in which the university can contribute academic input, including providing support for critically reflective perspectives. In the present neoliberal political climate a capacity to work within and at times against insistent accreditation and accountability agendas is increasingly important for educators at all levels.

TEIs are currently challenged in allocating resources towards academics, in both continuing and contracted positions, who aim to work with pre-service teachers in schools during Professional Experience placements. The resources allocated to this academic contribution are significant both in budgetary and in workload terms and are often hard fought for at a Faculty level. Commonly the academic role is focussed on the learning of the student teacher whilst only in a smaller way facilitating the supervisory work of Cooperating Teachers. Common practice during a school visit for a Tertiary Mentor would be the observation of the individual student teacher in the classroom, writing a report on their performance and discussing the student teacher's progress at an individual level. Varying degrees of communication occur with Cooperating Teachers with the focus again towards the learning of the pre-service teacher. What is absent commonly in this model is a collegial relationship between the supervising teacher and the Tertiary Mentor and attention to the Cooperating Teacher's own professional learning needs, other than those explicitly arising from their supervision role.

It could be argued that a more significant and resource effective contribution of the university could be directed towards concurrently supporting the professional learning of student teachers and that of their supervising teachers. Rather than Tertiary Mentors working in a 1:1 supervisory relationship with a pre-service teacher their work could shift to facilitating critical discussion within groups of pre-service and in-service teachers. The focus would be facilitating the development within the school of a learning community cohering around professional experience placements. In order to maximise the peer

learning potential within these groups, 'community of learners' sites would be encouraged to accept from 5-10 student teachers in a group at one time so that the Tertiary Mentor's work could be concentrated within the one school. With such resource efficiencies, support for this work could be more easily accommodated within the budget allocation of the university towards its professional experience programs.

Attention to Engeström's Activity Theory model however provides a valuable and salutary reminder of the complex and dynamic effects of any change proposed for ways in which universities and schools work together around professional experience programs. What the model signifies is that change occurs in much more than community structures alone. Also implicated are inevitable shifts in subject positions, rules, division of labour as well as learning outcomes. Thus for any partnership and learning community that links university and school site(s) to evolve, attention needs to be collaboratively directed towards all the complex and dynamic elements associated with the community. It is only by acknowledging the complex practices associated with developing and maintaining productive partnerships and communities that enduring change can occur. Engeström's Activity Theory provides a productive model through which to develop an understanding of such complexity for both present structures and reconceptualised ones.

If universities can find ways of contributing more productively to the practices of schools and teachers they would be in a better position to expect the significant support they require from the profession around their professional experience programs. This paper has argued that new relationships can be forged between universities and schools by creating co-learning opportunities around the field of professional experience in association with specifically supporting teachers as professional learners. Additionally, it has claimed that responses required to the present neoliberal agendas of pervasive accountability, measurement and accreditation can serve (almost paradoxically) to bind institutions and practitioners. Mutually supportive partnerships between schools and universities and between teachers and academics when articulated through learning communities have the potential to turn the pressures of neoliberal accountability into productive professional learning opportunities for all.

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