

A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS: YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW

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tomorrow

Helen Woodward and Catherine Sinclair-Gaffey

Like many universities, the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur has many partnerships with the schools in the area. Partnerships are formed through joint membership of various committees, in-school experiences, teachers-as-tutors, teachers-as-students and joint research projects. All of these forms of partnership play different roles in establishing links between the University and the work place. This paper will explore the various partnerships, their origins (the yesterday), current purposes, structures and conduct (today) and, through an evaluation of the current partnerships, suggest possibilities for the future (tomorrow).

Introduction

There are many contacts and interactions between the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur (UWS, Macarthur) and schools. Some might even call them partners. But is it really a partnership or is it a ploy by the hierarchy to impress those who count? What is the reality? What role do the players play in this partnership? What voice do the partners have or is there a power play going on so that it disenfranchises some of the members? How is the relationship seen by the various members? Are the university participants executing a position of power in order to seemingly produce a partnership that honours the knowledge and understanding of teachers? Who is in control? What is this control and why do we perceive the necessity for

a partnership in the first place? How can we do it better? These are but some of the questions we started to ask when we began to investigate the nature of the relationship between the University and the teaching profession. To acquire information as to how the participants view the partnership we asked both university staff and teachers some of the above questions. Before analysing participant answers to these questions, it is worthwhile to consider the need for partnerships, the context of the partnerships that exist between the university and the schools and how they originated.

Importance of Partnerships in Teacher Education

To begin, we need to consider what are partnerships and the importance of university-school partnerships. The definition used in this paper, extends that used by Dobbins (1993, p.1) in describing a "practicum partnership", to include a mutually beneficial relationship between the schools, teacher employers, teacher unions and the University which acknowledges their involvement in the education of prospective and practising teachers, recognises the particular contribution each partner has to make and considers that each partner is equally valued and involved in the process.

Traditionally, schools have been concerned with children's learning and universities (tertiary institutions) with the professional development of student teachers (Dobbins, 1993; Low, 1988; Zeichner, 1989). This traditional situation often resulted in failure to develop "mutually beneficial" liaisons between schools and the universities. It perpetuated and exacerbated the gaps between theory and practice and left the schools feeling they were being 'used' by the tertiary institutions as "child banks", that is, the providers of children on whom student teachers could practise their teaching techniques (Fraser, 1995, p. 1, 2). Thus, as the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) reported in *The Discipline Review of Teacher Education in Mathematics and Science* (1989):

In general, everyone is losing out. The higher education institutions complain that they have no control over the appointment of school supervisors; the school supervisors complain that they do not know what goes on in the curriculum studies/methodology in the teacher education program; the students complain about lack of congruence between what they are taught in their classes and what they are allowed to do in the schools. (p. 118)

Recently, in Australia as in the United Kingdom (Field, 1993), there have been increasing calls for an improvement in communication and information-sharing, and closer collaboration and partnership between the schools and the universities (DEET, 1989; Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, 1994; New South Wales Ministry of Education, Youth and Women's Affairs, 1990; Wiltshire, 1994). As The Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, 1994 suggested:

Teaching and other practical experiences should be planned and conducted in close collaboration with participating schools and teachers. The notion of partnerships between higher education institutions and schools in the conduct of preservice teacher education should be fostered so that all parties have a genuine sense of 'ownership' of the program and an understanding of each other's perspectives on the fundamental relationship between the theoretical and practical components of the program. (p.15)

Further, School - university partnerships can also play a role in reform of education at both the university and the school level.

According to Gore (1995), these partnerships, "are fundamental to proposed reforms and considerable faith must be placed in the capacity of partnerships to both participate and sustain the necessary change in both contexts"(p.14).

A review of research on school-university partnerships suggests that the potential benefits of such partnership to both schools and universities include:

1. More clearly defined roles for the partners.
2. Shared ownership of in-school experiences.
 3. Increased communication and cooperation within schools leading to the development of "professional discourse" and a support network amongst supervising teachers .
4. The development of a closer and more professional working relationship between the university and the schools resulting in a "joint dialogue" between the schools and the University, increased enthusiasm in schools towards in-school experiences, improved perceptions by the partners of each other, a reduction in the gap between university and schools, increases teacher knowledge of the students' university-based experiences and increased commitment to the university's teacher education program and/or its in-school

experiences.

5. The professional development of university and school personnel as well as student teachers with an improvement in each partner's competency and the creation of a "reciprocal influence". (Dobbins, 1993; Fraser, 1995; Gaffey, 1994; Mayer & Phillips, 1995; Millwater & Yarrow, 1995; Sinclair-Gaffey & Dobbins, 1995; Taggart, 1988; Traill & Kemp, 1980).

However, despite the reported benefits attached to the development of partnerships with schools, barriers also exist. As reported in the literature, these barriers include:

1. The need for time to develop and maintain the partnership.
2. The reluctance of schools to make the "hard decisions" such as failing student teachers in their in-school experience.
3. The university - school partnership (particularly between the university lecturers and the supervising teachers and school coordinators) being seen by student teachers as a threat to their own relationship with the supervising teachers.
4. The importance of high levels of interpersonal skills of university personnel to work closely with the various partners and the need for training of university and school personnel.
5. The need to adequately address funding and resources .
6. The need to maximise support for partnerships rather than relying on key personnel. (Goodlad, 1994; Gore, 1995; Haberman, 1971 cited in Clark, 1988; Mayer & Phillips, 1995; Sinclair- Gaffey & Dobbins, 1995; Williams, 1994).

Partnerships at UWS, Macarthur: From yesterday to today

The Faculty of Education at University of Western Sydney, Macarthur and the Metropolitan South West Region of the Department of School Education in New South Wales have enjoyed a long period of cooperation in the initial preparation and continuing professional development of teachers. Through this cooperation there have been many connections made in an endeavour to create a partnership between these two educational organisations. This cooperation is characterised by committees, professional development, research, secondment and school-based programs.

Committees

The committee format operates at many levels from executive personnel

within the Department and University to classroom teacher and lecturer. The overarching committee, The Committee of Cooperation, as its name implies, seeks to encourage cooperation at the top level between the two organisations. It was formed in the mid 1980's by the Dean of the Faculty of Education and the head of the Metropolitan South West region

of the NSW Department of School Education. The Committee of Cooperation deals with ideas for joint implementation of courses at both the university and Departmental sites and research. It is controlled jointly by the Dean of the Faculty of Education and the Regional Assistant Director General from the Department of School Education.

Committees are also in place to assist the university in course development at a subject level. For example, one such committee, the In-School Committee assists in the development of the in-school sections of our courses. Members of academic staff are also on Department of School Education Regional Committees, for example the Research and Evaluation Committee which deals with approval of applications for all research and evaluation projects to be carried out in the schools in the region. Personnel from the Department of School Education also play a prominent role in all course advisory committees thus helping to ensure the course content is both appropriate and applicable to the classroom, school or early childhood centre.

Professional Development

Professional development takes a variety of forms within the partnership. The Faculty of Education has combined with the Department of School Education to form the Centre for Professional Development. This centre produces packages of subjects that serve as both teacher development and credit towards university degrees. Other forms of professional development come from joint development of a regional journal, instigation of the Macarthur Lecture series, teachers participating in both full- and part-time study and teachers also being part of lecturing teams at the university.

Research

There are continuing opportunities for members of the partnership to interact via research. Again this takes many forms, the most common forms being joint projects initiated by the University, the Innovative Links project involving schools in a co-researching role and a Literacy and Learning project which combines research and professional development. Various academic staff carry out individual research projects either as part of higher degrees or their normal professional responsibilities, or for personal interest and professional development. On the other hand, teachers completing degrees also carry out research within the school context, again making the links between the two parties.

Secondment

Every year the university, in a joint program with the Department of School Education, seconded practising teachers to its staff. This program has been expanded over the past several years from one seconded lecturer in 1992 to three in 1995 (early childhood, primary

and secondary). The duration of the secondment is one year with the teachers retaining the right of return to their previous position at the end of the secondment. This particular program adds further legitimacy to the university courses in initial teacher education.

School-based programs

All Bachelor of Teaching undergraduate courses in the Faculty of Education have very dominant in-school components. These experiences range from one day a week only three weeks after entry into the Bachelor of Teaching degree, blocks of experience in a variety of settings, depending on the course, to a prolonged whole semester experience in the final semester of the degree. Many of these experiences go beyond the 'usual' practicum and aim at the student experiencing the culture and community of school life as well as becoming practising teachers. These programs are jointly designed through the In-school Committee and various planning days. Pre-practicum meetings are also conducted with student teachers and school personnel to encourage a two-way discussion of program philosophy and requirements, and the roles and expectations of participants (lecturers included). Students, teachers and lecturers are all involved in the evaluation of these programs each semester. Finally, teachers are invited to be part of various interviewing panels that assess student competencies as beginning teachers. For example, teachers take part in the Department of School Education eligibility for employment interviews and a 'Defence' interview. Students must be assessed as satisfactory as a beginning teacher at the 'Defence' interview before deemed as passing their teacher education course.

Evaluating the school-university partnership

Even with the above cooperative experiences which have come into existence over the last three to ten years, it was still not clear as to the nature of the relationship between the Faculty of Education and the Department of School Education. Both parties would acknowledge that there were many opportunities for interaction between the players but how do the players themselves view the partnership? Also while, UWS, Macarthur has developed a wide range of partnerships there was some concern as Furlong, Whitty, Barrett, Barton & Miles (1995) pointed out that, "Adopting a partnership model is in itself no necessary guarantee of quality in initial teacher education" (p295). Further, the literature acknowledged both the benefits and barriers attached to such partnerships and so it was considered timely after some years of building up the partnership relationship to inquire as to how it was viewed by its participants.

Both university staff and teachers were asked some of the questions outlined in the first paragraph by means of open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix A). Data gathered from the respondents have been analysed

in terms of its source - schools or university. The responses show a wide range of ideas and indicate initial trends. General comparisons of school and University views from the questionnaire are summarised in the table below.

Table 1. The partnership in action

CRITERIA	RESPONSES FROM SCHOOL PERSONNEL (n=18)	RESPONSES FROM UNIVERSITY PERSONNEL (n=20)
Partnership involvement	Involved in all current activities	Involved in all current activities plus more
Initiator of involvement	University(11 responses) Both the school and the University (3) The schools themselves (4)	University (28 mentions) ^a , The school (6)
Balance of	A balanced partnership (12)	A balanced partnership (16)
Partnership	Unbalanced towards the University(4)	Unbalanced towards the University (4)
Control of partnership	Shared school-University control (10) School control (4) University control (0)	University control (15) ^a Shared school-University control (7) School control (6)
Level of involvement in partnership	Equal school & Uni involvement (14)	Equal school & Uni involvement (20) ^a University (2)
Value of partnership	Positive (17)	Positive (20)

^a this number is larger than the number of respondents because some entered several interactions on the one questionnaire

From the above table it can be seen that, both the university and school personnel groups of respondents were involved in all the partnership activities currently available (ie university and Regional committees, professional development, research, secondment and/ or school-based programs) with university personnel able to add several others such as school committees, membership of the NSW Board of Studies (the organisation that develops curriculum material and syllabi for government schools in NSW), professional organisations and through the conduct of inservice programs in schools. Some respondents included

up to seven involvements on the one questionnaire.

The partnership between the University and the schools from the school personnel point of view is considered balanced, worthwhile and generative. There was very little indication from school personnel of the University controlling the situation (unlike the perceptions of the University personnel) and at no time was the University the sole player even though in most instances the University initiated the involvement. The University was not considered to dominate or dictate either the procedures or the interaction. The decisions were reported as jointly made and the involvement maintained by continual contact, negotiation and consultation. Only four teachers considered the partnership as unbalanced in favour of the University. Two of these teachers were studying at the University at the time and did not see that relationship as needing to be balanced.

The significant features of the partnership for both school and University respondents were the communication, liaison and cooperation between partners; availability and support for each other; and, the mutual benefit derived. School personnel noted the positive attitudes of both school and university staff, consistent liaison between the two parties and the noticeable development in all concerned. The organisational features that were reported as significant were the "long term notification" of impending interaction and "well informed meetings". As school and university respondents noted:

School respondents

"ongoing and consistent communication"
"honesty and willingness to trust"
"open door policy for both partners"
"complete cooperation and professionalism exists"

"the availability of the university coordinators supporting the school and the students"

University respondents

"generosity of the school"
"personal learning"
"support of the region"
"willingness of the schools to host the students and the lecturers"

"cooperation of the school staff"

"helpfulness of the school principals"

The benefits derived from the partnership for both school and university personnel included the contacts made and the reciprocal learning, professional development for each partner and the sharing of new ideas between schools and the university resulting in benefits to both the school and the university. Schools also added that the partnership allowed a recognition of the contribution they made to teacher education and to quality teaching and quality teachers. One school went so far as to claim that the "University of Western Sydney

Macarthur is the best teacher training institution in NSW" and was pleased and proud to be able to be part of any program emanating from the University .

Additional benefits for university personnel included working with teachers, seeing how things operate in and out of the classroom and "keeping in touch with reality". The partnership was also seen to add "legitimacy given to the university courses" particularly through the involvement of school personnel in the delivery of the teaching programs, enable the university to be positively viewed by the teaching profession and encourage a "two way flow of information". Lecturers were also able to see "theory put into practice" and gave "opportunity to implement new and innovative strategies" or even as a foundation for both "policy development" and "future academic publications".

On the negative side a few school-based respondents (3) commented that "practicum supervisors from the university were not always prepared" and that there was a lack of lecturer contact and communication which contradicts to some extent the previous comments on the continual contact made in order to maintain the involvement. There was also some feeling of "overload caused by additional work", not an uncommon feature of the average school ethos these days. Issues that arose from negative statements about the partnership from university personnel were that some of the school teachers were "not necessarily good role models" as they had not kept up to date with current theory or put it into practice. This situation caused conflict at times as student teachers were not able to see the theory put into practice and were therefore not sure of its validity in the 'real' world. Time was also an issue from two points of view- firstly, the teachers did not have enough time to work jointly with either the student teachers or the lecturers and, secondly, the lecturers did not always have enough time to spend, in the way they would want to, when they were at the schools. Travelling to the schools was also time consuming and sometimes resulted in abbreviated contact.

Suggestions for improvement in the partnership from school-based respondents were limited in that most felt the partnership was working and needed little change. Those who had previously stated negative views obviously countered these with the appropriate suggestions- for example, more lecturer contact and better coordination. On the whole schools were satisfied with some requesting clarification of expectations and more contact in the form of longer practica. Others asked for further discussions with university staff as to future directions and anything that would enhance learning. One respondent felt that lecturers should visit the real world of teaching with the added suggestion of the possibility of exchange of university staff with school staff. Another had experienced difficulty with timetabling school experience and hence requested changes in this regard. A need

for correct protocol when students were visiting the schools was also requested. Even though some respondents felt there was room for improvement, the greater majority praised the partnership, wishing it to continue and expand in a similar fashion to that already established.

For university personnel, when considering ways to improve the partnership, time became the most emphasised issue with suggestions but also that some of the meetings (school committees) were not very productive and needed to be monitored more closely. It was suggested that money be made available for more time release for teachers so they could work more with the student teachers in joint planning. Time also was needed for ongoing professional development at both the school and university level. More school visits were recommended as was the increased use of teachers from the schools in our programs. In looking at the time spent on the partnership, weekly contact was made by some lecturers while other contacts were more sporadic depending on the nature of the partnership. It would seem that there are many hours of contact and the contact is being used well but more is needed if the university is to realise its full potential and if the school personnel are themselves to grow and develop professionally as well as support the growth and development of student teachers.

Creating balanced partnerships: Implications for tomorrow

So, what is the nature of the partnership between the University and the schools? It is clear that school and university personnel are involved in at all levels in the Faculty and Department of School Education. The partnership is both valued by all concerned and considered to be highly relevant to the current educational development. It is, generally speaking, balanced in that the majority of respondents stated that contacts were interactive and reciprocal. No one member dominated except in a small number of cases where the dominating party could validate the lack of reciprocity. Of even greater importance to the actual balance of the partnership is the nature of the partnership. The roles played by the schools was seen as very valuable as was the importance of the input to the student teachers at the school level. The co-existence of theory and practice at all levels and the continual importance placed on all participants living in the 'real' world of education was seen as extremely important. In agreement with the literature, the benefits of the partnership as identified in this study include closer relationships with schools and the subsequent development of commitment and support for the University's program and personnel. Professional development and the notion of "reciprocal learning" was also most evident in the present study.

The current study, together with the findings from Gore's review of the literature (1995), suggest the following considerations when building

genuine partnerships:

1. Democracy is required in partnerships and hierarchical relationships "where expertise is seen to belong more clearly to one set of participants than another" (McCulloch & Fidler, 1994, p.xiii), are to be avoided.
2. In the planning of the partnerships, the distinctive interests of all parties need to be taken into account.
3. Trust, communication and understanding of each partner's perspective should be developed
4. Time is needed to build and maintain the partnership- the strain

of

the reform should be acknowledged and allowed for in planning and adequate time for reflection provided.

5. Acknowledge and address the problems associated with a lack of, or limits on, rewards and recognition of individual in universities and school for collaborative activities need to be acknowledged and addressed.
6. Implement theory into practise through a deliberate link between university courses and school experience.
7. Joint responsibility and involvement by all partnership members in the planning of the partnership from the very beginning using a combination of top-down and bottom up strategies.
8. Development of common vision or goals and commitment by partners.
9. Ensure that reform and change actually takes place and not be just merely symbolic. (Banks, 1993; Bligh, 1984, cited in Nicol, 1993; Berry & Catoe, 1994; Clark, 1988; Clift & Say, 1988; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Dart & Drake, 1993; Elliot, Park & Holliday, 1994; Fiddler, 1994; Fullan, 1993; Furlong et al., 1988; Goodlad, 1994; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Harris & Harris, 1992-93; Mc Culloch 1994; Nichol, 1993; Snyder, 1994; Stallings & Kowalski, 1990; Whitehead, Foster, & Blight, 1994; Yopp, Guillaume & Savage, 1993-94).

Many of the recommendations for improvement, such as extra time, need to be considered particularly from the University point of view and at a more realistic view from the region itself. There is a continual importance placed on an increase in the student visits to schools as we grapple with a combination of union regulations, money available and student load. The notion of more time in schools in line with the current 'happenings' in England is not realistic and moves away from the partnership model.

The partnership between UWS, Macarthur and schools not only exists on paper but is a balanced, living interaction that benefits not only all those immediately concerned but those in the future whom it will serve as the teachers developed, the research conducted and the professional development explored maximises the potential of all concerned. This research has attempted to address the benefits, barriers and points of building genuine partnerships. With such partnerships still in their

infancy and the continual restructuring of both the school and university systems, information of the educational maintenance and possible reform is constantly shifting. Further endeavour is needed to consolidate what we have established and now know, and to move us forward in both our thinking and the partnerships we are building.

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APPENDIX A

-----UNIVERSITY - SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP UNIVERSITY QUESTIONNAIRE

We are gathering information about the various partnerships we have with schools and/or educational settings. We would appreciate your assistance through completion of this questionnaire. Any additional information you could add would be appreciated. (Return Date 13th March 1995)

1.Are you directly involved in any way with schools and/or educational settings (primary, secondary, early childhood, Department of School Education, Board of Studies, Catholic Education Office, Regional office, Independent system or other). If you are involved in more than one please indicate and photocopy this questionnaire if necessary. YesNo (if no please return questionnaire)

2.If yes How are you involved?

3.How often does this involvement take place?_____

4.Is it on-going or time framed?_____

5.For how long?_____

6.Who initiated the contact?

7.Who governs (controls) the process?

8.Who is involved?

9. What are the expected outcomes of this contact?

10.Why do you value this contact?

11.Of what value is this contact to:

11a. education

11b. teaching

11c. you

11d. the partnership

12. Do you see it as a partnership or is one party more dominant? If so who is the dominant party.

13. For you, what has been the most positive and the most negative aspects of developing the partnership?

14. For you, what has been the significant factors either assisting or restricting the partnership?

15. How could the partnership be improved?

16. Any further comments?

Thank you for your time and the information you have afforded us.
Please return this questionnaire to us by March 13th 1995

Helen Woodward & Catherine Sinclair-Gaffey

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY MACARTHUR
UNIVERSITY - SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP SCHOOL QUESTIONNAIRE

We are gathering information about the various partnerships we have with schools and/or educational settings. We would appreciate your assistance through completion of this questionnaire. Any additional information you could add would be appreciated. (Return Date 13th March 1995)

1. Is your school or any of your teachers/staff involved with the University. either through for example research, study, teaching, student involvement, committees, interviews panels?

YesNo

2. What is the nature of this involvement (research, , study, teaching, student involvement, committees, interviews panels, other [please state])? If more than one please state and photocopy this questionnaire if necessary.

3. Who initiated this involvement? _____

4. How often does this involvement take place?

5. How is this involvement maintained?

6.How are decisions made in these circumstances?

7.Is it a balanced partnership? Why/Why not?

8.Who governs(controls) the process?

9.Who is involved?

10.What are the expected outcomes of this contact?

11.Is it on-going or time framed? For how long?

12.Why do you value this contact?

13.Of what value is it to:

13a. education

13b. teaching

13c. you

13d. the partnership

14. For you, what has been the most positive and the most negative aspects of developing the partnership?

15. For you, what has been the significant factors either assisting or restricting the partnership?

16. How could the partnership be improved?

17. Any further comments?

Thank you for your time and the information you have afforded us.
Please return this questionnaire to us by March 13th 1995

Helen Woodward & Catherine Sinclair-Gaffey

Woodward & Sinclair-Gaffey AARE '95