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Teacher Education: The times they are a changing

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The world of teaching is undergoing rapid and radical changes for what is seen by many as a conservative profession. Significant changes are occurring in school curricula and assessment practices, together with an increasing emphasis on inclusive education. At the same time teachers are responsible for providing quality teaching and learning programs for an increasingly diverse and at risk student population.

During a time of diminishing resources teacher educators, along with other providers, are grappling with the need to integrate university based theoretical learning with relevant and effective field based learning. In response to this changing context new forms of partnerships and collaboration have emerged or have been pursued between universities, school systems and teachers.

This paper provides a history of the changing vision, shape and contexts of teacher education within the School of Education [NSW] at Australian Catholic University. Traditional models of relationships between schools, school systems and universities are examined in light of the evolving partnerships and alliances that are being pursued by Australian catholic University and key educational and community agencies. These partnerships are promoting a climate of shared ownerships within a framework of field based learning. Integral to these partnerships is the student teacher who not only benefits from but also enriches the work of the other partners. The paper includes an evaluation of some of the current field based initiatives and presents models and principles for extending these partnerships and initiatives in the future.

Background

Teachers entering the profession need to be ready to assume the responsibilities associated with this "profoundly more complex and professional demanding activity that teaching is now compared to the 1970s" (A Class Act, 1998, p. 10). Teacher educators are becoming increasingly aware that the responsibility of adequately preparing teachers for their role has to be shared with other members of the teaching profession and the wider community. This

awareness has been associated with a stronger emphasis on field based learning (A Class Act, 1998; Adey, 1997; Blunkett, 1998). A collaborative commitment by stakeholders to field based learning provides avenues for the teaching profession to form alliances focussed on the development of appropriate teacher education, induction and continuing professional development programs.

An educational alliance is a formal agreement between two or more parties to work together to achieve particular educational outcomes (Butcher, 1998, 1998a). Such alliances have to be effective in research and teacher professional development across their teaching and across the educational spectrum (Dockett, Howard & Perry, 1999; Perry, Howard, Dockett & Tracey, 1998; Sutherland, 1997). Alliances involve firm commitment on the part of each stakeholder to work together in adopting an agenda and approach which addresses the needs of all partners and focuses upon mutually beneficial outcomes that no one stakeholder group could achieve on its own (Butcher, Howard, Dockett & Perry, 1999). This requires an openness to and respect for the values and realities of the different groups involved and the substantive allocation of time to ensuring regular and effective communication between partners (Day, 1998; Sutherland, 1997). These educational alliances provide a more participative basis for the implementation of field based learning.

The participative basis for these partnerships is different in kind from the early model where teacher education institutions assumed the cooperation of schools to provide appropriate field experience for student teachers. It is also different in kind from the market model of responding to client needs and "market signals" inherent in recent federal government policies (Coaldrake and Stedman, 1998) and the Report of the Review into Higher Education Financing and Policy (West, 1998).

The earlier practice teaching model was focussed almost exclusively on the learning needs and outcomes of the student teachers. The current emphasis on field based learning needs to be accompanied by a genuine commitment of universities to formal and genuine partnerships with schools (Gore, 1995). Such partnerships need to be more akin to those underlying the Innovative Links project which

> "developed as a formal and explicit relationship the partnership between practicing teachers and teacher educators in ways which are designed to foster professional development of both of these partners" (Sachs & Groundwater Smith, 1999, p. 222).

Within the changing context of teacher education, teacher educators need to embrace the reality of educational alliances with a genuine commitment to the benefits of all stakeholders including school teachers and students while having a particular responsibility for ensuring that the learning outcomes of their own students are fostered.

Stevens emphasises the importance of understanding the "deep cultural and structural challenges" that need to be addressed "in the development of formal and intentional school-university partnerships" (1999, p. 298). This paper presents an analysis of the history and practice of educational alliances at Australian Catholic University to identify and evaluate their underlying principles and conceptual model.

History

The School of Education [NSW] at Australian Catholic University began developing field based learning initiatives in the form of a Teaching learning Consortium (TLC) in late 1995

for both primary and secondary teacher education students (Beck, Howard, Long, 1999; Howard, 1999). The development of the Consortium involved representatives from university staff and students, school principals, employer groups, and university and school unions. University staff acted as the catalyst for the initial discussions. During the development of the TLC, university representatives moved from a goal of professional learning for the student teachers to the goal of enhancing the learning for all participants establishing a mutually beneficial relationship between all groups working together in the field. Being responsive to the views of all stakeholders was essential to the achievement of the goals of the TLC, which included:

∑ assisting student teachers in their professional development and learning through the formal and informal integration of theory and practice in the field;

∑ providing a collaborative context which enhances the learning of all involved;

∑ achieving the goals of the stakeholders which challenge students to achieve their full potential, providing an environment for staff which promotes growth, and developing a true partnership with the wider community.

ACU's implementation of the TLC was positively evaluated (Sutherland, 1997) and the initiative has evolved in 1998 and 1999 and widened to include other initiatives (Butcher, Howard, Kelly, Long, Maynard & McDonald, 1999). An important factor for fostering both the alliance itself and field based learning in particular was the effective communication and planning prior to the commencement of each new TLC venture.

Principles and Phases of Educational Alliances

An analyses of the processes involved in the formation of mutually beneficial educational alliances has identified both phases of development and principles underlying the inter-relational processes. Butcher (1998a) has presented seven principles for educational alliances:

∑ there is a shared agenda;

∑ attention is focussed on core rather than peripheral issues;

∑ all levels of the organisations involved are committed to the goals and resource implications of the alliance;

∑ a win/win environment is created for all organistaions;

∑ there is an appropriate meeting of cultures for all organisations;

∑ all aspects of the alliance are operational, actionable and open to review;

∑ new professional relationships and a constructive meeting of differing priorities and approaches are established.

These seven principles have been found to underlie a successful alliances for research in other educational settings (Butcher, Howard, Dockett & Perry, 1999; Dockett, Howard & Perry, 1999). Further, they can be related to the establishment, maintenance and continuation phases of alliances.

Effective alliances are built upon the identification of a shared agenda which emerges in the initial establishment phase. Through shared development, understanding and ownership of the agenda each alliance is able to work towards evolving items that extend the agenda. A core issue, learning, is often the focus of alliances with people working together for the mutual benefits of all participants. This requires a commitment of time, money, energy and personnel. It necessitates the development of an open environment of trust, integrity, honesty, respect in which the opinions of each stakeholder is valued. These three principles impact upon each other in the establishment of alliances.

Though overlapping the establishment phase the principles of win/win environment, the meeting of cultures and the management of the alliance indicate the maintenance phase of established alliances. Stakeholders come together to work more purposefully with each other and come to know, understand and appreciate the needs and perspectives of each other. There is a meeting of cultures which brings a more focussed awareness of the similarities and differences between the partners. Such awareness leads to an appreciation of the elements of the different organisations and their cultures which may challenge or support the alliance. The management of the alliance requires continuous review of progress and formal evaluation of outcomes. Such review monitors how the alliance's shared agenda and the core issues are being addressed in ways which are evident to all participants.

Across the establishment and maintenance phases professional relationships emerge which become the foundation for the continuance of the alliance and its expression in new initiatives and the adaption of the agenda and core issues.

University – Agency Alliances: One model explored

The Teaching Learning Consortium model which has emerged from a continuing collaborative alliance between the employing agencies of Parramatta Catholic Education Office, Sydney Diocese, Broken Bay Catholic Education Office and Australian Catholic University can be utilised as one model for exploring the relationship of alliance phases, principles and actions (see Table 1).

The principles emphasised in each phase are exemplified in the different action involved in the establishment, maintenance and continuation of the Teaching Learning Consortium. The actions in the establishment phase focus upon the learning of all participants. This focus is taken further in the maintenance phase where consideration is given to seeing how the learning outcomes for all participants can be achieved more effectively and with best use of available resources. The continuation phase is concerned with enhancing both the professional base for the initiative and its ownership by all stakeholders.

Phase	Principle	Actions
Establishment	Shared Agenda	Focus on learning benefits for all participants- pupils, teachers, student teachers and university staff.

		Change the learning culture in schools and universities through closer collaboration and integration of theory and practice.
	Core Issue	Learning and continuing professional development of teachers through pre-service, initial and continuing teacher education. Enhancing the status of teacher education and teacher educators In respect to the needs of the teaching profession.
	Commitment	Catalyst and provocateur for a learning agenda across the different stakeholders. Strategic planning for effective and collaborative work.
Maintenance	Win/Win Environment	Making better and effective use of available resources. Recognising the potential of student teachers within a school based learning agenda. Enhancing the quality of teacher education programs through school and system based links with the university.

	Meeting of cultures	Appreciation of the student teacher, university and school contexts within which each group of participants is based.
	Management of Alliance	Commitment of time and people to maintaining effective communication. Appropriate balance between proactive and reactive strategies based on continuous formal evaluation of the initiative.
Continuation	Emerging Professional Relationships	Greater respect for each other. Development of new forms of professional interaction. Joint ownership of initiative and commitment to review.

Table 1. Relationship of Alliance Phases, Principles and Actions in the Teaching Learning Consortium

Partnership Challenges and Supports

The evolutionary nature of the development of a variety of educational alliances has begun to identify two levels of challenges and supports. These levels can be referred to as macro and micro. Macro relating to the organisational and personal factors at the management level of collaboration amongst the senior representatives of the involved partners. The micro level refers to the practical implementation of agreed upon agendas on a daily basis as the alliance begins to affect other stakeholders bringing more and more people into the alliance. Having identified these two levels this paper refers to the challenges and supports evident at the macro level whilst signalling the need to investigate similar factors at the micro level. In the case of the Teaching Learning Consortium this involves the practical implementation [the micro level] of the program at the school based level.

A macro analysis of the Teaching Learning Consortium (Sutherland, 1997) supported Swanson's (1995) identified potential challenges as well as supports of effective development of school-university partnerships. The challenges have been identified as:

        I. the labour intensive nature of developing collaborative relationships;

II. the need to develop professional expertise amongst all stakeholders;

III. the extent to which field-based teacher education is rewarded in the tertiary sector;

IV. the financial and 'in kind' investment required by the stakeholders;

V. the balance needed between maintaining a quality control whilst allowing initiative and learner autonomy; and

VI. unclear communication of the purposes and conceptual framework of the negotiated outcomes of the collaboration.

Each alliance requires a catalyst to begin discussion about possible mutual benefits that can emerge from collaboration. A challenge in the establishment phase of an alliance is to guard against the development of a 'One-sided model' that has stakeholders perceiving that one partner is benefiting from the alliance at the expense of or to a greater degree than the others.

Leidtka (1997) has highlighted further challenges facing educational and other organisations involved in collaboration.

> [E]ffective collaboration is difficult to achieve in a climate of business as usual, as it relies on qualities not present in most organisations. Successful collaboration requires the development of new skills, mindsets and corporate architectures. The quality of many attempts at collaboration today is discouraging, as any time stressed, meeting-saturated manager will testify. The risks and effort involved in working across lines of business often seem to outweigh the benefits in organisations where turf protection has been the norm and where competition for corporate funding has been the only reminder of interdependence. (p. 286)

Significant strengths of alliances relate to (i) the leadership that directed the reforms and fostered a shared vision; (ii) the importance of personal and professional relationships; (iii) shared ownership amongst the stakeholders; (iv) commitment to continuous improvement through reflection, evaluation and research; (vi) recognising peers as a source of professional growth; and (vii) a reconceptualisation of the role of the teacher as they act as mentors and the liaison roles of university staff.

Conclusion

The principles of alliance as presented and the experiences reported in the developing nature of partnerships between universities and school systems provide a basis for analysing such evolving educational alliances with business and industry. There are similarities in the development of relational, purpose specific and mutually beneficial partnerships. A significant issue which is emerging in the relationships between universities, particularly Faculties of Education, community agencies and business is the meaning inherent in the term 'educational alliance'.

The perspectives brought to this term by community agencies and businesses will differ in some ways from that of the school based notion of alliances that many Faculties of Education have experienced. A significant factor for university-business partnerships that is becoming more apparent in educational settings is 'the bottom line'. Resource and particularly fiscal factors play a critical role in the direction and extent of educational based

partnership development between business and universities. This is a new domain for teacher educators as they move into often unchartered educational settings. Their personal experiences, evident role changes and the case study alliance models that emerge require investigation and reporting.

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