

Developing a project within a school-university partnership: factors that influence effective partnership working

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Abstract

This paper advances the discourse on school-university partnerships by considering the challenges of implementing a project to support the professional development of teachers through the use of video-mediated lesson observation within such a partnership network. The project discussed here was initially established by teacher-educators and located in the secondary sector of a school-university partnership in England. It offers an interpretive framework for analysing school-university partnerships. The impact of this project was limited due to asymmetric power relations. The effectiveness of partnership working is discussed by considering the degree of congruence between the perspectives of and division of labour between both school-based mentors and teacher-educators and those factors identified in literature as supporting effective partnership working. The findings point to effectiveness being compromised when power and control are located within one community resulting in school-based mentor disengagement and the project aims only being partly fulfilled.

Key Words

school-university partnership, communities of practice, collaborative working, power, teacher development, discourse

Introduction

School-university partnerships are an important feature in many international contexts for teacher preparation. The changing nature of such partnerships is subject to much discussion as different jurisdictions develop multiple pathways for beginning teachers to enter the teaching profession. Successful partnerships tend to be built on clear and agreed divisions of labour in which there is scope for all partners to make distinctive contributions according to their distinctive expertise and experience. Recognising, clear and agreed divisions of labour based on clarity of distinctive expertise within the partnership mix represents a non-trivial challenge. Bringing such distinctive strands of expertise together in a well-coordinated partnership in support of teacher formation involves an openness to, trust in and respect for quite different kinds of knowledge, expertise and ways of working. Consequently, developing a teacher learning project within a school-university partnership is a complex matter.

This project was implemented at a time when partnership working in England began undergoing significant change towards an increasingly school-led system which Hulme et al. (2016, p219) describe as an 'outlier' compared to other European systems. Thus, this paper explores the nature of school-university partnerships in this context and discusses how:

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1. partnership discourse affords some insights into those conditions that are important for effective partnership working and also those factors which militate against successful functioning;
2. considers a specific partnership where the use of mediated video for teacher learning was novel at this time;
3. uses partnership discourse to develop an interpretive framework for examining the effectiveness of this project.

The project was sponsored by a charitable trust and focussed on supporting the professional development of beginning and in-service teachers through the use of mediated interactive video technology for lesson observation. The project aims were to (1) enhance the initial teacher education (ITE) experience of Post-Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE)² beginning teachers, (2) facilitate effective mentor training and (3) support the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers in partner schools. At the heart of the project was a two-way, fully interactive video system enabling beginning teachers in a dedicated university teaching room to observe 'real time' classroom activities from school classrooms in a number of equipped partner schools. The research context of this article was the evaluation of a three-year project that was both ambitious and innovative in its conception.

The hope of the project team, comprising teacher-mentors from participating schools and teacher-educators from the university, was that while the technology would first be used for enhancing the learning of beginning teachers, experienced teachers subsequently being afforded the similar opportunities so meeting the project's aim of supporting CPD. The letters of invitation from the university to the participating schools included the stated intentions of the teacher-educators that:

1. Some lessons undertaken by teachers in the participating schools would be observed by the beginning teachers in the university and this observation would be supported with commentary by one of the teacher-educators and followed by peer discussion mediated by the same teacher-educator.
2. Some of these lessons would be recorded, thus providing opportunities for both synchronous and asynchronous operation with the recordings being undertaken by both the teacher-educators and school-based mentors

Projects of this type have considerable potential in both exemplifying complex classroom practice (Brophy 2004, Gardner and McNally 1995, Spiro, Collins, and Ramchandran 2007) and enhancing the collaborative working between schools and universities (Hagger and McIntyre 2006, Su 1992, Walkington 2007). It also had the potential for:

1. Bringing about greater alignment between the partner schools and the university and so afford opportunity for developing aspects of clinical practice that hitherto had not been present,
2. Facilitating "sustained professional deliberation" within the school setting (Conroy, Hulme, and Menter 2013, 564).

² The Post-Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) is a one-year programme leading to a professional teaching qualification and qualified teacher status. In this programme beginning teachers spend one-third of their time within the university and two-thirds of their time on school-placement.

Data from the original project evaluation suggests that the project had some success in supporting the development of beginning teachers (Marsh, Mitchell, and Adamczyk 2010, Mitchell et al. 2010). However, the original evaluation of this project also indicated that the interactive video system may have been underutilised specifically in the area of teacher-mentor engagement.

The research question addressed in this paper is, “What are the factors involved in school-university partnership working that support or militate against the effective implementation of a teacher development project?” Therefore, in this paper, I extend the earlier analyses to explore the relationships within the partnership in question and its impact on the agency of the various participants and consider some of the issues that support or limit the development of a teacher development project within a school-university partnership

The challenges to successfully implementing a teacher development project within an established school-university partnership is considered through the lens of existing school-university partnership discourse. This will both further enhance this discourse and offer a framework for considering the relational dynamics involved in developing partnership projects and evaluating the level of success that occurs in undertaking a project in such partnerships.

Context

This project spanned the network between a university and 23 of its partner secondary schools, 6 of these being equipped with the interactive video technology. Year one saw the project established by the university-based teacher-educators with invitations made by them to 6 partner schools to partake in the project; the invitations based on each school having previously undertaken collaborative projects with the university. In Year Two the interactive video technology was used between the university and two partner schools expanding to full capability (though not fully used) in Year Three. An overview of the project is shown in figure 1:

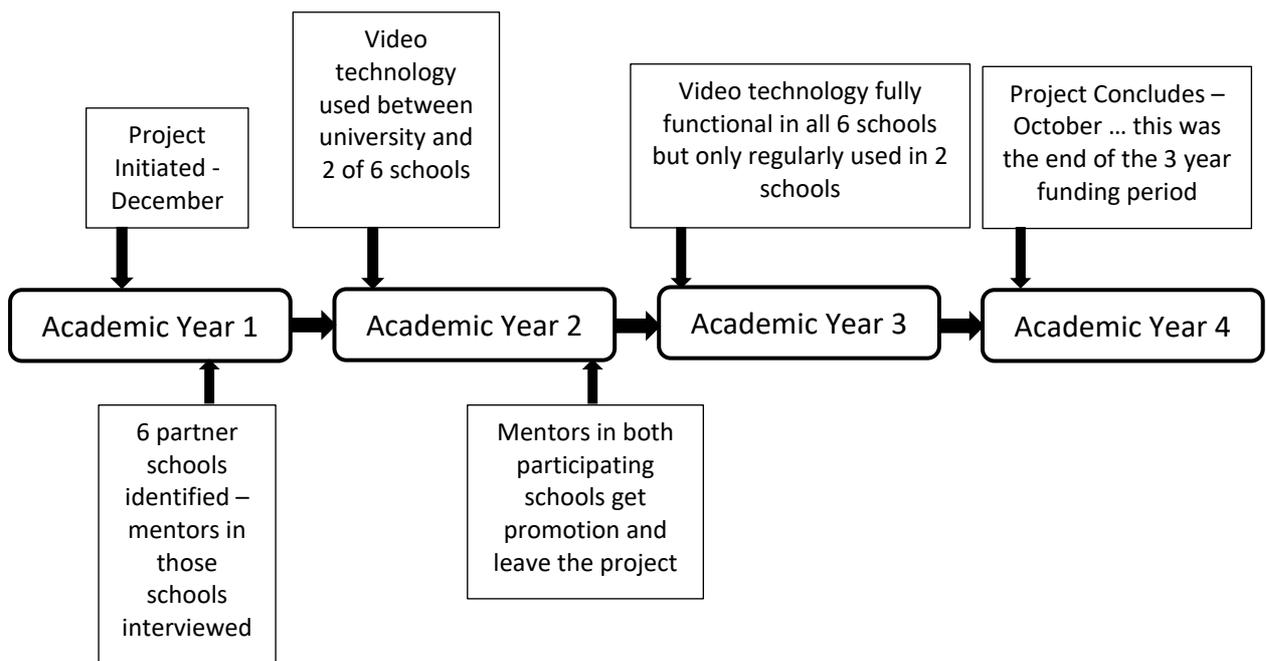


Figure 1: The project timeline

It was the belief of both teacher-educators, who led the project, and school-based mentors in the six participating schools that the use of interactive video had great potential for transforming the initial teacher education (ITE) experience of beginning teachers and the continuing professional development of experienced teachers. The expectation of the participating mentors and the teacher-educators was that practice would be transformed along with the enhancement of the nature of the partnership relationships.

While the University personnel involved remained constant throughout the period of the project, there was considerable turnover amongst the mentors in these partner schools and thus associated with the project, which militated against stability. The partnership relationships between the University and individual schools varied in character and depth, and the development of the project therefore took place in the context of a complex and shifting web of personal interactions between teacher-educators, school-based mentors and beginning teachers typical of many Initial Teacher Education settings.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In order to examine those conditions that support the development of a project within a school-university partnership the key framework employed in this study is drawn from partnership discourse with a particular focus on initial teacher education.

Complexity of School-University Partnerships

That school-university partnerships are contestable and complex systems (Walkington 2007, Douglas 2012) is well accepted. They “can be sites of both struggle and enjoyment” (Handscomb, Gu, and Varley 2014, 4). Collaboration in partnerships has been described by Adamson and Walker (2011) as messy in that it is complex, unpredictable and difficult to monitor or manage. Partnerships vary in character but in terms of ITE they work to link “knowledge about teaching and learning (academic study) with knowledge of teaching and learning (professional practice knowledge)” (Conroy, Hulme, and Menter 2013, 559) which implies the need to consider questions around the division of labour and mutual recognition in a partnership of the value and validity of both forms of knowledge and knowledge use. Mutton (2016) describes partnership in terms of both a pedagogical and a logistical framework. The first has its focus on teacher professional learning and considers the extent to which there is a shared understanding of what beginning teachers need to learn, how they might best learn these things and the site of learning. This perspective is not that common as only a small amount of studies focus on learning as a major feature of partnership working Callahan and Martin (2007). The latter draws attention to practical issues such as balance of responsibilities and arrangements for the practicum. Thus, beginning teacher learning is characteristically sited in:

1. School communities – where the practicum occurs and beginning teachers start developing craft-knowledge (Hagger and McIntyre, 2006)

2. HEI communities – where there is the development of propositional knowledge, development of pedagogical content knowledge along with subject knowledge for teaching

Smagorinsky et al. (2003) and Eraut (2004) indicate that there are features of the way educational theory is addressed in traditional HEI settings that makes it resistant to transfer into the practical activity of schools. A second issue is the situated nature of learning (Brown et al., 1989). The association beginning teachers often make of theory being part of university teaching and practice with schools can be understood in terms of the divergence of two communities of practice (Wenger, 1999; Smagorinsky et al., 2003) which mirrors the separation of school-based mentors and teacher educators. As Mitchell et al. (2010, p24) write:

“University tutors rarely find themselves in schools for purposes other than observing student teachers and most school practitioners generally have limited awareness of, or involvement in, university-based teacher preparation activities.”

Partnership activity (Day 1998) is located in (1) supervisory relationships between the beginning teachers and both their mentors and teacher educators, (2) teacher CPD and (3) research and development.

It is recognised that universities and schools often have conflicting agendas and often have radically different purposes, which are reflected in both their activities (Cope and Stephen 2001) and micro-politics (Kruger et al. 2009). Compounding this complexity is:

- a) the emerging evidence that schools are extending their notion of partnership from solely ITE to a multi-level position involving overlapping communities of practice concerned with some aspects of professional learning, CPD and research (Callahan and Martin 2007, Mutton and Butcher 2008)
- b) a “changing orientation towards teachers and teacher professionalism”, a feature found in e.g. Australia, England and the USA (Mockler, 2013, p281)
- c) debates that are at the heart of ITE discussions in most parts of the world (Menter 2016) including (1) the balance between educational theory, research and practical experience, (2) who contributes to the delivery of ITE and (3) which is the best site for ITE. The implications of these debates for establishing a successful project within this partnership lay in terms of agency and power of both the teacher-educators and school-based mentors – in particular where was the locus of power.

Characteristics of School-University Partnerships

An important component of aligning school-based and university-based components of partnership working is the work of the school-based mentor (for ITE) and school-based professional development co-ordinator (for CPD and research). Su (1992) argues that the school-based mentor has a powerful influence on the learning of a beginning teacher. However, as Mitchell et al. (2010) comment, this potential can only be fully realised when school-based mentors are comprehensively involved in partnership programmes.

Kruger et al. (2009) describe partnerships as social practices exhibiting the characteristics of trust, mutuality and reciprocity where the primary focus is on pupil learning. However, these characteristics are not explicitly defined nor is it clear how the focus is on pupil learning whereas teacher-educators focus is the learning of the beginning teachers. So Handscomb, Gu, and Varley (2014) argue that effective partnerships are based on personal relationships, a point expanded by Smedley (2001, 193) who writes of “partnerships of people not institutions”. Consequently there should be no hierarchy of partners nor any sense of one partner ‘providing’ for another (Mockler 2013). This suggests the formation of new types of relationships predicated on the view that each partner has something to offer to the professional learning of the other (Sachs 2003). This is discussed by Brissard, Menter, and Smith (2005) in terms of high levels of trust, mutual respect and a recognition of the professional expertise and commitment of those involved.

However, building partnerships is highly problematic as there are “contradictory and uneven” influences on partnership development (Handscomb, Gu, and Varley 2014, 13). Tensions in partnership working are identified by Bain, Bruce, and Weir (2016) who argue for each partner recognising and respecting the other's differing contribution and approach. This is not easy as Mockler's (2013) longitudinal study identified university partners positioned more as providers than learning-partners.

A persistent feature throughout school-university partnership literature is that of power and control. There are tensions caused when the locus of power remain unquestioned (Baumfield and Butterworth (2007). This perspective is developed by Quinlivan, Boyask, and Carswell (2008) who discuss the importance of acknowledging power differentials and finding ways to negotiate the tensions that arise particularly in (1) the ownership of initiatives, (2) politics and (3) positionality of the participants. Thus, trust between participants in the partnership is required for effective working. Moreover Mockler (2013) argues for a willingness of all partners to build robust working relationships that result in understanding each other's perspectives, putting aside preconceptions and developing an openness to working together. This requires time, honesty and trust. At the heart of effective partnership working are the professional relationships which the partnership initiates (Kruger et al. 2009).

Partnership leadership, according to (Handscomb, Gu, and Varley 2014), needs to be strategic and distributed between the partners. They further comment that effective partnership working requires leadership that looks for win-win situations. Both (Mockler 2013) and (Sachs 2003) see this as the need for reciprocity with leadership distributed and shared between partners. Such leadership operates from an understanding of the equality and collegiality of partners (Smedley 2001).

Improving the degree of congruence between the partners is a further aspect of effective partnership working identified in literature. This involves recognition of differences and begins to articulate coherence between the range of differences in knowledge and perspectives. Kruger et al. (2009) note that this results in the development of structures that span the boundaries of both schools and university that leads to altered relationship practices. Hobson et al. (2008, 426) consider congruence in terms of the need to reduce “fragmentation between distinct communities of practice”, a symptom of which is institutional separation (Eraut 1994) resulting in a gap between

theoretical propositional knowledge and tacit professional craft knowledge (Hobson 2003, Hobson et al. 2006, Roth and Tobin 2001). It results in the practicum and HEI based components of ITE being perceived as disjointed or disconnected (Mason 2013).

Problematizing School-University Partnerships

There is much descriptive literature describing the nature of partnerships but not so much problematizing the nature and activities within school-university partnerships (Quinlivan, Boyask, and Carswell 2008). Such description usually centres on observable representations of partnership practice. Two taxonomies are e.g. drawn from Day (1998) and Jones et al. (2016):

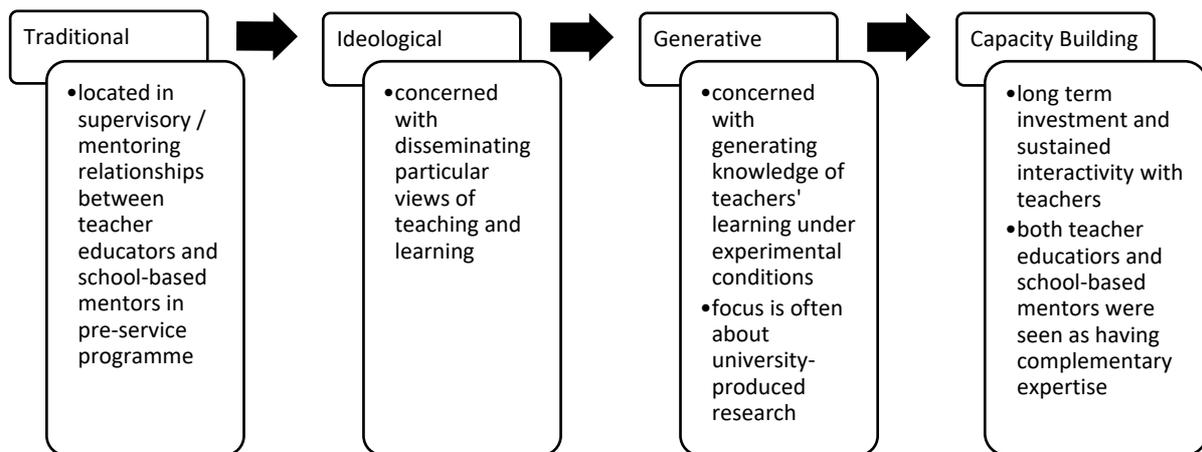


Figure 2: Observable Representations of Partnership Practice (1) - after Day (1998)

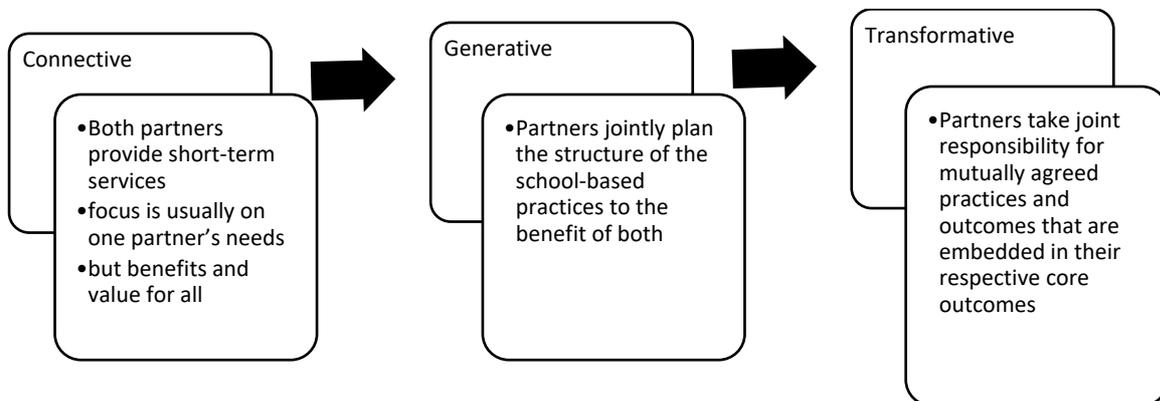


Figure 3: Observable Representations of Partnership Practice (2) - after Jones et al. (2016)

A comparison of the two taxonomies illustrates the difficulty of problematizing the nature of school-university partnerships as there is no common perspective or shared language.

Furlong et al. (2000) offer an alternative way of understanding partnerships, namely relationally (figure 4).

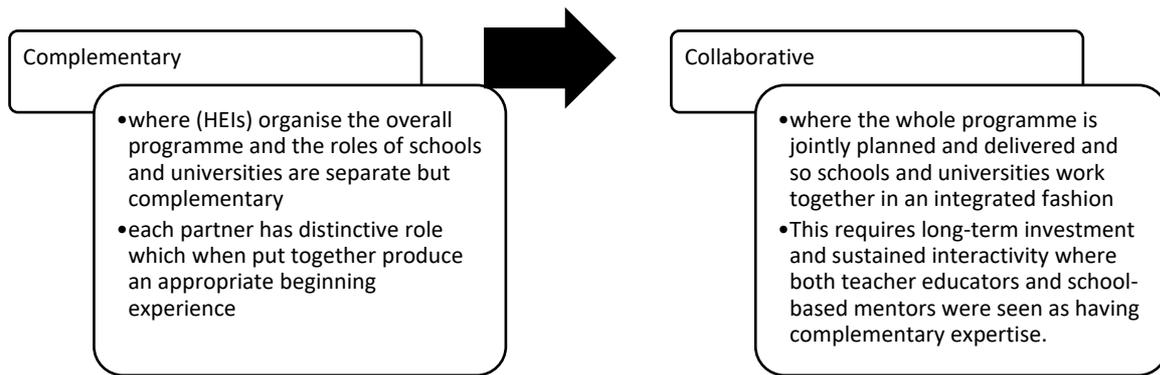


Figure 4: Relational Perspectives

It is worth noting that an alternative position is also recognised by Furlong et al. (2000) and is neither complementary nor collaborative. They describe it as HEI led which is characterised by power and control that has been described by Sachs (2003) as being an unequal expert-client relationship.

An Interpretive Framework for Analysing School-University Partnerships

The interpretive framework presented in figure 5 draws together the perspectives identified in school-university partnership literature. Each section of the framework is a continuum, there being no discrete boundary between one segment and another. This framework identifies 3 interlinked modes of partnership working:

1. Institutional Separation – this recognises schools and their university partner as separate and competing groups
2. Contrived Collegiality – there are formal and specific procedures, often with limited flexibility, that determine partnership working. Jackson and Burch (2019) describe this as working in parallel
3. Partnership Becoming a Professional Learning Community – this is characterised by committed relationships where there is a collective responsibility to mutually develop the learning of beginning teachers, school-based mentors and teacher-educators. This is described by Jackson and Burch (2019) as collaborative working

The framework shown in figure 5 presents a developmental continuum for each strand. However, even though these strands are inter-related there is no implication that any one strand cannot be more developed than the other two. This dynamic can be understood in terms of the differing experiences of the teacher-mentors and the differences in relationships between the university and individual partner schools.

Strand	Institutional Separation	Contrived Collegiality	Partnership Becoming a Professional Learning Community
Partnership Relationships	<p>HEI or School Led</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • characterised by power and control • leadership of programme resides with one partner (usually HEI) • hierarchy of relationships • minimal reciprocity • unequal expert-client relationship 	<p>Complementary / Parallel Working</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEIs organise overall programme • roles of HEI and schools are separate but complementary 	<p>Collaborative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whole programme is jointly planned and delivered • schools and universities work together in an integrated multi-level fashion involving ITE, CDP and research • trust and mutuality • distributed leadership • reciprocity
Observable Practice	<p>Traditional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • programme designed by HEI for implementation in both HEI and schools • fragmentation • lack of connection between school-based and university experiences 	<p>Developing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus is usually on one partner's needs • but benefits and value for all 	<p>Transformative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • both teacher educators and school-based mentors were seen by each other as having complementary expertise • joint responsibility for agreed practices and outcomes • congruence of purpose between partners
Pedagogical Framework	<p>Theory-Practice Gap</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • classroom practice knowledge and codified evidence informed knowledge perceived as separate • disconnect between learning in school and learning in HEI 	<p>Reflection on Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • beginning teacher learning is driven by simple reflective questioning of "how can I do this better" • limited interpretation of practice in terms of theory 	<p>Shared Understandings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • of what beginning teachers need to learn • of how they might learn • of best site for learning • practice of theory and theorising of practice • pedagogy of beginning teacher education developed and shared between school-based mentors and teacher-educators

Figure 5: Framework for analysing school university partnerships

Methodology

This teacher development project was subject to a collaborative evaluation undertaken by an internal and external evaluator and this paper draws upon a further analysis of the wider project evaluation data. My role in the project was to undertake the internal evaluation starting from the beginning of year 2 and running to the end of the project. I collaborated with the external evaluators on design issues and instrument development, sharing data in order to reduce the burden on participants, increase capacity by having access to larger datasets and so making the most of opportunities for data generation. The data used for the final summative evaluation report and subsequently further analysed for this paper is drawn from both internal and external evaluations.

The original project evaluation was aimed at meeting the requirements of the sponsors and so explored three areas:

- 1) the potential benefit of the project technology to beginning teachers
- 2) the potential benefits for partner schools by participating in this teacher development project
- 3) the extent to which the project promoted partnership between schools and the university

The data were interrogated for evidence of school-university partnership working with respect to ITE and how that partnership working influenced the progress of this teacher development project. Although CPD between schools was a declared aim and predicated on the view that project equipped schools would be satellite hubs for neighbouring schools this never happened³. Thus school-university partnerships discussed here primarily relate to ITE. Even though formative feedback was provided throughout the lifetime of the project the evaluation was essentially summative in nature with the focus being to identify the effectiveness of the project in the three areas above.

The findings reported in this study are based on a further analysis of data generated for the original project evaluation. While the broader picture pointed to some benefits and enhancement of the beginning teachers' ITE programme the data also suggested some disengagement of the teacher-mentors. The data included in this further analysis was drawn from those responses about mentoring and partnership relationships.

The initial evaluation adopted a 3-year longitudinal iterative cycle of data generation, analysis and review allowing for follow-up in subsequent stages of data generation and analysis. Such iterative evaluation is effective in researching a developing project such as this where the technology at the centre of the project is continually evolving and there is a turnover of personnel involved (Coughlan and Coughlan 2002). Evaluators working on such projects need a flexible and responsive multi-methodological approach.

A number of methods of data generation were employed for the original evaluation at different

³ Minutes of the meetings between teacher-educators and school-based mentors

stages of the project. Those which are the focus for this further analysis are:

- a) initial semi-structured interviews were undertaken with two teacher-educators and with the six school-based mentors in the project equipped schools (end of year 1)
- b) semi-structured interviews with the two school-based mentors then participating in the project and with two teacher-educators (summer of year 2)
- c) semi-structured interviews were undertaken with seven school-based mentors from partnership schools (3 from project equipped schools and 4 from non-equipped schools) and two teacher-educators (summer of year 3)
- d) subsequent interviews being conducted in the summer of year 4 with the teacher-educators in order to explore further issues arising from the initial findings.

Additional data were drawn from field notes, project documentation and the minutes of project meetings of both (a) the teacher-educators and school-based mentors and (b) the university steering committee.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because of their balance of flexibility with structure allowing for a responsive probing of interviewees' understanding whilst also offering comparability between interviews (Pawson and Tilley 1999). In each category of interview the same questions were asked of all those involved and to ensure equivalent coverage the interviewees were prompted by supplementary questions. The questions were open and probes were used when it was judged there was more to be disclosed at a particular point in the interview. The individual interviews and group interviews were fully transcribed before being analysed.

For the original evaluation of the project the data from the various interviews was subject to a *posteriori* thematic analysis (Wellington 2015) with emergent themes being identified (Glaser and Strauss 1980). The primary focus of this work was on the impact of the project on teacher learning.

The further analysis undertaken for this paper involved themes:

- a. drawn from the interpretive framework of partnership working namely institutional separation, contrived collegiality and becoming a professional learning community
- b. considered through the lens of those factors influencing effective partnership working namely driving and restraining forces.

To structure this further analysis, the data were first coded by the features drawn from partnership discourse around partnership relationships. In the coding I also looked for those forces influencing partnership working. It emerged early in this process that discrete categorisation was not always possible. Although the classification descriptors of partnership working are reasonably self-contained in the literature, when interviewed both the teacher-educators and the school-based mentors conflated different aspects of the categories. This was not unexpected and reflects the nature of a data-set obtained for one purpose being further analysed to consider a different question. Captured in the following findings section are some of the tensions experienced between the teacher-educators and the school-based mentors in their attempts to develop this project.

The methodology was guided by the ethical principles of the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2004, 2011) which placed informed consent at the centre of the research. Additionally, it was agreed by the university steering committee, comprising senior university staff overseeing the project that the findings of the evaluation would be presented to the steering committee with further dissemination through conference presentations and publications.

Findings

The findings of the original project evaluation provided evidence of this resource being under-utilised and some school-based mentors, in the project-equipped schools, not fully engaging with the project. This suggests a missed opportunity for partnership working. It was this that prompted a further analysis of the data.

The major beneficiaries of this technology project were the teacher-educators who had their teaching enriched through the availability of observing live lessons. Although the beginning teachers benefited from this enhancing of the university component of their training, they were not able to experience the benefits of in-school recording of lessons and subsequent coaching. In contrast, there was little reciprocal gain for the mentors. There was also evidence of some mentors from schools equipped with the video technology not engaging fully with the project even when they had previously stated they were committed to the project and so an important resource was not being fully utilised.

Power and leadership of both the project and within the school-university partnership consistently surfaced in the interviews with contrasting views being held by the teacher-educators and school-based mentors.

Throughout the lifetime of the project the teacher-educators held the view that the project had played a role in strengthening and developing the partnership links and they assumed that partnership relationships were stronger than they actually were. This is seen in their following statements:

“It’s a cultural change which creates a mutual respect between teacher educators and teachers. Teachers out in schools get to see us teaching and they get to see us teaching kids sometimes. It means schools are prepared to take on some of the theoretical approaches that have been developed here. Because they can watch you and you can watch them and they can see what you’re bringing in, what you’re adding”. (*summer – year 2*)

and

“The project certainly consolidates partnership. Schools like the fact they’re being consulted and valued for their expertise and that in itself is very valuable.” (*summer – year 3*)

The teacher-educators responses point to partnership working characterised by reciprocity where both school-based mentors and the teacher-educators jointly shape and lead the programme and where propositional and craft-based knowledge are equally valued. This suggests a teacher-educator perspective of the partnership becoming a professional learning community. However, this

perspective was not the viewpoint of the mentors. Two comments from mentors given at the end of the project illustrate this:

“I haven’t really used it here. It (*the project technology*) has been mainly used for the University”. (*summer – year 3*)

“Most of the discussion at mentor meetings is about the project and what is going to happen. But this leaves out the others. I think we should focus on the overall mentor practice and then think how the technology could be used to develop this”. (*summer – year 3*)

A lack of pedagogic training related to the project led to an uneven pattern of practice. It is important to note that, while not all the mentors interviewed were fully engaged with the project, they were all committed to their beginning teachers. This suggests a missed opportunity, particularly with the initial disposition of the mentors to develop and change their practice.

Learning to use the technology involves more than training in operating the hardware and software. It requires pedagogic understanding of what the applications are capable of delivering (Scott and Robinson 1996). This was not the case here - the use of the technology did not form part of the mentor training. The multidimensional nature of change, particularly the focus upon human factors, did not feature in the development of the programme. One teacher-educator commented,

“The real problem of training at any level is one of time, I’ve always been reluctant to call teachers in after school because I don’t think training should be done in their own time but schools can’t release teachers as much as they would like – so we compromise and do what we can.” (*summer – year 3*)

The reluctance to by the teacher-educators to engage with developing a pedagogic framework, both in terms of the wider pedagogy of training beginning teachers and also in using the technology to serve that end, indicates the locus of control and influence. The school-base mentors variously indicated that:

1. More should be made of the recording facility in order to more effectively discuss classroom performance. The view was expressed that trainees should have a DVD of their lessons which could then be used for reflection, discussion, target setting and subsequent performance enhancement;
2. The facility should be used for mentor training.

Consequently the outcome was more an unequal expert-client relationship (Sachs 2003) which was university led (Furlong et al. 2000) leading to both dissatisfaction and some degree of disengagement by the school-based mentors.

As the project began there was evidence that the mentors in the project-equipped schools were committed to driving the project forward. There was a desire among the mentors to see project succeed and a broad consensus as to their understanding of the aims of the project. The project was seen as enhancing initial teacher training through

- Enabling trainee teachers to see a variety of differing lessons in a range of contexts,
- Having modelled good practice recorded and available for discussion in mentor meetings and to
- Having the mentees practice recorded and used as the basis of discussion in mentor meetings.

A number of comments from these mentors illustrate this:

“To be able to model some lessons and then play them back and say, ‘look, I did this and I did that, and these were some of the key points to come out of that’ is actually stronger than actually asking a trainee to observe in the first instance because they don’t know what they’re looking for.” (*summer – year 1*)

“When I do some observation of the trainee, it’s a lot stronger to have the video in front of you and be able to say, I was observing this, now have a look at what you did. We can draw constructive feedback out of that.” (*summer – year 1*)

The enthusiasm for the project had wavered by the end of year 2. All the mentors interviewed spoke of being updated on the use of the technology but apart from those schools involved it had no direct bearing on training or practice. It has been information but not training. As one mentor said,

“I find it hard to imagine its use in the classroom”. (*summer – year 2*)

The technology was never used by mentors with trainees in schools. Use has only been made by the trainee body observing lessons or activities remotely from the university. One mentor commented:

“I have done sessions for the university and have talked about methodology and practice. So the trainees have seen some practice before they come. But I’ve not had opportunity to use it here for trainees”. (*summer – year 3*)

From mid-way through year 1 to the end of the project, mentor meetings were dominated by being told how the technology was going to be used and what aspects of theory and practice for the beginning teachers would be covered. Thus the warnings of extolling the merits of the technology (Scott & Robinson, 1996) were ignored and the impact of the project was talked up (Darra 2008). The disenchantment of some school-based mentors was not recognised.

In terms of general partnership working initially there was a real hope that this technology could have a major impact in the way teachers are trained. Interactivity between mentor and trainee through live observation and coaching through focussed discussion of recorded material from a trainee’s lesson were perceived as the major changes. The impact was thus of trainees seeing issues in classrooms before starting practice, directed observation of aspects of other teacher’s lessons and developmental mentor meetings through the coaching of specific skills.

There were, however, some concerns about the project. Whilst each school-based mentor expressed excitement with this development, it was tempered by caution. These concerns surrounded the ability of the technology to deliver what was anticipated, the ability to make this embedded practice for both trainees and departmental colleagues and the avoidance of using the technology for performativity purposes.

Discussion

It is not contingent on partnerships becoming professional learning communities (figure 5) to have the benefits spread equitably among the partners. This does not affect collaborative, transformative working. However, in terms of this specific project, the aims identified anticipated gains for all participants. Reviewing the findings against the interpretive framework for school-university partnerships provides some indication of the model of partnership working within which this project was located and how this facilitated or constrained the fulfilment of the project aims.

Partnership Relationships

Achieving effective collaborative working is difficult as there have traditionally been inherent inequalities between a university and partner schools (van Kraayenoord, Honan, and Moni 2011) and as Day (1998) points out it is sometimes difficult to recognise the legitimate interests of both schools and universities. Kershner, Pedder, and Doddington (2013) note that this can be a difficult 'messy' business where across a partnership network of a university and a number of partner schools there are alternative perspectives, competing discourses and micro-political processes to contend with. As (McLaughlin and Black-Hawkins 2004) note partnerships rarely exhibit partners working equally together as there are often differing degrees of involvement. The boundaries between schools and higher education are complex and unstable (Edwards and Mutton 2007) yet these are the contestable places where ITE teacher-educators and school-based mentors operate.

This project was influenced by the consistent asymmetric power relations between the schools and the university with the locus of power being with the teacher-educators which affected both organisational and relationship issues. This affected the operational influence, the focus given to mentors (Fenwick and Edwards 2012) and their empowerment in programme design. Implementing this teacher development project within the complexity of a school university partnership required strategic leadership and careful negotiation of new partnership practices. There needed to be a pre-disposition for mutual working yet there was no sense of building upon the participating mentors' initial willingness to change their practice. Had this occurred a better understanding would have been gained of the disposition, motivation and potential agency of all the participants. This is characteristic of institutional separation.

A recurring feature throughout school-university partnership discourse is the importance of robust relationships (Allen and Wright 2014, Brissard, Menter, and Smith 2005, Mockler 2013, Walkington 2007) between people rather than institutions (Smedley, 2001). This takes time as trust and reciprocity need to be developed along with the willingness of all participants to develop an openness to fully engage together (Mockler 2013). That there was a lack of congruence between

what the teacher-educators were saying and what actually was happening, evidenced by the lead tutor's view of in-school recording, led to mentor dissatisfaction and disengagement. Additionally the contrasting views of partnership strength indicates a lack of robustness in relationships. The distinction drawn by Portes (1998) between instrumental and consummatory social capital is helpful here. The partnership relationships reflect an instrumental perspective whereby privileged access to the resources was provided by the teacher-educators. A more consummatory approach may have resulted in greater trust and reciprocity.

From a relational perspective both Johnston (2010) and Zeichner (2006) report that collaborative arrangements between universities and schools can be weak and ineffectual. Thus Allen (2011) writes of the tenuous nature of partnerships and the fragility of relationships between teacher-educators and mentors. Identifying and resolving these tensions should have been a priority. The data from the teacher-mentors indicated that they had very limited agency in shaping the project. Busher (2005) warns about those who project a forceful personality whatever their position which can lead to non-consultative leadership. With regard to this project there was a single, albeit valuable, focus set by the tutor team to which the mentors had little power to shape or add – the agency of the mentors was restricted.

Practitioner discourse points to some understanding of the control held by the tutor team. Public statements located the project at the heart of the partnership network with all stakeholders benefiting. Had this occurred it would have changed the way the partnership functioned and would have altered the locus of power. However, the observed practice was a single focus on developing and using the technology to only enhance the learning experience of the beginnings at the university with no recording of lessons, no mentor training and no CPD taking place. The inconsistency is described by (Argyris and Schön 1975) in terms of the lack of congruence between espoused theory and theory in action, i.e. the mental maps individuals have that guide their actions (denoted as theories in action) being different to what they say (espoused theories). Such inconsistency often arises when there is the need to be self-protected (Argyris and Schön 1975, Eraut 2004). It can mitigate or avoid the emarrassment of (1) statements / decisions that might be difficult to achieve. Characteristics of such an approach, all of which were observed, include the purposes of the principal actor being achieved, the project being tightly controlled and there being low freedom of choice. This is built on by (Eraut 2004) who identifies the role of tacit knowledge that limits what people can say and deceptive discourse which controls what people choose to say particularly when being self-protective. Difficulties can occur, not necessarily consciously, when participants fear that they might be exposed or put at risk (Smyth and Holian 1999). Manifestations of this were:

1. In the sole use of the technology to support the work of the teacher-educators
2. The talking up of the potential of the project.

Observable Practice

Chan and Clarke (2014) write of the importance of negotiating the complexities of identity and power when educators from different institutional cultures collaborate. There was no explicit consideration about the pedagogical organisation of teacher training and thus the status quo of what happens in both the university and school continued. The project technology and all its

benefits were incorporated into the existing structure in a way that the primary beneficiaries were the teacher educators.

There was an apparent failure to consider the power differentials between the two communities and the ownership of the project. Had these been considered and discussed by both mentors and tutor teams then greater opportunities would have been afforded to critically negotiate effective partnership working with alternative patterns of practice rather than trying to develop a project within an existing structure. The intrinsic forces that influenced the direction of the project arose from the desires of the teacher-educators – this being seen in the way the technology only supported teaching in the university teaching room. The technological challenges surrounding the recording of lessons was never discussed in mentor meetings.

Cornelissen et al. (2015, p368) write, “It is critical to take structural and relational dimensions into account”. It would appear that the teacher-educators omitted to do this by (1) over-estimating the strength of relationships with the partner schools and (2) making no response to the changes offered by the school-based mentors in the partner schools.

One consequence of the locus of power and control being with the teacher-educators was the lack of reciprocity. The teacher-educators had their practice enriched by having the ability to illustrate and promote both reflection and discussion of complex classroom situations as described by (Brophy 2004) and (Van Es and Sherin 2010) but there were no parallel benefits for the mentors.

Throughout the lifetime of the project a number of key issues identified by Brissard, Menter, and Smith (2005) and Quinlivan, Boyask, and Carswell (2008) were neither addressed by either the teacher-educators or the mentors. For example, there was no discussion of pedagogy, beliefs about the mentoring role or how both the tutor and mentor practice might evolve as a consequence of using the video technology. A consideration of these questions would have led to some understanding of (1) where the knowledge and skills beginning teachers require is situated, (2) who is best placed to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding of the beginning teachers and (3) how and by whom is their learning assessed. When interviewed one of the teacher-educators commented about not being concerned regarding the lack of training as “most mentors are our former PGCE students and so know what is expected of them”.

From the beginning of the project the minutes of the mentor meetings indicate a lack of shared ownership of the project which in part reflects the asymmetric power relationships between the teacher-educators and school-based mentors. Responses from interviews indicate differences in perception about the strength of the partnership and the disengaging of mentors with the project.

The mentors, however, described views identified by Edwards and Mutton (2007), namely that partnerships are rarely complementary or collaborative when the HEI is leading the relationship.

Pedagogical Framework

Literature indicates the benefits of both synchronous and asynchronous use of video technology (Marsh and Mitchell 2014, Borko et al. 2008, Sherin and Van Es 2009). However, there was no

recording and asynchronous coaching intervention by the mentors and so the potential benefits of doing this were not realised. Such benefits include developing the ability of beginning teachers to reflect and analyse their practice through focussed on reflection, analysis and consideration of alternative pedagogical practices. The project was never expanded to address the development of school-based mentors or wider teacher professional development. Recordings could have been used to support the beginning teachers by giving focus to teaching episodes in which they were involved – a request made by all mentors in the project equipped schools. The school-based mentors desired to support their mentees, through the use of recorded lessons in school, in seeing their teaching from a new perspective and so reflectively ask questions of their emerging practice (Gröschner et al. 2015). The beginning teachers were able to reflect on the practice of others, albeit mainly experienced teachers, but without the immediacy of personalised coaching related to their own practice.

Although the recording of lessons was the widespread desire of both beginning teachers and mentors in participating schools, technological issues were reported that militated against it. The mentor steering group at the beginning of the project was led to believe that the technological difficulties would be resolved in the short term⁴. The work reported by Coyle (2004) and Dyke, Harding, and Lajeunesse (2006) regarding similar projects in other universities in England suggested that these difficulties were not insurmountable. However, this never happened and became an increasing source of frustration for the mentors.

The ‘problem of training’ was not discussed with the participating mentors, and this limited the effectiveness of the project. Nor was there any discussion amongst the project team or the mentors that might have led to developing a pedagogic understanding of what the technology and applications were capable of delivering. The participating mentors were not asked to discuss the challenges of adopting new practices nor encouraged to share their experiences contrary to their initial beliefs that they would be supporting the development of the project by sharing ideas and examples of practice and also discussing how it might be used in school. The project was not used to enhance mentor practice, and requests for recording were told that ‘it’s not possible at this time’. There was little sense of partnership development to fulfil the aims of the project, no discussion of pedagogy and no training⁵.

The initial response from all six mentors in the project equipped schools was a willingness to re-think and develop their practice (Edwards, Gilroy, and Hartley 2002). They were disposed to developing reciprocity (Sachs 2003) in such a way that the expertise of both school staff and teacher-educators was pooled, deployed and valued across the whole project (Brissard, Menter, and Smith 2005).

Conclusion

In extending the analysis of the data from the evaluation of this project some of the challenges that are faced when developing a project across a school-university partnership have been identified. The

⁴ Source: Notes and minutes of the mentor steering meetings throughout the project.

⁵ I attended all of the Mentor Steering Group meetings. There was goodwill regarding the welfare and development of the beginning teachers. However, there was no sense of reciprocity regarding the benefits accruing from the project. The lack of pedagogical training regarding using the technology coupled to mentors not being able to use the technology for recording lessons of their beginnings led to mentor frustration.

project appeared to afford a highly favourable environment to enhance the partnership through presenting new opportunities for beginning teacher learning in both the school-based and university-based components, mentor development, CPD and research. Had the expectations of the teacher-mentors and teacher educators from the early stages of the project been met, there was a likelihood that each of the strands of the framework would have seen progressive development to more collaborative working and the partnership becoming more of a professional learning community. That this did not occur indicates that conflicts and inequalities were not addressed in the overlap of the two communities of practice.

A critical message arising from this project was the power asymmetry between teacher-educators and mentors leading to the lack of shared ownership. This appears to be a major factor militating against effective partnership working and the development of school-university partnership relationships. This was evidenced by:

1. A lack of engagement by the school-based mentors with the project. Rather than being empowered they were, to an extent, controlled (Brown and Rutherford 1998). Even in some of the project equipped schools mentors were working with the beginning teachers in much the same way as they had before the introduction of the project;
2. There were important differences in understanding between the mentors and teacher-educators as to the strength of the partnership and thus the value of the project illustrating the fragmentation and lack of connection between distinct communities of practice (Hobson et al. 2008).

This is unsurprising in that insufficient attention was given to how praxis was mediated throughout the partnership – issues of identity and power in all stakeholders was never discussed. Additionally, the existing ways of working with their power and status inequalities were never discussed by the teacher-educators even though the teacher-mentors had indicated their willingness to embrace change. Collaboration was always going to be shaped by this (Chan and Clarke 2014) and a major consequence was that the agency of the mentors was constrained.

Power derives from belonging as well as exercising control over what we belong to (Wenger 1998) thus the claiming of both project ownership and meaning resulted in the teacher-educators being the locus of power thus militating against effective collaborative working. A critical feature in partnership working is the extent of commitment by both schools and teachers to the relationship (Kruger et al. 2009) as exemplified in characteristics such as passion, commitment, professional understanding and expertise. Throughout the teacher-mentor group this commitment to this project was, at best, variable.

Also militating against the effectiveness of this project was the high turnover of school-based mentors associated with the project. While this factor faces all ITE partnerships, it has a greater impact when there is a novel technological project to support. Edwards, Gilroy, and Hartley (2002) indicate that even in effective university-school collaborative partnerships, the continuity and consistency of mentors cannot be assumed and local learning may well be lost to future practitioners (Edwards and Mutton 2007).

Power, ownership and control continued to be located with the teacher-educators rather than being distributed. Important issues of pedagogy and partnership working were not discussed and this militated against reciprocity and seriously affected trust between partners. The project did appear to have some benefits for the beginning teachers and this in part represents the commitment of all partners to the beginning teachers themselves. However, the evidence does point to:

1. missed opportunities for enhanced partnership working which may have been avoided had the above issues been addressed
2. a lack of wider pedagogical considerations beyond the benefits to the teacher-educators
3. the overall project being limited in its effectiveness

The school-university partnership described in this paper had the potential to be collaborative and capacity building – the outcome was very different. In all 3 strands of the framework (figure 5) the partnership working for this project is categorised as institutional separation.

This specific school-university partnership project has been discussed through the lens of an interpretive framework drawn from partnership discourse. By using the framework it has been possible to:

1. analyse the effectiveness of the implementation of this project;
2. come to some understanding of those factors involved.

This framework has the potential to be an analysis tool for other partnership projects.

While believing that the findings advances the discourse on school-university partnerships I caution against generalising the conclusions. This is an individual project located in one specific school-university partnership in England. Nevertheless, there are identifiable characteristics of general university-school partnership working that can be used to both inform and subsequently evaluate the effective implementation of projects within the complexity of such a partnership. Additionally, the issues identified from the re-analysis of the original data indicate the potential constraints that can both frustrate partnership relationships as well limit the effectiveness of collaborative working. The extension of this work, particularly in England with the changing orientation of school-university partnerships, would be to apply such a framework to other school-university partnership projects.

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