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Bridging the Gap: Investigating teachers' perceptions of professional development and the role of the university

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Abstract

Although professional development in Australian schools is often part of the mandatory requirement for teachers to remain current with policies, practices and pedagogy, some teachers question the relevance of such programs. As Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) note, many teachers are critical of conventional staff development ventures with workplace driven in-services traditionally being met with 'aversion'. The perception that such professional development is of limited worth is exacerbated by the very universality of an experience that often sees an entire staff 'complete' many hours of passive learning with little apparent relevance to the core business of teaching.

At least some of these criticisms can be addressed with the forging of mutually beneficial relationships between schools and universities. Professional development programs run by universities expose teachers, who can feel isolated from educational developments as they grapple with the minutia of a school day, to modern educational thinking. The university lecturers maintain links with the practical application of their research, ensuring that they remain credible experts to successive generations of pre-service teachers. The value of establishing communities of practice, particularly during initial teacher training, between the school in which pre-service teachers undertake practicum, and the university cannot be underestimated.

This paper discusses the experiences of two teachers, one working in the school system and the other in the university system in Australia, and their perception of the role of the university in the professional development area. Narrative inquiry methodology has been utilised to provide important insights into the researcher participants' experiences of professional development in the school and university sector. The findings reveal that there is a disjuncture between the culture of the school and university which are important to their survival but nevertheless also results in partnerships which need to be consistently reviewed.

Key Words

Professional Development; Collaboration; Schools; Universities; Communities of Practice; School-University Partnerships

Introduction

The term 'professional development' is often used to describe activities such as peer collaboration, seminars, workshops, or more formalised accredited qualifications obtained through short courses or postgraduate study in order to further develop one's skill set and/or to facilitate career advancement. In the Australian Education sector, professional development is aligned with institutional goals, such as those proposed through school vision statements or a university's strategic plans. These in turn are informed by state or territory bodies such as the Queensland College of Teachers and relevant state and national educational policies.

There are many synergies which currently exist between the school sector and higher education institutions responsible for preparing teachers to work in schools. However, there are also a number of issues evident in the literature, and borne out in both authors' professional experiences, which impact upon the extent and effectiveness of this type of alliance. Additionally, the different mandate for each institution inevitably results in outcomes and goals particular to each.

Context

The accreditation of Australian teachers occurs through the gaining of formal university qualifications followed by certification through a teacher registration body. Teachers in schools have therefore already experienced university, either through an undergraduate qualification or a one to two year teaching qualification linked to this initial qualification. The quality of that experience will inevitably influence their perception of universities, a situation which may remain unaltered unless they revisit the university through postgraduate study, professional development courses or some type of research partnership. Additionally, academics who may have only taught in schools for a short period of time, if at all, will also have a particular view of teaching based on this experience and their own schooling. Clearly therefore, both teachers and academics have a range of attitudes informed by their personal experiences in each other's respective institution.

Schools and universities responsible for teacher education would therefore appear to exist in a mutually beneficial, symbiotic relationship. Both types of institutions provide skills and expertise in an educational environment which expose students to the complexities of teaching both at a theoretical and practical level. Yet for all the shared values, at times there is a clear disjuncture between what the respective institutions require of practicum students. The tensions which can result from this connection may also contribute to a perception that teachers work at the 'coalface' whilst academics work in the 'ivory tower' seemingly unaware or unconcerned about the practical realities of the school context (Rigden, 1986, cited in Mewborn & Stanulis, 2000, p. 9).

The researcher participants are situated in the school (Kerby) and university (Baguley) environment. Kerby has worked in the secondary school environment for 23 years and Baguley has worked in primary and secondary school environments for 14 years, followed by academic teaching for 8 years. They have recently established a school-university research team, consisting of regional, national and international members from the school and university sector, to 'bridge the gap' between the school and university environment.

Theoretical Background

The literature considered in relation to this topic was categorised into the following four themes: Recent developments affecting the Australian school and university sectors; Challenges; Professional development in the school and university sectors; and School-University partnerships.

Recent Developments affecting the Australian school and university sectors

Australian schools have been engaged in external NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) testing since 2008. Students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are annually assessed using national tests in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions (Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation) and Numeracy. These results are collated and published in league tables as a

response to society's demand for transparency and accountability. As Collier (2010, Feb 3) contends however, it is difficult to reduce a school's effectiveness to a single statistic and "much of what schools do – pastoral care, extension of life opportunities through co-curricular and sporting programs, formation of values, creation of community – cannot be quantified." This opposition to a one dimensional understanding of schooling is not new, for it has been almost half a century since Dewey (1963, p. 27) argued that "everything depends on the quality of experience."

The Australian Government has recognised the important links between teacher education and the quality of teaching and is currently providing $550 million nationally over five years through the Smarter Schools – Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership (TQNP) agreement (Australian Government, u.d.). The three aims of this partnership are to: address disadvantage, support teachers and school leaders and improve literacy and numeracy. This program also recognises that quality teaching is "the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and achievement." There are two broad areas of reform which are relevant to this paper: improving the quality and consistency of teacher training in partnership with universities; and, developing and enhancing the skills and knowledge of teachers and school leaders through improved performance management and professional learning.

In 2000, the Australian College of Educators released the *Standards of Professional Practice for Accomplished Teaching in Australian Classrooms.* This association views the impending national curriculum implementation in Australia as an opportunity for broader discussion about teaching standards amongst both the school and tertiary sector. Professional development is described in this document as teachers "seeking to deepen their knowledge, sharpen their judgement, expand their teaching repertoire, and to adapt their teaching to educationally sound developments arising from authentic research and scholarship" (p. 11). Ingvarson (2003) sees the value of such a national certification body as a vehicle to "strengthen the capacity of schools, school systems, professional associations and universities to provide effective professional learning opportunities" (p. 21). A closer alignment between both schools and universities is vital in achieving this outcome, one in which there is an emphasis on quality teaching and a shared responsibility for the preparation of future teachers (Miller & O'Shea, 1996; Sandholtz & Finan, 1998).

In 2002 the Australian Government commissioned the *Investigation into the Provision of Professional Development for University Teaching in Australia: A Discussion Paper* (Dearn, Fraser & Ryan, 2002). This paper investigated professional development for academics in Australian universities and the attitude of key university stakeholders towards the professionalization of the teaching role of academics. This report revealed that, as was the case in many schools, "the provision of both preparation programs and ongoing support for academic staff for their teaching role is uneven and unsystematic" (Dearn, Fraser & Ryan, 2002, p. iv). These failings were directly linked to broader institutional shortcomings in the form of heavy workloads and a lack of resourcing. Interestingly, there was some criticism of the perceived professionalization of the teaching role of academics on the grounds that it would undermine the concept of the university as a place where teaching is informed by research and research is informed by teaching. This concern is addressed in the report when the authors note that in contrast to the professionalization of the research role of academics through activities such as doctoral study and the ongoing immersion in a scholarly community, there is "no commensurate rigour in the preparation and ongoing support for the teaching role" (Dearn, Fraser & Ryan, 2002, p. iv). In 2011 the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) released the National Professional Standards for Teachers which "make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching in 21st century schools and provide a framework that makes explicit the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required across teachers' careers" (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011).

The Australian Government is currently in the process of implementing a new standards-based quality assurance framework for higher education, evidenced in the announcement of performance funding as part of reforms for the sector in the 2009 – 10 budget. Institutional targets will be negotiated with each university as a series of compacts[1] against a framework of indicators related to the quality of teaching and learning, the student experience, participation and attainment. As part of this initiative the Teaching Standards Framework (TSF) project, involving nine universities[2] during the latter part of 2010, was initiated to develop teaching standards for the higher education sector in Australia (Sachs, Mansfield, & Kosman, 2011). This project was informed by the teaching standards framework implemented by Macquarie University in 2009. The *Developing a framework for teaching and learning standards in Australian higher education and the role of TEQSA[3]* discussion paper was released in June, 2011 (http://www.deewr.gov.au/ HigherEducation/Policy /teqsa/Documents/Teaching_ Learning_Discussion_Paper.pdf).

These recent developments in the school and university sectors are indicative of an increasing emphasis on quality and accountability and have a direct impact on the content of professional development programs both in the school and university sector.

Challenges
The importance of good teaching is essential in preparing students to confidently and competently engage with the 21st century (Johnson, 1999; Robinson, 2001). However, when investigating the status of teacher education Goodland (1991, cited in Burton & Greher, 2007, p. 14) found that it suffered from "a lack of prestige, a lack of program coherence, a separation of theory and practice, and was subjected to regulated conformity." He also discovered that many university academics felt their work was undone by practicum experiences undertaken by teachers in training. Interestingly Johnston, Wetherill, High and Greenebaum (2002) proposed that reform efforts in teacher education and professional standards promoted in university programs were not consistent with what student teachers were experiencing while on practicum. Consequently they argued that many student teachers felt that their teacher training did not prepare them adequately for the daily life of a classroom teacher (Britzman, 1986; Lampert & Clark, 1990; Zeichner, 1985). In addition, Mewborn and Stanulis (2000, p. 11) found that university assignments were "incongruous with their classroom norms or curricula, and therefore, placed the teacher in the position of having to alter her practices in order to accommodate the university's requirements."

This situation is exacerbated, as Ball (1992) explains, by many teacher educators preparing pre-service teachers in line with current reforms without any practical experience of using the methods they are themselves advocating. Rigden (1986, cited in Mewborn & Stanulis, 2000) contends that both academics and teachers are partly culpable for this state of affairs. Academics have spoken "with disdain about current classroom practices in local schools. Similarly, classroom teachers have relegated the knowledge of university faculty to "the ivory tower realm, decrying the lack of contemporary school experience of university faculty" (Rigden, 1986, cited in Mewborn & Stanulis, 2000, p. 9). Burton and Greher (2007) reveal that although there are debates in relation to

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[1] Compacts outline the relationship between the Commonwealth and individual universities and provide a framework for jointly achieving the Government's reform agenda and the mission of the individual institution. The compacts will be comprised of three parts: a preamble which defines the institution's particular mission and how it will fulfil this mission; a teaching and learning component with targets for performance funding; and a research component (DEEWR, (2009). *An Indicator Framework for Higher Education Performance Funding: Discussion Paper*, p. 25. Retrieved from http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Documents/HIEDPerformanceFunding.pdf

[2] Australian National University, Flinders University*, Griffith University, Macquarie University, Queensland University of Technology, Swinburne University of Technology, University of New England, University of Southern Queensland*, University of Wollongong. [Participated at own expense].

[3] The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is an independent body with powers to regulate university and non-university education providers. Their role is to monitor quality and set standards with the primary task of ensuring students receive a high quality education at any higher education provider.

pedagogical knowledge as opposed to content knowledge in the creation of highly effective teachers, there are also "nonquantifiable qualities that go into the development of an effective teacher that cannot be learned from Praxis exams, books, lectures or discussions" (p. 19).

Interestingly, the value of teachers gaining further qualifications has only been slowly recognised by the schooling sector, an issue exacerbated by the fact that beyond an undergraduate qualification, no postgraduate study is mandatory. Research projects undertaken to investigate pedagogical issues or to enhance teaching and learning are not considered to be the 'core business' of the school and are an additional task undertaken by teachers often implementing a postgraduate project as part of university requirements or as part of a funded project. In addition, teachers' practical knowledge derived from their classroom experience is invaluable but is often seen as tacit and suffers from a misconception that teacher research is not as rigorously validated as academic research (McLaughlin, Black-Hawkins, Brindley, McIntyre, & Taber, 2006, p. 7). This difference is outlook is indicative of Stenhouse's (1975) observation that there are inherent cultural differences between schools and universities, and as such, the delivery of effective and relevant professional development must embrace this difference rather than challenge or, worse still, ignore it.

One of the challenges for academics is that the university system may not fully recognise work academics undertake in K-12 schools as either teaching or research (Beck & Kosnick, 2002; Grundy, Robison & Tomazos, 2001). Beck and Kosnick (2002) contend that academics who work predominately with schools also risk isolation from the university. Ginsberg and Rhodes (2003) reveal that academics who have established partnerships with schools require support and recognition for this work:

> ... when evaluation procedures do not effectively document new kinds of work, when workloads for faculty who work in partner schools are higher than for those who do not, when working across two contexts (school and university) is not supported with extra financial or personal resources, it is surprising that so many university faculty seem willing to risk reinventing their professional lives to establish and sustain partner schools. (p. 158)

These are important considerations which can affect the existence and the ultimate quality of school-university partnerships.

Professional development in the school and university sectors

Mewborn and Stanulis (2000) argue that there is a need for "individual and collective professional development for both classroom teachers and university faculty" (p. 17), and that university-based teacher educators have an important role to play "in helping classroom teachers reconstruct their roles as teacher educators" (p. 18). When professional development is valued and implemented effectively in concert with a long-term plan which complements the vision of the institution and the journey of the educator, it is at its most valuable. "Most of the significant things that good teachers learn through experience take years of quiet pain and risk taking before bearing fruit. Effective professional learning starts to resemble "a long-term, personal quest, rather than a course or a workshop on implementing the latest policy change, important though the latter can be" (Ingvarson, 2003, p. 11).

Additionally, effective professional development is an important component for improving student learning outcomes. Research has shown that the quality of what teachers know and how they implement this has the greatest impact on student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rice, 2003; Weglinksy, 2000). As Richardson (1990) reveals, a strong sense of personal and professional identity is essential when systemic change occurs as it is the individual who is affected first.

It appears that although there are numerous effective professional development programs operating at both the school and university level within Australia, they are often not sequentially planned. In relation to schools and system levels, Ingvarson (2003) has found that "the capacity of the profession to engage most of its members in effective modes of professional learning over the long term is weak" (p. 1). Some Australian states and territories, such as Queensland, require professional development to occur as part of the renewal of teacher registration process, with a clear link to teacher professional standards. These are often organised by the school to occur on pupil free days, presented by staff within the school or through guest speakers and/or attending events such as seminars which may be external to the school site. Ketelhut, McCloskey, Dede, et al., (2006) advocate for inclusion of the voice of the teacher, as it is "an often neglected consideration in the design of teacher professional development" (cited in Atkinson & O'Connor, 2007, p. 29). Hutchens (1998) found that many teachers are not interested in collaboration and professional development experiences developed by academics:

> Teachers view university faculty as reluctant participants in K-12 schooling, unwilling to join as equal partners with them, and ignorant of school programs and issues. Moreover, faculty research is often viewed by practitioners as having little capacity for generalisation to their needs. Faculty inquiry has too seldom focussed on processes and programs of initial and continuing education of teachers. (p. 37)

Academics within the university system however, appear to have much greater autonomy in choosing professional development opportunities which enhance and contribute to their academic profile, resulting in greater overall satisfaction with the process. It is evident that the system for professional development needs reinvention if it is to realise its potential as the main lever for improving student learning outcomes (Ingvarson, 2003, p. 2).

Interestingly, although there is extensive research on school teachers' beliefs and practices (Alsup, 2006; Barone, 2001; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Palmer, 1998), there is limited research which examines the beliefs of teacher educators (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Interestingly, Hutchens (1998) and Goodlad (1990) found that neither schools nor universities were overly supportive of teacher educators. They noted that universities tend to see the work of teacher educators as insufficiently scholarly and therefore dismissed as inferior when compared to other research areas.

School-University Partnerships

Burton and Gregher (2007) contend that any discussion of educational reform within higher education in relation to school accountability, teacher training, and student outcomes is "not complete without addressing the efficacy of various collaborative models such as school-university partnerships in the education of highly qualified teachers" (p. 13). They note that when "partnerships are well thought-out and designed for success, a number of benefits are possible for all participants (p. 16)." One of the possible limitations, however, in school-university partnerships is that the university often assumes the dominant role. It is essential, as Peters (2002) argues, to establish a clear understanding of the project and the participants' roles which need to be negotiated rather than being imposed. Leo-Nyqist and Rich (1998) recommend beginning any school-university partnership as a voluntary endeavour.

Bresler (2002) describes how collaboration between schools and universities can negate a teacher's sense of isolation given that they are able to experience a sense of belonging to a larger community. Johnson (1999) agrees that accountability within teaching is best grounded in collaboration borne of trust and the promise of appropriate success for all participants. In turn Mewborn and Stanulis (2000) found that teacher educators who maintained regular involvement in the classroom had a "renewed appreciation for the daily work of classroom teachers" (p. 16). The regular classroom teacher is afforded richer insights into their individual students and a forum to discuss the relative merits of different pedagogical practices. This is essential information to be

shared with training teachers and teacher educators and can be utilised as a rich resource of information which acknowledges the teacher's experience and expertise. Although it is necessary to recognise and value the difference in roles of teacher educators and classroom teachers, we also need to

> ... acknowledge that indeed teachers educators do have knowledge about effective ways of preparing teachers that classroom teachers can learn from in developing their roles as school-based educators. Similarly, we also need to internalise habits of open-mindedness and wholeheartedness (Dewey, 1933) in order to truly respect and welcome the valuable expertise that teachers bring to strengthen teacher preparation. (Mewborn & Stanulis, 2000, p. 19)

Utilising collaborative action research projects with teachers, academics and pre-service teachers is ultimately beneficial to all participants. Regular meetings need to occur in order to emphasise the relational aspect of such partnerships. School-university partnerships require constant maintenance and nurturing in order to meet the needs of all stakeholders (Bracey, 1990; Lewison & Holliday, 1997). Otherwise, if participants feel disenfranchised in such a collaborative endeavour they "may begin to withhold support and do less than they would otherwise be willing to do" (Sandoval, 2001, p. 24). Grundoff and Williams (2010) re-conceptualised the practicum experience so that it becomes a site for collaborative endeavour and university and school-staff become 'co-learners.' They note that two factors enabled teachers and academics to challenge and transform the traditional practicum model: "First, the explicit recognition of teacher professional knowledge as having the same value as university theoretical knowledge; second, the empowering of schools to develop contextually relevant ways of working with student teachers" (p. 41). However, Grundoff and Williams (2010) also found that such collaborative arrangements place considerable financial pressure on the university and extensive demands of time on both teachers and academics. Kohengkul, Wongwanich and Nonglak (2009) contend that there are many types of collaborations between school teachers and university researchers, however they found the most important to be the university-school practicum collaboration.

Methods and Techniques
In order to examine the complexity of professional development in the school and university sector, the researcher participants utilised the methodology of narrative inquiry. This methodology uses participants' stories and through reflection and discussion explores why the subject of the narrative has acted in a particular way. The researcher and participant co-construct the final narrative, also known as the research text, through a series of interviews which assists the reader in gaining a deeper understanding of how the participants have been affected by the issue/s under discussion (Chase, 2005; Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In order to make full use of narrative methodology, the researcher participants decided to structure their investigation in the following way. They initially met to discuss their experiences of professional development in the school sector and then wrote a narrative summarising their respective experiences. They subsequently exchanged narratives and identified themes that emerged in the other's writing and also indicated areas which they sought further clarification or expansion of the narrative. The second meeting resulted in further discussion of these areas and also allowed comparison of the themes which were common to both narratives. During this time the role of the university in relation to professional development was discussed in addition to each researcher participant's experiences. This information was included and expanded on in the narratives which were exchanged in the third and final meeting. Refinement of the themes was made during this meeting to facilitate the incorporation of issues around the role of the university and the area of professional development. Excerpts from the final narratives appear in italics in the discussion of the themes.

Validity and Reliability in Narrative Research

The measures of access, honesty, verisimilitude, authenticity, familiarity, transferability and economy can be used to determine validity and reliability in narrative research (Huberman, 1995). In relation to this study the reader has been granted access through narrative excerpts into the lives of the researchers to provide a first-hand account of the experience on which the researchers have based their findings. The researcher participants have been honest in their appraisal and responsiveness to one another's narrative through seeking clarification and further exploration. Verisimilitude has been achieved by choosing a common experience for both researcher participants. This provides the reader with an experience that may also be plausible for them and generate new insights into and/or understandings of the experience of professional development in the school and university sector.

Authenticity is often intertwined with verisimilitude (Webster & Mertova, 2007) and has been achieved in this study by ensuring the narrative are coherent and have been written with integrity through continual reflection during the meetings and writing stages. The exchange of the narratives created an inter-personal difference in order to make the familiar strange (Amsterdam & Bruner, 2000). Transferability is possible from this study which has provided enough detail and accessibility to the reader in order for them to create a similar study in another setting. Efficiency and economy is evident through reflection on, and incorporation of the researcher participants experiences into one narrative without compromising the integrity of the data or the findings.

Analysis

Narrative inquiry uses a three-dimensional inquiry space utilising commonplaces to explore the narratives under discussion. The three commonplaces are: Temporality (people always have a past, present and future); Sociality (personal and social conditions); and Place (the specificity of location) (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007). Although these aspects are also evident in most qualitative research studies, a simultaneous exploration of all three commonplaces is necessary in narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). These three commonplaces provide a conceptual framework to assist the researcher participants in ensuring each of these aspects were considered during this process.

Each research participant listened to the other's account of their experience of professional development, both at the school and university level and through further questioning were able to both clarify and expand the original written accounts they had exchanged. During the subsequent meeting the researcher participants included extra information/clarification from the verbal and written accounts to ascertain emergent themes which they grouped into categories independently from one another. During the subsequent comparison they decided on the following three themes which were the most common in their narratives: The Reality, Appropriateness, and School-University Partnerships.

During the analysis of the narratives the main focus was to ascertain the effectiveness of professional development, its effect on the researcher participant, and their perception of the role of the university with the school sector. The unique perspectives which the participants brought to the research study (Burns, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000) are an important part of narrative inquiry research and are incorporated as elements in the following discussion. Important elements from both researchers narratives, (identified in italics) and supported by relevant literature, are provided to further investigate the issue of professional development in the school and university sector.

Narrative Themes

The Reality

Martin's narrative revealed that in his first few years of teaching at a metropolitan school the term professional development meant relaxing and *all I was required to do was attend, sit passively and return from lunch on time.* Margaret's regional experience was also similar and she recalled *an entire day of P.D. dedicated to ensuring we were aware of the importance of drinking water so our brain remained healthy!* During these times neither thought to question the relevance of the professional development as they assumed the leadership team of their school had chosen particular foci for sound reasons. Any criticism was inevitably muted due to the failure of the school administration to provide a forum for feedback or to welcome it when it was offered. The reality of their experiences reinforces Lieberman and Wood's (2001) contention that the role of the teacher falls between "being a 'passive consumer' to a 'compliant participant' and "regardless of where a teacher falls in the spectrum, professional development fails consistently" (p. 174).

It is evident that the early professional development sessions both Martin and Margaret attended were before the emphasis on self-study as an important aspect of improving practice. Both researcher participants had undertaken further tertiary study upon their initial employment, however the reality was that this was seen as something quite separate in relation to the type of professional development they undertook in their early years of teaching. They both agreed that at this time there were barriers in investigating one's own teaching more closely as revealed by Stenhouse (1975) who described the psychological and social threat some teachers felt in relation to close examination of their practice. Margaret described how it was so important in teaching to invest the experience of students in their learning and this *was sadly lacking in a majority of school professional development I attended. We were never really asked to share our experiences in the classroom but instead were to learn about a new curriculum initiative that lasted for a short time until the next 'trend' came around.*

Appropriateness

Over the years Martin revealed *that what shocks me is not so much that the PD was poorly conceived and executed – as invariably it was – but that there was a systemic acceptance that this was the natural order of things.* Margaret revealed that it was *disheartening to attend some P.D.'s where the presenter was not aware of the local context, and our school's inability to implement some of the initiatives they were suggesting due to lack of resources and facilities.* This disconnection is also recognised by Stenhouse (1975) who argues that successful schools are aware of their staff's expertise and ensure professional development is integrated and takes place on a regular basis.

To reinforce this point Martin recalled his monotonous decade long experience of professional development. *For ten years I became used to butcher paper, felt pens, group work, report back to the group, morning tea, discussion, lunch, recap, vote of thanks. I learnt little more than the basic tricks – get in a group that had someone young and ambitious so they would be spokesperson, and admit – truthfully, I might add – that my poor handwriting would suggest that the group's note taker should be someone other than me.* Margaret agreed and recalled the groans if staff sighted butcher paper as they walked into a professional development session. She noted that *I initially used to feel sorry for the presenter because in some of the sessions the atmosphere was very negative. The more experienced teachers really felt at times that their experience and expertise was devalued due to the passive nature of the P.D. being presented.* Margaret did reveal that one of her favourite professional development sessions was learning about the Ennegram which *provided us with important insights into the personalities of other people on staff. I think because it was more personal it seemed much more relevant and appropriate.*

School-University Partnerships

Martin is enthusiastic about working with the university sector: *I am more critical these days as I am mid-way through my career and less mollified by a paid day of passivity. Having completed a*

Masters and a PhD and enjoyed the professional thrill of overseas conference presentations and research teams I want to further pursue research of my practice but it has little currency in the workplace despite a supportive Leadership Team and a comparatively nurturing professional environment. In the narrative Martin and Margaret both revealed their enthusiasm as founding members of the School University Research Team (SURT) which they began early this year. Margaret described how she felt she was losing touch with the school context and this initiative provided her with an opportunity to work with teachers and utilise her academic expertise to provide mentoring and support for those wishing to engage with research. She agrees with Stenhouse's (1975) contention that teachers need to adopt a research approach to their teaching which involves examining "one's own practice critically and systematically" (p. 156). However, this organisational change would require a reconceptualisation of the way teachers, and indeed schools, view their practices and has been identified as a key area of investigation in the professional development area (Hargreaves, 1999; McIntyre, 2005).

Martin's narrative described his instrumental role in starting *a University/School Research team, but without the career pathway it is a challenge to ask teachers to commit to research and writing and conferences without offering tangible career benefits.* He also revealed that he had become *more critical of teachers, for they, like me for so many years, see the world of teaching and research, of the doing and the insight, as incompatible. My enjoyment – easily the most profound and fulfilling moments in a two decade career – has sadly come from educational experiences/research/professional relationships quite divorced from my workplace responsibilities.* In contrast, Margaret revels in the amount of autonomy that she has experienced as an academic in attending professional development opportunities in areas she is passionate about. She also revealed that funding was available through a publication incentives scheme at her university which also encouraged her active participation in research. Miller (2001) reveals the fragility of school/university partnerships and the marginality which is essential for survival. She notes that this protects against over-identification with one institution and also ensures that multiple voices are heard and valued. Both Martin and Margaret revealed that SURT would probably not retain the same membership due to the requirements of the school, the university and the participants, echoing Stronach and McNamara's (2002, p. 155) contention that any institutional partnership is "never a stable or final achievement, always a work in progress."

Martin felt that universities needed to approach schools more actively to discuss initiatives such as school teachers completing Masters degrees and possibly action research projects where they could be mentored by academic staff. *I am surprised that this has not occurred as we have a number of universities in close proximity to us. In fact I organised a university academic to speak to members of SURT about this as I felt it was an ideal opportunity to create a strategic link between the school and the university.* Interestingly, although Martin and Margaret had both mentored pre-service teachers during practicum they had very little contact with the university supervisor at the time.

Conclusion
The literature reveals important changes occurring in parallel in both the school and university sectors in relation to quality teaching and national standards in teaching and learning. It is evident, however, that there are a number of challenges which must be overcome in order to provide high quality, relevant professional development for teachers and academics. In turn, this will subsequently affect the value in which school-university partnerships are held. Rust (2010) contends that dramatic change is required in order to redefine teacher education "taking it beyond preservice preparation to include the ongoing support of teachers throughout their professional lives" (p. 5).

Gregory (1995) found that amongst issues experienced by academics in school-university partnerships, in addition to heavy teaching loads, were a lack of financial support, conflicting

organisational structures between both institutions and difficulty in ensuring time release for teachers in schools. He also found that a school-university partnership model tended to benefit the university over the school. In addition, in relation to practicum placements the perception is often that teachers are doing the university a favour rather than seeing themselves as active contributors to this process (Mewborn & Stanulis, 2000). Wilkin (1992) believes that the empowerment of teachers as equal partners within teacher education is long overdue. Interestingly there are parallel tensions for both teachers and academics in that a significant proportion of their work lies outside teacher education; for teachers their primary responsibility is to their own students, and many academics pursue research programs that do not directly involve teacher education (Mewborn & Stanulis, 2000). As Szuminski (1993 cited in Mewborn & Stanulis, 2000, p. 18) states "We are not a faculty of people whose primary job is teacher education. We are a faculty of people who are doing a whole lot of other things and now we're being asked to revolutionise teacher education" (pp. 95 – 96). In addition, Hutchens (1998) contends that academics work in a culture where status is accorded to individual effort, and into which they have been socialised, although collaborative work is becoming more common.

Communities of practice in which teachers and academics "share their experiences and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems" (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 140) are essential to such change. As Wenger and Snyder (2000) argue communities of practice are a paradox as they are informal structures which "require specific managerial efforts to develop them and to integrate them into the organisation so that their full power can be leveraged" (p. 145). These communities of practice can inform school-university partnerships and enhance professional development opportunities due to their collaborative nature. Professional development itself is an important instrument which can be used to provide effective change due to the fact that what teachers know and are able to do has the greatest impact on student learning - at both the school and university level (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2000).

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