Partnership in teacher education: are we speaking the same language?

Cveta Razdevšek-Pučko, Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana

The concept of partnership

For the concept of partnership in English, a number of overlapping terms is used: cooperation, collaboration, collaborative partnership, collaborative research, collaborative inquiry, critical partnership, etc. Goldstein (2002), among others, draws attention to the vagueness and loose definitions of terms when he says that writers take certain terms for granted believing they mean the same thing to everyone, yet a closer analysis shows that there are considerable differences in how they are understood. Some other authors (e.g. Stoll and Fink 1996: 138) also point out that the word 'partnership' has been overused and frequently used as mere rhetoric.

In the Slovenian language too, we have recently started using the word in a much wider context than the Dictionary of the Slovenian Literary Language anticipates (SSKJ, 1979, III, Ne – Pren): »partnership, especially in business, e.g., business partnership". It is used in the sense the Dictionary defines to 'co-operate' (1985, IV, Preo – Š), namely, as to 'actively participate in working together'.

In this paper, the word 'partnership' is used in the sense Webster defines a “relationship resembling a legal partnership and usually involving close co-operation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities”, while co-operation means, again as defined by Webster, “to work together toward a common end or purpose”.

From this, we derived the term 'partnership co-operation' in the sense of 'working together towards the goals with clearly defined duties and responsibilities of all partners'. According to this definition, for the partnership to be effective it is of utmost importance that all issues are clearly defined: the partnership itself as well as its goals, the role and responsibilities of all partners, and the management support (including funding).

1 Partnership as a need and challenge of our society today

Many writers in their papers addressing the question of partnership claim that partnership is a necessity, an imperative in the society today as no system can function in isolation: the key is the seeking of synergy as neither school nor university, i.e. teacher education institutions, can take the responsibility for all challenges of the 21st century alone; and it is a fact that every new generation of students embarking on their studies in education now will significantly affect education in the next thirty to forty years (Frost 2000, Hargreaves 2003, McBeath and Mortimore 2001, Parsons and Stephenson 2005, Orland-Barak and Tilllema 2006, Thomas 2003, Zellermayer and Tabak 2006).

Partnership in teacher education is of course not an invention of our society today and its needs. Thomas (2003) mentions that some forms of co-operation came to existence with the introduction of common and compulsory education (and a related need for suitably
trained teachers) already in the 19th century, initially in the form of apprenticeship. As teacher education developed, the partnership goals and models changed as well. The role of school gradually diminished as teacher training became more academic.

Delors (1996) offers his justification for the introduction of partnership co-operation in his principles: "to learn how to live and work together". Support for partnership principles comes also from some recent discoveries in psychology on different types of intelligence (Sternberg's triarchic theory of intelligence including social intelligence, Gardner's understanding of interpersonal intelligence, Goleman's emotional intelligence). On this basis, McGilchrist et al. (2004) developed the notion of 'intelligent school' which covers nine types of 'school intelligence' including 'collegial intelligence' which among other things means trust and belief in common goals - together with some other types of intelligence (systemic, operative, reflective, emotional, educational and contextual) it is an important factor when the vision of school should be put to practice.

These writers who point out the importance of partnership in the society today see many positive effects partnership co-operation can have on teacher education. Frost (2000: 158), for example, talks about 'shared perspective and shared commitment': partners get a better insight into each other's work and thus outgrow the role of outsider critics: together they strive for an improvement and better quality.

One important result is an increased influence of practice on school policies ("Teachers' voices play a more prominent part in the dialogue", McGilchrist, 2004: 103). If partnership bonds different schools, this alleviates the pressure arising from the competition affecting school today; on the other hand, partnership and co-operative situations create room for exchange of ideas and good practices, room for professional discourse (Zellermayer and Tabac, 2006), for the generation and dissemination of new knowledge (Frost, 2000), enriching the teacher profession, enabling and encouraging reflection on the work of all partners, and helping establish control over one's thinking, understanding, and practical activities (Parsons and Stephenson, 2005), which facilitates improvements in the work of individuals as well as institutions (Frost 2000, Thomas 2003). Different co-operative situations (mentor training, research activities, teachers team work in school, etc.) may encourage and generate new discoveries, enrich and make individuals change their views and accept different aspects based on deeper and reflected knowledge of a number of individuals (Orland-Barak and Tillema, 2006). Knowledge resulting from 'collaborative enquiry' and acquired through the process of reflection is conscious, internalised and more likely to be applied to practice (Zellermayer and Tabac, 2006).

Thomas (2003) lists among other initiatives for the change/improvement and search for new forms of partnership also the rationalisation of expenses (some segments of training are overlapping), but he also warns that new forms of partnership do not necessarily mean lower costs. Partnership of schools and teacher education institutions is in fact a natural process in which schools play the key role on both sides: on one side, they are the trainers while on the other they are the consumers, hence it is clear that they have to (another question is whether they want to) play an important role in the process of teacher education. Schools have a better insight into the »real school life« - what are the key problems of classroom work and also what are the key weaknesses of the existing
situation, which means they can faster and more directly facilitate an improvement in the current situation. New forms of partnership should ensure there is a permanent exchange of ideas between partners (as opposed to sporadic projects). Participation of schools in teacher education should not only be limited to the "on site" training creating only more work for teachers yet failing to give them an opportunity for professional improvement and development. New forms of partnership should provide opportunities for professional development of teachers from practice, for upgrading their qualifications and for widening the scope of opportunities for personal development. Last but not least, TEI can indirectly benefit also from the ties local schools maintain in their environment with the local community and businesses.

Thomas (ibid), however, notes that partnership is not important only in the first stage of teacher education (work placement), but also in the process of induction, further professional development and for the promotion system. An effective partnership model can facilitate a softer and more effective transition into the occupation be it through the mentorship or through other forms of support for novices. In this process, school authorities (e.g., LEA in England) have an important role to play. The mentor support is again not strictly related to mentor support for the novices but rather affects the whole professional development and indirectly also influences the quality of work in school (introduction of reflection, professional discourse). Even though the organisational aspects are very important, setting up a network of partners should not be the end result: it is only the means which should lead to an improved quality of work and improved learning process: the pupil, the trainee teacher should be its beneficiaries. The positive results of particular importance could be grouped around trends such as: "student-centred", "self improvement" in "institutional improvement". This applies both to university departments as well as schools. In a quality partnership, everyone is a winner while the quality improves in both/all institutions. A developed partnership is thus one of indicators by which the quality of work in educational institutions could be measured.

2 Types of partnership

In order to use the term 'partnership' certain requirements need to be met. Among them, Stoll and Fink (1996: 137) mention clearly set conditions, boundaries and limitations all partners need to respect. Connections must be aimed at people (teachers, students, pupils) rather than managerial structures ('partnership with a human face'). Institutions should encourage and develop a co-operative work ethic making external partners feel welcome (as opposed to being a nuisance). Some other conditions should also be in place, such as time and necessary funding. Another important factor is the mechanisms that ensure the respect for the principles of equality, reciprocity and trust.

When discussing partnership and partnership links in the context of teacher education, we usually think of the partnership between schools and teacher education institutions. However, partners in teacher education are also individuals (principals and teachers mentors), students, graduates, university and other faculties, teacher unions, government agencies, other public institutions, etc.
Most relations with the mentioned partners are not formalised, hence we cannot talk about actual partnerships but in most cases about more or less formalised co-operation. All too often these relations are about superiors and subordinates, thus creating unequal relationships which diminish the quality of co-operation. Hence trainee teachers as the most immediate participants in the process do not get enough opportunity (and power) to express their ideas and needs, both in regards to the program carried out at the university and to the work placement program taking place in schools. We often stumble upon their difficulties and suggestions by chance and unsystematically, and due to the informality of the relations they have very little effect on changes and improvements. The same applies to graduates, teacher mentors and school principles.

On the other side are the relations where faculties are in a subordinate position within university: where education departments do not get enough opportunity to present their specific situation and where work placement in education is not considered academic, while teaching remains one of the lesser components in the professional development of lecturing staff. In relation to government agencies (ministries), the faculty is again in a subordinate situation while the government searches for (most frequently politically compatible) individuals who can be included in various committees as experts, sidelining the co-operation between institutions. This situation is typical for Slovenia, also in this period of educational programs reconstruction.

Better quality and more systematic connections coming close to partnership co-operation have been appearing in Slovenia only in the recent years as part of the Partnership project encouraged by the Ministry of Education and supported by the European Social Fund. Results of the project's first stage (including other faculties in Slovenia involved in teacher education) at the Faculty of Education, Ljubljana University, will be presented in continuation of this paper.

3 Partnership areas

Partnership between schools and teacher education institutions can be realised in many areas but most frequently it occurs in the context of trainee teacher work placement. As noted by Thomas (2003), partnership is not important only in the first stage of teacher training (work placement) but also later in the induction period and in further teacher professional development as well as in program evaluation.

However, partnership is most frequently a matter of trainee teacher work placement where the usual mentorship could be accompanied by other goals. Parsons and Stephenson (2005: 110) report of a research study which established that an improved partnership model including a group of students on their work placement and their teacher mentors could facilitate a deeper understanding of one's teaching and thus benefit also the mentors. In a model called 'Critical partnership' (consisting of a team of students on work placement, two students and one teacher mentor), students reported about open discussions on different questions which later helped them make improvements. If a student was on his/her own, there were no such open discussions. Comeaux (Parsons and Stephenson, 2005) compares this type of partnership with a sort of support in critical thinking («scaffolding»), where students encourage reflection asking questions, searching for answers, solving problems, etc., with one another. Discussion in a team with
someone who observed the same teaching provides an opportunity for a more equal exchange of experiences (in comparison with an analysis of the teaching led by the mentor).

The mentor's role is to provide support in the verbalisation of thoughts and in offering a model on how and what to reflect on in teaching. In accordance with the Vygotsky's theory, namely that thinking begins in a social interaction before it becomes internalised, this type of discourse is essential for the development of reflection and metacognition - as two important elements of a reflective practitioner.

As opposed to an analysis carried out between a trainee teacher and his/her mentor and focused mainly on the planning and execution of teaching activities and their effects on pupils, a discussion in a team of two students is more concerned with the experiences and reflections on teaching by the two trainees themselves.

Beside the standard types of partnership in teacher education, other most frequent types are various formal projects in which different government agencies take part (e.g., LEA in the UK). There are many reports of such projects in the UK, New Zealand, Canada (e.g., CANTIS Sheme, model RAP, »Improvement in Action«, »Learning to Learn«, »The Learning Consortium«, cited by Frost, 2000, MacGilchrist, 2004, Thornley, 2004, Stoll and Fink, 1996). The aim of such projects is to improve work at schools in different ways, such as dissemination of good practice, introduction of the role of a 'critical friend', encouragement of a critical discourse to empower teachers. It is typical that they always have clearly defined roles and responsibilities of all partners and are therefore rightfully called partnerships. It is necessary to note, however, that some projects are very demanding both in terms of time and management (e.g., project RAP, Frost, 2003), and do not allow for participation on just administrative level.

Most projects are based on the principles of action research; partnership co-operation is frequent in the area of research. In joint research (e.g. Frost, 2000, Goldstein, 2002, McGilchrist, 2004,) it is necessary to take notice of the moral and ethical dimension of research. In research projects, 'academic imperialism' can very quickly impose an unequal situation and exploitation of partners (schools) by using them as a research field to collect information with the aim to write and publish papers and not to provide any feedback to the practice, thus disregarding the basic rules of partnership. The principles of action research should provide a safety switch to prevent such occurrences (Frost, 2003). Clarifying the term 'research partnership', on the other hand, also works as a safety switch. Goldstein (2002: 166-167) suggests that this term should be clarified on a case-to-case basis from three perspectives: from the perspective of procedure (who devises the model, the goals, who appoints the participants in each stage of co-operation, who performs specific tasks and who is the owner of the research results); from the perspective of interpersonal relationships (the nature, frequency and content of communications, assurance of anonymity; in research results also who is responsible for risk-taking), and from the perspective of research partnership results (who presents the results to the general public, who is the author of publications, who benefits from the results - e.g., promotion, salary raise). For research to be called partnership co-operation, it is necessary for all partners to come to an agreement on these and similar questions to prevent misunderstandings and conflict situations.
Among initiatives to promote partnership in research, there is one called 'bridging a gap', arising from the lack of contact between research in education and its practice. It is not enough to research teacher's work, teachers themselves should research it too (Thornley et al. 2004: 10). However, including teachers in research projects is not without its problems. Among them, Thornley (ibid) names an increase in teacher's workload: teachers need to achieve certain standards of knowledge and see research only as another burden. Time dedicated to research is another frequently cited problem. Another obstacle is the fact that teachers are practice-oriented and this is the perspective from which they see research priorities and the language they use («culture gap», Goldstein, 2002:158). The academic vocabulary makes teachers feel inferior; they do not believe in their own knowledge and research skills, this creates an inequality among partners in research projects in terms of power, teachers become distrustful while researchers can have their own hidden agendas (Goldstein, 2002:159). Teachers do not see research as a way to solve problems they encounter in their day-to-day work but rather as means of opening up new problems and new insecurities which erode their confidence. Teachers are also used to work privately, almost in isolation, where they do not need to negotiate and make adjustments. Their communications with pupils are much more one-sided than communications in a research project (Goldstein, 2002). As they are used to work in isolation, teachers feel uncomfortable co-operating with other adults (researchers, other teachers), they feel they are being scrutinised, that somebody is assessing their work even when the research is interested in the pupils' work. The presence of another person in the classroom also affects the conditions in it which means that children also feel and act differently in research conditions. As the following statement sums it up: "Although we all agree this work has been exciting, learning to work together has not been easy."(Goldstein, 2002:157):

Despite all mentioned obstacles and problems which can mostly be overcome by establishing a true partnership co-operation, partnership in research remains the most effective method of linking theory to practice in the classroom.

4 Partnership models in teacher education

Based on analyses of partnership in different countries, Thomas (2003) classifies four groups of partnership models between schools and TEI:

- Uni-dimensional model, usual in many countries, appears to be quite successful, at least judging from the children's academic results (it is typical for Asian countries and children from these countries perform very well in international comparative studies). In this model, the TEI plays the key role, defining the scope and forms of co-operation while schools only create the right conditions for the 'field practice'. It is typical for this model that there is relatively little 'on site' training (up to 15%). (This is also the model prevalent in Slovenia.)

- Complementarily model allows for a more prominent role of schools, trainee teachers spend more time in schools (30 to 40%). The partners
(schools and TEI) share their responsibilities in teacher education; schools also participate in assessment of competences ('school-based ITT and INSET').

- Integrated model is formalised, regulated by government accreditation regulations (e.g., England, Scotland); it includes joint research projects and provides teachers with more opportunity for their professional development. The danger of this model is the narrowing of teacher education down to practical problems only and a tendency to overdo adjusting to practical needs, or in short, practicism. The writer also notes that this model is more expensive (Thomas, 2003: 74).

- Reciprocal model is the most complex of them all, it includes not only schools but also other institutions, also from non-education areas (e.g., social care). This model is very promising, open, but organisationally demanding and therefore not very frequently used. The potential pitfall of this model is the possibility that all other goals become more important than its primary one, i.e., a better quality education for teachers. (In our Partnership project, there are some elements of this model.)

The suitability of each model depends on a number of contextual factors; each school and circumstances in each country are different, hence there cannot be one model to suit all situations ('no blueprint can be offered', Stoll and Fink, 1996: 143). Introducing or amending a model therefore requires an analysis of the situation, awareness of the goals and understanding of the relationship dynamics of all stakeholders in the partnership process.

In line with findings of social psychology, the success of partnership depends on a string of factors, among them, according to Thomas (2003: 76-79), mainly on the **expectations and views about changes** (including typical stereotypes held by individual groups of partners, such as: "practice is one thing, theory another", or "faculty is the place where trainee teachers gain their general theoretical knowledge, practical experience will come later", etc.)

Another factor is the area of **social cognitions** which stands for the views of one group on the members of another (e.g., "lecturers at the Faculty have no idea about the practice", "teachers in school don't understand...", etc).

Expectations and social cognitions are affected by the frequency and type of social interactions between the groups in question: frequent and open communications facilitate a better mutual understanding and provide an opportunity to confront different views and make adjustments.

Related to social interactions is communication which is often more difficult because of different vernaculars (academic vs. practical), different approaches, levels of openness, etc.

To encourage reflection, teachers need a broader vocabulary while lecturers need to adjust their academic language. Clear communication is extremely important, especially when procedures are involved which require that all partners understand and carry them out in the same way (e.g., student assessment in the integrated model).
Communication break-downs could be a source of conflict. Sometimes individual partners change their understanding of issues due to newly created circumstances or to noises in the communication. Conflicts can also arise from quite tangible sources, e.g., funding, rooms (activity venues), vaguely defined roles and responsibilities. Inappropriately addressed conflicts between individuals can lead to further conflicts between partners.

5 Partnership in the study program reconstruction

We have already mentioned how important partnership is throughout the process of education, from planning and accreditation to program implementation and evaluation.

In the document Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications the teacher’s occupation is defined as an ‘occupation based on partnership’: "A profession based on partnerships (as one of the common principles): institutions providing teacher education should organise their work collaboratively in partnership with schools, local work environments, work-based training providers and other stakeholders. Higher education institutions need to ensure that their teaching benefits from knowledge of current practice. Teacher education partnerships, which have an emphasis on practical skills and an academic and scientific basis, should provide teachers with the competence and confidence to reflect on their own and others’ practice. Teacher education, in itself, should be supported and be an object of study and research." (http://europa.eu.int/education/policies/2010/testingconf_e.html)

There is a stress on the principle of partnership in the reconstruction of study programs in the context of Bologna process, which takes a different shape in each state. In teacher education, one of the key partners is the government who generally sets the formal rules regarding the required qualifications and accreditation conditions. According to B.P. Campos (2006), there is a trend to give more autonomy to education departments and other teacher education institutions. Such a trend affects the role of all partners, such as the government and employers. In the view of the same author, these partners should mainly concentrate on defining the expected outcomes of teacher education in graduates, support and encourage university departments in the devising of new study programs that can fulfil those expectations, end to ensure all conditions for operation are met. They also have an important role in ensuring the quality comparable to European standards. The responsibility to provide the content and to carry out such programs that will ensure that graduates meet all the defined expectations remain on university departments, while other partners are entitled to expect graduates to have the competences needed to work in compliance with the expectations.

Such an approach can be illustrate by an example from Norway (B.Berg, 2006: 97) where "Ministry of Education lays down national curriculum regulations for teacher education, which constitute a mandatory basis for the institutions, staff, students and practice schools. On this basis the institutions develop a course curriculum in cooperation with students and practice schools«.

An emphasis on partnership and closer co-operation with schools is one of the key aspects of the latest changes in teacher education also in Sweden (B. Astrand, 2006).
Partnership is mentioned as one of the principles also in the project Tuning (Gonzales, Wagenaar, 2005). In the first stage of this project, different partners (graduates, employers) were drawn in a discussion on the competences required - their views on the level of importance of most competences, especially the generic ones, were quite harmonised. Different partners agreed that for graduates it was especially important to be competent in the areas such as being able to apply one's knowledge to practice, to act autonomously but also as a team member, to have organisational and communication skills. For these reasons, these competences need to be paid more attention than in the past. This is quite a positive outcome as we like to think that other partners are merely interested in the practical knowledge graduates have.

As one of Bologna guidelines is student-centred approach, trainee teachers are gaining an important role as partners in many different areas. One of them is the defining of competences and learning and teaching methods to acquire the required competences and learning outcomes. Another area is student participation in defining the student workload, measured in time needed for achieving the learning outcomes, translated into ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) units. The methods of student inclusion in this approach vary: from purely administrative to those where groups of students are invited to not only estimate but also keep records of the time spent on specific study requirements.

Important partners in teacher education are also various teaching boards and associations which can exert considerable influence over parts of the process in some countries (such as England, Scotland, Ireland). Such co-operations can be extremely beneficial and can provide support to university departments both in their academic work as well as regarding work placement. They create room for the identification of problems and the verification and evaluation of the solutions offered. In Slovenia, this type of partnership does not exist, hence we support the initiative for the foundation of a special teacher education council that has recently been promoted.

Another partnership area is the co-operation of different expert guilds, employers, graduates and students to improve the quality of teacher education study programs (Zgaga, 2006).
In this area, the forms partnerships take are more or less formalised and can cover very different areas and different procedures. There are different approaches in different countries, the quality assessment methods, however, are quite developed and scientifically tested. A very good evaluation system is in place in Finland (Niemi, H. and Jakku-Sihvonen, R., 2006) where evaluations showed there was insufficient co-operation among partners (educational departments, practising schools and local communities).

6 Some examples of partnership

Even though there is no one best partnership model in teacher education, we will give as an example of a successful partnership (with a few weaknesses) the model from Scotland,
and a comparison between the models from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. We will also provide more details on the Partnership project from Slovenia which promises high quality partnership co-operation in teacher education in Slovenia.

The Scottish model is not ideal, some studies have shown it has a few critical points, nevertheless, we present it here because it links different partners in the system of teacher education. Brisard, Menter and Smith (2006) report that in 2000 Standard for Initial Teacher Education (SITE) was adopted in Scotland. It involved all stakeholders: Scottish Executive and its Education Department (SEED), Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (HMIE), General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), local authorities (LEA) and all seven teacher education providers (ITE providers). A feature of this model is that the partnership between teacher education institutions and schools is less formal. Some writers (Conlon, Gemmell and Long, 2004) even claim that the lacking of "specified and joint rights and responsibilities" creates a problem. Trainee teachers are generally welcome in schools, however, mentorship (observations, analyses) is not particularly systematically organised and schools and teachers are not fully aware of the goals of trainees' work placement.

An analysis on this model from the perspective of individual partners as presented by Brisard, Menter and Smith (2006) shows an interesting picture. Teachers in schools view teacher education acquired at university as an entry/theoretical and research contribution to their education, and a contribution which assists in shaping up a more autonomous, critical and less obedient teacher. Teachers see the partnership in teacher education in many different ways; in their opinion, their own contribution is:
- their professional duty.
- an expectation (from outside, from the system) which they should not fail,
- their belonging to an occupation, sometimes with altruistic motives.

Teachers in schools note that they work under different kinds of pressure which stand in the way of partnership processes, namely:
- Pressure to lift educational standards and academic results of their pupils (paying more attention to trainee teachers and to work with them means having less time for their own pupils, hence schools often see trainee teachers as somebody who takes their time rather than somebody who can contribute to better quality of work in school);
- Changes to the promotion system for teachers in school;
- Induction model, introduced in 2002, increased the number of newly qualified teachers in schools: as they need to be paid special attention by their mentors, there is no eagerness to have also trainee teachers;
- Teachers are already heavily burdened by many innovative teaching methods and do not get enough peace and quiet;

The existing situation is described as a model of 'instrumental partnership' which means there is no mutual responsibility, only completing the tasks set up by university (uni-dimensional model according to Thomas);
- It is hard to find a 'cost neutral' system of mentorship, while additional funding necessary remains a problem.
For this reason, Brisard, Menter and Smith (ibid) come to a conclusion that a greater level of formalisation is necessary, even in a form of agreements which would define the minimum knowledge standard for the teacher mentor, and the time spent on planning, observation and analysis should also be spelled out.

Conlon, Gemmell and Long (2004) also think that a national system and model of partnership connections is necessary, but it should be flexible enough to allow for adjustments on the local level. The model should ensure a responsible partnership in a specific context.

McWilliams et al. (2006) in their paper compare the model of co-operation between schools and TEI in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, partnership is developed throughout the process of competence acquisition (3 I): in the initial stages of education, introduction to practice (induction), in professional development; there are three partners responsible for the whole process: TEI, Board of Education (CASS) and schools. Partnership between TEI and schools is voluntary based while TEIs are required to develop this co-operation.

In mentorship for trainee teachers on their work placement in school, the model used is clearly uni-dimensional and controlled by schools: teachers feel responsible for their pupils and do not like to leave their class to trainee teachers on work placement, instead they more or less try to control them all the time. Trainee teachers feel this control as a safe environment with lots of support, however, they do not get any opportunity to try on their own ideas (this is a clear case of apprenticeship model).

In the Republic of Ireland, there is no special contractual co-operation, yet one third of all schools (town, country, multiethnic, in Irish language) co-operate with university departments.

Trainee teachers get work placements from year one on, teachers gradually grant them more initiative and responsibilities which enables them to gain enough experience to maintain discipline in classroom: they think the weakness of this model is the fact they get less opportunity to observe good lesson examples performed by their mentors. Teachers voluntarily participate in this partnership from the sense of professional responsibility. Assessment of work placement is still the responsibility of TEI tutors, there is no shared responsibility to assess the acquired competences; however, there have been changes in this direction (currently at the ‘cooperative’ level).

A large project of the Faculty of Education, Ljubljana University, (Devjak, T., ed., 2005) titled Partnership Between the Faculty and Educational Institutions and financed by the European Social Fund and Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia (2004-2005), aims to develop and test models of partnership in all areas of teacher education (3 I: initial, induction and in service), as well as joint research; it not only includes schools but also other education related institutions. In line with Thomas’s definitions (2003) we can classify this project as one closing on the reciprocal model of partnership. Included in the project have also been other teacher education institutions from Slovenia, Austria and Croatia, 23 partner institutions who drew into the project other institutions and generated additional networks of institutions
(e.g. network 1 includes 88 institutions) with the view of co-operation, gathering and dissemination of information in specific partnership areas.

The project has followed objectives in four areas:

a) To examine and devise a model of work placement as part of undergraduate program for teachers and other educators.

b) To devise a model of a systematic induction of newly qualified teachers to teaching practice.

c) To develop a model of continuous professional development.

d) To examine the model of joint research projects relating to teaching practice and the application of its results back to practice.

The project was initiated by the Ministry with a public tender and was supported by ECS; nevertheless, it is in line with calls for change on the basis of the analysis of the current situation in teacher education in Slovenia (Razdevšek-Pučko, 2000), with the evaluations on the required vs. acquired graduate competences (Razdevšek-Pučko, Rugelj, 2006) and with the education redevelopment instigated by the Bologna process. In this paper we will present only some major conclusions reached in the first stage of the project focused on the analysis of the current situation (the project will be presented in more detail in other papers, the project will continue in 2006 to 2008).

Ad a) Partnership as a model of work placement for the students of the Faculty of Education, Ljubljana University (Juriševič, 2005).

The writer defines partnership as a working relationship, a professional co-existence and also as a professional co-operation between the faculties of education (TEI) and schools. Her analysis of the current situation included 327 mentors and 32 lecturers from the Faculty of Education who have participated in practical teacher training. The mentors assessed the co-operation between the two partners with an average grade of 3.3, while lecturers' grade was 3.8 on the scale from 1 to 5.

Mentors were happy with the instructions but missed more feedback, more opportunity for improvements in their work and clearer criteria for trainee teacher assessment. They also mentioned unsatisfactory participation of school administration in their work. It has been established (Magajna, 2005) that in some areas mentors and faculty lecturers did not share their perception of what areas of knowledge were important. These results will serve as the basis for the future definition of the roles of individual partners and for the development of partnership relations in this area.

Ad b) Partnership in the induction phase (Valenčič Zuljan and Vogrinc, 2005).

In order to improve the induction model, we carried out a large analysis of the current situation in this area: 331 mentors, 361 newly qualified teachers (in academic years 2002/03 or 2003/04) and 77 school principles contributed their views. Newly qualified teachers expect their mentors mainly to help them, in 73% their expectations were very well covered. Newly qualified teachers also regarded very highly their mentors’ qualifications for this role, while mentors themselves were not quite consistent in their answers, saying on one side they did not feel qualified for this role but on the other hand expressing a relatively low level of need for additional qualifications. Most mentors (75.7%) saw their role as a challenge and an opportunity for professional development, only a small minority (5.9%) perceived it as a burden and duty.
Ad c) The Faculty of Education is running many programs for **professional development of teachers and other educators (In-service)**. As part of the project, a research study was set up (Polak, Devjak and Cencič, 2005) with the goal to test the success and efficiency of the current offering, to find out more about the users' needs in terms of content and management and to test how willing they were to participate more actively (e.g., case studies from practice). This study included 425 respondents from different schools and institutions (kindergartens, primary schools, high schools, vocational institutions, housing communities, etc.) An analysis of replies confirmed our expectations: participants were interested in more active forms of work (workshops), they wished more practical content, more materials to work with, they preferred day-long and back-to-back programs, advanced seminars, and they wished them to be organised close to their home: school principals were supportive of the teachers' quest to further their education, however, teachers would like to have more days off to pursue this goal. Our findings will be used as a basis for organisational changes while a partnership approach will be used as a model for more active participation.

Ad d/ Fourth goal was to research the model of joint project researching the practice and the possibility of applying the results directly back into practice.

In research, Slovenia has so far known mainly the uni-dimensional model (Thomas, 2004) of partnership: research institutions and departments used schools and other educational institutions mainly as their bases to collect data, carry out research, while examples of action research have been few and far between.

In order to devise a **model for joint research** and to complement the top-down with bottom-up projects, we made an analysis of research needs (Tancig and Dekleva, 2005). The questionnaire on the research needs in practice was answered by 54 schools and institutions: the most frequently expressed needs were the school educational concept, teacher's position, co-operation with parents, social integration and assessment.

### 6.1 SWOT analysis of the situation at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana in terms of partnership and conditions for further development

Research studies (Juriševič, 2005, Devjak, Polak in Cencič, 2005, Valenčič Zuljan and Vogrinc, 2005, Magajna, 2005, Tancig in Dekleva, 2005) within this project which included a representative number of schools, institutions and lecturers from the Faculty of Education, make a good basis for a SWOT analysis of this area, providing the framework for individual models of partnership in the continuation of this project (2006-2008); the response we got from schools is a proof that teachers want to co-operate and are showing their interest and willingness to actively participate. Before the project is concluded, we plan to take account of these findings in many areas while the partnership network will help us update our study programs.

In our SWOT analysis (S= Strengths, W= Weaknesses, O= Opportunities, T= Threats) all areas of partnership will be covered (3 x 1 = initial, induction and in-service and
research): initial teacher education and work placement as its part, induction, further professional development, and possibilities for joint research.

S (strengths)
One of the main strengths of partnership between schools, institutions and TEI for teacher education is the tradition of this type of co-operation, a willingness to co-operate and an expressed awareness of the importance of mentorship, also the understanding of mentorship in the sense of linking theory with practice, and fairly similar expectations shared by university lecturers and mentors.

W (weaknesses)
The list of weaknesses is quite long, however, it is not much different from the ones found in other countries. First, there is the question of vaguely defined roles, responsibilities and duties of each partner (schools, principals, teachers, education departments, unclear role of the government and the relevant ministry); vaguely defined competences trainees/newly qualified teachers should acquire in mentorship; undefined time mentors should devote to trainee teachers; lack of co-operation (especially in writing) between lecturers and mentors in individual stages of student training; the feelings of inequality in the communication (unit-dimensional model). One of the weaknesses is also poor management of different forms of co-operation between teachers in schools and university lecturers (mentorship and in-service); the in-service programs are not always synchronised (in content and time) with teachers' needs. The promotion system in workplace currently does not motivate experienced teachers enough to cooperate.

O (opportunities)
The current situation and also the Partnership project present many opportunities for improvement. We noticed there is a lot of support in schools and among principals for different forms of co-operation and their awareness of the importance of such co-operation. Teachers' response was positive and they seem to be aware that the co-operation with the Faculty means recognition and a challenge for their professional development. The project results provide a good insight into the situation which will enable us to introduce new measures. This period when study programs are under reconstruction is an excellent opportunity to make changes also to the partnership models.

T (threats)
Introducing changes in the partnership models presents an opportunity but also creates certain threats, mostly arising from the changes themselves, as we might lose some advantages of the current system on the way. The main danger is in pursuing the organisational and formal changes to such a degree to forget the content which would mean that the new forms could become the goal in themselves rather than just the means to find new content. As always when discussing the role of school in different types of teacher education, we should be aware of the dangers of practicism, especially in conducting in-service and research. Big changes always pose a threat of imbalance, pushing the scale too far to the other side. We should also not forget the government's push to make education as cost-effective as possible which means that the government is always after cost-cutting when changes are introduced.
7 Conclusion

In this paper, it was our aim to present the concept of partnership, its effects and various models and areas where partnership could play an important role, make sense or even prove necessary. We pointed out the vagueness of its definition and the need to have partnership co-operation clearly defined as well as its goals, and the roles, duties and responsibilities of everyone involved.
In teacher education, the prevalent form of partnership is mentoring trainee teachers on their work placement; in recent years, partnership has proved valuable also in research as many writers believe it creates the most direct and effective link between theory and practice while opening a series of problems and ethic dilemmas.
It has been recognised that a well developed partnership co-operation is an important indicator of the quality of teacher education institutions, but it is especially important in the current reconstruction of study programs in the context of Bologna process. Examples of partnership co-operation and partnership projects in individual countries, including Slovenia, show that the word is not devoid of meaning and used as mere rhetoric but can denote rich content and have important positive effects on everyone involved. It is therefore very promising that in general there is a willingness to enter into partnership among stakeholders, especially when they see that connections make sense and make them actually feel as equal partners.

8 References


Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (http://europa.eu.int/education/policies/2010/testingconf _e.html)


