Partnership in Teacher Education

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It was a great privilege and pleasure to be invited to offer a brief set of discussion points to the excellent review paper presented by Cveta Razdevsck-Pucko. Some ten years ago the 21st Annual Conference of the ATEE was held in Glasgow on the theme of Partnership and Cooperation (McCall and Mackay, 1996) and I particularly welcomed the opportunity to revisit the issues discussed at that conference and to reflect on developments over the last decade.

As Cveta's paper makes clear there have been many initiatives on partnership and cooperation and there has been much rhetoric and debate on the meaning of the terms partnership and cooperation from teacher educators, writers and politicians. Many of the relevant papers have been critically reviewed by Cveta in her paper and it is not necessary or possible within the time available to rehearse them here.

Typical examples of the type of language used are the following definitions:

- Partnership ‘working together towards the goals with clearly defined duties and responsibilities of all partners’.
- Partnership cooperation ‘shared perspective and shared commitment’

While it would be possible to carry out a detailed linguistic analysis of the common elements and of the differences between these definitions I will have to leave that to others, who are better qualified to carry out that activity than I am.

Of greater importance, I would argue, are the operational imperatives arising out of such definitions and the paper provides examples drawn from a number of countries, including my own, of work which has been or currently is being carried out on a partnership and or cooperative basis. Cveta's description of the initiatives at Ljubljana are highly informative and her SWOT analysis provides a suitable framework for the understanding and evaluation of such developments.

I would, however, like to offer an alternative framework for considering such partnership arrangements based on what Kirk (1996) at the Glasgow Conference argued should be the major features of partnership programmes. These are listed below.

1. Research and development rationale
2. Negotiated involvement
3. Parity
4. Focus on school rather than individuals
5. Should cover multiple activities
6. Provision for staff development
7. Integration of theory and practice
8. Complementarity of function
9. Reciprocal communication
10. Selected schools
11. Joint mechanisms for managing partnership
12. Adequate resources.

As is apparent from this list certain of the features are fairly non-problematical, at least in principle, although others may require somewhat greater justification. Thus the first of the features implies that all activity should be seen as at least developmental i.e. that the status quo is subject to change based on the growing knowledge base being created.

The second feature is, in my view, essential in that all potential stakeholders should be involved in the discussion and development of the partnership and of the roles and responsibilities of the participants.

Parity or equality among the partners is essential and as Cveta has pointed out there is very real danger of ‘academic imperialism’ if the university or TEI is seen as the dominant partner in the relationship. Even if this is not the reality it may be a strong and important perception.

Although it is clear that working with individual teachers is vitally important we have to remember that the placement experience of a student is more than simply the practice of class teaching and must include more school-wide experiences which contextualise the work being carried out in the individual classrooms and these are issues addressed in points 4 and 5.

Given the research and development focus prescribed by feature 1 it is imperative that opportunities are provided for the development of all of the stakeholders in the partnership and these have implications for features 7 and 12. For too long critics of many ITE programmes have complained about what they see as a major dichotomy between theory, arguably the work being carried out in the university or TEI, and practice the real-life activity going on in schools. Partnership, it is argued, should help to bridge this perceived gap by providing a common and shared framework for unifying the student and teacher experience. This shared perspective is further emphasised by accepting that there is a complementarity of function rather than duplication and that this is not only acceptable to the partners but considered to be entirely appropriate. The different players in the partnership have different roles and experiences and these should be optimised rather than minimised. A related issue which is often raised in connection with points 6, 7 and 8 is that of recent, relevant experience and this phrase has almost become a mantra in certain educational and political discussions. If the teacher educator is carrying out a different role from the teachers in the schools the question is ‘what constitutes recent, relevant experience?’ As Cove (2005) has pointed out these are complex terms and subject to vastly different interpretations by different players in the partnership. In her paper Cveta has discussed the possibility of academic imperialism, and we note that in point 9 that communication must be omni-directional both between the different members of the partnership and within the partner groups themselves thus helping in a number of ways to diminish that perception

The selection of schools (issue 10) may be more problematic but I tend to agree with Kirk’s view that if partnership is to be developed it has to be, at least initially, with a clearly delimited group of willing participants rather than with all available schools and institutions. In asserting that this is the preferred approach it has to be acknowledged that
there may be specific problems if the aim is ultimately to roll the programme out to all potential partners.

It is evident that in developing partnerships that once clarity and agreement has been reached on goals and responsibilities that joint structures should be established for the delivery of the intended outcomes and for the ongoing evaluation of the partnership arrangements and for their further development.

Finally such partnerships require to be adequately resourced, not only in their initial phases but on an ongoing basis and it must simply be accepted by funding agencies that two or more partners can not live as cheaply as one! To under-resource is to create tensions among the partners and potentially to undermine the whole enterprise

Having briefly examined some of the major features of partnerships it is clear that there are many potential players in the partnership arena. These include:

- Government
- Unions
- Education authorities
- Universities/Teacher Education Institutions
- Schools
- Students
- Pupils
- Parents
- Community groups

In different partnerships and dependent on the purpose of the partnership these potential players may have large, small or negligible roles to play and you are invited to re-examine the examples listed in Cveta’s paper and decide on the roles played by some of these stakeholders in each of them.

As a further example you may wish to consider for these partnerships or for others with which you are familiar the question: **Who controls the standards?**

- On entry
- During the course
- On course completion
- On induction into the profession
- On continuing professional development

Since these are often seen as critical indicators of the ‘power’ held by partners at different stages in the development process.

A further critical question in devising any future partnership arrangements for the preparation, induction and continuing future development of teachers is: **Teachers what are they…**but that is a question best left to another conference and another paper!

In the title to her paper Cveta posed the question ‘Partnership in teacher education: are we speaking the same language?’ I think my answer is probably ‘yes’ but we are using different dialects. The ongoing issue for many of us is: ‘do we wish these dialects to
continue and to develop’ since they may result in partnerships which are entirely ‘fit for purpose’ in a particular country, sub-region, or culture? Or do we wish to ‘eliminate the dialects’ and replace them with an entirely homogeneous European or even World solution?

References

Razdevsck-Pucko, C (2006) Partnership in teacher education: are we speaking the same language?. Keynote address at 31st Annual ATEE Conference, Slovenia October 2006
McCall, J and Mackay, R (Eds) Partnership and Cooperation, Proceedings of 21st ATEE Conference, Glasgow