Co-operative Partnership in Teacher Education at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim

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For most of my professional life I, Rolf Grankvist, have been a teacher educator at Programme for Teacher Education at the University of Trondheim, now called the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. I started as a practice teacher for students in the 1970’s and had the function as a dean for teacher training at The University of Trondheim from 1980 to 1996.

Over the years the University of Trondheim and the Faculty of Teacher Education have had various names. From 1996 my university is called the Norwegian University of Science and Technology with MIT as a far away American model..

Program for Teacher Education, or PLU, is since 1998 the current name for teacher education at my university, and we will refer to ourselves as PLU throughout this presentation.

At PLU we have long been wrestling with a number of questions related to the training of teachers, questions which I think most of you will be familiar with:

How do we establish a connection between theory and practice?
How do we provide relevant, individual training for each student?
How do we give the students a realistic and relevant classroom practice?
In other words: How do we establish a realistic teacher education which ensures that the students are prepared for the reality they will meet in the schools?

In our work trying to find answers to these questions we have come across many institutions and individuals that have grappled with the same questions, and we have drawn on many sources.

In 1988/89 the Dean Rolf Grankvist was given a sabbatical year as a visiting professor at the University of Washington in Seattle. The reason why the Dean at that time went to the UW was two-sided. He wanted to go to the university that got the prestigious US-prize for Partnership in Teacher Education in the 1972 and find out more about how they in the 1980’s had continued to improve the model with a close collaboration with classrooms in their teacher education.

The Dean also wanted to meet the famous Californian Dean and Professor John Goodlad who in 1988 was working at the UW. He was at that time in charge of a large research project where school partnership was an important part of teacher education. A question. Goodlad was much occupied with was the fact that universities preferred standard academic research for full professor within teacher education instead of valuing classroom practice and partnership with teachers in schools as an important part of the competence for a professional professor in this area. The main question in the book I referred to and for Goodlad was the following question: Why are the schools of medicine, law and business highly respected when the schools of education are in low regard?

Coming to Seattle in 1988 I was very disappointed finding out that school partnership was not on the agenda in Seattle any more. The President of the university had in collaboration with a new Dean at the Faculty of Education changed the profile of partnership in the 1980’s. The Professors at the university were from that time on not allowed to use so much time visiting

1 Geraldine Joncich Clifford and James W. Guthrie: Ed Schools, Chicago 1988. This is a very interesting book about the history of teacher education in the US where John Goodlad is mentioned several times as an important person as to the renewing of teacher education in the US.
students in the classrooms. They should spend more time doing traditional educational research. The result of this goes without saying. When the program of teacher education was changed between 1991 and 1998 many of the old and new professors tried to change this approach and introduce the partnership again between schools and professors, but they did not succeed.2

During my stay in the US I also went to the Stanford University in California to meet Professor Lee Shulman, who was doing research about partnership models both in Israel and in the US. He was also doing research on portfolio evaluation for teachers that was on its way to Europe at that time.

Coming back to Norway the introduction of the partnership model had to wait until we had introduced a one year course for the practical part of teacher training in Norway. This one ear course was introduced in 1992, and now we also had European models to follow as to so-called partnership.

I will shortly mention projects at University of Utrecht in The Netherlands and the changes that was going on in Great Britain the 1990’s. Sweden had also visions about partnership at the same time.3

Our colleagues Ove Kr, Haugaløkken and Per Ramberg has been very important in this process after I became Dean emeritus from 1996. The partnership model was also introduced with full support from professor Svein Lorentzen, who was elected chair at PLU 1997-2001.4

The concept of the Partnership Model in teacher education is thus neither original nor new. At PLU we have drawn on these many sources and developed our own version. It is this PLU-version Hæge and I present in this paper. Hæge Hestnes is what the old dean will characterize as an important link between the class room and the theoretical lectures we give at PLU. She started as part time lecturer at PLU when the Partnership Model was being introduced at PLU in 1998. At the same time Hæge was a Coordinator for PLU and an active English teacher in a secondary school. This made it possible for her to view the new model from the classroom perspective in a way that was impossible for us that had a full time job at PLU. The following presentation of the Partnership Model is thus representing her point of view, but the old Dean supports Associate Professor Hæge Hestnes fully in her presentation.

Introduction

We at PLU developed our partnership model with one central aim in mind: “To establish a clear link between theory and teaching practice”5 We wished to link the theoretical and practical aspects of teacher education closer together, to achieve, at least in some measure what Fred Korthagen describes as “a realistic teacher education”.6 We wanted to link our academic teacher training institution closer to the schools and the classrooms, we wanted to link the theories of education closer to the practical experiences of teaching, and we wanted

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3 Ramberg, P, & Haugaløkken, O.Kr. (2005:3) The Use of Partnership Models in Teacher Education
4 The deanship was dissolved when teacher education at our university became a Department of Education and not a Faculty of Teacher Training as it had been between 1975 and 1996. An elected chair now became the political leader and a director was appointed as the head of administration.
5 Ramberg, P, & Haugaløkken, O.Kr. (2005:3) The Use of Partnership Models in Teacher Education.
our programme to be a realistic preparation for our students’ future careers. To achieve this, a number of subsidiary aims had to be fulfilled. First, the schools’ administration and staff would need to want to be part of this system and to experience that it also served their needs, not just ours. In other words, there would have to be something in it for them. Second, the methods of teaching would have to be considered. Lecturing to several hundred people may serve some needs, but we also wanted to explore alternative ways of reaching our students. Given the constraints of economy and practicalities such as rooms, teaching staff, demands placed on the students within the year’s course, and the assessment methods; how could we restructure the programme and the teaching methods to achieve what we wanted? Third, the students would have to experience that the demands of the programme were beneficial to them, both in the long term development their future careers as teachers and in the short term needs of having to pass their exams. There were a number of other aspects to consider as well, but to outline the structure of our partnership model we will focus on these three central aspects: The schools, the teaching and the students. we will deal with each of these three aspects in detail below.

The Schools

As for the schools, we had a fortunate history to build on. We already had contact with a large number of local schools which we had used as placement schools for the students’ teaching practice. Each of these schools accepted from two to four student teachers at least once a year. In most of these schools we had established a formal contact through a Professional Mentor Coordinator. The Coordinator is one of the permanent teaching staff who is partially employed and paid by PLU (from 10-20% depending on size of school and number of students accepted). Not all the schools we had contact with were invited into the partnership programme, since we initially only needed 30 schools, (this has been increased to 36 schools in 2006), so a number of schools placed themselves on an unofficial “waiting list”, hoping to be included in the future. The administration and staff at the schools indicate that there are three main benefits to the schools. They have close contact with an academic environment and participate in our classroom research programmes, and they can call on staff from PLU to give in-service lectures and workshops on a number of topics, a service we provide free of cost to the schools. They find that the twice annual arrival of 6-7 students lift the school and add new zest, energy and ideas to the permanent staff. In addition, partnership schools are offered the option of placing an English speaking student in their school for two to three months. PLU receives 6-8 English speaking student teachers every year as part of our International Exchange Programme. The addition of an English speaking student is of value both to the English programme and to the school generally. Finally, the schools are invited to participate in our School Adoption Programme. This programme involves our students, with the assistant of PLU staff, “adopting” the school for a week while the entire permanent staff goes away on a study trip, often abroad. We pay a set sum for each student we bring in and this helps to finance the trip. Schools literally line up to participate in this programme. The benefits of these study trips to the permanent staff are highly valued, providing as they do an opportunity for both professional development and a unique social environment for the staff to interact.

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7 PLU exchanges student teachers in the spring term every year with Utrecht University in the Netherlands and with Pennsylvania State University and University of Washington, Seattle, both in the USA. This programme has led to school exchanges between Utrecht and Trondheim organized by the schools.  
8 Ramberg, P. & Haugaløkken, O. Kr (2005:14) School Adoption as a Form of Teaching Practice in Initial Teacher Education.
The central link between the partnership schools and PLU are the Professional Mentor Coordinators. Without good Coordinators the whole system would soon grind to a halt. The job as Coordinator is manifold. To ensure good contact between the schools and PLU throughout the year, the Coordinators attend meetings at PLU on a regular basis, both for us to impart information and to involve them in decisions and changes in the Teacher Training Programme. Their teaching schedules are organised so as to give them one afternoon per week non-classroom time to enable them to attend such meetings and take care of their other duties to us. They are not just our administrators; we view them as a valuable part of our Teacher Educator staff. To listen to their needs and their suggestions, and to understand through them what is afoot in the schools, is invaluable to the staff at PLU, some of whom have little contact with the classroom due to the academic demands on their time. The lack of contact between some Teacher Educators and the schools is a cause of concern to us, and to counter it we have developed a system whereby staff from PLU get the opportunity to teach a regular class. The time thus used by one of our staff in school is made up by one of the school’s teachers taking on responsibilities for PLU. We have also recently introduced a system whereby academically well qualified staff must have a period in the classroom, and similarly, experienced teachers which we employ are expected to work and achieve higher academic qualification. The Goodlad system for qualification to become a professor at the professional School of Education is thus on its way. In 2006 our elected chair Per Ramberg became a full professor within this new system of qualification. This is now a part of a national system in Norway.

The Coordinator’s job is vital to our partnership model. They are responsible for placing the student teachers with suitable mentors, to vet - meaning to examine or criticise- the mentors, to guide the student teachers through the course we call “The School’s Inner Life”, to assess the students’ practical teaching skills (we listen carefully to the Coordinator’s voice during the assessment meetings), to plan and organize school adoptions (a major job, involving time-tabling, providing work space for all the students, bringing the entire staff up to good mentoring levels etc.), and to listen to staff needs and engage suitable PLU staff for workshops and lectures. The Coordinators are the central pivot in this structure. They add the immediacy of everyday school experience to our academic institution. Through them, contact with any of our schools is only an email or a telephone call away.

The Teaching

With our partnership model we have opted to organize the schools in groups of five. Each partnership thus comprises five schools representing as wide a variety of schools as possible, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, vocational programmes and academic programmes. The students teachers are similarly organised into groups called partnership classes, numbered 1 to 7, with between 35 and 40 students in each class. The students in a given partnership have all their teaching practice and other school experiences at schools within their partnership. This model was chosen because we believe that the pedagogical benefits of teaching to a small group (35 as opposed to 280), and that to give the students a sense of ‘belonging’, both to their schools and to their partnership classes, will enhance their learning experiences.
The teaching is organized in three different ways. The students attend classes in pedagogical content knowledge linked to their teaching subjects, they attend some lectures in pedagogy where the entire cohort is present, and they attend seminars within their partnership. The seminar classes often use the content from a pedagogy lecture as starting point, developing the ideas through discussions, group presentations, role plays etc. The educational theories they have been introduced to may thus be reflected in the practical experiences they themselves have encountered. Some of the seminars are led by teaching staff from PLU, while others are entirely student led, giving them the possibility to delve or dig into issues they have met with in the schools or which they find particularly interesting or confounding.

The students within a partnership class are also divided into what we call Base Groups. A Base Group consists of four to five students and one teacher educator from PLU. The Base Groups are formed during the first days of the course and the students are encouraged to take responsibility for each other both personally and professionally, to help, encourage and keep an eye out for each other. This caring aspect we consider an important part of the development of professional teachers. On admittance to the course, each student has to write a personal profile stating his/her strong and weak qualities as a future teacher. These profiles are given to the PLU Base Group member to read as an introduction to the students. The PLU member conducts three personal interviews with each student during the year. The main purpose of the interviews is to encourage and help the students to reflect on their own development as teachers, to become aware of weaknesses and strengths and to develop a professional approach to his/her future career as teacher. In preparation for the first seven weeks of classroom teaching in the autumn term, the Base Group undertakes an exercise we term “Micro Teaching”. Each student must prepare and teach a short unit of his/her own choice to the other group members, while the rest of the group gives response. In this safe environment we are able to discuss details such as body language, voice, facial expressions, structure of the teaching etc. Because the responses are given both by student teachers and by the PLU professional teacher educator, a multiplicity of views and impressions are discussed. The Base Groups are also given responsibility for parts of the seminars, to plan, prepare and present various issues related to classroom management and teaching to the rest of their partnership.

With the partnership model we decided that a form of portfolio exam would serve our needs best, as this supports the on-going learning that we wish to encourage. The students are obliged to write papers throughout the year, both for pedagogical content knowledge classes and in pedagogy. They have continuous deadlines to meet and are given feedback on everything they produce by a PLU lecturer. In addition, the students are asked to pick a response giver from among their fellow students. This must be someone who knows the topic they are writing on and whose job it is to give sensible feedback on the work in progress, an important skill for a future teacher. On the basis of the feedback received they have the option of changing and improving their work before they make the final selection for their exam portfolio which is given a summary assessment at the end of the course. In addition, we have recently decided that all our students must sit an “exam” half way through the course. The PLU staff decide what topics of the set texts will be examined. In this way we hope to counter the trends we have seen in recent years, that some students only read the sections of the set texts they find interesting and wish to write about, and simply ignore the remainder.

With these methods of teaching we have found it necessary to insist on compulsory attendance in much of the course and compulsory submission of work. Most of our students have completed their degrees within the Norwegian university system and are not used to
compulsory attendance, deadlines etc., and some no doubt find these restraints irksome. However, since teacher training is not a purely academic discipline, but education for a profession, we have no problem defending this system, and we find that the vast number of students see the benefit of the structure we impose.

The Students

Teacher training in Norway, (as in other countries) have not always had a good reputation. We are familiar with the experienced teacher who welcomes the new teacher with the following words: Welcome to the ‘real world’! Now forget everything they taught you at the Teacher Training institution and start teaching! With the development of our partnership model we quietly hoped that maybe some of these teachers might discover that our student teachers had indeed been prepared for the ‘real world’. At least we hoped that the students themselves would find that the course was a realistic preparation for the teaching profession and that it had provided them with skills, insights and knowledge which would serve them in their careers. Dividing the large cohort of about 280 students into smaller classes, the partnership classes of about 35 students, serves to make each student visible. Dividing each partnership class into Base Groups of four to five makes each student stand out as a unique individual. Some students and at least one of the PLU staff know the name and face of every single student in the cohort. No one can get lost or be absent or fall behind in the work without someone noticing and being responsible for taking action. This close following up of the students, albeit irksome to some initially, is one aspect that the students themselves mention as important in the end of term evaluation of the course.9

The partnership class is an arena for learning, for linking together theory and practice and for cooperating with other students. Whether in the Base Groups or in looser knit groups the students have to cooperate and communicate. Most schools in Norway organise their staff in groups that cooperate in planning and carrying out the activities in school. Group planning and cooperation are important skills for teachers. Working together on given topics gives them the advantage of drawing on the experience of several individuals. They have the opportunity to listen to and reflect on a variety of experiences and responses which they already are familiar with through their own teaching practice and reading, such as their classroom experience, their subject related experience and the varying assimilation of texts read. No student in his ivory tower this! The partnership class is also a social arena. We encourage social activities and parties to help build a sense of identity in each partnership, and we find that the students identify readily with their partnership class. The social activity helps to forge bonds that spill over in learning activity and vice versa. As Ramberg states in his report: “Communication and social interaction are essential to develop the ability to reflect.”10

Using portfolio assessment as a learning arena is seen by many, but not all, students as a great advantage. Some still state that they prefer to cram for end of term exams, but most realize that this is a much better way of learning. As one student wrote: This is the first time in all my years as a student that I have opened the text books at the beginning of the year. Normally I wait until the week before the exams. I have never learned so much in one year, ever.11

Having to write texts and participate in set activities along the way and on a compulsory basis is part of PLU’s training for the continuous activity and assessment they will be expected to

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11 PLU student’s written evaluation 2003
make in their classes in school. Receiving and giving feedback on texts written by their fellow students is similarly a preparation for their profession.

A school adoption is probably the most intense learning experience of our students, and we try to ensure that all students participate in an adoption. An entire partnership class, sometimes two partnership classes if the school is large, cooperate in this venture. The school adoption starts a few months before the actual adoption week, with all the students involved visiting the school and meeting the teachers. They begin their student teaching practice five weeks before the actual adoption week and work with a classroom mentor, getting to know the school, the pupils and the school culture. Then comes the adoption week, the staff has left and the students are in charge of all classes, all disciplinary problems, all the everyday problems and joys of any school. They are not entirely alone, PLU staff with school experience is on hand at all times, but as far as possible we leave the work to the students. They work from early morning till late into the night preparing classes, dealing with issues, comparing notes. Once a day we gather all the students and discuss every class in detail, attendance, illness, accidents, problems, solutions, successes etc. It is truly wonderful to experience how they all pull together and grow as professionals during this week. The students are unanimous in their response. School adoption is the most intense and valuable preparation for their profession. The following week the staff returns and the students go back to working with their mentors. Debriefing sessions are held and the school is “handed back” to the permanent staff. School adoptions, which we first tried on a tentative basis in 1998? (check year), we had no idea it would be such a success. However, we have encountered one problem which we are still grappling with. In an adoption, every permanent member of staff must work as mentor, and not all is suited to this work. We therefore find that the quality of mentoring is not always as good as we would like it to be. We are attempting to deal with this through more intensive mentoring courses for the staff and also by providing students with two mentors where possible. Despite this problem, we find that the learning outcome for the students is exceptional. Very few students balk at the heavy work load, which is way and above what a student would consider “normal”. They hand back “their” classes with a heavy heart and are rearing to go and gain a position in a school so that they truly can work with their own class.

Conclusion

Our work in developing the partnership model stems from a desire to make this one year course a realistic and valuable training for the teaching profession. We want our student teachers to be able to leave at the end of the year with the assurance and conviction that the work and experiences they have been led through has prepared them for the job in hand: To teach their subjects in a Norwegian school, to be able to deal with the learning needs and problems of their pupils and students, to function as valued colleagues in the school, and to be respected representatives of the teaching profession in the community. We do not achieve all of this in equal measure, but we feel that with the partnership model we are approaching a realistic teacher education.

References