Expanding University-School Co-Operation to Enhance Pre-Service Teacher Education

Abstract

The mutual dependence of schools and universities in relation to the professional education of teachers carries with it the potential for tension between contrasting understandings of the nature of professionalism, training methodologies and rival bodies of knowledge. Regardless of these differences, there is a clear international trend towards closer co-operation between schools and universities, usually characterised by extended periods of student immersion in the school environment, joint involvement of university and school staff in the teacher education processes, and student teachers sharing greater responsibility in school and classroom settings.

In these real-life settings it is argued that student teachers potentially benefit from opportunities to acquire actual professional skills and competencies. Ideally, being accompanied by school and university experts ensures that preservice teachers not only achieve professional standards, but also learn how to prevent stress-related deprofessionalisation.

While the history and concept of university-school partnerships varies across different countries, the general focus is on enhancing student professionalism, especially in terms of robust school and classroom-based competencies and skills, use of (knowledge) resources and professional knowledge, ability and willingness to co-operate in the school setting, and focus on pupils' learning. These developments in the professionalization of teachers are not unproblematic. Issues around the interdependence of academic and practitioner knowledge and the 'theory-practice gap' continue to be reported together with a lack of ability and/or willingness to cooperate in communities of practice and a continuing lack of evidence of impact of such approaches where it really matters, namely, in terms of classroom learning.

To explore the potential of the 'partnership approach' and some of these issues, this symposium presents a range of perspectives and research evidence from three different European countries which have recently adopted policies for teacher education that advocate closer partnerships between universities and schools, namely, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Scotland.

Paper 1:

Professionalizing Pre-service Teachers in University-School Partnerships: An Intervention Study in Switzerland

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In this study of Swiss 'partner-schools', the professional development of pre-service teachers is construed as a form of social learning in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), a process of situated and collaborative learning in the hybrid space at the intersection of university and schools, involving
cooperative learning and joint knowledge building through co-planning and co-teaching of pre-service and in-service teachers and courses led by a university lecturer to reflect experiences.

A Design-Based Research approach enabled ongoing evaluation and redirection of the intervention to optimize implementation. After a two-year pilot, the project was conducted in 10 primary and secondary schools each with about 10 student teachers, 10 mentor teachers, and 1 lecturer. Quantitative data were obtained from questionnaires and classroom observation; qualitative data from individual and group interviews.

Findings were: (1) Quality of cooperation in partner schools increases significantly regarding co-planning and co-teaching; students are better integrated in schools. (2) An increasing orientation of pre-service teachers in partner schools towards student learning. Qualitative data confirm these results and provide deeper understanding of learning processes in cooperative settings. Although students experience higher workloads, they recognize the positive effects on their competences. The implications of these findings are discussed.

References


Paper 2:

School-University Partnerships in the Netherlands

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This paper discusses the partnership agreements which have been in place in the Netherlands since 2009 involving cooperation between institution-based teacher educators (IBTEs) and school-based teacher educators (SBTEs). Research evidence shows that collaboration within partnerships is improving, with greater shared understanding of the meaning of professional learning among teachers, educators and administrators. Support for student teachers in schools has improved and the alignment of programs at the universities and at school is ameliorated. The findings show that, overall, student teachers in partnerships are better prepared and there is increased attention paid to the ongoing professional development of all teachers (van Veltzen & Volman, 2009; van Veltzen et al., 2012). However, there is a need for further development of pedagogies in (work-based) teacher education aimed at the integration of working and learning. The professional development needs of mentors and of institute based-teacher educators remain important issues for future development.
The paper discusses the extent to which further improvement in the quality of collaboration, shared programs and communication can be achieved in a challenging financial climate amid demands for greater accountability.

References
