



Provided by the author(s) and NUI Galway in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite the published version when available.

Title	Creating the future of teacher education together: The role of emotionality in university-school partnership
Author(s)	Higgins, Andrea; Heinz, Manuela; McCauley, Veronica; Fleming, Mary
Publication Date	2013-10-13
Publication Information	Higgins, A., Heinz, M., McCauley, V., & Fleming, M. (2013). Creating the Future of Teacher Education Together: The Role of Emotionality in University-school Partnership. <i>Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences</i> , 93, 1110-1115. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.09.340
Publisher	Elsevier
Link to publisher's version	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.09.340
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/7293
DOI	http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.09.340

Downloaded 2019-01-21T06:14:02Z

Some rights reserved. For more information, please see the item record link above.



3rd World Conference on Learning, Teaching and Educational Leadership - WCLTA 2012

Creating the future of teacher education together: the role of emotionality in university-school partnership

Andrea Higgins *, Manuela Heinz, Veronica McCauley, Mary Fleming

School of Education, National University of Ireland Galway, Galway, Ireland.

Abstract

This paper describes an innovative project between university tutors and co-operating teachers in self-selected partner schools with a focus on improving the school placement experience of the pre-service teacher. The evolution of collaborative partnership is explored from the perspectives of the university tutors. A social constructivist interpretation guided the project and the central role that engagement with emotion played, emerged as a dominant and defining theme. The paper concludes with a final reflection on the transformational effects of the experience on the work lives of the tutors

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Ferhan Odabaşı

Keywords: school placement; co-operating teachers; collaborative partnership; emotion, innovative, social constructivist;

1. Introduction

The benefits of the university-school partnership in teacher education have been frequently described in the literature (Brisard, Menter, & Smith, 2005; The Teaching Council, 2011a, 2011b) This paper presents an overview of a pilot initiative led by an Irish School of Education, at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway) which sought to build a collaborative partnership between the university and post-primary schools hosting its student teachers. The purpose of the initiative was to enhance pre-service teachers' experience and learning during teaching practice placements. Within this context, the role that interpersonal relationships and emotions played in the implementation of this pilot initiative is explored from the university tutors' perspective.

2. Description of the initiative

During Spring and Summer 2011, schools and practicing teachers were approached by the Director of Teaching Practice and the Director of Teacher Education to invite them to build closer links with the university and to become

* Corresponding Author: Andrea Higgins. Tel.: +353-91-495136

E-mail address: andrea.higgins@nuigalway.ie

‘NUI Galway School of Education Partner Schools’. School principals were invited to identify experienced, committed and enthusiastic teachers who would like to work with student teachers as ‘practice educators’ in their schools. Following discussions with principals and interested teachers, guidelines for partner schools were designed and the tasks for both practice educators and university tutors were specified.

The practice educators’ role was described as a guidance role in the context of practice learning in the placement school. It was suggested that practice educators would make themselves available for regular lesson observation and feedback sessions (every two weeks) with their student teacher and that they would also liaise with the university tutor to discuss the student teachers’ progress. University tutors who had full responsibility for the assessment of teaching practice, visited student teachers in their school three times throughout the academic year, to observe lessons and provide feedback. A vital part of these visits was the opportunity for collaborative discussions with the practice educators and student teachers. The School of Education prepared a practice educator handbook outlining the practice educator’s responsibilities as well as important details relating to the structure and content of its Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme. Practice educators were also provided with a reader containing a number of readings addressing mentoring, teacher professional development and reflective practice.

The initiative was launched in September 2011 with a practice educator seminar day to which all interested principals and schools were invited. Following this meeting, twenty schools agreed to participate. Each partnership school hosted between one and five student teachers with one or two practice educators associated with each of them. Student teachers who had secured teaching practice placements in these self-selected partner schools were invited to partake in the initiative. All thirty-four students who were teaching in partner schools participated in the pilot initiative. In the School of Education, university tutors worked closely with the partner schools, practice educators and student teachers. Throughout the pilot year, practice educators were invited to three seminar days to exchange experiences and discuss issues related to the partnership project and student teacher development.

The described initiative represents an innovative approach to teacher education in the Irish context where, so far, no formal agreements have existed between Higher Education providers of post-primary ITE and post-primary schools. Innovative school placements and collaborative arrangements between universities and schools are integral to the Irish Teaching Council’s recently published policy document ‘Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers of Initial Teacher Education’ (2011a), in accordance with section 38 of the Teaching Council Act, 2001. This document is the blueprint for the accreditation of all ITE programmes. On publication of this document, the Teaching Council was requested to facilitate negotiations between all ITE providers and associated placement schools, with the aim of achieving greater coherence and clarity of roles and processes in the important area of student teachers’ practice learning. This process is testament to the enduring challenges which Irish ITE providers have been facing in this area in the past and which have recently been further compounded by budget constraints and new pressures facing schools as a result of Ireland’s economic crisis.

The writers of this paper consider the establishment of this Partner School initiative to be a pioneering project which can inform national policy reform. It clearly addresses the Irish Teaching Council’s expectations and aspires to create educative collaborative partnerships between a university and its School of Education and post-primary schools to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in schools and in teacher education. We are looking forward to the agreement which is currently being drafted at national level. In the design and implementation of our school-university partnership initiative, we took a bottom-up collaborative and action-focused approach. This has provided us with a unique insight into the dynamics of initiating and implementing inter-institutional change in a ‘hybrid learning space’ (Miell, Phoenix, & Thomas, 2002). The hybrid space in teacher education is a collective learning opportunity where “academic and practitioner knowledge and knowledge that exists in communities come together in new, less hierarchical ways in the service of teacher learning” (Zeichner, 2010, p. 89). The establishment of this new space in our School of Education invited the triad of stakeholders into the collaboration with a view to supporting positive change.

Throughout the pilot phase of this project, three university tutors (co-authors of this paper) also assumed a research role, and set about reflecting on the process. We individually and collaboratively explored our feelings, actions and thoughts as we engaged with school based practitioners and pre-service teachers as the collaborative partnership project developed. As a result of this exploration the following questions emerged:

- What have we learnt from our experience?
- What key factors contributed to the success of the project?
- How did our interactions and relationships impact on our emotions and actions?
- How did our emotions impact on our interactions and actions?

3. Methodology

3.1. Overview

The methodology discussed here was designed to explore and examine the experiences of the University ITE tutors throughout the initial year of the implementation of the new model of school-university partnership. Working within the interpretive paradigm, a qualitative approach was employed. As Sherman and Webb note “qualitative research has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it” (1988, p.7). Accordingly, the research design aims to ascertain the thoughts, experiences and feelings of three university tutors as they worked within the newly conceptualised hybrid space.

3.2 The research strategy

When developing an appropriate research strategy, it was decided that the effective use of a collaborative self-study would best suit the aims of this research. Martin, Snow & Franklin-Torrez (2011) view self-study of teacher education as “a reflective mode of inquiry focused on critical examination of the space between self and practice with purposes that are improvement aimed” (p. 301). In order to derive such data, a flexible research strategy was required that invited the participants to meet regularly at agreed sessions, during and after the intervention. During these meetings, tutors explored their experiences in a secure focused environment, allowing for a depth of critical self- and peer- reflection. Martin et al. (2011) cite Borko, Liston and White (2007), when describing self-study as practitioner research, as a genre of empirical teacher education research in which researchers fill dual roles as practitioners and researchers. The three participants in this research who assumed these dual roles were female university tutors who were instrumental in setting up the practice educator programme. One participant was the ITE programme leader (P1), another was responsible for the coordination of the teaching practice element of the programme (P2) and the third an experienced practitioner and tutor (P3). A fourth university tutor, who was not directly involved in the work with the self-selected partner schools, was invited into the reflective process to help lead the discussion, to ask critical questions and to help surface themes.

3.2 Data collection

Data included individually written self-reflections, e-mail conversations and notes taken from regular programme design meetings. In addition to several informal meetings, three formal discursive meetings were organised. In the first meeting, the three university tutors read aloud selected self-reflections from their diaries of the process in rotation, drawing out key themes during the progression. Similar to Martin et al. (2011), we sketched emerging questions, quotes and ideas, working from a broad perspective and themes developed inductively. Emerging themes revealed the complexity of the role of the university tutors and the challenges inherent in collaborative partnership work.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Summary of main themes

The visual representation below illustrates the central findings from our reflective journey. The outer ring represents the contextual factors which have been described earlier, most importantly national policy change in

initial teacher education. As part of this and in keeping with all change initiatives the implementation of our project played out before a critical audience. The middle ring represents the university tutors' experiences and interactions within the hybrid space. The main themes of collaboration, communication, honesty, trust and identity emerged. The inner ring illustrates the central role emotion played in the process of building a collaborative partnership approach.



Figure 1. Collaborative partnership approach to ITE: the centrality of emotional labour

4.2. Telling the story

Prior to the partnership project an individual approach to teaching practice supervision was in operation whereby we entered the school as outsiders, supervised our students and left, paying the usual courtesies. The project required a move to a collaborative approach. We were now working with practising teachers in their schools. They had chosen to be practice educators and work with us to support the student teachers in developing their professional teaching practice. This was an entirely new experience. Practice educators were unpaid and working in a voluntary capacity. In the absence of established structures and designated roles and without the institutional constructs of contractual obligations and sanctions, the central role of social interaction and relationships, as the key determinants of success, came to the fore. Central to the social interaction process was emotionality and our previous approach to teaching practice supervision required change to meet the requirements of this new focus. We had unknowingly supported a binary, separating emotion and intellect and the power of their interconnectivity caught us by surprise and challenged us to develop new understanding, new skills and new ways of communicating.

Extract from Reflective Diary (P1): *Often when I visited schools I felt like I was begging for teachers' valuable time. I would sit in the staffrooms, some friendlier than others, smiling, nodding, making small talk and hoping to meet a teacher who would talk to me.*

The protection afforded by the aforementioned outsider role no longer existed. The main organisational unit of the partnership was the triad, which consisted of a university tutor, a practice educator and a student teacher working together to provide the best teaching practice experience possible. Social interaction, in the emotionally charged socio cultural context of the school, was the glue that held the triad together. Emotionality played a key role in creating and nurturing the interactive process.

We became aware that Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which we regularly suggested our student teachers should use in their professional practice, was highly effective in this adult context. The description of ZPD as "a complex whole, a system of systems in which interrelated and interdependent elements include participants, artefacts and environment/context and participants' experience of their interactions within it" (Mahn & John-Steiners, 2002, p. 7) resonated with the approach that developed in our triadic relationships. Vygotsky's concept of *Perezhivanie* sometimes referred to as 'lived experience' and described as the "affective processes through which interactions in ZPD are individually perceived, appropriated and represented by the participants" (Mahn & John-Steiners, 2002, p. 7) engaged our attention most and is the concept to which the success of the project is most indebted.

Extract from Reflective Diary (P2): *We kept saying as this was a pilot year that we were willing to go with any suggestions by the teachers as to what would work for them and their school...I believe this created a certain freedom into the project and allowed everyone engage better with each other.*

Another ZPD of the most fundamental importance was that in which, we, the University tutors participated back in the safety of our offices. It was here that our confidence and competence developed "through dignified, collaborative, caring support". Together we built "emotional scaffolding" and the social interdependence and human connection gave us the strength to go back to the schools and surface our creativity and take the necessary risks to advance the project (Mahn & John-Steiners, 2002, pp. 5 & 12)

Extract from Reflective Diary (P3): *I felt relieved to be able to debrief this and many other unsettling experiences with my university colleagues. Their understanding and support, the mutual trust and respect we have built and the laughter we share when we come together have been my source of confidence, energy and commitment to this project.*

Through our developing awareness of the importance of affect in social interaction within the triads we managed the many challenges which emerged. It was vital that each triad member's role and their knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning was respected. The development of a shared vision around providing the best teaching practice experience possible for the student required a meshing of the different approaches that reflected the different perspectives and backgrounds and was consonant with best practice models. While equal partners in the process, we each had different roles and responsibilities. These differences revealed the power dynamic which could have jeopardised the sense of equality. Maintaining subtlety while pursuing truthfulness and honesty in the observation and feedback process emphasised the emotional aspects of social interaction and learning. On occasions conversations within the triad were informed by preceding one to one conversations with practice educators and student teachers, the exact content of which remained confidential to the university tutor as s/he carried ultimate responsibility for the welfare of student, teacher and project. The confidentiality of dyadic conversations posed a possible threat to the collaborative nature of the partnership model. The purely supportive role of the practice educator as distinct from the support and assessment role of the University tutor also rested uneasily with equality and partnership. Discussion between university tutor and practice educator on a student's progress was vital if continuous support was to be provided. Such discussion by its nature conferred a certain assessment role on the practice educator. Yet an assessment role would change the practice educator's relationship with the student teacher and add a continuous assessment dimension to teaching practice. These greyer, more nuanced areas had the potential to derail the process. It was the human connection evident in the careful listening, the sensitive conversations, the understanding of each member's vulnerabilities in the particular socio cultural context, the emotional support and trust which assisted us in collaboratively constructing and owning an understanding of the partnership process that overcame these potential pitfalls.

Extract from Reflective Diary (P2): *I guess as university tutors we are used to this as we are constantly struggling to adequately fulfill our dual role of mentor and assessor. However, this was a new experience for*

practice educators. Despite our clear role descriptions and communication with students where we explained that the responsibility for assessment lies solely with the university tutor, students were, probably naturally, unsure – some even doubtfully suspicious. “How does it work” one asked me” if my Practice Educator discusses my progress with you how can that not influence your assessment?”

5. Conclusions and future work

On reflection, our experience accords with Vygotsky’s view that our emotions are not ‘a state within a state’. Instead our emotions played a central role in informing our thoughts and actions (DiPardo & Potter, 2003, p. 318). They were value judgments that helped us understand our need for the project to succeed and guides that led us to a successful outcome and thereby to our own ‘flourishing’ Nussbaum (2001, p. 22). Through the social interaction played out in the cultural contexts of the school and the university, the cognitive, social and emotional worked in concert to deliver a very rich outcome. We learned to discuss and trust our ‘felt knowledge’ (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 133) and our language and laughter reflected this new influence. We discovered first hand that ‘collaboration is complex; it is charged both cognitively and emotionally’ (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 124) but through it a transformation in our approach to teacher education was achieved that would not have happened otherwise. Collaboration also changed our work lives. Prior to this experience we ploughed individual furrows in the same field in the belief that detachment and intellect was an exclusive pair. Collaborative partnership forced us to acknowledge the significant role emotion played in our work. Together we shared the hopes, joys, disappointments, fears and risks associated with our new venture and got to know ourselves and each other in a new and enabling way. Our challenge for the year ahead is to courageously develop our collaborative partnership model both in the University and in the school settings and to reflect deeply and holistically on our experiences and those of our partners.

Chastened and liberated through partnership we join Feldman in supporting Vera John Steiner’s belief that ‘together we create our future’ (Feldman, 2006, xiii).

References

- Brisard, E., Menter, I., & Smith, I. (2005). *Models of partnership in programmes of initial teacher education*. Systematic Literature review commissioned by the General Teaching Council Scotland.
- Di Pardo, A. & Potter, C. (2003). Beyond Cognition: A vygotkian perspective on emotionality and teachers’ professional lives. In Kozulin, A. Gindis, B. Ageyev, V.S., & Miller, S. (Eds.), *Vygotsky’s educational theory in cultural context*. USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Feldman, D.H., (2000). Foreword. In Steiner. J. V., *Creative collaboration* USA: Oxford University Press.
- The Teaching Council. (2011a). *Initial teacher education: Criteria and guidelines for programme providers*. Retrieved August 10, 2012, from http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/Teacher%20Education/ITE%20Criteria%20and%20Guidelines%20Final%20July%202011.pdf
- The Teaching Council. (2011b). *Policy on the continuum of teacher education*. Retrieved August 10, 2012, from [http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/Teacher%20Education/FINAL%20TC_Policy_Paper_SP\(1\).pdf](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/_fileupload/Teacher%20Education/FINAL%20TC_Policy_Paper_SP(1).pdf)
- John-Steiner, V. (2000). *Creative collaboration*. USA: Oxford University Press.
- Mahn, H. & John-Steiner, V. (2002). The gift of confidence: A vygotkian view of emotions. In Wells, G. & Claxton, G. *Learning for life in the 21st Century: Sociological perspectives on the future*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Martin, S, Snow, J. & Franklin-Torrez, C.A. (2011). Navigating the terrain of third space: Tensions with/in relationships in school-university partnerships. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 62 (3), 299-311.
- Miell, D., Phoenix, A., & Thomas, K. (Eds.) (2002) *Mapping psychology I*. Milton Keynes: Open University.
- Nussbaum, M. (2001). *Upheavals of thought: the intelligence of emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sherman, R. & Webb, R. (Eds.). (1988). *Qualitative research in education: forms and methods*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Zeichner, K. (2010). Rethinking the connection between campus courses and field experiences in college-and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61 (1-20), 89-99.