

An examination of university-school partnerships in South Africa

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The purpose of the study was to examine university-school partnerships in the process of teacher education. The research question that guided the study was how teacher educators partner with schools in teacher training. A qualitative study was preferred because the aim was to gather information and opinions on how teacher educators trained student teachers as well as to provide a forum for pre-service student teachers to air their views about how they were trained. Twenty- six lecturers and nine student focus groups, purposively sampled, participated in the study. An interview was used for data collection and Holliday's thematic approach was used to analyse the data. The research revealed that there was a weak partnership between teacher education and schools. The study recommends the creation of third spaces in teacher education which involve an "equal and more dialectical relationship between academic and practitioner knowledge" in support of student teachers' learning.

Keywords: mentors; partnership; practice teaching; skills development; student teacher learning; third spaces

Introduction

The major purpose of the research was to examine university-school partnerships in pre-service student teacher training in South Africa. Experiences with student teachers over the past few years have revealed that they persistently express disenchantment about the worth of theory in practice. There is a general belief among student teachers that what happens at the university during lectures has little relationship with what pertains in the classroom. It is therefore important to harness both teacher education and school efforts in order to enhance student teacher learning. In this light a closer cooperation between teacher education and schools becomes imperative.

The university-school partnership is central to teacher training. Student teachers should not only complete their programme with adequate and appropriate skills, but should also view their practice teaching experience as a continuum to their training and an integral component of their development as teachers. The prioritization of learning experiences of students in higher education is currently under the spotlight with debates, amongst others, of work integrated learning and the theory/practice nexus, hence the significance of this study of the university-school partnership.

Conceptual framework

The teacher education-school partnerships are premised upon Goodlad's (1991:10) conclusion that "any teacher education programme created or conducted without the collaboration of surrounding schools is defective". Teitel (2003:45) argues that the separation of coursework

and practice creates problems in transfer and in implementation within schools and this may result in under-preparedness of the newly qualified teacher. The European Commission (EC) (2007:1) suggests that “in the growing complexity of society and the demands on the educational system, schools should play an active and central role in developing teaching methods, improving the quality of teaching, and extending knowledge about teaching and learning” in teacher education. The EC argues that the relationship between teacher education institutions (TEIs) and schools has often been one-sided, in which the school is the passive recipient of trainee teachers and in which most power lies with the TEIs. The foregoing correlates with Zeichner’s (2010:90) argument that under the traditional view of practice teaching, schools are expected mainly to provide a place for education students to practice teaching and they are usually not provided with the kind of preparation and support they would need to implement a more active and educative concept of mentoring. The danger of this view is that it reinforces the dichotomy between the school and the university instead of an integrative approach to teacher training where the school is viewed as an essential contributor to the programme.

Coble and Williams (1998) posit five guiding principles for an effective teacher education-school partnership:

- Increased time for pre-service teachers to experience earlier, longer, and more intensive field-based placements in the schools, connected to method classes and mentors at the school sites;
- Jointly crafted professional development programmes for student teachers;
- Increased communication between public schools and higher education for the purpose of sharing and disseminating good practices;
- Generation and application of research and new knowledge about teaching and learning; and
- Joint involvement of university and school personnel in curriculum planning and programme development.

According to Coble and Williams (1998:2) there is a wide range of existing relationships between universities and schools, from simple episodic transactions to complex on-going partnerships. Cortada (1995:3) argues that what distinguishes between these polarities is the value-added to university-school relationships as they grow from transactions to partnerships. Henderson (1990:4) provides a conceptual framework for understanding the structure of what is meant by the term ‘partnership’, what characterizes successful partnerships, and some of the general benefits derived from developing strategic partnerships. There are two dimensions of partnership style relationships described by Henderson (1990); they are partnership in context and partnership in action.

Partnership in context is the degree to which the university and schools believe that the partnership will be sustained over time. The key indicators are longevity, stability, and interdependence between the partners. There are three domains that help define the context of a successful strategic partnership, namely, a) mutual benefits; if a partnership succeeds, it will be because both parties have something to gain, b) commitment; partnerships require a long range view as well as a willingness, over time, to relinquish some organizational controls in favour of operationalized shared governance, and c) predisposition; developing strategic partnerships as a means to achieve improvement in teacher preparation and development is a significant departure from past practice (Henderson, 1990).

Partnership in action is the ability of the partners to influence policies, processes, and programmes that affect the operational performance of the partnership. The key indicator is the

ability to affect the day-to-day working relationship of the partners. Henderson (1990) asserts that there are three major principles that help define successful partnerships. The first principle is shared knowledge. Partnerships ultimately survive on a deep foundation of shared knowledge between partner organizations. University-school partners must understand the environment and culture that affect how the other works if they are to support and influence each other in critical areas. The second principle is dependency. In every partnership there are distinctive competencies and resources, so that if the partnership fails, each member of the partnership loses. Successful university-school partnerships learn how to manage an environment where each holds critical cards tied to the other's success. The third principle is an organizational linkage. Successful partnerships are characterized by formal and informal linkages at all levels in the organization.

The EC (2007) has suggested aims of partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools. While the aims and efforts of partnerships could vary depending on circumstances and the context of institutions, the EC has proposed three elements that are crucial, namely, a) improving methods for teaching and learning; b) raising the quality of teachers; and c) developing knowledge about teaching and learning through research. For sustained relationships both parties should benefit from the outcomes of partnerships. The EC (2007:5) has postulated benefits for the school, teacher education and for the students. The benefits for the school are:

- Involvement in the initial education of new teachers;
- In-service development of staff within the school;
- Increased capacity for innovation and knowledge development through support from teacher educators and through student-teachers' development and research activities; and
- The feedback of the outcomes of educational research into the reality of the schools.

The benefits for teacher education include:

- Opportunities to relate the curriculum of teacher education more closely to the complex reality within the school;
- The provision of a realistic learning environment for student teachers; and
- Opportunities for realistic and relevant research questions and assignments for student teachers.

The benefits for student teachers are:

- An involvement in the reality of the schools. This would help to reduce the practice shock sometimes experienced by students when they go out for practice teaching;
- A more realistic view of the profession and the demands that it places on teachers; and
- An involvement in a wider variety of activities, better reflecting the breadth of the profession.

Coble and Williams (1998) are of the view that although partnerships between schools and teacher education need to be addressed at policy level, partnerships are not an aim in themselves; they are a means to improve the quality of teacher education and to support innovation within schools and school development.

Teitel (2003:3) suggests the concept of professional development schools (PDS) as a special case of teacher education-school collaboration in which the experience in partnership formation provides rich backgrounds for the efforts to 'grow' PDSs. PDSs can be seen as places in which to resolve the tension between schools and universities. They are creative ways to bridge the gap and avoid the theory-practice dichotomy (Stoddard, 1993:43). For teacher education, PDSs provide an opportunity to create a venue for literal praxis, the development of teaching skill and practice in context. PDSs provide an opportunity to bridge the gap be-

tween the abstract and the authentic in the preparation and development of student teachers (Teitel, 2003).

Zeichner (2010) argues for the rejection of binaries such as practitioner and academic knowledge; and theory and practice, arguing instead for the creation of new hybrid spaces for integrating what are seen as competing discourses, in new ways where an either/or perspective is transformed into both/also point of view. In other words, a third space is concerned with the creation of hybrid spaces in teacher education programmes that bring together school mentors and teacher educators and academic knowledge in new ways to enhance student learning. Contrary to the traditional disconnection between teacher education and schools and to the valorisation of academic knowledge as the authoritative source of knowledge for learning about teaching in traditional university models of teacher education, third spaces bring mentors and academic knowledge in less hierarchical ways to create new learning opportunities for student teachers. Creating third spaces in teacher education involves an equal and more dialectical relationship between academic and practitioner knowledge in support of student learning. Gorodetsky and Barak (2008) are of the view that third spaces in school-university partnerships in teacher education encourage a more egalitarian status for participants than conventional school-university partnerships. Examples of hybrid spaces that could be created in teacher education include, a) bringing mentors and their knowledge into campus courses and field experiences; b) incorporating representations of teachers' practices in campus courses; and c) mediated instruction and field experiences where method courses could be school based.

Methodology

A post-modern qualitative research design was used. Phenomenology was chosen as a research strategy since it focuses "on the ways that the life world; the world every individual takes for granted — is experienced by its members" (Holliday, 2007:16). It also offered a descriptive, reflective, interpretive and engaging mode of inquiry from which the fundamental nature of the relationship between teacher education and schools could be elicited from respondents. The major aim was to examine and describe the partnership between teacher education and schools from respondents within their natural context. That is, a "seeing through the eyes of the respondents" (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:51) so that the partnership between teacher education and schools could be described in terms of the meanings that they have for the respondents.

The research sites included the largest provider of teacher education in four provinces — Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, and the Western Cape. Purposive sampling was conducted to adequately capture the heterogeneity of institutions especially after the restructuring in higher education. As a result the major variable of size and different configurations in the higher education scenario post-1994 were taken into account. The aim was to ensure that the conclusions adequately represented the range of variation.

Purposive sampling was used to select both student teachers and lecturers. Respondents were selected on the basis of some defining characteristic that made them holders of the data needed for the study. The main criterion for inclusion was the level of study of the teacher education students. The sample comprised of BEd 4th year pre-service student teachers and the lecturers in the 4th year programme. The major reason was that BEd final year students had experienced three years of teacher training and it was assumed that they were in a better position to give informed comments on how the partnership between teacher education and schools (where they did their practice teaching) impacted on their learning. On the other hand it was also assumed that lecturers of BEd level four students had the knowledge and experience

pertaining to the collaboration between teacher education and schools. Sampling decisions were therefore made for the explicit purpose of obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research question. Twenty-six lecturers and nine focus groups with a total of 61 final-year undergraduate student teachers participated in the study.

The principal means of data collection was the interview. Interviews were preferred as a tool for data collection because they allowed the researchers to tap into the experiences of teacher educators and student teachers. Interviews provided rich data that gave “solid material for building a significant analysis as participants’ views, feelings, intentions, actions as well as the context were revealed” (Charmaz, 2006:65). Questions were tailored to fit the respondents’ knowledge, degree of involvement and status as illustrated in the interview matrices, Table 1.

Table 1. Interview matrices

Focus	Lecturer questions	Student questions
Organization of practice teaching	How do you organize student placement in schools?	How do you assess your placement for practice teaching?
University-school partnership	How do you collaborate with the schools to enhance student learning?	How does the university link with the schools in order to enhance your learning?

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with lecturers and it provided an opportunity to voice their personal opinions about how they trained student teachers. The foci of the interview were organization of practice teaching, mentoring and student teacher supervision. Focus group interviews (with an average of six per group) were carried out with student teachers. The focus group interview was based on the assumption that group interaction would be productive in widening and diversifying the range of responses, activating forgotten details of experience and releasing inhibitions that could otherwise have discouraged respondents from disclosing information (Niewenhuis, 2007:90). In the focus groups, student teachers were able to build on each others’ ideas and comments to provide an in-depth view of data. The foci of the student interviews were practice teaching organization, mentoring and practice teaching supervision.

The validity of interview question items was ensured through a pilot study that was carried out with both lecturers and student teachers who were not part of the sample. The exercise was important as it provided feedback on whether the interview questions “sounded right” and also if they were understandable (Brace, 2004:164). Validity was considered to be a relative term that referred to credibility of explanation, interpretation and conclusions made (Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell’s (2002) realist approach to validity was used as a guide in monitoring issues of validity. In addition to providing an accurate record of what respondents expressed, the digital recordings were a proof that determined if the respondents made particular statements during the interview. To overcome descriptive validity threats like omission, we used observer comments to note non-verbal cues and as a result captured whole meaning of interview information. Interpretive validity was gained through seeking to understand information from the respondents’ perspective in their contexts. An effort was made to maintain the interpretations

'experience-near' (Maxwell, 2002), i.e. based on the immediate concepts employed by interviewees through employing two verification techniques. Through respondent validation, i.e. member checks, we solicited feedback about collected data in order to verify the accuracy of interpretations and conclusions from participants. Dialoguing the knowledge is what Henning (2004:149) calls communication as validity, i.e. checking whether respondents agreed with the researcher data. We also sounded our understanding of transcribed interviews with respondents to verify whether our interpretation of what they had shared with us was accurate.

We relied on Holliday's (2007) thematic analysis as a means of organizing data. Holliday (2007:93) argues that "taking a purely thematic approach, in which data is taken holistically and rearranged under themes which emerge as running through its totality, is the classic way to maintain the principle of emergence".

Hofstee (2006:112) contends that all methods have limitations. In qualitative inquiry, the issue of bias and generalizability are often questioned, especially the argument that personal experiences, beliefs and value laden narratives are subjective. However within the postmodern qualitative research framework, subjectivity is strength because truth is relative. To that extent "no story can have more credibility than any other, all stories are equally valid being so validated by the community that lives by them" (All About Philosophy Series, 2009). The sample was limited. However, we echo Zientek's (2007:962) assertion that "such samples can yield some insights when sample characteristics reasonably well match those of a targeted population".

All four institutions that formed the sample granted approval for the research project.

Results

In data presentation themes are used, namely, a) organization of practice teaching, b) mentoring, and c) student teacher supervision. In presenting data we were mindful, however, of an ethical issue about guarding against misrepresenting, distorting or deleting findings which have been provided in good faith by respondents. Arguing along the same lines, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2008:462) are of the opinion that some "researchers feel that it is important to keep the flavour of the original data, so they report direct phrases and sentences, not only because they are often more illuminative and direct than the researcher's own words, but also because they feel that it is important to be faithful to the exact words used". In the same manner, in presenting data, an effort was made not to distort respondents' meanings by retaining and quoting actual spoken words. This is further coupled by the fact that the post-modern qualitative paradigm celebrates multiple interpretations.

Data from lecturers

Organization of practice teaching

In all four institutions, student teachers go out for about six weeks in a year and 24 weeks in four years for practice teaching. Responding to adequacy of time allocated for practice teaching, the data reflect a divide among lecturer responses — there was an equal balance of opinion that time allocated was adequate and that practice teaching time was inadequate. For instance, the respondents voiced the sentiment that they did not,

believe it's adequate ... we are not doing students any good. Students should be spending a semester or a full year. They need to experience what teaching is — students go out there it's like play teaching.

The observation was that "if the teaching practice is only to develop teaching skills then it's

not enough". As a follow up, lecturers were asked whether practice teaching served its intended purpose; to which the majority did not think so. The sentiment expressed was that it depended *"on the school they are in and who is mentoring them and it depends on how the school is running and the degree of freedom they are given to develop themselves"*.

Teaching practice supervision

Responding to the question about how supervision was organized and implemented, the argument advanced by 40% of lecturers was that it is inadequate:

We arrange to see them two times per session and once the two times is over we don't go back. So I don't think that we are really serious about it, maybe we need to rethink about how student teaching practice can be done.

About 80% of the lecturers expressed the sentiment that student teachers should have someone knowledgeable on the spot, i.e. during practice teaching. Data reveal that, however, there were challenges in certain schools because as argued by lecturers,

Some of the schools are so dysfunctional that there is hardly any supervision if you just leave them in the school and expect the school members of staff to do it. Their standards are very different to yours even if you have workshops it's still very different,

— that is, university standards and school standards remain incompatible.

Mentoring

Commenting about the support student teachers get from subject or Grade teachers, 75% of the respondents were concerned about the capacity of mentor teachers: *"you see the mentor teachers don't have any training of what we expect from teachers in mentoring our students ..."* Examples of sentiments expressed were: *"most of the schools still emphasize rote learning rather than learning and understanding ..."*; *"And so if our students go out to schools teachers tell them no, no, no there is no time for all that nice stuff... teach them what they have to know and get on with the job"*.

Responding to how the situation could be resolved, the need to train mentor teachers was emphasized especially with the observation that in some cases schools award teachers *"strange"* and *"unrealistic"* marks, *"even in the range of 90%"*. The belief was, *"So there is a lot of work that needs to go into that in terms of mentorship training"*.

University-school partnerships

Responding to the question on how universities collaborated with schools, 60% of the lecturers were of the opinion that there is a lot that needs to be done in this regard. Comments expressed included: *"We don't liaise with mentor teachers from our side at this university, we don't. What happens is that we send students into the schools with the knowledge that the teacher will know what to do"*. It was believed that it is important to have *"structures in place for students to meet with mentors and things like that"*.

Half of the sample of lecturers felt that despite workshops and seminars and other incentives given to mentors, no positive changes seemed to have been realized in the quality of student support. The sentiment expressed among the respondents was that

... it's not building incentives, its creating links between university and schools. There should be a reciprocal relationship where both parties benefit. You need to develop an understanding that the school is but an extension of the university in order to have a better understanding of the dialectical relationship between theory and practice.

Asked about how teacher educators linked with the mentor teachers, 65% acknowledged that they still had a lot to do within this area as the practice was simply to appoint students to good mentors: *“At some schools they have willing mentors. At other schools they have appointed mentors; this is at gun-point because the principal says you have to have a mentor.”* There was a general belief among respondents that students *“are sort of left to their own devices and lecturers just pop in for the evaluation and out they go. They don’t even talk to teachers or something like that”*.

Data from student teachers

Organization of teaching practice

While some of the student teachers were of the opinion that practice teaching was well organized, the majority believed that some improvements could be made. For instance a concern was expressed among the latter group that *“the previous year we went to a school again and they didn’t know that we were coming. They [lecturers] make us feel bad. We had to apologize and it puts us in an awkward situation”*. It was evident that in some instances student teachers were sent to schools without prior arrangements and confirmation from the schools. Students were generally dissatisfied with the administration of practice teaching —

administration should be done much more earlier than its done: I feel it should be done the previous year already so that the school that you are going to can be notified on time and that you can start preparing yourself for that school as well.

An interesting observation was that the majority of respondents believed that time spent on practice teaching should be extended. The argument was, *“we should actually spend more time in schools to be able to see what goes on in there so that we have a realistic feel of what goes on in the classroom”*. Almost all the respondents believed that practice teaching was a brilliant idea but the concern was in the

way in which we are presented to the schools. Sometimes some schools don’t want us in actual fact. They don’t want us...when the social atmosphere is not conducive you don’t learn. And I think it should be emphasized to the schools that if you do not want students don’t take them. At the end even if the crit comes you are anxious, you are tight. It’s not a learning environment anymore.

Some students strongly believed that

they [lecturers] need to evaluate the teachers that they are sending us to because some of the teachers we get sent to are horrible. Teachers like ... we don’t learn anything from them. So I think they need to evaluate the teachers that we get sent to so that we get to tutor teachers that are what we should be, what we are aiming to be.

Respondents expressed concerns about their attachment to nonchalant mentor teachers —

well another thing with practice teaching is that it is not organized in the sense that you are just being dropped in a school whether the teacher that you working with is helpful or not.

Practice teaching supervision

Pertaining to practice teaching assessment, the majority of the respondents believed that *“it would be a lot better to have tutor teachers correct us and not the lecturers”*; *“there are a lot of areas in which the institution will have to up on,”* were some of the comments expressed.

The general sentiment was,

they should give us to the tutor teachers to evaluate us. But the schools must be more

informed of what the university requires of us so that when they judge us, evaluate us, they know what to evaluate us on. It is not just a tutor-teacher thing. There should be a clear structure that the school needs to know that this is what is required from the student teacher.

In all the focus groups, the students indicated that most of their mentor teachers had a poor idea of the aims of practice teaching, that they viewed students as apprentices that needed space to practice, that they did not read the information provided by the university and that teachers complained that the documentation was so thick that they were “*put-off*” reading it. Students commented that “*the handouts that were issued to mentor teachers were put in drawers because it’s not applying to them. It’s not telling them this is what we expect you to do*”.

Partnerships between teacher education and schools

Relationships

Data suggested that there was an ineffective relationship between universities and schools. There was a general sentiment expressed by respondents that schools were not welcoming to them and in some schools they experienced very strained relationships during practice teaching. This argument was countered by others in the focus group that defended the friendly and accommodating teachers that were willing to assist them in the schools. However, students indicated that there are teachers in almost every school who are unwilling to share their classrooms and time with the student teachers and it is these teachers who do not do valid assessments of their teaching practice.

Skills development

The majority of the students expressed concern that the areas they were lacking in, like work plans and work schedules, are some of the items that school principals requested immediately when they started their practice teaching sessions. A large majority of students felt that they were not trained to have these documents in place — “*what impression will we be giving if we sort of hand in this half piece together — what we sort of think is — we are going to look like idiots*”. The general belief was that the aspects in which they had limited capacity, were considered to be among the most important in the schools — “*so it is part of what’s left off, and as students getting in their final year, we realize how important they are*”.

School teacher knowledge

A further concern expressed by student teachers was the area of assessment:

another scary thing is that you go into the schools and teachers themselves are not sure about assessment, the differences between a learning programme and a learning area ... we are also worried that if we go into a school with some idea of assessment and the school is doing it differently and they might prescribe to me how its done but when the department comes for assessment it will be all wrong. It puts like pressure on us because you kind of panic and think are we going to make it or what?

In an effort to create a third space in teacher education, there was a faculty that had invited teachers from a local school to work in their programme. Teachers were included in the teaching of methodology courses. While there was a general appreciation of the whole idea, some students however, believed that the arrangement was not serving its intended purpose. The sentiment expressed was that, “*Yes it’s cool for us to know what is happening within her class because it is reality, something that we can learn from her, but she does not bring it back*

to theory". Asked whether the visiting tutor teacher was attached to a member of staff, the reply was, "no, no one even knows her name". In other words the lecturer's expectation in terms of content coverage was not clarified and teacher educators did not build on the experiences shared by visiting teachers.

Discussion

University-school partnership

While most universities acknowledge the integral role played by schools in teacher training, in practice the issue of partnership lags behind. The partnership scale ranges from weak to no partnership at all as evidenced by the lecturer who acknowledged that "*at this university we don't liaise with schools. We don't.*" Data suggest that the relationship that pertains between some TEIs and schools is one-sided, the school is the passive recipient of trainee teachers and almost all the power lies with the TEI. Gorodetsky, Barak and Hadari (2007:27) reiterate that even in the current wave of school-university partnerships in teacher education, universities continue to maintain hegemony over the construction and dissemination of knowledge and schools remain in the position of practice fields where students are to try out the practices provided by the university. Such an arrangement is however, fraught with weaknesses as Zeichner (2010:90) argues that it is very common for mentor teachers to know very little about the specifics of the methods and foundation courses that their student teachers have completed on campus, and teacher educators often know very little about the specific practices used in the classroom where their students are placed. There is much validity in this feeling of ignorance with regards to school practices as is evidenced in the implementation of Outcomes-Based Education by teacher educators who never had experience with the approach, yet they trained students to use the approach in schools.

Reading through transcribed data, it is evident that communication between some TEIs and schools were not always optimal. Lecturer expectations and the role of the school during practice teaching were not clearly communicated to mentors. As a result more often than not, schools had negative perceptions of TEIs and vice versa. The European Commission (2007:1) policy stresses that the contribution that a TEI can make to a school's programme of continuous professional development for its staff, the contribution that student teachers can make to school development, or the contributions that school staff can make to teacher education have not always been recognized, leading to wasted opportunities.

The taken for granted assumptions about school roles in teacher education

Data suggest that 60% of teacher educators took for granted the role of the school in teacher education without making deliberate and clearly spelt out links with the schools with regards to teaching practice. According to Ross, Brownell, and Sindelar (1999) schools and universities must critically examine the core assumptions that guide how they do their work. Both schools and universities must be open to new ideas regarding their goals and operating structures, and they must be open to the possibility of redefining existing roles. Hence, Zeichner (2010:92) suggests the use of a third space as a lens to examine various kinds of boundary crossing between campus and schools that could be effectively enacted. Data suggest that 65% of teacher educators were of the belief that certain components of teacher education were supposed to be imparted by schools where students do their practice teaching. These included record keeping and classroom management.

However, leaving some skills to be learnt at school during practice teaching was one of

the issues that teacher education students reacted to with strong emotions. Student teachers felt that it is these aspects that they are left to go and learn at school that make them very uncomfortable as they tend to lose confidence when they get to schools. Student teachers argued that *if all we needed was learnt at school, then why should we waste huge sums of money for courses that would not benefit us; we would rather go straight into the schools and learn from there.*

Levine (2006:31) contends that “*one of the unfortunate consequences of teacher education’s retreat from practice and practitioners is that graduates are not being adequately prepared for the classroom*”. Although there is a growing consensus that much of what student teachers need to learn must be acquired in and from practice rather than in preparing for practice (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), there is much disagreement about the conditions for teacher learning that must exist for this learning in and from practice to be educative and enduring (Zeichner, 2010:91).

It was evident that there was a clash of expectation between some teacher educators and schools as far as the level of skill development in teacher education students was concerned. For instance some schools expected to receive knowledgeable and skilled student teachers while some lecturers expected student teachers to go and acquire certain knowledge and skills from the schools. However, in reality, teachers feel that the teacher education departments must not abdicate their responsibilities in teacher preparation. This was confirmed by a few lecturers who believed that, “... *in most schools teachers do not trust them enough in their second year to say teach my class*”. It was evident that with the clash of expectations the student teacher was caught in the middle and hence was a victim of circumstances beyond his/her control. In light of the foregoing it was concluded that the teacher educators have taken the school role in the teaching and learning of student teachers for granted without making a deliberate link and clarifying the role of the schools in the process.

Conclusion and recommendations

Data reveal that there is poor collaboration between universities and schools. It is evident that university practice is still characterized by the traditional ‘application of theory model’ where prospective teachers are supposed to learn theories at the university and then go to practice or apply what they have learnt in schools; a practice that, instead of emphasizing on university-school partnerships, widened the gap between theory and practice. Links between teacher educators and practising teachers need to be strengthened. Higher education institutions have an important role to play in developing effective partnerships with schools and other stakeholders to ensure that their teacher education courses are relevant to the realities of the school context and that good classroom practice is the corner-stone of the teacher education programme. To this end teacher educators should possess practical experience of classroom teaching and should have attained a very high standard in the skills, attitudes and competencies demanded of teachers. There is evidence in the study that many teacher educators have spent minimal time in classrooms, while others have spent over two decades in the university without any opportunity to return to the classroom to inform their practice or appreciate the current realities that the student teachers and mentor teachers face in schools.

It is argued that the old paradigm of university-based teacher education where academic knowledge is viewed as the authoritative source of knowledge about teaching needs to change to one where there is a non-hierarchical interplay between academic and practitioner expertise. This new epistemology for teacher education may create expanded learning opportunities for

prospective teachers that would better prepare them to be successful teachers and more importantly, ensure that the new teachers do not deepen the crisis in public schooling in South Africa.

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