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Link2Practice: A Model of Ongoing Teacher and Teacher Candidate Professional Learning

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A common complaint about teacher education programs is that they follow a linear model—where theory and teaching skills are learned at the university and then applied in practicum experiences—that is inadequate and does not accurately represent teacher candidates' (TC) experiences (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Korthagen, Loughran & Russell, 2006). Indeed, teacher education programs have long been faced with the challenge of a "theory/practice divide", creating what has been seen as a mechanistic separation between university programs (where it is implied theory is learned) and the practicum (where it is implied skills and strategies are learned). This divide continues once teacher candidates become teachers in their own classrooms, where the divide further widens by valuing of the practical over the theoretical. We need a new frame of reference to understand teacher education as a whole (throughout a professional career), as emerging from interconnected, non-linear, and at times unpredictable structures. Teacher education programs should form in relation to teacher professional learning, student learning, and the realities of dynamically evolving modern-day schools. In our institutions, the ongoing tension between learning sites of campus and schools is reduced in the teacher education partnership called Link2Practice, where TCs' courses are integrated in a school district program with teachers who are making inquiries into their practice. This partnership responds to the increasing need for educators to understand and remain current about the interactions between TCs, K-12 public schools' students and the pedagogy practices, informed by theory, that they advocate. This paper describes the development of the Link2Practice model and discusses its importance for teacher education.

On reproche souvent aux programmes de formation des enseignants de suivre un modèle linéaire—selon lequel la théorie et les compétences pédagogiques sont acquises à l'université pour ensuite être appliquées pendant les stages—qui est inadéquat et qui ne représente pas avec exactitude les expériences des stagiaires (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Korthagen, Loughran & Russell, 2006). En effet, les programmes de formation des enseignants font face depuis longtemps au défi que représente l'écart entre la théorie et la pratique ayant créé ce qu'on perçoit comme étant une séparation mécaniste entre les programmes universitaires (où il est sous-entendu que les étudiants apprennent la théorie) et les stages (où il est sous-entendu que les étudiants apprennent des habiletés et des stratégies). Cet écart se poursuit quand les stagiaires commencent à enseigner dans leur propre salle de classe et se creuse par la valorisation de la pratique aux dépens de la théorie. Il nous faut un nouveau cadre de référence qui permettra de comprendre la formation des enseignants dans son ensemble (tout au long de la carrière d'enseignant) comme produit de structures interconnectées, non linéaires et parfois imprévisibles. Les programmes de formation des enseignants devraient exister en relation avec le perfectionnement professionnel

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des enseignants, l'apprentissage des élèves et les réalités des écoles modernes en évolution dynamique. Dans nos institutions, la tension constante entre les deux sites d'apprentissage—le campus et les écoles—est réduit grâce à un partenariat éducatif nommé Link2Practice par lequel les stagiaires sont intégrés dans un programme de district scolaire avec des enseignants qui font enquête sur leur pratique. Ce partenariat répond au besoin croissant qu'ont les enseignants de comprendre les interactions entre les stagiaires, les élèves M-12 des écoles publiques et les pratiques pédagogiques informées par la théorie qu'ils préconisent, et de rester au courant de ces interactions. Cet article décrit le développement du modèle Link2Practice et discute de son importance dans la formation des enseignants.

Traditional approaches to teacher education are increasingly critiqued for their limited relationship to teacher candidates' (TC) needs and lack of impact on their future practices (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006). A common complaint is that teacher education programs follow a linear model where theory and teaching skills are learned at the university and then applied in practicum experiences. However, this is an inadequate model for complex realities of schools and does not accurately represent TCs' experiences. Indeed, teacher education programs (TEP) have long been faced with the challenge of a "theory/practice divide," creating what has been seen as a mechanistic separation between university programs where it is implied theory is learned and practicum where it is implied skills and strategies, informed by theory are applied and practiced. The divide continues to grow once TCs become teachers with their own classrooms, the divide further widened with a valuing of the "practical" over the theoretical. This fosters a professional system that underestimates the importance of reflection or collaboration between teachers and does not promote an understanding of the "why" of teaching practices, the theorizing of human learning or the creation of conditions that can nurture meaningful learning for all learners. As noted by Cochran-Smith, Ell, Ludlow, and Aitken (2014), multiple studies intended to improve initial teacher education "have generally focused on pieces of teacher education rather than wholes, and have used an underlying linear logic" (p. 1). We need a new frame of reference to understand teacher education as a whole (throughout a professional career), as emerging from interconnected, non-linear and at times unpredictable structures that form in relation to teachers' professional learning. Teachers need opportunities to strengthen their abilities to improve student learning, and understanding the realities of dynamically evolving modern-day schools.

Examinations of TEPs have identified several persistent challenges between field-based experiences and university coursework, including: (1) articulation of professional identity (Hopper, Sanford, & Bonsor-Kurki, 2012; ten Dam & Blom, 2006); (2) disconnect between theoretical and practice-based understandings (Russell & Martin, 2016); (3) fragmentation of courses/experiences (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2009; Grossman, Hammerness, & Mcdonald, 2009); (4) the need for professional learning communities to prepare for change within universities as well as in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Korthagen et al., 2006; Russell, McPherson, & Martin, 2001); and (5) the need for recognizing the importance of relational understandings and relationship building, with peers, mentors, students, families, the public, self, and the knowledge we collectively create (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011; Sanford, Hopper, & Starr, 2015). Especially problematic for deep sustained learning is that TCs initially value field-based learning over theoretical understandings, an imbalanced valuing that was aptly captured by Britzman (1991) in her now oft-cited phrase "practice makes practice" (p. 1). The common

outcome from typical teacher education program (TEP) design is that TCs (and subsequently teachers) join the profession with knowledge (of the "what") and skills (of the "how") but without rationale or articulated intention (of the "why"). In order to encourage the advancement of confident, reflective, and informed educators, an alternative approach to teacher education and professional ongoing learning needs to be conceptualized and offered.

Professional Learning for Teachers

Ongoing professional learning for teachers has been critically examined as lacking coherence, sustained exploration, or opportunities to create meaningful relationships with colleagues (Smyth, 2002). Although professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004; Hord, 2009; Stoll & Louis, 2007), professional learning networks (Schnellert, Fisher, & Sanford, 2018; deVries & Prenger, 2018) and other forms of professional learning spaces have been described and researched (Smyth, 1998; Schmoker, 2015), Schmoker asks, "what if, in fact, we do know 'what works'—but haven't acted on it?" (para. 2). He suggests that we need to seek out the strongest, most enduring evidence base to transform professional learning, one that provides a "sustained focus on a … limited number of practices, with multiple opportunities for frequent monitoring, feedback, and follow-up training" (para. 5). Further, Corcoran, Fuhrman, and Belcher (2001) found that professional development was most often conducted not by members of an evidence-based culture but one "in which 'whims, fads, opportunism, and ideology' prevailed" (p. 79). Recognizing the importance of sustained and personalized professional learning, we (the authors) have worked collaboratively to create an alternative approach to teachers' ongoing professional development and learning. Our notion of professional learning grows from the ground up, from the context of the school environment where issues arise, and from a network of interested professionals connected to the issues and committed to improving the conditions in which practices emerge in order to address recurring challenges. Within this notion of professional development, we focus on a relational epistemology (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011; Sanford et al., 2015) that frames human learning and the cognitive processes it entails as distributed in the world and our interactions in that world. As Barab and Plucker (2012) note, "cognition is distributed among individuals … is socially constructed through collaborative efforts to achieve shared objectives in cultural surroundings, and … is processed between individuals and the tools and artifacts provided by culture" (p. 166).

It is from these understandings that the authors have come together in partnership to explore ways in which teacher education structures can be adapted to better connect schools and university—and to better understand for ourselves the complexities of this work. Three of the authors work in teacher education at the university, and have all been closely aligned with schools in their teaching and research. The other two authors are a district principal and curriculum coordinator and they are co-leads of the *Link2Practice* (*L2P*) initiative in the district developing in-service teacher education; their combined background and expertise includes extensive experience in facilitating ongoing professional learning; they also act as district leads for several provincial teacher inquiry initiatives.

In our educational institutions, the ongoing tension between learning sites (campus and schools) is, we believe, being broken down in the teacher education partnership *L2P* that responds to the increasing need for educators to maintain current understandings of education, students, and pedagogy. This paper describes the development of the *L2P* model we have put into place that builds upon earlier approaches focused on integrating university course experiences in school

contexts. The *L2P* model has adapted the previous two models we have used, focusing on the integration of the TEP with a school district professional learning approach that frames teacher education around professional inquiry.

The *L2P* model is a structured response to previously articulated challenges and grew out of a desire to integrate the two learning spaces—university campus and school communities—and create a new/third space in which professional learning among TCs, practicing teachers, district leaders and teacher educators could be fostered and nurtured. This approach, including integrated school/campus experiences from the beginning of the Teacher Education Program (TEP), develops an authentic partnership between campus and a school district. Activities generated in this partnership included linking of pre-service and ongoing professional learning opportunities with teachers, sharing of school teachers' inquiry projects, development of TCs' inquiry projects to pursue during their program, and practicum experiences developed within school sites where some TCs had already worked. All these opportunities offered alternative inter-connected experiences to the traditional segregation of learning sites between university TEP and School districts. Spawned by the Holmes Report, similar professional development school models were developed in the United States during the 1990s (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001). However, *L2P* does not advocate relocating teacher education instructors and large portions of the TEP program into school sites, but rather seeks to find a mutually supportive ongoing and sustainable integration between school district and TEP.

Methodology

Framed by what Stake (2005) calls an intrinsic case study approach, this paper uses our personal reflective accounts of developing and implementing the *L2P* model as well as artifacts such as meeting notes and events to stimulate our conversations about how the *L2P* model evolved. However, the case study also draws on what Loughran and Russell (2002) refer to as a self-study approach. In this approach the intent is to take an inquiry-oriented stance to researching one's own practice for 'personal-professional development and for broader purposes of enhanced understanding of teacher education practices, processes, programs and contexts' (Cole & Knowles, 2005, p. 252). According to Vanassche & Kelchtermans' (2015) literature review of self-study practices, "self-study has no single method inscribed to it. Self-study borrows its repertoire of research methods and strategies from the conventional methods of empirical-analytical and/or qualitative-interpretive research" (pp. 514-515). As such, we frame this study as an intrinsic case study where we as teacher educators we used a self-study approach.

Ovens and Fletcher (2014) note that the main aim of self-study for teacher educators is to 'conduct systematic research of the self-in practice in order to consider and articulate the complexities and challenges of teaching and learning to teach' (p. 6). Self-study also utilizes elements of reflective practice as it entails teachers examining their own practice, critically reflecting on it, and consciously participating in their own growth and learning (Samaras & Freese, 2009). Self-study calls on researchers to examine the self in context critically. From this perspective, we are asked to consider why we do what we do, and unbury our assumptions, often in collaboration with a critical friend (Placier, Pinnegar, Hamilton & Guilfoyle, 2005). As Hopper (2015) notes: "self-study is done with other practitioners either in a collaborative or in relation to a critical friend's counsel to ensure interpretations are ones that others could support—a form of inter-subjective warrant" (p. 262). Another feature of this study was to create this paper as a collaborative approach in that all the participants and critical friend become co-authors of the

paper as they unpacked the teacher education practices in the *L2P* partnership.

Data in a self-study draws from natural artifacts with the process being investigated; as Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) note it can come from lesson plans, meeting reports, recordings, blogs, and photographs, for example, which are generated in the daily activities of the researchers as participants.

The aim of the paper is to describe and discuss developments of the *L2P* project, now in its fifth year, and offer reflections from all of us about our learning of integrated teacher education who have worked closely to implement it. Critically, the *L2P* approach enables TCs, from the beginning of their program, to experience "school" as novice teachers, supported by experienced partnering educators.

Theoretical Framework

Relational Approach to Learning and Complexivist Worldview

A key assumption within this paper is that learning to teach, either as a practicing teacher or as a TC, happens through a reciprocal dynamic interaction between an acting teacher working with students and the environment framed around teaching and learning. This relational approach to learning draws on a complexivist worldview that frames learning as emergent within self-organizing processes (Capra & Luigi Luisi, 2014; Osberg, 2015; Osberg, Biesta, & Cilliers, 2008), where any natural system that forms (e.g. ant colonies, flocks of birds, human brains) (Johnson, 2001) learns by adapting to the challenges of the environment by going through a structural change or transformation (Davis & Sumara, 1997; Kauffman, 1997). This interactive process is captured by the notion of enactivism which Osberg (2015) explains as offering:

> the idea that the living entity or 'organism' can, on the one hand, be considered as a self-organizing 'unity' in its own right (organizing its own organization) and, on the other hand, as a 'lower-level' element or 'part' of a 'higher-level' self-organizing unity (which in turn forms part of an even higher level unity, and so on, in a nested series) (p. 10).

Essentially this means that:

> as the learner learns, the context changes, simply because one of its components changes. Conversely, as the context changes, so does the very identity of the learner ... Both the cognising agent and everything that it is connected to are in constant flux, each adapting to the other in the same way that the environment evolves simultaneously with the species that inhabit it. (Davis & Sumara, 1997, p. 414)

Learning as enactivism is therefore understood as an ongoing transformative process not only within learners as structured beings, but also in relation to the environment their actions affect. Understanding learning in this complex way challenges us to consider how to prepare TCs for the role of teacher as we support the ongoing professional learning of teachers. In this project we have attempted to do that by relocating portions of the TEP into school district activities where learning is facilitated through social interaction, personal reflections and an on-going feedback process in relation to school and school district spaces that frame and enable the learning process.

Davis and Sumara (2006) suggest that from a complexivist worldview we derive our competence from forming connections with people, with institutions, and with an array of interconnected technological processes that self-organize around common intents and needs.

With this perspective, professional knowing is based on a connection to a dynamic reality through reflecting on an experience in relation to what was known as well as new knowledge that emerges from the array of interactions. Within complexity thinking, individual learning is an active process in relation to the environment and networked connections to others. As described by Capra and Luigi Luisi (2014), this is seen as a structural change in the person, a coupling between the person's capacity to learn and the aspects of the environment in which they are able to engage with, affect and be affected by, personally, socially, locally, and globally.

Transformative Learning for Partnership Leaders, TCs, and Schoolteachers

This dynamic relational approach to professional learning has allowed us to consider Mezirow's notions of transformative learning. He states that transformative learning is,

> the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally able to change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 7-8).

This definition means that a process of transformation in becoming a teacher, or becoming a more informed teacher, involves a structural change in the teacher that is usually precipitated by an event or situation, a "disorienting dilemma" (Cranton, 2006, p. 23), or a series of "everyday occurrences" (Cranton, 2006, p. 23) causing teachers to question their assumptions or perspectives which, over time, become provocations for transformative learning. For transformative learning to occur, these provocations lead to a series of actions in response, including self-examination, critical reflection, exploration of options that involves acquiring additional knowledge and skills, trying new roles, building competence and integrating the new learning into one's role as a teacher. It is this idea of transformation, for the TEP leaders and TCs as well as the school district leaders and their school teachers, which laid the foundation for the *L2P* partnership.

Professional "Transformative" Learning Framed by Complexity Worldview

Transformative learning theory is mainly concerned with the individual experience of the transformed learner, resulting in what Gunnlaugson refers to as "a mosaic of perspectives" (2008, p. 124). Considering transformation as cross-group and within social systems recognizes the need to set up systems that form a catalyst for a cohesive and coherent understanding of learning as a social event that yields "a broader—integrative, holistic, and integral—theoretical perspective" on social transformative learning (Gunnlaugson, 2008, p. 124). Professional learning requires both an individualized understanding of self and understanding of self in community; social transformation involves considering how people "transform society and their own reality" (Taylor, 2009, p. 5). This idea of social transformative learning connects back to a complexity worldview and an enactivist perspective of learning as co-created, interconnected and nested, extending "mainstream constructivist theories of learning by understanding the individual and the collective (or learner and environment) as enfolded in, and unfolding from each other" (Osberg, 2015, p. 11). The model elaborated below has endeavoured to embrace this notion of transformative learning by challenging mainstream constructivism's focus on separating the learner from their

environment in order to construct new knowledge, incrementally and in a linear way. In this mechanistic or reductionist approach the learner is seen as deficit, with learning being necessary to correct this deficit. In contrast, learning from an enactivist perspective is sensitive to individual difference, where learning is open to novelty and unpredictability in the learning situation. Learning from this perspective results from "apparent change (or 'growth') of knowledge" as "an unintended by-product (of the organisms' efforts to remain stable amidst change)" (Osberg, 2015, p. 12). This process opens the possibility for knowledge and learning to proceed in unexpected and even novel directions as it builds on a forming sense of being a teacher.

However, we feel it is key to note that transformation of education is intentional and considers the question "For what purpose?" In *L2P*, the focus has been on transforming educational practices and values that centre on the needs of children and youth, recognizing that education should play a fundamental role in creating a just, sustainable, and equitable society (Giroux, 1983).

Context

Post-Degree Program

The TEP post-degree 16-month program involves a cohort of twenty-five to thirty TCs, each who have previously completed a Bachelor of Arts or Science degree. Although the group is fairly homogenous in terms of race and cultural background, their ages, gender, and experiences are varied. The *L2P* project is focused on the first term of the program, although there is space in their schedules in subsequent terms for TCs to continue their professional connections and relationships if they choose. In addition to the *L2P* school connections and seminar on Wednesdays (described below), the TCs also take five other courses during the term. Their program consists of two subsequent formal practicum experiences, a 6-week spring practicum at the conclusion of their first two terms, and a 9-week practicum the following fall. Although not a formal intention of the *L2P* project, practicum connections are possible as a result of their connections.

School District

The *L2P* integrated TEP was a natural extension of work that had been going on in the school district for a number of years. The culture of distributed leadership in the school district for ongoing professional learning, valuing teacher expertise in collaborative learning, was prevalent. The district leadership team had facilitated teacher inquiry and mentorship in school teams in systematic and informed ways for over a decade, including opportunities for teachers to investigate and share their practices in supported and collaborative ways.

Prior to the *L2P* partnership, the culture of professional learning in the school district was framed around positive respectful relationships and community efficacy in safe and encouraging spaces. The district team provided formalized mentor training in peer coaching conversations and support for new career teachers' professional growth interests. The relationships that were developed in the district enabled the district leaders to get to know their teachers, which enabled them to encourage and invite those they thought would be interested contributors into the TEP community to share their ideas and practices. This district environment, then, provided a supportive space to include TCs. The *L2P* project built on an existing school-integrated secondary

teacher education partnership and was adapted in a collaborative way for the elementary school contexts and possibilities—with the new opportunities offered by school district partners. In 2015, with the launch of the *L2P* program, the school district leaders became equal partners in this teacher education project, in what traditionally is seen as the purview of universities. The intention of the *L2P* program was three-fold: 1) to enable new TCs to experience school life early in their program; 2) to integrate teachers and administrators in meaningful ways into teacher education; and 3) to provide a context for campus-based teaching relating to the reality of today's schools. What developed in addition to these objectives were meaningful professional learning opportunities (e.g., presenting their ideas to colleagues and TCs, engaging in professional conversations with TCs) for ourselves, for teachers involved in *L2P*, both new career teachers and senior members of the profession, as well as the TCs. The *L2P* project evolved for and adapted to the particular needs of the school district, the TEP and the elementary teacher education candidates.

Drawing from the secondary teacher education model mentioned above, the *L2P* evolved. Recognizing the small size of elementary schools, the team sought not one school for each course as in the secondary education model, but rather a cluster of elementary and middle schools to host TCs each Wednesday for the entire term. The seminar was held each Wednesday at the end of the day by seminar instructors who were also educators in the school district, after TCs had spent the day in the school working with their partner teachers who had all volunteered to host a pair of TCs each Wednesday in their classrooms. Additionally, all of these partnering educators were released by the school district from their schools to attend the three professional learning workshops/meetings held throughout the year, along with their TCs; these professional learning workshops were led by the district partners and attended by the university partners. The following case study describes how this process developed over a three-year period.

Data Collection and Analysis

Both school and campus partners created documents (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, agendas, descriptions of the program). These artifacts then served to inform our subsequent reflections, analysis and further development of the model. Additionally, meetings were recorded with extensive notes then created and shared with the team members. These notes, along with documents, were then analyzed as data and shared across the group in the form of emerging themes. Data included extensive notes taken at: (1) the four professional learning sessions (attended by seminar instructors, partnering educators, TCs and the leadership partners); (2) planning and debrief meeting notes (two times each year); and (3) personal observations from the authors gathered at the end of each year. All these data sources were used to shape the insights offered in this paper. Additionally, insights are offered on the Teacher Education competency document (2017), developed by the Faculty in the TEP program, which informed the seminars and discussions with partnering educators.

The following six areas capture the critical aspects of this model's development. The initial "Field Experience Partnership" section lays out the forming foundations of the project that developed from previous university/school projects. The next section, "*L2P* Development", charts the evolution of the project over the subsequent three years. The third section "Not What We Expected!" highlights the novel and unpredictable insights that emerged. The fourth section captures the unique "Insider and Outsider Perspectives" that developed from the working relationships between the leadership partners. Section five describes how the educational

partners developed their own professional learning by being in a mentoring role. The final section captures how the *L2P* project enabled the teacher education competencies to provide an ongoing connection between TCs and teachers around their forming and reforming professional practice.

Field Experience Partnership Elaborated

In the fall of 2015, district staff from a local school district heard about the secondary education model of integrated teacher education and met with teacher educators at the university, were attracted to this idea and proposed a partnership with their district for elementary education. The goal was to support TCs' integration into local elementary schools from the start of their Elementary Post Degree Program (PDP)—beginning the following year.

Through several meetings and discussions, the partnership, titled *Link to Practice* (*L2P)*, was piloted in September 2016 and has completed its third iteration. The school district members of the team identified seven elementary and middle schools in close proximity to each other and invited teachers to volunteer to mentor a pair of TCs for the Elementary PDP program, including them in their classes each Wednesday for the fall term. These "partnering educators" committed their time and expertise, "welcom[ing] TCs into their daily teaching and learning experiences, pedagogical conversations, and professional communities" (Collyer, 2016). During each of the Wednesdays throughout the term (approximately 11 day-long visits between September and December), the partnering educators committed to model effective teacher practices, engage in peer-coaching conversations, provide opportunities for TCs to work with groups of students in educative ways, offer feedback to TCs, and attend two district-sponsored professional learning workshop afternoons.

To further connect the university and school district, one of the courses in the Elementary PDP program, the field experience seminar, was taught each Wednesday after school at one of the participating school sites by two district educators, identified and hired by the university as course instructors. This seminar was designed to guide the experiences on Wednesday by providing focus questions, text prompts or readings prior to the Wednesday visits, followed by a debrief and extension of learning after school. Topics included exploration of new curriculum, alternative assessment practices, relationship building, integrating First Peoples' Principles, and support of all learners, to give just a few examples.

The expectation of the TCs was to immerse themselves in the life of the school on Wednesdays and to actively observe and participate in their partnering educators' classes. The afterschool seminars were intended to be an opportunity for them to share their experiences with their peers and seminar leaders and begin to connect theories and practices across their coursework. For many, it was the first time they had been in elementary and middle schools since they were students there themselves. During the second and third years, the district invited secondary seminar instructors and TCs to join the professional learning workshops, increasing the dynamic nature of the discussions, topics, and perspectives.

The three professional learning afternoons were designed to explore teacher inquiry. The TCs also themselves engaged in an inquiry during the fall term, supported at the university and school site, thus participating in professional learning right from the beginning of their program. Through these professional learning afternoons, partnering educators had opportunities to share their inquiry journeys, guide the TCs, reflect on their experiences, describe how inquiry shaped their professional practice, and open new avenues for investigation. These non-evaluative opportunities offered a new model of professional learning for the participating teachers, allowing

them the time to share with one another, the TCs and with their administrators/leaders. As their role was one of supportive mentor, they were not required to evaluate or judge the TCs' skills or attitudes, but rather to provide ongoing guidance and formative feedback. Through our observations, we saw TCs enthusiastic and energized in the professional learning sessions as they grappled with inquiry questions, sought out feedback from their peers and partnering educators, and reflected on their own learning.

Connecting this vision to the work of teacher education and field experience partnerships requires sustained, collaborative work that transcends individual courses, instructors, and experiences. It is this more integrative, relational view of learning where TCs were learning to act in and be influenced by school contexts and emerging issues, specifically in addressing tensions between the social and individual contexts of transformative learning (i.e., getting good grades or supporting their peers; valuing processes of learning as well as products), that informs teacher education and field experience partnerships. Both individual and social contexts are important in informing teacher education practices, providing educators who are working with TCs with opportunities to recognize and embrace disorientation, puzzlement, and challenging conversations as they come to better understand their practices, beliefs, assumptions, and motivations. Through these conversations with TCs, the partnership leaders and partnering educators came to question their own thinking and practices, better articulate their beliefs, ask questions (of themselves and others), and reflect more deeply on their work.

L2P Emergence and Development

The *L2P* project began in 2015 with an inquiry by the school district leaders about ways they could develop a partnership between their district and teachers and the TEP. Reaching out by the school district to bring the TEP into their professional learning inquiry program is somewhat unique but resulted from a positive view of the earlier program being shared by partnering school principals in a neighbouring school district. A subsequent meeting saw the emergence of a plan for creating this partnership, beginning in 2016. The following time-line offers insight on the emerging conversations that created the conditions for the partnership. The project timeline over the past three years was as follows:

Year 1.

- June 2016: meeting of district leaders, teacher education leaders, potential teacher partners (later named partnering educators)
- Fall 2016: *L2P* project began, with seven elementary and middle schools and 15-18 teachers involved, two district educators and one campus instructor leading the weekly seminar; three professional afternoon learning sessions (two full afternoon release for the teachers and 35 TCs) and final after school Inquiry Project Gallery Walk involving all teachers and TCs
- Winter 2017: debrief and reflection meeting of partnership leaders; agreement to continue for the subsequent year
- June 2017: half-day meeting with partnering educators (some new, some returning), partnership leaders, (re)introducing the partnership concept and roles for the upcoming 2017/18 school year

Year 2.

- Fall 2017: second iteration of the *L2P* project; again two half-day release for all partnering educators, TCs, and partnership leaders (as secondary teacher education was added to the project in the second year, the secondary seminar leaders and their 24 TCs joined the workshops
- Winter 2017: debrief/reflection meeting again held with partnership leaders; once again agreement to continue the project for the following year

Year 3.

- June 2018: half-day meeting with all partner educators (elementary and secondary), (re)introducing the concept and noting changes that had happened over the second year.

Throughout this project to date, 28 partnering educators, over 120 TCs, four partnership leaders and three University instructors/staff have engaged in meaningful reflections, contextual professional dialogue, classroom visits, and sharing of their inquiry projects and their development.

An in-depth review of the first three years by the four partnership leaders of this ongoing project, through partnership meetings, discussions and review of the previously created materials over each of the three years, has revealed several significant learnings for us:

- educators are seeking meaningful partnerships with post-secondary colleagues, recognizing the importance of listening and understanding context as well as sharing theoretical knowledge;
- deep understanding of ongoing professional learning requires both "insider" and "outsider" knowledge, with each of holding both types of knowledge; and
- professional learning needs leaders from diverse locations who are able to work collaboratively, respond to issues that arise, model and sustain new initiatives.

Not What We Expected!

The campus-based members of our team were initially surprised at the enthusiasm of district leaders to participate in our TEP, and to offer their time, resources, and expertise, which suggests that teacher education partnerships are not common.

The recruitment of partnering educators revealed many enthusiastic teachers from the seven partnering schools who responded to the district-developed poster shown in Figure 1. A key idea in the poster was fostering a different relationship with the TCs that built on the previously established peer-coaching professional learning model.

Another element of this project was the unexpected but welcome support of the district to release teachers for three half days each year (with lunch provided) to initiate education partners into the project. These sessions were guided by the partnership leaders, and involved the partner educators (school teachers) in the planning. The resources provided by the district were invaluable and were enabled by a conviction and valuing of partnership work by the district leaders.

The partnership, once developed, provided opportunities for ongoing development of learning and practice for all participants—partnering educators, TCs, and partnership leaders from both institutions. The partner educators engaged with the partnership leaders in meaningful and

Partnering Educators participating in this project will commit to:

- Welcoming two or more TCs into their classrooms and the schools every Wednesday from Sept. 14 to Nov. 30, 2016.
- Modeling effective teacher practices, trying innovative approaches and reflecting on practice.
- Engaging in peer-coaching conversions as opportunities for candidates to ask questions and reflect on their learning within an inquiry mindset.
- Providing many opportunities for candidates to work with individuals and small groups as part of their school life experience.
- Enhancing TCs' professional learning growth through on-going descriptive feedback and collaboration. (You will not be required to complete evaluations, as this field experience is not a practicum.)
- Participating in this project's professional learning community.

Figure 1. School district poster to recruit teachers to participate in *L2P* model (Collyer (2016).

complex conversations, enabling a growing recognition of the practices and beliefs, of all who were involved. Engaging in professional conversations early in their careers offered insights for the TCs about ways in which teachers think and develop their practices. In an iterative process, TCs were able to engage in professional practices, observe teachers in their complex classroom contexts, reflect and inquire as they returned to further professional discussions. The depth of conversations in the professional half-day release events was evident to us as observers of their engagement—there was a roomful of noisy conversation, smiles and intense listening as educators shared their practices.

As one of the partnership leaders noted, partnering educators and TCs engaged in a gradual release of responsibility (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Duke & Pearson, 2002), as the partnering educators scaffolded their novice partners into the complexity of classroom life and the profession more generally; they gradually gained experience and deepened understandings about the needs of the learners. As outsiders, we were excited by observing the opportunities for TCs to see how teachers develop teams, work collaboratively and develop relationships over time.

Another unexpected but welcome outcome was the increasingly collaborative relationship among the partnership leaders. Initially the discussions were focused around structure, organization, information sharing and planning, but as the work and partnership has continued, the discussions have allowed us all more meaningful insights into our work and our contexts. Our different sites have become more familiar and welcoming as we learn together on campus and in schools.

We noted a shift in focus from our agendas over the three years. Initially the emphasis was on describing the project and its potential for all participants and building a professional learning community. The agenda in year two began to more explicitly integrate discussions about competency-based curriculum as we all came to understand it more fully, and in year three we recognized the need to align assessment practices with a competency framework. Additionally, in year 3 university partners also shared their own competency framework that shaped the TEP. In

the first year, partnership leaders spent time explaining the program but in subsequent years, time in the agenda was given for the partner educators to share their experiences and insights as the partnership team listened. There was also a shift in emphasis based on our own learning about mentorship, community/societal needs such as Indigenous learning, and new curricular areas such as Career-Life Education. Each of us brought insights to the next iteration of the agenda, sharing ideas from our different roles in the university or in the school district, offering our different insiders' and outsiders' perspectives on each other's needs and processes through the *L2P* model.

Insider/Outsider Knowledge in Professional Learning Partnerships

While university partnership leaders had a vision for the TEP, the school district partnership leaders had a vision of welcoming TCs into a supportive existing professional learning community, by helping the TC see how teachers are lifelong learners to continuously develop their pedagogical theory and practice. As teacher educators, we all recognized the value of this project in developing ongoing learning and deepened understandings of increasingly complex learning environments for the TCs, the teachers, and their students, as well as deepening our own learning. It was very important for the success of this project for the partners to have in-depth knowledge of their own educational institutions/systems, ways in which deep meaningful learning to happen, and ways to build sustaining relationships.

The insider knowledge we brought to the project was important to its success. In particular we brought in understanding of the needs of the different institutions, language use for connecting to and addressing constituent groups, and external requirements (e.g., scheduling, timing of meetings, and communication strategies). Additionally, the district-based partnership leaders brought an insider knowledge of the strengths and capacities of potential partner educators in the school district, encouraging the involvement of interested teachers and inviting them to consider this opportunity.

Once the school year began, the partnering educators welcomed the TCs into their daily teaching and learning experiences, pedagogical conversations, and professional community. These 'insider' perspectives were only possible through working with the practicing teachers in the system. As described in the recruitment brochure shown in Figure 2 there was a commitment to co-create and join with the university TEP process. There was obvious excitement and energy from the district and campus partnership leaders as stated in the extract from the brochure: "The Curriculum & Learning Team and Faculty of Education are excited to partner in this project that immerses elementary TCs (K-7) into school life" (Collyer, 2016).

While partnering educators were creating meaningful opportunities to engage with TCs, led by the district partners, campus partners were also utilizing their insider knowledge of the university systems and expectations, sharing research and theory-informed ideas and readings. Their awareness of both the trepidation and excitement of the TCs was important for partnering educators to realize—even though they had all experienced a teacher education program, it was often forgotten as they became competent and skilled teachers.

Although each of the partnership leaders brought insider knowledge of their institutions, roles, and students, we were also aware of being outside of each other's spaces, not having contextual or institutional insights. This outsider role was also valuable in enabling new ideas to be explored and new questions to be asked. Introducing new strategies and theories in workshops, sharing professional readings and outsider insights enabled us to exchange diverse perspectives.

Within this enhanced approach to a TC's first field experience, we hope to ...

- Integrate two learning spaces ~ the university and the school;
- Link educational theory to professional practice;
- Build supportive and reciprocal relationships in our professional community;
- Investigate pedagogy that engages ALL students in deep & meaningful learning;
- Approach teaching from an inquiry stance as we explore practices that enhance student learning;
- Offer a school life learning experience;
- Share our learning with one another.

Figure 2. Extract from the recruitment brochure (Collyer, 2016).

The partnership leaders also gained significant insights from each other and from the partnering educators and TCs, having a chance to "look behind the curtains" and better understand what is going on in the minds of teachers and TCs. These insights enabled us to develop and adapt the project programming to align with their needs. The richness of our own learning, the meaningful relationships we developed, and the awareness of district leaders' deep commitment to the profession was surprising and valued.

Engaging Professional Educators (Partnering Educators) Through Mentoring and Meaningful Relationships

From the outset of the project, the partnership leaders modeled a professional learning model, one that was contextual, sustained, collaborative and connected to competency-based curriculum and assessment. Each of the half-day meetings connected to district and Ministry initiatives, built on previous sessions, modeling of collaborative professional learning and initiation of new TCs to the profession. Included in the sessions were references to Ministry documents and professional readings; all partners were included in the sessions and often Ministry personnel were included as well.

The first-year professional learning session began with professional and coaching conversations. These conversations were stimulated by questions such as "What do teachers think and talk about in relation to student learning and the profession?" and "How do we support TCs in the inquiry process?" These questions, we think, fostered community and deepened partner educators' understandings of their role and potential contributions. The second-year session was similar, modeling learning strategies and offering opportunities for partner educators to connect, and had the added element of shared experiences and insights from the previous year. By the third year of the project these questions more explicitly embraced competency-based curriculum both in schools and at the university, asking questions such as "What are competencies?" and "What competencies do we value in colleagues, and how are competencies used in our practice?", as we

attended to the interests of partner educators and TCs.

A powerful way to learn is to teach: by discussing educational issues and practices with TCs, the partnering educators became more aware and more articulate about their practices and their beliefs. The regular conversations they had with TCs who were generally eager to learn and who had many questions fueled their enthusiasm and activated their thinking. Throughout the term, teachers and TCs were introduced to professional readings, were asked to discuss inquiry learning, their own learning, and to share their ideas with others. Partner educators were given opportunities to lead workshops related to their practices, new curriculum and implementation and complementary assessment strategies, ideas about integration/inclusion, planning for a competency-based curriculum, and pedagogically appropriate uses of technology, helping us all learn together.

Some of the types of questions posed to partnering educators by district leaders in the annual introductory meeting included:

- What does "teaching" mean in the 21st century?
- What competencies do we value in our colleagues?
- How do we create a community of respectful dialogue?
- How do we recognize and embrace a changing identity, reflecting on –changing from being a "student" to a teacher and the realities of teaching?
- What is your learning mindset?
- As a teacher: How are you feeling? What are you thinking? What are you wondering? What surprises you? What are you worried about? What confuses you?
- How do we consider our role as speaker, and our role as listener?
- How do you welcome novices into your school, classrooms and profession?
- What are ways to facilitate "teaching experiences" for novices/TCs?
- Can you share prior experiences and ideas with your colleagues and the TCs?
- How can you use your twitter profile to introduce yourself to TCs and consider appropriate uses of technology?

In addition to partnering educators examining their own practices and beliefs, they were also better able to get to know their TCs and recognize them as competent individuals who were excited about learning. The insights gained through meaningful relationships enabled collegial relationships rather than distanced and hierarchical relationships. The time and space afforded partner educators through the *L2P* project offered significant and sustained professional learning that enabled their growth as well as support for the TCs—their future colleagues, as well as for the partnership leaders as we planned for the subsequent year.

Teacher Education Competencies: Building on Curriculum Redesign

To create a fluid connection between teacher education and ongoing professional learning in the district, faculty and instructors at the university created a university teacher education set of professional competencies. Using competency language and similar concepts to the curriculum documents, the teacher education competencies provide an ongoing connection among the

partnership leaders, the TCs and teachers. The competency framework demonstrates the importance of recognizing and challenging assumptions and embracing the dissonance that comes with change, framing the beginning of ongoing educational discussions. The teacher education competency framework utilizes language that mirrors the K-12 curriculum and signals significant changes in relation to learning as based on processes rather than on prescribed learning outcomes (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Fu, Hopper, & Sanford, 2018). The teacher education competencies recognize the importance of personal and professional growth as individuals, as well as collaboration and engagement as members of a larger community and include the following:

- developing an awareness of their worldview and how this relates to others' worldviews;
- developing a growth mindset demonstrated in collaboration with others;
- demonstrating an understanding of the complexity of teaching and learning;
- practicing effective communication appropriate to the context and audience, enabling responsiveness to diversities of learners;
- practicing respect for all learners from all cultures, including, specifically, Indigenous learners;
- practicing working collaboratively and collegially as well as independently; and
- developing positive and supportive connections with students and colleagues, building professional learning networks.

The development of these competencies was enabled by our collaborative learning through the *L2P* program.

The move to competency-based language in both the K to 12 curriculum and our TEPs, we realized, requires changes in assessment practice. Although instructors still presently grade student coursework, the use of competency language opens up more possibility, and requires a development of self-assessment practices. As TCs become more willing to identify their own strength, growth and challenges, it is our hope that they carry this reflexive practice into their practica and their careers and will be a focus of subsequent iterations of *L2P*.

Learning in community is a key feature of the *L2P* model, supported by the K-12 Core Competencies and the teacher education competencies. Shifting language and creating a common language that is used by TCs and their partner educators, enabled by ongoing dialogue among the partnership leaders, shifts thinking and creates a consistent starting point for beginning and continuing professional learning. Critically, TCs and teachers must come to professional conversations with a willingness to engage in critical reflection and to develop new understandings. The partner educators in *L2P* have already indicated their willingness, both through their involvement and through sharing their classroom practices through stories and in action.

Conclusion: Structural Changes and Complexity Worldview

As noted by Korthagen et al., (2006) "the theory–practice issue seems intractable: telling new teachers what research shows about good teaching and sending them off to practice has failed to change, in any major way, what happens in our schools and universities" (p. 1038). In the *L2P* project, however, we have described meaningful contextual experiences for the partnership

leaders and the partnering educators to examine and reflect on their practice with TCs. This partnership has allowed the TCs to gain insights into the complexities of the daily classroom life of a teacher. For the partnership leaders it created a space to deepen their understandings of their practices through explaining their reasoning and their theorizing to the TCs. The *L2P* created a relational pedagogy for the partnership leaders, partnering educators and TCs to continue their growth together developing the TEP and the professional learning community in the district (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011; Sanford et al., 2015). The current *L2P* model is located in the first term of a four-term program. Though this term influences all TCs' mindsets going into their second term of courses at the university and subsequent practicum, the reality is, we realize, that the TEP tends to default back to a more traditional linear model in the campus-based term where TCs are asked to try to construct teacher knowledge within discrete courses. As noted by Ramiah (2014), in this traditional model "knowledge is a pre-existing entity, a 'thing' and learning is a process of acquiring and internalizing the 'thing'" (p. 62). Such knowledge becomes objectified, leading to dualistic thinking about theory and practice, "spurning knowledge that is intrinsic to the knower" (p. 62).

As we reflect back on the contrast between the *L2P* term and the more traditional term we return to Korthagen et al's., (2006) review of teacher education research. They refer to three key components that support the link between experience and theory, and they offer seven fundamental principles for teacher education programs:

1. Views of knowledge and learning (addressed in principles 1, 2 and 3);
2. Program structures and practices (addressed in principles 4 and 5); and
3. Quality of staff and organization (principles 6 and 7).

To conclude this discussion, we will reflect on how these principles resonate with the insights from our self-study.

In relation to views of knowledge and learning, the *L2P* semester in the school district and schools creates a relational epistemology to learning to teach. This creates the space for Korthagan et al's "Principle 1: Learning about teaching involves continuously conflicting and competing demands" (2006, p. 1025). As Hopper, Sanford, and Fu (2016) describe, *L2P* "shifted how *TCs* as a cohort and their instructors as a collective described the world of teaching, as they learned to teach" (p. 1031). The TCs in *L2P* began to learn to think like a teacher, to develop deep and open mindset to learning, "to simultaneously be both learners of learning and learners of teaching so that they come to better understand not only how a particular teaching approach influences their learning, but also how that teaching was constructed and performed" (p. 1026). The partnership leaders noted that the TCs felt, looked and spoke like teachers as they learned to draw on and embody the professional inquiry approach modeled by the teachers in the school.

The *L2P* approach to teacher education, we feel, better integrates embodied understandings of 21st century teaching and learning that is focused on students' learning and on processes of creating knowledge rather than on curriculum. In regards to Korthagen et al.'s, (2006) "Principle 2: Learning about teaching requires a view of knowledge as a subject to be created rather than as a created subject" (p. 1027) and "Principle 3: Learning about teaching requires a shift in focus from the curriculum to the learner "(p. 1029), the *L2P* created a holistic approach for everyone involved. The TCs, in enactivist terms, started to learn how to live in the complexity of a teaching and learning world (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014). As partnering educators engaged with TCs about their inquiry projects, they naturally tried to explain their inquiry in terms of theory, thus affecting the TCs' understanding of being a teacher. In this *L2P* environment, in terms of complexity

thinking (Davis & Sumara, 2006), the TCs self-organized around common inquiry projects with practicing teachers, around the practices of teachers that captured their attention that they were ready and able to perceive, and around the work of teachers they found intriguing and wanted to explore further.

Korthagen et al's, (2006) "Principle 4: Learning about teaching is enhanced through (student) teacher research" (p. 1030) speaks to the developing capacity to be inside the practice, inquiring with each other, partnership leaders and partnering educators as they developed and explained their practices in relation to their inquiry projects. *L2P* helped to reduce the theory/practice gap as it focused TCs as learners who were developing their "ability to analyze and make meaning from their experiences that matters most to them" (p. 1030). As noted by Davis and Sumara (2012), teachers should be experts of learning, researchers of their own practice. The teachers in *L2P* modeled this through their inquiry projects. The inquiry experiences asked TCs to transform their prior assumptions about teaching and learning that is born out of an apprenticeship of schooling (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Lortie, 1975; Russell, 2012). Learning to teach is about TCs developing "a sort of theoretical connoisseurship by developing awareness of vital distinctions, varied implications, and hidden assumptions" (Davis & Sumara, 2012, p. 36) that informs their practices. This *L2P* integrated approach to teacher education developed TCs' greater awareness of the complexities of learning to teach thereby informing their practices and future decisions in regards to the processes for doing school.

In relation to Korthagen et al.'s (2006) "Principle 5: Learning about teaching requires an emphasis on those learning to teach working closely with their peers" (p. 1033), the *L2P* approach combined the cohort experience for the TCs in the school with the initiatives and practices the partner educators were leading in the school district. A collective consciousness about learning and teaching seemed to develop around a professional understanding of what schools are doing and learning in collegial relationships that "help to bridge the gap between what is done in teacher education and what those learning to teach actually need in their future practice" (p. 1034).

The *L2P* program embodies Korthagen et al.'s (2006) "Principle 6: Learning about teaching requires meaningful relationships between schools, universities and student teachers" (p. 1034) through ongoing, and supported interaction with partnership leaders and partnering educators. However, in relation to Korthagen et al.'s "Principle 7: Learning about teaching is enhanced when the teaching and learning approaches advocated in the program are modeled by the teacher educators in their own practice" (p. 1036), we recognized the potential tensions for us all—partnership leaders, partnering educators and TCs. For example, partnering educators felt a responsibility to appear skilled and knowledgeable about their work, so although risk-taking was supported it was difficult to 'let go' and realize those risks.

Embracing the messiness of working in a school district and individual schools meant that TCs were learning to be a teacher in the complexity of schools, but at the same time were also students in the traditional university structure. TCs, we felt, were sometimes getting mixed messages; that is, they were encouraged to be flexible, adaptable, and demonstrate a growth mindset but were also expected to be prepared, well planned, follow a given structure in the school and focus on what was being assigned at the university. They were encouraged to reflect and unpack their prior experiences but they were also expected to listen to the wisdom of their mentors and follow their lead, to do tasks set by instructors at university that tended to treat them as students rather than as prospective teachers. They were expected to perform well in their campus courses, some of which followed a more traditional linear path of content development, but then spend more time in schools, and show commitment to their professional role development when

opportunities arose to do volunteer work or teach a lesson. To counter this, the *L2P* team worked in partnership across institutions, communicating potential situations to instructors and education partners, recognizing tensions and complexities that TCs were negotiating and adapting to the broader demands on the teachers. As partnership leaders, we noted the tensions that were being created by the *L2P* approach—sometimes by ourselves—and worked to mediate TCs' confusion and anxiety as it arose.

Although the *L2P* is more fully integrating teacher education between campus and school sites, it is not without its challenges. As the partnership leaders all recognized from the inception of the idea, collaborative partnerships take time and energy—to co-plan, negotiate differences in perspectives, and to engage the partnering educators and TCs in meaningful professional learning. We have all devoted hours of meeting time, aligning our visions, sharing with district and campus administrators, scheduling and timetabling to enable meaningful *L2P* experiences. Resources, in the form of time and space in busy workdays, are needed continually to support each other, the TCs and the partnering educators—the more people involved, the more complex the process becomes. However, the benefits to our own learning and how we felt engaging with enthusiastic TCs and energized partnering educators, has given new meaning to our professional learning and commitment to *L2P*. We are committed to continuing this work.

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