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John Trent
Hong Kong Institute of Education, jtrent@ied.edu.hk

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Teacher Professional Development Through a School-University Partnership. What Role Does Teacher Identity Play?

John Trent
The Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong

Abstract: This study examines the continuing professional development of one group of secondary school English language teachers who participated in a school-university partnership in Hong Kong. Grounded in a framework of teacher identity and using in-depth interviews conducted over the entire 12 month period of the partnership, the study explores the teacher's professional development experiences in terms of their negotiation of membership within and across multiple communities. Results suggest that the teachers' experienced professional development through partnership partly as identity conflict, as they negotiated recognition of the competencies they associated with the partnership within the different communities of teachers in which they participated. It is argued that such identity conflict can inhibit the opportunities for professional development that partnerships potentially offer teacher and schools and that a critical understanding of the contribution of partnerships to the professional development of teachers and other stakeholders within and beyond the partnership is necessary.

Introduction

In many parts of the world partnerships between schools and higher education institutions are, as Smedley (2001) puts it, "ubiquitous" (p. 189). Brady's observation that understanding the benefits and challenges of partnership has emerged as a "pervasive theme in the international teacher education literature" (2005, p. 659) reflects the burgeoning interest in partnership since the 1980's.

Partnerships between schools and higher education institutions worldwide have adopted various structures and practices and have been concerned with areas such as preservice teacher education, educational reform, teacher professional development, and research (Callahan & Martin, 2007). A common aim of partnerships internationally is the "simultaneous renewal" (Stephens & Boldt, 2004, p. 703) of both schools and higher education institutions. For example, in the United States, collaboration between academics and school teachers within professional development schools is seen as a means of addressing concerns over the quality of the educational system (Nath, Guadarrama, & Ramsy, 2011). Within the United Kingdom, partnership has been prescribed by government with the aim of providing schools with greater input into teacher education. In the case of Australia, partnership is predominately concerned with teacher professional development (Brady, 2005).

This view of partnerships as the "renewal" of schools and higher education institutions highlights the professional development of teachers. As Brady (2005) points out:

> *Robust school university partnerships can improve the learning of school students; promote teacher education; and provide professional development for practising teachers. (p. 668)*

Attention to the role of teacher learning within a partnership is consistent with understandings of teacher professional development, such as that proposed by Day (1994):

> *Professional development consists of all the natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute through these to the quality of education in the classroom. (p. 4)*

Reflecting this emphasis on learning and professional development, school-university partnerships (SUPs) within different countries have been examined as communities (Sutherland, Scanlon, & Sperring, 2005; Tsui, Edwards, & Lopez-Real, 2009). However, the perspective of community implies the existence of boundaries, which describe "different enterprises, different ways of engaging with one another, different histories, repertoires, ways of communicating, and capabilities" (Wenger, 2003, p. 84). While community boundaries can represent sites for professional development through learning, they can also represent sites of struggle. As a result, understanding the professional development opportunities of partnerships by exploring relations between participants, their values and motives, has been seen as crucial to understanding how individuals work and develop at boundaries (Edwards & Kinti, 2010). For instance, acknowledging the difficulties of boundary crossing, a growing body of international literature has considered the challenges of achieving the professional development potential of partnerships against the background of negotiating relations between stakeholders such as student teachers, their inservice colleagues, teacher educators, researchers, and school authorities (Bartholomew & Sandholtz, 2009; Martin, Snow, & Franklin Torrez, 2011; Mitchell, Hayes, & Mills, 2010; Tsui & Law, 2007). As Mitchell et al. (2010) argue, more research is needed:

> *While cross-institutional partnerships and learning communities are advocated in the literature, there is relatively little that details how such relationships can be sustained to serve multiple institutional agendas, or how they can make more porous the boundaries between teachers in schools and teacher educators/researchers in universities (p. 491).*

The current study contributes to our understanding of how teachers experience professional development within the context of school-university partnership (SUP) from the perspective of teacher identity. Hamel and Ryken (2010) have examined the role of identity development amongst pre-service teachers within a SUP in the United States, arguing that such development is "central to the purposes of partnership" (p. 347). This study extends understanding of the role identity can play in the professional development of teachers within a SUP by exploring the experiences of one group of in-service secondary school English language teachers who took part in a partnership arrangement with a higher education institution in Hong Kong. The paper begins by describing a framework of teacher identity which is then used to understand how professional development was experienced by participants in a SUP in Hong Kong. Implications for the design and implementation of partnerships between schools and universities for the purposes of the continuing professional development of school teachers are considered and implications for future research are discussed.

Towards an Integrated Framework for Understanding Teacher Identity

Identity refers to "our understanding of who we are and who we think other people are" (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 10). Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005) maintain that a comprehensive exploration of identity requires attention to both 'identity-in-discourse' and 'identity-in-practice'. Identity-in-practice describes an action-orientated approach to understanding identity, underlining the need to investigate identity formation as a social matter, which is operationalized through concrete practices and tasks. The other essential constituent of teacher identity, identity-in-discourse, recognizes that "identity is constructed, maintained and negotiated to a significant extent through language and discourse" (Varghese et. al., 2005, p. 23). Figure One summarizes the role of practice, language, and discourse in the framework of teacher identity used in this study:

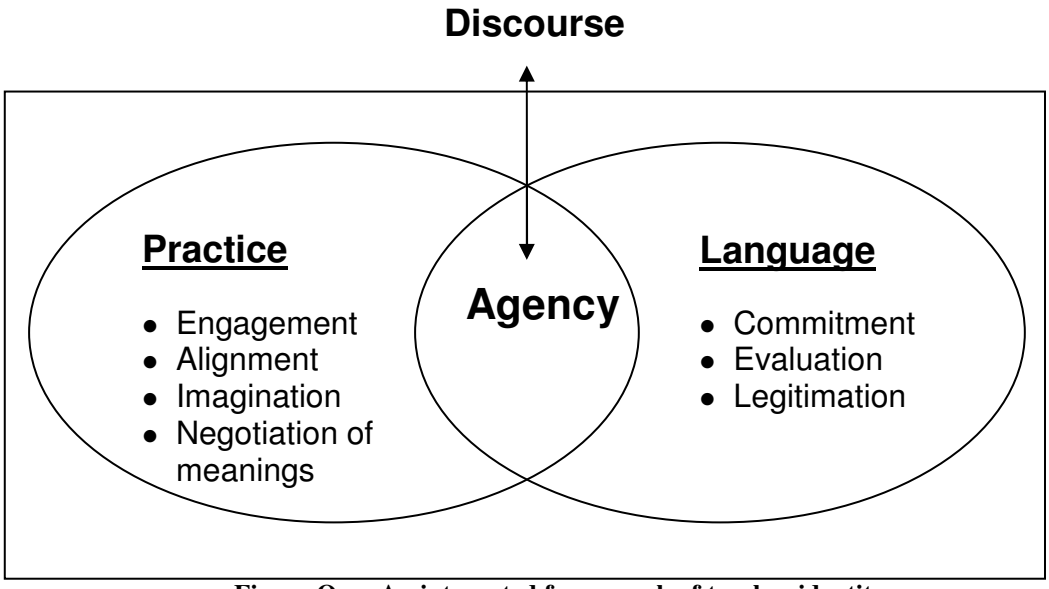

Figure One: An integrated framework of teacher identity

The left-hand side of Figure One reflects the experiential nature of identity. As Wenger puts it, "identification takes place in the doing" (1998, p. 193). Wenger (1998) explores identity as an experience in terms of three modes of belonging: engagement, alignment, and imagination. Through engagement, individuals establish and maintain joint enterprises and negotiate meanings. Engagement allows us to invest in what we do and in our relations with other people, gaining "a lived sense of who we are" (Wenger, 1998, p. 192). Imagination refers to creating images of the world and our place within it across time and space by extrapolating beyond our own experience. Alignment coordinates an individual's activities within broader structures and enterprises, allowing the identity of a larger group to become part of the identity of the individual participants (Wenger, 1998).

Wenger (1998) also investigates identity formation in terms of the negotiation of meanings that matter within a social configuration. For Wenger, meanings exist within a broader structure termed the economy of meanings, in which a range of meanings are produced, each of which competes "for the definition of certain events, actions, or artifacts" (1998, p. 199). If negotiability over meanings is absent an identity of non-participation and marginality can result; the individual's experience "becomes irrelevant because it cannot be asserted and recognized as a form of competence" (Wenger, 1998, p.203).

Another essential feature of identity shown in Figure One is language. While Wenger's (1998) framework has been criticized for failing to develop a theory of language (Creeze, 2005), language is crucial to poststructuralist understandings of identity. Weedon (1997), for

instance, argues that language and identity are mutually constitutive; while language presents to the individual historically specific ways of giving meaning to social reality, "it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed" (Weedon, 1997, p. 21). From a poststructuralist perspective, such construction is also a process of struggle because "the individual is always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity" (Weedon, 1997, p. 32).

Acknowledging the role of conflict and struggle means that identity is seen as always in process, which underscores the role of agency, that is, the capacity of people "to do things which affect the social relationships in which they are embedded" (Layder, 2006, p. 4). Understanding agency requires investigation of how people do things together in social settings and how such doing is shaped by the meditational tools, including language, that are made available to them (Lasky, 2005). In Figure One, this link between identity and agency is therefore shown at the interface of practice and language.

Attention to the availability, or otherwise, of meditational tools such as language in the exercise of individual agency implies that identities are not constructed completely free of constraints. Rather, identity is shaped to a significant degree by discourse, as Danielewicz (2001) explains:

> *Discourse, which is manifested through language, consists of a system of beliefs, attitudes, and values that exist within social and cultural practices. Engaging in these language practices…shapes an individual's identity (p.11).*

What this means for understanding teacher identity is that while teachers are active agents "their actions are mediated by the structural elements of their setting such as the resources available to them, the norms of their school, and externally mandated policies" (Lasky, 2005, p. 901). This interplay between constraint and enablement is represented in Figure One by the arrow linking discourse and agency, a relationship which is explored in more detail in the following section.

Discourse and Agency: Identity as a Site of Struggle

Although Wenger (1998) admits the possibility of struggle that this interplay of discourse and individual agency implies, his framework has been criticized as a "benign model" (Barton & Tusting, 2005, p. 10) that fails to adequately theorize the role of power relations and contestation within communities (Busher, Hammersley-Fletcher, & Turner, 2007). One theory of discourse that does take conflict seriously is that of Laclau and Mouffe, whose framework is described by Jorgensen and Philips (2002). For Laclau and Mouffe (1985), meanings are fluid and discourses contingent, that is, there is always scope for struggles over what discourses should prevail. Within this view of discourse, identity is discursively constituted through chains of equivalence which contain nodal points or master signifiers of identity, such as "man", with which particular content comes to be equated: "strength" and "reason", for instance.

Different signifiers or signs, including 'passive' and 'passion', contrast this nodal point with other master signifiers such as 'woman'. It is the collision of conflicting discourses that can result in social antagonisms, which occur "when different identities mutually exclude each other" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 47). Social antagonisms can be dissolved through a hegemonic intervention in which one discourse comes to dominate and "by means of force reconstitutes ambiguity" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 48). However, because discourses are always contingent and the meaning of signs can never be ultimately fixed scope for individual agency always exists, meaning that a hegemonic intervention can be undermined in an ongoing social struggle over the definition of society and identity.

While the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) provides insight into the role of struggle and contestation in identity formation, their framework lacks specific tools for discourse analysis. Within this paper, this limitation is addressed through the use of Fairclough's (2003)

model of identity formation, which argues that "what people commit themselves to in texts is an important part of how they identify themselves, the texturing of identity" (p. 164). Linguistically, Fairclough (2003) examines the commitments an author makes in terms of both modality and evaluation. Modality refers to what individuals commit themselves to in terms of truth, obligation, and necessity, and is often displayed in the use of modal verbs, such as 'should' and 'must', and modal adverbs, including 'probably' and 'possibly'. Evaluation describes what is believed to be desirable or undesirable and can be expressed in terms of what is considered good or bad, as well as useful and important. While such evaluations can be expressed explicitly, through the use of terms such as 'wonderful' or 'dreadful', they can also be more deeply embedded in texts through, for example, invoking implicit value systems that are assumed to be shared between author and interpreter.

This paper also considers four strategies used to explain and legitimize the texturing of identities. Authorization occurs through reference to tradition, laws, or institutional authority. A second strategy, rationalization, relies upon references to the utility of a particular course of action, while moral evaluation appeals to value systems. Finally, mythopoesis refers to legitimation derived from narratives (Fairclough, 2003).

Based on this theoretical framework, the collection and analysis of data was guided by the following research question:

How did identity shape the professional development of one group of secondary school English language teachers within a school university partnership in Hong Kong?

The Partnership

A case study approach was used to address the research question described above. As Merriam (1998) points out, case study represents "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 27). In this study, the single instance or phenomenon investigated was a partnership arrangement between a secondary school and a higher education institution in Hong Kong for the purpose of teacher professional development. This section provides background information on this particular partnership, beginning with an overview of recent curriculum reform in Hong Kong.

The Educational Context and the Nature of Professional Development

Within Hong Kong, reform of the senior secondary school curriculum (grades 10 to 12) was launched in 2001, with a three year senior secondary academic structure commencing in September 2009. The subject 'English language' represents a core component of the new senior secondary (NSS) curriculum and is comprised of several interlocking components that include subject knowledge and skills, generic skills, and positive values and attitudes. To operationalize these components, the NSS English language curricula includes a compulsory part that addresses essential learning content including the four 'macro' language skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, as well as grammar, communicative functions, vocabulary, and text types. In addition, an elective part that includes modules such as 'Learning English through Drama' and 'Learning English through Short Stories' aims to extend students' learning experiences and allow them to use the language they have learnt in a range of contexts.

In September 2008, Valley Heights College (a pseudonym) entered into a twelve month partnership with a higher education institution in Hong Kong. The college is a coeducational band-two secondary school located in an urban area of Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, schools are divided into three bands, with band one being the highest, meaning that the academic ability and motivation of students at the school is high. For this school, the

rationale for establishing the partnership focused on how to respond to the implications for English language teaching and learning suggested by the NSS reforms. In particular, the college sought advice on how to facilitate effective English language teaching, learning, and school-based curriculum development within the NSS framework. Four English language teachers were jointly invited by the college principal to take part in the partnership: Andrew, Rebecca, Philip, and Robert (pseudonyms). These teachers, who were ethnic Chinese and who spoke Cantonese as their mother tongue, were all trained and qualified English language teachers. Their teaching experience within Hong Kong schools ranged from three years (Philip) to twelve years (Andrew). Throughout the period of the partnership Andrew was employed as the head of the English department at the school.

The university consultant, Emma (a pseudonym), is ethnic Chinese and an experienced educator. At the time of the study, she had worked as a teacher, teacher educator, and researcher for approximately fifteen years in both secondary and tertiary education institutions in Hong Kong. She has also taken part in numerous school-university partnerships in her role as a teacher educator. Emma met with the four English language teachers at Valley Heights College on a regular basis from August 2008 until the partnership concluded in August 2009.

Opportunities for teacher professional development took a variety of forms during the partnership. For example, throughout the 12 month period, a series of meetings were held between the consultant and the four teachers described above with the aim of devising teaching methods, activities, and materials that were appropriate to both the core module and some electives associated with the NSS. These meetings were conducted as workshops in that all participants were expected to play an active role in terms of contributing ideas and designing teaching and assessment materials. In addition, team teaching was undertaken in some English language lessons in which responsibility for planning and implementing specific lessons was shared between the consultant and one of the teachers participating in the SUP. All teachers participating in the SUP were encouraged to observe and reflect upon these lessons in a form of peer observation. These experiences were later shared amongst SUP members, with this feedback representing one input into future workshop meetings.

Data Collection and Analysis

According to Stake (1995), particularization is the goal of case study research: “We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does” (p. 8). To come to understand the professional development opportunities the partnership described above offered teachers at Valley Heights College, qualitative research methods were used. One source of data was semi-structured interviews conducted by one of the authors with each of the English language teachers described in the previous section throughout the partnership. From September 2008 to August 2009, a total of sixteen interviews were conducted, four interviews with each of the four Valley Heights College English language teacher participants, at intervals of approximately three months in order to achieve a longitudinal perspective on their perceptions of the establishment and development of the SUP within the college.

The goal of the interviews was to gain an in-depth understanding of these teachers’ experiences of partnership participation. Interview questions reflected the belief that social conditions can be investigated at different levels of social organisation (Layder, 2006). For example, at the institutional level, participants were asked to describe their understanding of the goals and outcomes of the SUP in terms of learning and teaching within their respective schools. At the interpersonal level, teachers were asked to reflect upon their relations with other SUP members - primarily their colleagues, school officials, and the consultant -

throughout the period of the partnership. At the intrapersonal level, teachers discussed their beliefs about the impact of the SUP on their own personal and professional development.

Another source of data was audio recordings of partnership meetings between the university consultant and the four English language teachers who participated directly in the SUP and who were described in the previous section. A total of eight partnership meetings, which ranged from 45 to 90 minutes, were recorded. These meetings, conducted in Cantonese, were translated and transcribed.

Data analysis occurred in a recursive, iterative manner as I moved between the data and the theoretical framework described above. As a first step, "codes" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56) were used to organize the data. Initially, this involved searching for words, phrases, and ideas that occurred and reoccurred in the data. The codes developed reflected the "indigenous concepts" (Patton, 2002, p. 454) used by participants to describe their professional development within and beyond the partnership (e.g., "new, modern teaching approaches", "curriculum planning", "professional development", and "communication between teachers").

As Bogden and Biklen (2003) argue, data analysis can also reflect the theoretical approach adopted by a study. In this case, the theoretical framework for understanding identity described earlier was used to explore how participants' experiences of the SUP shaped and were shaped by the ongoing construction of their teacher identities. For example, one participant, Andrew, offered the following comment:

> *It (the partnership) is certainly helpful for us to think about using new, modern approaches in our teaching, like being communicative and student centered and inquiry based.*

This strongly modalized statement of belief, underscored by the term "certainly", presents a positive evaluation of the partnership in terms of its contribution to helping teachers think about modern approaches to teaching, where it is supposed that what is "helpful" for teachers at Valley Heights College is also desirable. This assessment of the partnership is legitimized by invoking the authority of contemporary language education, recorded in the use of terms such as "communicative", "student centered', and "inquiry based".

This approach to data analysis represented the use of a "case-oriented strategy" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 174), meaning that data from each participant were considered as a whole. Later, a comparative analysis was undertaken across data from different participants to identify parallel or connected comments. Thus, different participants added meaning to categories such as 'personal and professional development' by referring to concepts that included 'knowledge about curriculum planning', 'confidence planning future modules', and 'learning new things'.

A "variable-orientated strategy" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 175) was also employed, in which data from all participants were sorted using concepts suggested by the theory of identity outlined above. Examples of these "sensitizing concepts" (Patton, 2002, p. 456) included 'engagement in partnership', 'constructing a joint enterprise', and 'developing a shared repertoire'. Throughout this process of data analysis participants were consulted for their interpretations of the emerging findings. Based upon their comments, further refinements were made.

Results

Negotiating Identity and Community in Partnership Meetings

This section examines how teachers and the consultant who took part in the SUP described above discursively created and maintained a community in practice and in language

in terms of three constituent components: The mutual engagement of participants, the negotiation of a joint enterprise, and the development of a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). Table One reports data collected from one of the meetings concerned with developing teaching and assessment materials suitable for the NSS and which took place between the consultant and three of the Valley Heights College English language teachers who participated in the SUP in December 2008. This meeting excerpt is reproduced in detail here as it illustrates the ways in which meanings were negotiated within many of the partnership team meetings, and in so doing how SUPs continued to the development of these teacher's professional identities.

Table One
Excerpt of SUP meeting December 2008

1. Emma (consultant): We should discuss the worksheets
2. Philip: We should discuss what we lack in the worksheets and what we should add.
3. Emma: Right. But we can only do it once we've got the worksheets with us.
4. Rebecca: We'll just follow what you say as our team leader.
5. Robert: Actually, we've got some worksheets.
6. Emma: These worksheets look good, so it's not difficult for us to come up with a plan, like layout instructional steps….
7. Andrew: We'll do the plan.
8. Emma: You'll fix it and we'll talk about it next time. We should then focus on the worksheets. You ask teachers for their worksheets and compile them into a portfolio.
9. Andrew: I'll work on the short stories.
10. Emma: No, you don't only work on those; you should work on poems also.
11. Philip: Do we want to beautify our worksheets? Like having for space for students to fill in? But it'll take lot of time to do.
12. Emma: You don't have much time. How about forgetting S.3 students now?
13. Andrew: But they'll (form 3 students) have a new set of anthology for local students, using local context, language, etc. We'll then need to revise the worksheets.
14. Emma: No worries. You can treat this as a process of teacher learning. We are done with S.3 09-10 teaching plan. We haven't applied it yet, so there's no reason to revise now.
15. Andrew: We can use the worksheets we have right now. Then we can see what we've missed out and add them. Will it be faster?
16. Emma: Yes, We can follow this.
17. Andrew: And some teachers have different foci, like language teaching.
18. Emma: No problem, in the end we'll still all be teaching language communicatively.
19. Andrew: How about summarizing? We haven't taught our S.1 students about this.
20. Emma: Shall we focus on worksheets? We'll submit the plan we had last year.
21. Andrew: The teachers have different teaching styles… some teach fast while others…
22. Emma: We've solved the problem for (secondary) 1. We'll follow the plan as agreed.
23. Andrew: Is it possible to add stuff?
24. Emma: No, we won't add anything… We'll teach prediction, main idea and characters and point-of-view, poems… we'll follow the system…
25. Philip: You won't have too much time in the coming year.
26. Andrew: Our materials don't deal with the problem of learners' diversity, should we prepare 2 sets of them then?
27. Emma: Not necessary.

Wenger (1998) suggests that a community is partly characterized by mutual engagement, which occurs when "people are engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with one another" (p. 73). In Table One, the meanings that matter are established by the consultant through an initial resolute directive to "discuss the worksheets" (line one). However, because "identification takes place in the doing" (Wenger, 1998, p. 193), engagement in this SUP is not limited to the mere discussion of worksheets. Rather, engagement in the practices and activities of the SUP is crucial to identity work. Thus, through a series of strongly modalized statements, the teachers underscored the essential role that practice played in their engagement and identity within this SUP: *"we'll do* the plan" (turn seven) and *"I'll work on* the short stories" (turn nine). This emphasis on doing was also made clear within the consultant's directives, which included for instance, the assertion that Andrew will "fix it" (turn eight).

This form of engagement as doing was fundamental to the teacher's identity as it confirmed their competency as members of the SUP. Taking on tasks themselves, as well as being entrusted with tasks by the consultant, reified the value of their contributions to the partnership. Here, the role of the consultant, Emma, was critical to the identification of these teachers as legitimate participants in the practices and activities of this SUP. Through practice, the responsibilities she assigned to the teachers afforded them opportunities to display their competency. Linguistically, her explicit positive evaluations of the contributions of these teachers were also important markers of such competency: "these worksheets look *good*" (turn 6).

A community is marked in part by the construction of a joint enterprise, an essential component of which is the negotiation of meanings. Although Wenger (1998) points out that negotiation does not necessarily mean that everybody agrees, data from the partnership meetings frequently revealed a lack of disagreement. This may reflect the functioning of an economy of meanings in which the premium placed upon some meanings can imply the marginalization of others. A foreshadowing of the meanings that mattered in this SUP, and therefore of the relations of power that underpinned participants' negotiation of their joint enterprise, occurred in Rebecca's declaration to the consultant that, "we'll just follow what you say as our team leader"(turn four).

Further evidence of the privileging of the consultant's definition of partnership events and actions is apparent in the discursive means she uses to diminish the possibility for negotiation over what matters. For instance, Andrew explores the possibility of revising the worksheets (turn thirteen), describes the importance of recognizing differences in the "focus" and "style" of different teachers at Valley Heights College (turns seventeen and twenty-one), and considers learner diversity (turn twenty-six). Emma's response to each suggestion, couched as strongly modalized declarations, appears to marginalize these concerns: "no worries" turn fourteen; "no problem" turn eighteen; "we'll follow the plan as agreed" turn twenty-two; "not necessary" turn twenty-seven.

The final component of community, the development of a shared repertoire, refers to "a community's set of shared resources" (Wenger, 1998, p. 83). These resources can contain both linguistic and nonlinguistic elements. In the case of this SUP meeting, worksheets represented the primary nonlinguistic resource around which the negotiation of meanings was organized. Also important to this negotiation was the discourse of contemporary language education. Linguistically, this shared understanding of teaching and learning is reflected in the participant's use of terms such as "teacher learning" (turn 14), "teaching language communicatively"(turn 18), "teaching styles" (turn 21), and "learner diversity" (turn 26) which positioned such discourse as essential to the shared understandings, as well as the practices, of this SUP.

To summarize, the data collected from partnership meetings suggested that participants were able to construct and sustain a community partly through engaging in partnership tasks that displayed competencies valued by SUP participants. A second feature

of this community was the establishment of a joint enterprise which, underpinned by relations of power, defined what matters within the SUP. Finally, drawing upon a shared repertoire of linguistic and nonlinguistic resources, the teachers expressed and reified their membership of the SUP. However, this SUP did not exist as a segregated community. As Wenger (1998) suggests, "communities of practice cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of the world, or understood independently of other practices" (p. 103). Therefore, the following section examines how these teachers created connections between the SUP and other communities and how these boundary spanning experiences shaped and were shaped by their teacher identities.

Beyond Meetings: Negotiating Identity and Community Across Boundaries

This section examines the identity work of the English language teachers as they crossed boundaries between the SUP and other communities. The negotiation of these boundaries was played out as a series of potential discursive struggles in which different discourses competed to define the meaning of the SUP both in terms of its impact on the practices of teaching and learning at Valley Heights College and in relation to the professional identities and professional development of all teachers at this school, both within and beyond the SUP itself.

Partnership as Contemporary Language Teaching and Learning Versus Language Teaching and Learning in Hong Kong

One view to emerge from interviews with participants concerned the role the partnership was thought to play in the promotion of contemporary methods of language teaching and learning. This position was contrasted with an alternative perspective that drew attention to particular aspects of language teaching and learning within the wider context of language teaching and learning in Hong Kong. The presence of these two positions was clear from the beginning of the partnership, and the comments made by Andrew and Rebecca reflect the feelings of the teachers as they embarked upon their SUP experiences:

> *Extract One*
> *Partnership is certainly helpful for us to think about new, modern approaches in our teaching, like being communicative and student centered and inquiry based. But in Hong Kong's education system, I'm not confident we can really use, in the classroom, the new methods (of) the consultant. I know I'll use structural, not communicative, approaches for a lot of my teaching…I can tell you, I have used this (structural approach) for a long time and it's successful with students (Andrew).*
> *Extract Two*
> *NSS is a big reform and I think the partnership can help us to prepare for it, like showing us how to make lessons more interactive. But in Hong Kong, I don't think the education system has changed much, it's exam focused and memorization; what the partnership can change might be limited. (Rebecca)*

In extracts one and two, recorded at the commencement of the partnership in September 2008, the significance of contemporary approaches to language teaching and learning is demonstrated in terms such as "communicative, student centered, and inquiry based" (Andrew). Andrew's characterization of the partnership as "helpful" represents an implicit positive assessment; what is "helpful" is assumed to be desirable. This assessment is supported by strongly modalized statements of belief that detail the type of help that was anticipated. For instance, Andrew insists that the "idea of a partnership" is, in principal, "*certainly* helpful for us to think about using new, modern approaches…".

Both Andrew and Rebecca employ the adversative discourse marker "but" to suggest an alternative perspective, going on to foreground the Hong Kong educational context, which is characterized as "exam focused" and involving "memorization". This linguistic strategy is employed to advance an alternative evaluation of partnership, one in which its practical effects at the micro level - "in the classroom" (Andrew) - are challenged. Doubt over the impact of the SUP at this level is revealed in terms such as "limited" (Rebecca), as well as through Andrew's questioning of the extent to which teachers can "really use" the methods of teaching and learning endorsed by the SUP.

Legitimation of this negative evaluation of the partnership's likely classroom impact occurs through rationalization, or the appeal to the beneficial consequences of certain actions. For Andrew, these beneficial consequences take the form of student learning: Success is associated with the avid rejection of a communicative teaching philosophy in favour of structural methods of teaching which, without doubt, are believed to benefit students ("I have used this (structural approach) for a long time and *it's successful with students*").

Partnership as Contemporary Language Teaching Versus Teaching and Learning at Valley Heights College

In addition to this conflict between the contemporary language teaching methods endorsed by the SUP and language teaching and learning within the wider Hong Kong educational context, another potential struggle over teaching methods emerged at the level of Valley Heights College itself:

<u>*Extract Three*</u>

As teachers, we understand the need to make our classrooms interactive and interesting, to use modern communicative methods…The consultant has definitely helped us achieve this. However, some students in this school, and parents, may not accept this, they are quite traditional….they emphasize exam results, their goals are…to have achievement in exams. They might think that modern teaching methods may not be suitable for their children who are used to traditional approaches… It will present us with problems; we will need to deal with their complaints. (Philip)

In reflecting upon his first six months of partnership experience, Philip employs a series of emphatic statements to describe the benefits of partnership in terms of the promotion of the discourse of modern language teaching. Yet, immediately after these benefits are outlined, an alternative discourse, which is signaled by the term "however" and centered on conceptions of "traditional approaches" to teaching, surfaces to challenge his apparent endorsement of the partnership. In this case, support for "traditional" teaching is associated with college stakeholders other than teachers, including some parents and students.

Philip's deployment of relatively weak modality ("They *might* think that modern teaching methods *may* not be suitable…") may appear to undermine his own case that the "traditional" views of teaching held by these stakeholders could present a challenge to the partnership's apparent promotion of "modern" language teaching. Nevertheless, this apparent softening of his stance is quickly qualified through a resolute statement describing the difficulties that teachers will encounter in negotiating the discursive confrontation between these two different views of partnership and teaching methods: "it *will* present us with problems; we *will* need to deal with their complaints".

Partnership as Teacher Learning Versus "A Learning Burden"

The theme of teacher learning and the professional development of individual language teachers both within and beyond the SUP was raised by several participants, as seen in the following excerpts from interviews conducted shortly before the conclusion of the SUP:

Extract Four

For all teachers nowadays changing ourselves through professional development is really important. Previously, our knowledge was limited, but now, from the partnership, we have more insights, such as on planning. From this partnership, I think we have a deeper understanding of curriculum so after this partnership I will have more confidence planning future modules…we have to constantly upgrade ourselves as teachers. I've learnt so much from the process. (Robert)

Extract Five

The problem of having the partnership is that in this school we teachers are already overburdened by professional development; we have many professional development courses…it's (the partnership) a learning burden when added to our heavy teaching load and (administrative) duties, as well as ECA (extra curricula activities) responsibilities. So some teachers won't really take its (the partnership) changes seriously; their heart and their mind won't be in it when we try to share the results of the partnership with all the teachers (in the school). So, the outcome (of the partnership) in terms of the effects on teachers will definitely be very little. (Rebecca)

Emphatic modality underscores the importance that some teachers attached to partnership as professional development ("changing ourselves through professional development *is really* important… we *have to* constantly upgrade ourselves as teachers", Robert). In extract four, recorded after he had participated in the SUP for approximately nine months, Robert's commitment to truth that the partnership did realize learning opportunities is apparent in the use a 'before and after' comparative structure ("previously….but now"). This experience of professional development and change, presented as a personalized statement of belief using the first person singular, is positively evaluated as providing "insights", "deeper understanding", and "confidence".

When interviewed at the end of the partnership, Rebecca offered an alternative position on the partnership and its role in teachers' professional development. Linguistically, she lays the groundwork for conflict between the partnership and teacher's learning and development in her use of the term "problem". Rebecca's observation that teachers are "overburdened by professional development" represents an explicit negative perspective, a theme which is reiterated within her review of the partnership as "a learning burden".

Rebecca's use of the plural terms "we" and "our" assumes an authority to speak on behalf of all the teachers in his school. The repeated use of "so" to preface her closing remarks suggest that two outcomes follow logically from such an assessment. One is to question teachers' commitment to the implementation of partnership recommendations for teaching and learning: "some teachers won't really take its (the partnership) changes seriously; their heart and their mind won't be in it…". In addition, the emphatic negative association between partnership and professional development implies that the impact of the partnership on teachers at the college "*will definitely*" be negligible.

Partnership as Changing Teaching Versus Resistance to Change

In final set of interviews with the teachers in August 2009, a discursive struggle had emerged as participants' anticipated the possible responses of their colleagues at Valley Heights College to the changes to teaching and student learning that the SUP could imply. This struggle played out as conflict between a perceived need to revise language teaching at the college and resistance to change:

> *Extract Six*
> *We participated in the partnership because we believe that renewing our approach to teaching is essential in today's world. And undeniably, changes must accompany the new NSS and so we really have to make changes to our teaching. From this partnership we are learning different approaches to teach different topics. Even we, as experienced teachers, must learn new things. Our colleagues will be able to try something different, which they don't know before…we should adopt an open-minded attitude towards the new ideas. (Robert)*
> *Extract Seven*
> *In this school, teachers are reluctant to accept changes. Many teachers are set in their ways, they may not want to take up the suggestions of the consultant and accept new things. I think they are reluctant to learn new things… experienced teachers are reluctant to change their teaching methods, they will resist. (Andrew)*

Robert further builds upon his positive evaluation of the SUP, first reported in extract four, through a series of strongly modalized statements of belief which employ the plural "we" to underscore an apparent authority to speak on behalf of all English language teachers in the school. He presents the need to change teaching at the college as a necessity rather than an option: "renewing our approach to teaching *is essential* in today's world…we really *have to* make changes to our teaching". These statements of belief are legitimized by reference to the institutional authority of educational reform in Hong Kong, specifically the "new NSS". Indeed, in advocating an "open minded attitude" to the "new ideas" provided by the consultant, Robert implicitly positions the partnership as an inevitable catalyst for changing teaching: "our colleagues *will be* able to try out something different…"

A very different view on the interface between partnership and changing teaching is explored by Andrew. Using the plural "we" to assume an authority to speak on behalf of all teachers, his repeated use of the term "reluctant" calls into question the inevitability of the nexus between partnership and change. While his commitment to truth is softened by the use of weakened modality ("may") and personalized mental process clauses ("*I think* they are…"), his belief in the potential for teachers to oppose change remains resolute: "experienced teachers *are* reluctant to change their teaching methods, they *will* resist". The legitimation of this anticipated outcome occurs through mythopoesis; the certainty of resistance representing a cautionary tale of what will occur following the partnership.

Partnership as Socially Based Teaching Versus Teaching as Individually Constructed

The SUP, as the mutual engagement of all Valley Heights College English teachers in the development and use of a shared repertoire of NSS teaching skills and resources was challenged by a competing conception of teaching as an individual activity:

> Extract Eight
> *We, as a (partnership) group, have to work together and produce the materials and share them with colleagues. We enjoyed that. But now, after the partnership, we will also need the whole English department to come together to share these materials…they're not used to that way of working. Traditionally, in this school, they (teachers) usually do their own thing. We work mostly individually and the teachers*

might not want to work so closely with others, or they might not be able to. Their attitude is: "I can handle NSS by myself, or I can just attend a very short EB (Education Bureau) course, it's enough". (Andrew)

Andrew introduces two potentially competing discourses. One discourse refers to the need for partnership teachers to "work together", to produce and share teaching materials. This is positively evaluated: "we (partnership teachers) *enjoyed i*t". However, use of the linguistic marker "but" raises the possibility of an alternative discourse, built upon principles of teachers working individually, doing "their own thing". It is the former discourse which is thought to be alien to the teachers at the college. As Andrew puts it, teachers who did not take part in the partnership "are not really used to that way of working". However, through the use of weakened modality, the possibility is left open that these different discourses could coexist at Valley Heights College: "the teachers *might* not want to work so closely with others, or they *might* not be able to". This conclusion is legitimized through an appeal to the authority of the traditional ways of working at the school.

Discussion

Partnership Meetings: Belonging and Identity Construction

Identity, Wenger (1998) argues, "is produced as a lived experience of participation" (p. 151). For the teachers who participated in this study, the lived experience of partnership meetings was one source of identification because they positioned themselves, and were positioned by the consultant, as competent members of the SUP. Positioning themselves as engaged in the practices and activities of the SUP meant deploying strongly modalized statements that foregrounded action, including the production of teaching plans, short stories, and worksheets (Table One). Such outputs represented one means for the reification of these teachers as component partnership members, an outcome that was underscored linguistically through the consultant's endorsement of their partnership contributions. This lived experience of partnership afforded teachers legitimate access to the practices of the SUP. Their alignment with the goals of the partnership was implied within a series of positive evaluations that detailed the professional learning opportunities the SUP provided (extracts four and five).

Constructing and maintaining the joint enterprise of a SUP also focused attention on the ways in which particular meanings of teaching and learning were negotiated within partnership meetings. In particular, relations of power shaped the engagement of all SUP participants by determining which meanings and competencies were prioritized and which were marginalized. Here a premium was placed on the meanings of teaching and learning prioritized by the consultant, with the result that some teachers struggled to claim ownership of certain meanings, suggesting the possible marginalization of these meanings. This outcome might account for a series of discursive struggles that emerged as teachers situated their participation in the here-and-now of partnership meetings within their membership of multiple communities, an issue that is explored below.

Beyond Meetings: Partnership and Identity Across Multiple Communities

A contribution of this study is to focus attention on teacher identity construction beyond the here-and-now of SUP meetings. This addresses the fact that the teachers who took part in this study discursively positioned themselves as members of diverse communities that included not only the SUP, but also the community of ELTs within their school, as well as larger communities of English language teachers both within Hong Kong and internationally. To understand the role of these multiple community memberships in identity it is necessary to move beyond teachers' engagement in the SUP itself and to consider how these teachers' identities were shaped by Wenger's (1998) second mode of belonging, imagination. It was the work of imagination which allowed the teachers to transcend their immediate engagement in the practices of the SUP by "creating new images of the world and of (them)selves" (Wenger, 1998, p. 176). Thus, teachers connected their participation in the SUP to their engagement in several different communities of language educators, including an international community of English language teachers who use "modern teaching approaches" (extract one) and make learning interactive and interesting (extract three).

Another community in which the SUP teachers participated and constructed teacher identities was that of English language teachers and teaching in Hong Kong. Participation in this community was characterized by adherence to a rigid examination focus, marked, for example, by structural approaches to grammar teaching and memorization (extracts one and two). Thus, the capacity of the SUP teachers to imagine themselves as particular types of teachers was in part shaped by the beliefs about language teaching and learning valued within this broader community of Hong Kong English language teachers.

Two other communities were also identified as potential sources of meaning for the SUP and for the identification of the teachers who took part in it. The first was revealed as the teachers located their engagement in the practices and activities of the SUP within the beliefs about teaching, learning, and professional development that were afforded a premium within the wider community of English language teachers across Valley Heights College. In addition, the meanings of teaching and learning that were valued by communities of stakeholders such as parents and students also emerged as an imagined source of meaning that shaped how these teachers conceptualized their partnership engagement. Participating in these multiple communities necessarily implies the existence of community boundaries and the need for the teachers who took part in the SUP to cross such boundaries. As Wenger (1998) points out, boundary crossing can be both a source of learning and of conflict, an issue that is explored in greater detail in the remainder of this paper.

Discourse and agency: Professional Development Under Threat

The data suggest that the teachers at Valley Heights College who took part in this study enjoyed legitimate access to the practices and activities of several different communities, only one of which was the SUP. However, in addition to legitimate access to practice, Tsui (2009) argues that individuals also need to legitimate their access to practice and their participation within a community "by showing that they possess the competence that qualifies them as members of a community of practice" (p. 153). The essential role of this legitimation of access to practice for identity construction is underscored in the case of individuals who cross boundaries between different communities. For instance, teachers at this school positively evaluated the learning and professional development opportunities they associated with participation in the SUP. An essential component of this evaluation was their role in the production of artifacts such as worksheets and lesson plans that reified and demonstrated their competencies within this community. At the same time, the work of imagination suggested to these teachers that legitimation of the competencies they associated

with the SUP within the context of their participation in the practices of other communities, such as the community of English language teachers in Hong Kong as well as within Valley Heights College itself, could be problematic.

As suggested in Figure One, identity is constructed not only experientially, but also as a discursive accomplishment. It was then through language that the SUP participants constructed and explored what they saw as dissociation between, on the one hand, their legitimate access to participate in the SUP and, on the other, being potentially denied the legitimating access to the practice needed to reify their SUP identities within other communities in which they participated. The remainder of this section explores this tension.

One source of this disconnection focused on a disjuncture between the approaches to teaching and learning that underpinned the practices and activities of the SUP and those that were endorsed by other communities, including other English language teachers at the school as well as communities of stakeholders such as students and their parents. Within the context of their SUP participation, the four English language teachers who took part in this study appeared to align themselves with the discourse of contemporary language teaching, with its emphasis on communicative, student centered, and inquiry based teaching and learning. However, a competing discourse, which valued traditional, exam-focused, and memorization-based approaches to language teaching and learning, was thought to be endorsed by these alternative communities (extracts one to three).

Another discursive struggle appeared to take place over the issue of teacher's professional development. While the professional development that the participants associated with the SUP was evaluated as a positive contribution to their teacher identities, they simultaneously invoked the discourse of alternative communities, such as that of language teachers in Hong Kong, in which professional development appeared to be negatively evaluated as a burden (extract five).

Closely related to the discourse of teacher development, SUP teachers associated their engagement in the partnership with changing teachers and teaching and with the collective or social production and implementation of teaching. Confronting these discourses was a view of teaching and learning within the school which implied resistance to changes in teaching methods and approaches, as well as a school culture based on individualism in teaching, in which "teachers do their own thing (and) make their own decisions about their teaching" (extract eight).

Wenger (1998) maintains that it is necessary to reconcile diverse forms of membership across communities through the construction of an identity that can include "different meanings and forms of participation into one nexus" (p. 160). However, as argued previously, Wenger (1998) has been criticized for not fully theorizing conflict and contestation within his theory of identity. In contrast, the theory of discourse proposed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) provides insight into how this conflict may have been reconciled. Thus, data from SUP meetings suggested that, underpinned by relations of power, the teachers who took part in the SUP did attempt such a reconciliation through a hegemonic intervention which temporarily suppressed their participation, and hence identities, in other communities, such as English language teachers within the school, in favour of their identity as participants in the SUP itself.

However, the success of such an intervention appeared doubtful when, drawing upon interview data, the teachers' identity construction was situated within the broader context of their need to cross community boundaries. These doubts were reflected linguistically in variations teachers made to the strength of the modality they employed within partnership meetings on the one hand, and their descriptions of boundary crossings between this SUP and different communities on the other. For instance, with an emphasis on doing, analysis of the here-and-now of SUP meetings suggested that teachers, through strongly modalized statements, emphasized both their commitment to engaging in the practices and activities of

the SUP and their alignment with its objectives for teaching and learning at Valley Heights College.

This commitment to engagement in the SUP was also underlined by the use of a shared linguistic repertoire that privileged the discourse of contemporary language teaching and functioned as a resource for the negotiation of SUP meanings. In contrast, interview data revealed that this commitment could dissolve as these teachers crossed community boundaries and encountered discourses of teaching and learning that denied them the agency needed to legitimate their access to the practices, activities, competencies, and hence professional identity development, they associated with engagement in the SUP.

To summarize, the teacher's perceptions of the challenges of crossing boundaries between the SUP and some of the other communities in which they engaged threatened to undermine the learning and competencies they believed they had acquired from participation in the SUP. This was because their identities as SUP participants, reified within the knowledge and competencies acquired from engagement in the practices and activities of the SUP, might be opposed by the dominant discourses of other communities which did not value these competencies. The resulting marginalization of their identities as SUP participants could threaten the agency of these teachers, denying them the opportunity to legitimate, and to have legitimated, their identities as partnership participants. This lack of agency may undermine not only the professional development opportunities of these four teachers but also the professional development benefits of the SUP for all teachers at the school, ultimately calling into question the SUPs contribution to the promotion of quality education in the classrooms of this school.

Although situated within the Hong Kong context, the discursive struggles over identity that characterized SUP teachers' professional development experiences could be replicated by SUP participants in educational settings worldwide. Therefore, the following section considers how reconciliation of this identity conflict across community boundaries could be more successively accomplished in order to achieve the goals of teacher development within a school-university partnership.

Implications for Teacher Professional Development Through Partnership

Attempts to address the identity conflicts that teachers might encounter as they negotiate their professional development within a SUP and in other communities should consider the nature of interprofessional collaboration at organizational boundaries. A useful starting point could be the theory of relational agency, which examines the "capacity to work with others to expand the object that one is working on and trying to transform by recognizing and assessing the resources that others bring to bear as they interpret and respond to the object" (Edwards, 2005, p. 172).

Central to relational agency is recognizing and ensuring that participants have access to the object motives of their collaborators (Edwards & Kinti, 2010). One way in which the motives, beliefs, and perceptions of SUP stakeholders could be revealed is to require different stakeholders within and beyond the SUP itself - teachers, students, parents, university consultants, school authorities, and educational policy makers – to interview each other at regular intervals throughout the design and implementation of a SUP, as well as after the partnership has formally concluded. These interviews would provide insight into the identity construction experiences of stakeholders before, during and after their partnership experiences for, as Gee (1999) points out, "socially situated identities are co-constructed in interviews just as much as they are in everyday conversations" (p. 121).

The interviews should explore the different views of stakeholders, including their beliefs about teaching and learning in general and their experiences and perspectives on participating in a SUP in particular, including reasons for participating, relations with other

stakeholders, as well as perceptions about the partnership, including its potential contribution to teaching and learning within individual schools and higher education institutions. In narrating these experiences and feelings, the interviews would provide a profile of how stakeholders shape and reshape their identities over time both within and beyond a SUP because "in telling stories, participants are performing themselves; they are doing their identities" (Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 399). In addition, interviews could be supplemented by some stakeholders observing each other within the classroom to better understand the different discourses which shape their approaches to teaching and learning.

Analysis of these interviews and observations should seek a nuanced examination of stakeholders' voices to reveal the discourses that are implicated in this data. One aim of this analysis would be to understand how stakeholders are positioned within discourses as, for instance, teachers who use "modern communicative methods" (extract three) or as teachers who are "reluctant to accept changes" (extract eight). Moving beyond the conflict that can result as partnership stakeholders cross community boundaries and confront competing discourses might then be achieved by revealing the contingent nature of these positionings, allowing historically and socially specific meanings to be contested (Jorgensen & Philips, 2002). For example, scrutinizing discourses by enabling stakeholders "to occupy the subject position of the other" (Spivak, 1990, p. 121), and hence admitting multi-vocal dialogue (Hamel & Ryken, 2010), could allow these discourses to be seen as potential sites of struggle that are open to reflection and potential change. This step would address a second essential feature of a relational agency perspective on boundary crossing by assisting individuals to align their own perspectives on participation and identity with the views of others both within and beyond the boundaries of the partnership (Edwards & Kinti, 2010).

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that identity can play a crucial role in understanding teacher professional development through school university partnerships. Identity shaped not only teachers' engagement in the partnership itself, but also how these teachers might be able to participate in the practices of activities of other communities beyond the partnership, such as the community of English language teachers at Valley Heights College. As the teachers in this study took on the identity of a participant in the partnership, this identity was reified in the joint production and intended classroom use of particular teaching methods, activities, and materials. Indeed, such reification underpinned the very rationale of this SUP; to prepare teachers at this school for the educational reforms implied by the NSS.

However, these teachers foresaw challenges to this identity positioning as they crossed boundaries between the SUP and other communities of practice within and beyond their school. Their possible inability to exercise agency in the face of the dominant discourses of these communities, and therefore to claim ownership of the meanings of learning and teaching that matter in such communities, could imply the marginalization of the competencies and professional development they associated with their participation in the SUP. One outcome of this might be that the contribution of this SUP to teaching and learning is questioned. Therefore, if the potential benefits for teacher development that partnerships are thought to offer are to be realized, those responsible for partnership planning and implementation should be aware of the role identity can play in the professional development of teachers. In particular, there is a need to address how different discourses position teachers differently within the multiple communities in which they participate both within and beyond individual partnerships and schools and to consider the implications of this for their professional development.

The limitations of the current study include the focus on a single SUP within one educational context and the reliance on data collected during the period of the SUP itself.

Therefore, future research should adopt a comparative approach to understand how stakeholders within educational settings worldwide experience professional development and construct identities within school-university partnerships. This contextualized research should collect data over extended periods of time, including before and after the implementation of the SUP, with the aim of longitudinally tracing the impact of the partnership on teacher professional development. This research should also address the voices of different stakeholders, including teachers, consultants, school and university authorities, as well as parents and students, all of whom contribute to the SUP as an opportunity for the professional development of teachers.

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