



| CASE STUDY

# SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS: STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE RELATIONSHIPS

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There is only limited research available examining the relationship between a supervising teacher and the university sending its pre-service student teachers to a school to undertake their practicum.

School-university partnership approaches to professional experience are important in developing closer relationships between pre-service teachers, supervising teachers and university staff, particularly in regional institutions where positive relationships and a sense of connection are critical.



*The aim was to reflect on the current school-university experience and design a partnership model that could sustain effective practice, as well as be practical and “useable”.*

Indeed, there has been growing emphasis on university staff working in partnership with schools to construct professional experiences that maximise pre-service teacher engagement as part of their

professional accreditation.

To that end, Charles Sturt University set out to work with staff at a local multi-site secondary school to better understand the processes and elements that contribute to positive school-university partnerships.

A collaborative team was formed, including university and school staff, to investigate the perceptions of supervising teachers (all fully qualified, practising teachers) on the benefits, challenges and supportive factors related to school-university partnerships and the professional experience placement of pre-service teachers.

A case study approach allowed the team to focus on the unique attributes of the school and closely investigate this real-life context.

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An initial 10-minute voluntary survey was distributed to supervising teachers via SurveyMonkey to collect demographic information such as gender, years of teaching experience and the number of pre-service teachers supervised. Staff were also given the opportunity to participate in individual or focus group follow-up interviews of approximately 45 minutes duration.

Importantly, the follow-up interviews enabled the team to further elicit the views of supervising teachers about how higher education contexts could better cater for the needs of the school and pre-service teachers. The semi-structured nature of the interviews

allowed for particular aspects to be further investigated, with question design informed by initial survey responses and the personal experiences of supervising teachers; how the higher education context responds to their needs; and future opportunities in the professional experience space.

Five themes emerged from the team’s analysis of the data:

1. University workplace learning issues and processes
2. School-university communication processes and procedures
3. Within school issues and processes
4. Persistent myths regarding professional experience
5. The need to re-envision the benefit of professional experience for both stakeholders.

These themes and the implications they have for shared practice were then used to create an action plan for the partners to use to improve planning, ensure transparent communication, and enhance the supervising teacher and pre-service teacher experience.

Processes have since been established to enhance and explicitly align practices with quality teaching professional standards to improve the supervising teacher experience and ensure a positive practicum for pre-service teachers.

This small piece of research provided useful insights into school-university partnerships regarding professional experience relationships that will ultimately serve as a potential model for scaling into other local partnerships in the future.