



Building agency in School-University Partnerships: Lessons from Collaborative Research during the Pandemic

Journal:	<i>Journal of Educational Administration</i>
Manuscript ID	JEA-11-2023-0281.R3
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper (Qualitative)
Keywords:	School-University Partnership, Networked Learning System, Collaborative Research, Teacher Education, Relational agency, Collective agency

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

Publisher policy allows this work to be made available in this repository. Published in *Journal of Educational Administration* by Emerald. Madrid Miranda, R., Glas, K. and Chapman, C. (2024), "Building agency in school–university partnerships: lessons from collaborative research during the pandemic", *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. The original publication is available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/jea-11-2023-0281>. This author accepted manuscript is deposited under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC) licence. This means that anyone may distribute, adapt, and build upon the work for non-commercial purposes, subject to full attribution. If you wish to use this manuscript for commercial purposes, please contact permissions@emerald.com

Building Agency in School-University Partnerships: Lessons from Collaborative Research during the Pandemic

School-university partnerships as places for collaborative knowledge generation

The disconnection between university-based teacher education and experiences in the field has been highlighted in the literature as a significant and constant barrier to high quality teacher preparation, especially in terms of development of pedagogical knowledge and the ability to analyse and reflect on practice (Adoniou, 2013; Heinz and Fleming, 2019; Zeichner, 2010). This long-standing problem has been referred to as the theory-practice divide, and it has been attributed to the predominance of academic knowledge over practice-based knowledge in the hierarchical epistemic traditions of teacher education programmes (Zeichner et al., 2015). During the last two decades, efforts have been made to imagine and develop inquiry-based 'third spaces' (Zeichner, 2010; Daza et al., 2021). *Third spaces* are characterised by less hierarchical structures, drawing on combined expertise from universities, schools and communities, and co-construction of knowledge between teacher educators, pre-service teachers (PSTs), and mentor teachers. The notion of partnerships has become a new cornerstone aligned with the notion and principles of the 'third space' in professional practice in teacher education, which promises to move towards a radical shift in the focus of whose expertise counts while simultaneously presenting identities in constant negotiations as a result of crossing boundaries and performing hybrid roles (Daza et al., 2021). Robust partnerships between universities and schools as sites of different and complementary expertise, can be realised through the concept of teachers as researchers (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009) and reflective practitioners (Schon, 1983). Different systems have adopted various

1
2
3 approaches in an attempt to create these third spaces (Sandoval and Van Es, 2021;
4
5 Donaldson, 2011; McLaughlin and Black-Hawkins, 2007; Tanner and Davies, 2009;
6
7 Hamza et al., 2018).
8
9

10
11 In Chile, over the past two decades a series of measures have been implemented to
12
13 improve Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Whilst these have focused mostly on
14
15 accountability mechanisms, policies have also included support for collaboration
16
17 between ITE university programmes and schools with school-university partnership
18
19 policies that allow both to take the role of co-educators of future teachers
20
21 (Montecinos, 2014). The most recent policy measures include legislation regarding
22
23 the professional development of teachers (Ministerio de Educación, 2016), and the
24
25 formulation of standards for the teaching profession in 2014, revised in 2021. The
26
27 Research Teams (RTs) initiative presented in this study was created as part of
28
29 support mechanisms to bridge the gap between theory and practice, a challenging
30
31 dimension of teacher education in Chile (Bastías-Bastías and Iturra-Herrera, 2022).
32
33 This initiative was underpinned by the principles of a Networked Learning System
34
35 (NLS), which emphasises the importance of working across boundaries and inquiry
36
37 and critical reflection in collaborative research as ways to promote new ways of
38
39 generating knowledge and a set of relationships between university and schools to
40
41 improve both school outcomes and professional learning. An NLS is defined as:
42
43
44
45
46
47
48

49 a partnership between research and practice that is connected through
50
51 networks and different types of borders. These can be physical and/or
52
53 professional and it is driven by design-based research and collaborative
54
55 inquiry to innovate, test and refine practice and build leadership capacity
56
57 through practice-based professional learning. (Author, 2021, p. 2)
58
59
60

1
2
3 The potential benefits and opportunities for schools being engaged with the RTs are
4 increased support for improvement processes with a focus on student learning,
5
6 accessing professional learning with a focus on collaborative research focused on
7
8 problems of practice, and strengthening teachers' professional capacities for
9
10 collaboration (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Spante et al., 2022). University benefits
11
12 are related to developing a richer understanding of the complex challenges within the
13
14 educational system and the reality of demands placed on schools, professional
15
16 learning of faculty staff in models of collaborative research, and strengthening the
17
18 relationships with schools through more contextualised university teaching. The
19
20 development of research skills for teachers to be able to connect learning aims and
21
22 disciplinary knowledge with the students' characteristics, as well as skills for
23
24 professional reflection, innovation and collaborative work among teachers, forms part
25
26 of the most recent version of the Chilean standards for the teaching profession
27
28 (CPEIP, 2022, standards 2 and 11).
29
30
31
32
33
34
35

36 The intention of the RTs' model of collaboration is to disrupt traditional relationships
37
38 established among teacher educators, school teachers and PSTs in pursuit of new
39
40 rules of engagement. While the idea of collaborative inquiry is not new in teacher
41
42 professional learning and development, RTs aimed to explore a model to better align
43
44 university teaching with the realities of the school system supporting context-situated
45
46 professional learning and improving and innovating the teaching-learning processes
47
48 going on in schools. Moreover, the extreme circumstances of the pandemic
49
50 introduced, in some places, new collaborative ways of working between schools,
51
52 their communities, and universities, placing a stronger focus on students (CIAE and
53
54 Colegio Antilen, 2021), and bringing together a wider range of actors to explore
55
56 solutions of problems of practice (ROC, 2023).
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 This paper explores the RTs initiative as a space for research collaboration in
4
5 Chilean ITE, and as a site for relational and collective teacher agency during the
6
7 pandemic. We first present an overview of international studies on collaborative
8
9 research in ITE, and the promises and challenges of collaborative research practice
10
11 partnerships (RPPs). Then, we explain concepts related to teachers' professional
12
13 agency, which provided the framework for the analysis and discussion of the data
14
15 collected for our study. Special emphasis is placed on relational and collective
16
17 aspects of agency.
18
19
20
21

22 **Teacher preparation and collaborative research**

23
24
25
26 The increasing emphasis on professional learning in teacher preparation has seen a
27
28 sharper focus on adopting various forms of action research for educational change
29
30 (Elliott, 1991) and approaches to practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith and Lytle,
31
32 2009). In many countries, it is now commonplace for PSTs to undertake some form
33
34 of small-scale research project as part of their ITE experience (cf. Cárdenas-Claros
35
36 et al., 2023, Darwin and Barahona, 2023, Oolbakkink-Marchand et al., 2022).

37
38 Evidence shows that PSTs engaged with classroom research make connections
39
40 across pedagogy, research, and change (Price, 2001), strengthen critical reflection
41
42 and collaboration, create a more robust teacher identity (e.g. Dikilitaş and Yaylı,
43
44 2018), and learn to see students as partners (Ceylan and Comoglu, 2022). The
45
46 importance of teacher research in ITE is also supported by broader arguments
47
48 regarding the role of evidence-based approaches to school improvement
49
50 (McLaughlin and Black-Hawkins, 2007) and resonates with long-term visions of
51
52 teachers as researchers (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). Following the influential
53
54 and well-established traditions of John Dewey in the US and Lawrence Stenhouse
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 and John Elliott in the UK, the notion of teachers as reflective thinkers, questioning
4 and testing theory in practice, combined with readiness and openness to allow
5 others to observe and critique one's work, is key to the notion of professionalism.
6
7

8
9
10 Despite this tradition, the research capacity that exists in teacher education
11 institutions tends to be limited (Brooks, 2021). It has been argued that the lack of
12 research capacity in teacher preparation impacts on teachers' abilities to engage
13 with research. For example, in a study conducted in Chile, PSTs' research and
14 reflective skills were assessed, revealing a noticeable deficiency in their knowledge
15 and tools for data analysis and the identification of research issues (Cardenas-
16 Claros et al., 2023). Studies also highlight the importance of building research
17 capacity at different levels (individual, organisational and institutional) and including
18 various stakeholders (teacher educators, teachers, students, policy makers, etc.) in
19 the process to promote a research culture in teacher education (Brooks, 2021).
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36

37 **The promises and challenges of collaborative research practice partnerships** 38 **(RPPs)** 39 40

41
42 Collaboration between universities and schools can take various forms in shaping
43 knowledge generation and research engagement (McLaughlin and Black-Hawkins,
44 2007). New models move beyond notions of translating research evidence for the
45 use of practitioners towards "processes of collaboration and exchange that are both
46 messier and potentially more transformative than the one-way translation of
47 knowledge of research into practice" (Penuel et al., 2015, p.183).
48
49
50
51
52
53

54
55
56 Collaborative approaches to research emphasise promoting less hierarchical
57 relationships; the integration of school and university expertise; and the importance
58
59
60

1
2
3 and need to develop research capacity both at the university and school levels
4
5 (McLaughlin and Black-Hawkins, 2007; Tanner and Davies, 2009). By including
6
7 diverse voices and expertise, disrupting more hierarchical structures and
8
9 homogeneous systems, collaboration can enhance diversity in education practice
10
11 and research in teacher education and has the potential to foster reciprocity, a
12
13 coalition of interests, innovation, and synergy and be “emancipatory in the formation
14
15 of new relationships and systems of working” (Baumfield and Butterworth, 2007,
16
17 p.415).
18
19
20

21
22 In the context of teacher education, collaborative engagement with research has
23
24 positively impacted on teacher-educators' professional practice, improving the
25
26 knowledge, skills, and critical awareness, benefiting the learning of students (Tanner
27
28 and Davies, 2009). Likewise, the exploration of new roles in RPPs has demonstrated
29
30 that these alliances can enhance the link and use of research findings that can
31
32 inform local practices and create networks beyond schools and universities to
33
34 become open to new ideas and to judge research that is relevant for local systems
35
36 (e.g., Burn et al., 2021). A Welsh study emphasises integrating research into teacher
37
38 professional development, prioritising research capacity building in higher education
39
40 and illustrates how research fosters deeper pedagogical understanding via teacher-
41
42 educators' reflection and critical praxis analysis (Tanner and Davies, 2009).
43
44
45
46
47

48 Despite its attractiveness, developing equitable and genuine collaboration between
49
50 teachers and researchers can be a challenging ambition. Studies of RPPs involving
51
52 teacher education in the United States have focused on exploring how convergence
53
54 is achieved through Network Improvement Communities. They highlight the
55
56 importance of unpacking the complex processes, fraught with tensions, of how these
57
58 communities agreed on an aim (Sandoval and Van Es, 2021). Feldman (1993)
59
60

1
2
3 questioned whether this relationship can be called collaborative, while Oates and
4
5 Bignell (2022) identified resistance of school-based staff to take full ownership of the
6
7 process, and Hamza et al. (2018) found differences in the assumption of
8
9 responsibility and power in the process. In Scotland, 'hub schools' were envisioned
10
11 as the expression of strong partnerships between universities and schools that could
12
13 simultaneously strengthen ITE, in service-professional, and leadership development
14
15 through inquiry and research to ultimately improve student learning (Donaldson,
16
17 2011).

18
19
20
21
22 Unfortunately, despite attempts to create a more networked egalitarian culture, over
23
24 a decade later many of Donaldson's recommendations have not been fully
25
26 implemented; a relatively hierarchical and bureaucratic system remains dominant
27
28 (Author, 2019). McLaughlin and Black-Hawkins's (2007) seven-year study of a
29
30 partnership between the University of Cambridge and eight secondary schools
31
32 discussed the conditions (e.g. clarity of purpose), structures (e.g. dissemination of
33
34 findings), and organisational arrangements (e.g. resources and time) needed to
35
36 support such research, insisting on the importance of ensuring the conditions for this
37
38 work to be successful. Studies have also explored university-school research
39
40 partnerships by focusing mostly on their impact on either school teachers or teacher
41
42 educators (e.g. Burn et al., 2021; Oates and Bignell, 2022), but only few have
43
44 focused on PSTs (Sutherland et al., 2005).

51 52 53 **Teachers' agency**

54
55 In professional development contexts –including ITE– , *agency* is a concept of
56
57 central importance. Agency has been defined as:
58
59
60

1
2
3 the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural
4 environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the
5 interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement, both reproduces and
6 transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by
7 changing historical situations. (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 970)

8
9
10 Like other human endeavours, education occurs within structural environments, such
11 as schools, school systems, and universities, within which teachers (and others)
12 need to constantly respond to new situations and problems (such as the pandemic).

13
14
15 Priestley et al. (2015) avoid describing teacher agency as an *individual capacity*.

16
17
18 Rather, in their ecological approach, they focus on the *interplay* between capacity
19 and the social and material contexts and cultures in which agency can be *achieved*.

20
21
22 In this sense, research in this area often aims to offer an alternative to an excessive
23 focus on teachers' individual capacities, considering both individual and collective
24 experiences *within structural contexts* that may facilitate or obstruct teacher agency
25 (Edwards, 2015).

26
27
28 In ITE, research has shown that PSTs encounter limitations to exerting their agency,
29 especially when finding discrepancies between proposed innovations acquired in
30 university courses and constraints to implement these in their practicum placements;
31 this includes rigid assessment systems coupled with inflexible mentor teachers
32 (Yuan, 2016), or internal beliefs about their professional pedagogical responsibilities
33 (Barahona and Ibaceta-Quijanes, 2022). In order to overcome these challenges,
34 researchers have proposed the purposeful incorporation of critical reflection (Jones
35 and Charteris, 2017) or action research into ITE (e.g. Cochran-Smith and Lytle,
36 2009). However, these proposals often continue to focus on PST's individual
37 capacities and agency. With regards to action research in ITE, an analysis has
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 shown that for the development of effective teacher agency, individual PST research
4
5 must be supported by greater collaboration between different ITE stakeholders
6
7 (Darwin and Barahona, 2023), which can provide the basis for the experience of
8
9 collective agency—a group capability to work productively together and solve
10
11 problems (Zumpe, 2024).
12
13

14
15 The RTs initiative described in this paper constitutes a proposal to create this type of
16
17 structure for research collaboration (see below). New or challenging situations, such
18
19 as the pandemic, call upon educators to join forces and act together within the
20
21 structural contexts in which they work. The experience and belief to be able to
22
23 achieve meaningful solutions *together* is the distinctive element of collective agency
24
25 (cf. Bandura, 2000; Zumpe, 2024).
26
27

28
29 However, a necessary condition for collective agency to arise may be the presence
30
31 of *relational agency*, which Edwards defines as “a capacity to align one’s thought
32
33 and actions with those of others in order to interpret problems of practice and to
34
35 respond to those interpretations” (2005, p. 169). For relational agency to be learned
36
37 and practised, she highlights the importance of “recognising that another person may
38
39 be a resource and that work needs to be done to elicit, recognise and negotiate the
40
41 use of that resource in order to align oneself in joint action” (p. 172). It follows that a
42
43 system in which people engage in relational agency has a greater chance to
44
45 strengthen an NLS through reciprocal learning, and teaching through critical
46
47 connection with practice.
48
49
50

51
52 Teachers’ *professional use of language* is a central aspect in the achievement of
53
54 agency; the study and analysis of teacher discourse is, therefore, also an important
55
56 means to describe and understand how individual, relational, and collective agency
57
58 are reflected in their vocabulary and grammar (Ahearn, 2001; Konopasky and
59
60

1
2
3 Sheridan, 2016). This includes, for example, examining their use of singular or plural
4 pronouns and verb forms, or semantic fields related to collaboration and professional
5 enquiry. At the same time, one of the ways in which agency can be fostered is
6 through the development of teachers' "*discursive resources*" in teacher education,
7 aiming to improve their capacities to collaboratively discuss their work and thus
8 explore the opportunities for agency within their contextual structures (Biesta *et al.*
9 2017).

10
11 This paper explores the emergence of teachers' relational and collective agency in
12 an innovative model of collaborative research between different ITE stakeholders.
13 The nature and role of relational and collective agency in this type of collaborative
14 setting has received scant attention to date, especially in relation to ITE. The
15 research key questions guiding this research are:

- 16 1) How does the RTs initiative support the **recognition and appreciation of**
17 **differences** between different actors in the programme?
- 18 2) What new insights into relational agency as part of teacher preparation does
19 the RTs initiative offer?
- 20 3) How does the engagement with the RTs initiative support the development of
21 collective agency?

22 **Research context and participants**

23 The RTs initiative was part of a wider three-year plan for the strengthening of ITE at
24 a university in central Chile. This initiative sought to move beyond traditional notions
25 of school and university as the arrangements that facilitate, support and assess
26 PSTs in practical teaching experience. The development of a model of collaborative
27 research to tackle 'problems of practice' identified by practitioners, university staff
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 and students was core to this approach. The initiative brought together University
4 Tutors (UTs) leading subject pedagogy courses and/or supervising and evaluating
5 school practica, school staff (SS) involved in ITE as practicum mentors and PSTs.
6
7 UTs were invited to apply to be part of the RTs initiative. This required the UTs to
8 build a team with SS and PSTs, together identify problems of practice in classrooms,
9
10 and develop a research proposal to be carried out over a period of 12 months. The
11 initiative was coordinated and overseen by an advisory team consisting of a
12
13 psychologist and an external educational advisor (the first and third authors of this
14
15 paper) who, from the outset, reinforced clear expectations about *equal participation*
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

The first RT cohort moved complete online due to the pandemic. The second cohort of the RTs work with a hybrid model (face-to-face in schools and online meetings). For this paper, we drew data from the second cohort involving 18 participants from five subject areas: Mathematics, Special Education, History, Physics, and Chemistry. Research Team A involved 4 participants (1 UT, 1 PST, and 2 SS); Research Team B, 6 participants (3 UTs, 2PSTs, 1 SS), and Research Team C, 8 participants (2 UTs, 4 PST, 2 SS).

During the 12-month period, 14 meetings took place, 8 meetings between the advisory group and individual RTs and 6 meetings to share learning emerging from the initiative involving all the RTs and the Advisory Group. Meetings led with individual RTs focused on specific issues that arose during the design and implementation of the research projects (i.e. feedback on research questions,

1
2
3 discussing strategies to data production and analysis, etc.). Meetings with all RTs
4
5 present focused on developing a shared understanding of the principles and
6
7 techniques associated with undertaking collaborative inquiry and building a common
8
9 understanding of how to build an NLS. In addition, each RT held regular internal
10
11 meetings focusing on their own project agendas. The expected outputs of the RTs
12
13 included the implementation of the inquiry project and the production of an academic
14
15 article.
16
17
18
19
20

21 **Data sources**

22
23 The study was designed as an exploratory, qualitative case study (Yin, 2009). The
24
25 unit of analysis was the 2021 cohort of the RTs initiative. Qualitative data was
26
27 gathered from three sources including the advising team's notes and materials from
28
29 reflective sessions, ten online individual interviews, and four online focus groups to
30
31 which all participants of the 2021 cohort were invited. Those who accepted the
32
33 invitation signed a consent form where they were informed of the study aims and
34
35 requirements. Unfortunately, despite our concerted efforts to engage all groups,
36
37 professional pressures limited the degree of engagement and involvement of SS in
38
39 data collection. Consequently, their voices and perspectives are less conspicuous
40
41 than UTs' and PSTs.
42
43
44
45
46
47
48

49 **Data analysis**

50
51 Qualitative content and discourse analysis were used to analyse the data. For
52
53 content analysis, codes developed inductively (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). Triangulation
54
55 between researchers became a central aspect to ensure coding consistency and
56
57 thus data analysis validity and trustworthiness. The three investigators coded a sub-
58
59
60

1
2
3 sample of interviews and focus group transcriptions individually and then shared
4
5 codes to identify similarities and discrepancies. Discrepancies were addressed
6
7 through conversation. Then, codes were reviewed and organised to make sense of
8
9 the emerging themes, and their properties.
10
11
12
13

14
15 Once the themes were identified through content analysis, selected extracts were
16
17 analysed applying discourse analysis, focusing on grammatical and semantic
18
19 features expressing different types of agency within the frame of topics proposed by
20
21 interviews/focus groups protocols. Within this frame, agency was detected through
22
23 the use of the active voice, as well as verbs of possibility, intention and achievement
24
25 (Konopasky and Sheridan, 2016). Individual agency tended to be expressed through
26
27 the use of the first person singular ("I"). Relational agency was discursively detected
28
29 through nouns and verbs related to the semantic fields of collaboration, effective
30
31 communication and togetherness. Collective agency through the use of the first-
32
33 person plural ("we, our, etc.") whenever it appeared together with verbs and nouns
34
35 indicating effective action and achievement (cf. Ahearn, 2001; Konopasky and
36
37 Sheridan, 2016). After the analysis, the extracts were translated from the original
38
39 Spanish into English, aiming to keep the translations as close as possible to the
40
41 original.
42
43
44
45
46
47
48

49
50 In this study the first and third authors formed the advisory team, while the second
51
52 author was a UT in the initial cohort (2020). As authors, we acknowledge our
53
54 positionality as insiders of the RTs and recognise that our privileged positions within
55
56 the initiative were key to gathering *insider* knowledge and insights about
57
58 implementation (cf. Coburn and Penuel, 2016). To establish trustworthiness, we
59
60

1
2
3 relied on triangulation of methods and data sources. Inevitably, as with any
4
5 exploratory study of this scope and scale, the potential for statistical generalisations
6
7 is limited. However, the rich insights obtained during this project do lend themselves
8
9 to analytical generalisation (Yin, 2009).
10
11
12
13

14 **Findings**

15
16
17
18
19 This paper explores how the experience of the RTs initiative opened up a space for
20
21 relational agency and facilitated spaces for collective agency **between UTs, SS and**
22
23 **PSTs** in the context of collaborative research during the pandemic.
24
25
26
27

28
29 The most salient aspects of the coded data were summarised under **two** headings:
30
31 developing relational agency and developing collective agency. We selected quotes
32
33 that met the criteria of high density in agency markers, illustration of codes, and
34
35 variety of participants, and offer an overview of the discourse analysis for each of
36
37 them.
38
39
40
41

42 ***Developing relational agency***

43
44
45
46
47 The new relationships that formed through the research project, with the creation of
48
49 a space for constant dialogue across different roles, allowed the participants to align
50
51 perspectives to a common purpose, overcoming the usual boundaries of each
52
53 professional role. Edwards (2005, 2011) defines this process as relational agency.
54
55 The experience allowed PSTs and UTs alike to develop a more systemic view of
56
57 how schools operate, to see more clearly the interdependence between different
58
59
60

1
2
3 actors. The PST's recognition of relational agency was expressed in the interviews
4
5 through the naming of the different actors that participate in the process and their
6
7 specific roles, developing empathy, as well as the acknowledgement of the
8
9 necessary interplay between them to make things work. Relational agency, in this
10
11 sense, allows overcoming barriers between distributed expertise (Edwards, 2011).
12
13
14
15

16
17 To foster collective agency, it's essential to recognize and respect diverse
18
19 perspectives, to value input from colleagues, and to provide constructive feedback.
20
21 While differences in opinion may arise, maintaining a tone of professional dialogue
22
23 and support is crucial. This helps to recognize that "beyond what meets the eye,
24
25 there is a diverse world out there".
26
27
28
29

30
31 The following quote is from a PST who is talking about the most important insights
32
33 from participating in the initiative, reflecting on the work with her team:
34
35
36

37
38 And in that exchange, you feel that you want to be professional just for the
39
40 mere fact of reflecting on it. So, you steadily take nourishment from what the
41
42 other teachers say and give feedback, giving advice, sometimes you say
43
44 something and the teachers do not agree so much. But everything in the tone
45
46 of conversation and help in professional terms to get to know this experience,
47
48 to realise that beyond what meets the eye, there's a diverse world out there,
49
50 there are a lot of classroom realities, ways of teaching and that sometimes the
51
52 same methodology will not necessarily work in all contexts. All those kinds of
53
54 things related to diversity. So I feel that has become very clear during the
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 work with the community, especially in the diversity of the way in which people
4
5 teach and learn. (PST, RT-A)
6
7
8
9

10 In this quote, verbs like “want to”, “reflect”, “say”, in the active voice reflect intentional
11
12 causation of an agentic, thoughtful individual.
13
14
15

16
17 Verbs and nouns from the semantic field of communication like “exchange”, “give
18
19 feedback / advice”, indicate a high level of awareness of the dialogic use of language
20
21 to reach a common vision. The build-up of the ideas *disagreement*, followed by
22
23 “conversation” and “help”, and later “realise”, illustrate the process of alignment
24
25 between different agents’ thoughts. Moreover, verbal constructions (in Spanish) like
26
27 “uno se va nutriendo” (rendered in English as “you steadily take nourishment”) or
28
29 “has become very clear” transmit consciousness of a gradual development occurring
30
31 during that exchange.
32
33
34
35
36
37

38 The recurring codes of "listening to each other" and "considering all opinions"
39
40 emerged in interviews with all stakeholders, highlighting the initiative's potential to
41
42 break down traditional hierarchies in ITE. Listening to students, through data
43
44 collected by the teams, introduced new voices into the conversation. For some
45
46 PSTs, being listened to as peers felt "a bit strange and uncomfortable" (PST RT-A),
47
48 but this experience helped them overcome insecurities and build professional
49
50 confidence. As listening improved, so did the group's understanding of diverse
51
52 teaching and learning processes.
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Moreover, *the code theory and practice intertwined* emerged in the data as a way to
4 describe that particular practices such as reading together on the researched topic
5 allowed the PSTs to bring and use theory to make sense of the context of practice.
6
7 This type of engagement with theory facilitated the use of a common language by
8 *correcting previous misconceptions* of pedagogical tools and/or interventions
9 collectively. *This theme highlighted bridging theoretical approaches from university*
10 *with everyday experiences in schools, was evident in PSTs' data and supported by*
11 *UT and SS analysis.*
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23

24 From the UTs' perspective, relational agency also included deep learning about how
25 PSTs learn and interpret theories. The UTs also gained sophisticated insights into
26 the accountability demands within the school system. By recognising the gaps in
27 knowledge, UTs also received immediate feedback on their teaching of PSTs
28 including the barriers to learning that PSTs experience and suggestions for possible
29 innovations to teaching practice.
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

40 Relational agency in action, therefore, means to assess and connect diverse inputs.
41 Here, different types of knowledge enrich the conversations. However, our findings
42 also confirm that the achievement of relational agency is not an automatic
43 development, rather, it depends heavily on steady negotiation and the necessity to
44 develop trust, and learning to work together. The quote illustrates the necessary
45 mental and emotional work of what it means to learn to have confidence in a team,
46 from the point of view of a PST who joined an already formed team and was asked
47 to explain the challenges related to teamwork and the enactment of collaboration.
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 I think it is super complicated to work with many people around a single issue,
4
5 because there are always many ideas, many different positions and it is
6
7 difficult for people to also give up some things and also, trying to impose
8
9
10 some things that perhaps one sometimes believes are correct or believes they
11
12 are the best. So, one of the main points of working as a team, meeting
13
14 people, integrating people, and also, integrating myself in a formed team, was
15
16 a challenge (...) adapting, gaining confidence to give opinions and give
17
18 ideas... (...) I had to study ... and get to know phenomena that I didn't know
19
20 before. So it was a super long process and at the end I feel that for me, at
21
22 least, it was all winning, the experience and everything.
23
24

25
26 (PST, RT-C)
27
28
29
30

31 Adjectives from the semantic field of difficulty (“complicated”, “difficult”) as well as
32
33 repeated ideas referring to several different standpoints / people / ideas illustrate
34
35 some of the challenges of achieving relational agency. The opposing verbs “give up”
36
37 and “impose”, together with “believe correct / best” indicate conflicts that appear in
38
39 the process of a dialogic negotiation leading to a shared outcome.
40
41
42
43

44 Professional learning is associated with three aspects: adaptation to become part of
45
46 a team, increasing confidence, and personal study. The temporal dimension of this
47
48 development is expressed through the verbs, “try”, “gain confidence”, “didn't know”
49
50 with the adverb “before”, the noun “process”, and the final positive evaluation
51
52 introduced with “at the end”.
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Another PST, when asked to evaluate the whole experience, further illustrates the
4 concept of relational agency referring to the alignment of thoughts through the
5 “interweaving of perspectives” and the final common aim of the RTs, which is
6
7
8
9
10 working for the learners’ benefit:
11

12
13
14
15 I like this, that we can meet up here at university and that later when we get
16
17 out into the world of work we’ll have this capacity to have conversations and
18
19 interweave these perspectives to work together... for the students’ good. I
20
21 think that’s what I learned from my colleagues’ having other perspectives that
22
23 I can’t visualise. (PST, RT-B)
24
25
26
27
28

29 The entangled semantic fields of *different perspectives* and *togetherness* (both
30 repeated ideas) are enriched through verbs like *interweave*. The idea of *colleagues*
31 *bringing in new perspectives that a person on their own can’t visualise* illustrates the
32
33 speaker’s positive final evaluation of this relational instance of professional learning.
34
35
36
37
38
39

40 ***Developing collective agency***

41
42
43
44

45 Collective agency defined as the capacity of a group to become an affirmed,
46
47 cohesive collective body and to accomplish tasks and solve problems together. The
48
49 shared idea of “*gradually building something all together*” (PST, RS-C), the
50
51 experience of mutual support and the feeling of working at the same level as
52
53 everyone else in the research process were powerful facilitators of professional
54
55 learning.
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 The common work on the research permitted the emergence of a *new “we” feeling*.

4
5 This is exemplified in the quote below, where a UT reflects on this new team
6
7 constellation, which is different from the more traditional collaboration in ITE between
8
9 UTs and SS, implying more separate roles for the different stakeholders:
10
11

12
13
14
15 So, it’s been a learning process to be able to build a community among us,
16
17 getting to know and integrating these new people from the school system that,
18
19 even if we had already worked (together) before, it is different when you form
20
21 a team together. (UT Special Ed, RT-B)
22
23

24
25
26 The nouns “community” and “team”, verbs like “build”, “form”, “get to know”,
27
28 “integrate”, indicate a collective experience qualitatively different from the previous
29
30 experience of working together. The noun “process” and the verb tenses including
31
32 the present perfect “it’s been”, past perfect “had worked” and present tense “form”
33
34 are illustrative of the speaker’s awareness of a temporal development achieved
35
36 through the initiative.
37
38
39
40
41

42 **Collective agency encompasses this “we” feeling in relationship to achieving a**
43 **shared purpose.** The shared research topic gave the teams a common purpose,
44
45 which transcended the usual university-school system divide and helped the
46
47 stakeholders to have more focalised reflections, giving them an opportunity to
48
49 engage in reflective practice.
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Collective agency was also experienced in the achievement of common aims, as is
4 exemplified by a school teacher. This led one team to even visualise future possible
5 research areas, which indicated a future projection of collective agency, too.
6
7
8
9

10
11
12 To be able to play and experiment was like the most valuable thing, and also,
13 it consolidated in a product. We hope there will be a publication, there were
14 presentations, concrete things, moving from theory to practice, to action...
15
16
17
18
19 and it generated a product, a result. (SS, RT-C)
20
21

22 The semantic field of playful experimentation points to a shared pleasurable
23 experience. Verbs of possibility and achievement, as well as nouns that refer to
24 concrete end products to be able to and consolidate, indicate a positive evaluation of
25 the collective achievement.
26
27
28
29
30
31

32
33 The codes, more *real experiences* and *more real learning* were applied to interview
34 extracts of all types of participants, *suggesting that the* achievement of collective
35 agency appears intertwined with an individual capacity to engage personally in and
36 collectively exert leadership to resolve problems. This was mentioned by one UT
37 reflecting on how the RTs offered a new vision for her work with PSTs to develop
38 professionally as well as politically as agents of change.
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48

49 Discussion

50
51
52
53

54 This study set out to develop and implement a model of collaborative research that
55 crosses boundaries between university staff, PSTs in universities, and school
56 teachers by supporting the development of an *Networked Learning System*. Findings
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 suggest that the use of a shared language emerges as a result of building strong
4 horizontal relationships by engaging in a diverse range of experiences and adopting
5 a range of roles. Models of collaborative research are not just relevant as inquiry
6 techniques but are deeply transformative because they offer a new set of ideas and
7 concepts that configure and shape a language of collaboration around problems of
8 practice as a place of theory generation and building expertise (Adler and Styhre,
9 2004).

10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21 The collaborative effort to overcome challenges, drawing upon a diverse array of
22 actors and resources, underscores the cultivation of relational and collective agency
23 within the initiative. This experience not only strengthens bonds but also broadens
24 perspectives in the participants, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of
25 the larger context in which they operate.

26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35 Our findings illustrate the potential for university-school RPPs to foster relational and
36 collective teacher agency, but also the tensions involved in achieving it. We question
37 how the broader institutional contexts both at schools and universities played a role
38 in some cases enabling agency whilst in others inhibiting the development of teacher
39 agency. One key aspect in this regard is the issue of sustainability. The initiative
40 offered support and resources over a limited period of time and with the expectation
41 of specific outcomes. Therefore, there was uncertainty about the long-term future of
42 the RTs project. This was identified as a potential inhibitor of the development of
43 agency, and aligns with previous research on the absorptive capacity of institutions
44 (Farrell et al., 2022), and the conditions to sustain school-universities RPPs in the
45 medium-long term (McLaughlin and Black-Hawkins, 2007). This, in turn, confirms the
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 idea that the achievement of agency is always a result of the interplay of individual
4
5 efforts, available resources and contextual factors (Biesta and Tedder, 2007).
6
7
8
9

10 11 12 **Conclusion** 13 14 15

16
17 The disconnect between university-based ITE and experiences in the field has been
18 highlighted in the literature as a major barrier to the effective preparation of PSTs
19 (Adoniou, 2013; Zeichner, 2010). As illustrated by this study, school-university RPPs
20 seem to offer a potentially productive way forward in connecting university-based ITE
21 and experiences in the field while enhancing teachers' collective agency through a
22 NLS. This involves building new relationships with the power to connect and create
23 new understandings of school and university knowledge and expertise, and fostering
24 a professional culture where diverse theoretical and practical insights are valued
25 equally by different actors in the system.
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40

41 The relevance of this study relies upon the need to advance knowledge regarding
42 the development of collaborative learning systems that encourage cross institutional
43 relationships allowing the creation and flow of knowledge. As Zeichner et al (2015)
44 note, by recasting who is considered an expert, and rethinking how teacher
45 candidates and university faculty cross institutional boundaries to collaborate with
46 communities and schools, teacher education programs can better interrogate their
47 challenges and invent new solutions to prepare the teachers our students need. Our
48 findings confirm that the RTs initiative facilitated collaborative ways of working, and
49 opened new ways of connecting schools and universities during the pandemic.
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Through this process, all the involved actors could experience how relational agency
4 was developed, and collective agency could be enacted. However, a limitation of our
5 study is the use of retrospective as opposed to longitudinal data. Further research is
6 required to unpack the various processes that can expand our understanding of how
7 collective agency is developed through the initiative and the links between relational
8 and collective agency. Longitudinal studies could also trace relational agency in the
9 discourse produced during consecutive collaborative instances such as group
10 meetings, for example.
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24

25 The RTs initiative highlights the complexity of classroom life as messy, complex, and
26 socially contested. This perspective goes beyond idealised university preparation,
27 prompting questions about how practice is integrated into ITE programmes. This has
28 important implications for future teachers' agency development and benefits
29 students' learning outcomes (Tanner and Davies, 2009).
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

References

Author, 2019

Author, 2021

Adler, N., & Styhre, A. (2004). *Collaborative research in organizations: Foundations for learning, change, and theoretical development*. Sage.

Adoniou, M. (2013). Preparing Teachers: The Importance of Connecting Contexts in Teacher Education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(8), 47-60.

Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual review of anthropology*, 30(1), 109-137.

Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current directions in psychological science*, 9(3), 75-78.

Barahona, M., and Ibaceta-Quijanes, X. (2022). Chilean EFL student teachers and social justice: ambiguity and uncertainties in understanding their professional pedagogical responsibility. *Teachers and Teaching*, 1-15.

Bastías-Bastías, L. S., and Iturra-Herrera, C. (2022). La formación inicial docente en Chile: Una revisión bibliográfica sobre su implementación y logros. *Revista Electrónica Educare*, 26(1), 229-250.

1
2
3
4
5
6 Baumfield, V., and Butterworth, M. (2007). Creating and translating knowledge about
7 teaching and learning in collaborative school–university research partnerships: An
8 analysis of what is exchanged across the partnerships, by whom and how. *Teachers*
9 *and Teaching: Theory and practice*, 13(4), 411-427.

10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17 Biesta, G., Priestley, M., and Robinson, S. (2017). Talking about education:
18 exploring the significance of teachers' talk for teacher agency. *Journal of Curriculum*
19 *Studies*, 49(1), 38-54. DOI: 10.1080/00220272.2016.1205143

20
21
22
23
24
25
26 Brooks, C. (2021). Research capacity in initial teacher education: trends in joining
27 the 'village'. *Teaching education*, 32(1), 7-26.

28
29
30
31
32
33 Burn, K., Conway, R., Edwards, A., and Harries, E. (2021). The role of school-based
34 research champions in a school–university partnership. *British Educational Research*
35 *Journal*, 47(3), 616-633.

36
37
38
39
40
41
42 Cárdenas Claros, M. S., Buendía Arias, X. P., and Dassonvalle, K. (2023). Puzzle
43 identification in action research in initial teacher education. *Educational Action*
44 *Research*, 1-21.

45
46
47
48
49
50
51 Ceylan, E., and Çomoğlu, İ. (2022). A Thematic Analysis of Action Research in Initial
52 Teacher Education: Reflections and Future Directions. *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Buca*
53 *Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi/ The Journal of Buca Faculty of Education*, (54), 1314-1328.

1
2
3 CIAE and Colegio Antilen. (2021). Sistematización de Prácticas Relevantes e
4
5 Innovadoras en la Vinculación entre Colegio y Universidad durante la
6
7 Implementación de Prácticas de Formación Inicial Docente. Documentación. CIAE.
8
9

10
11
12 Cochran-Smith, M., and Lytle, S. L. (2009). Teacher research as stance. *The Sage*
13
14 *Handbook of Educational Action Research*. Sage, 39-49.
15
16

17
18
19 CPEIP (2022). *Estándares Pedagógicos y Disciplinarios para Carreras de*
20
21 *Pedagogía en Educación General Básica*. Chile: Ministerio de Educación Gobierno
22
23 de Chile.
24
25

26
27
28 Darwin, S., and Barahona, M. (2023). Making research (more) real for future
29
30 teachers: a classroom-based research model for initial teacher education.
31
32 *Educational Action Research*, 31(4), 745-761.
33
34

35
36
37 Daza, V., Gudmundsdottir, G. B., and Lund, A. (2021). Partnerships as third spaces
38
39 for professional practice in initial teacher education: A scoping review. *Teaching and*
40
41 *Teacher Education*, 102, 103338.
42
43

44
45
46 Dikilitaş, K., and Yaylı, D. (2018). Teachers' professional identity development
47
48 through action research. *ELT Journal*, 72(4), 415-424.
49
50

51
52
53 Donaldson, G. (2011). Teaching Scotland's future. *Scottish Government*, 201(1).
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Edwards, A. (2005). Relational agency: Learning to be a resourceful practitioner.
4
5 *International Journal of Educational Research*, 43(3), 168-182.
6
7

8
9
10 Edwards, A. (2011). Building common knowledge at the boundaries between
11
12 professional practices: Relational agency and relational expertise in systems of
13
14 distributed expertise. *International journal of educational research*, 50(1), 33-39.
15
16

17
18
19 Edwards, A. (2015). Recognising and realising teachers' professional agency.
20
21 *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 779-784.
22
23

24
25
26 Elliott, J. (1991). *Action research for educational change*. Open University Press.
27
28

29
30
31 Elo, S., and Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of*
32
33 *advanced nursing*, 62(1), 107-115.
34
35

36
37
38 Emirbayer, M., and Mische, A. (1998). What is agency?. *American journal of*
39
40 *sociology*, 103(4), 962-1023.
41
42

43
44
45 Farrell, C. C., Penuel, W. R., Allen, A., Anderson, E. R., Bohannon, A. X., Coburn, C.
46
47 E., and Brown, S. L. (2022). Learning at the boundaries of research and practice: A
48
49 framework for understanding research–practice partnerships. *Educational*
50
51 *Researcher*, 51(3), 197-208.
52
53

54
55
56
57
58
59
60
Feldman, A. (1993). Promoting equitable collaboration between university
researchers and school teachers. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 6(4), 341-357.

1
2
3 Hamza, K., Piqueras, J., Wickman, P. O., and Angelin, M. (2018). Who owns the
4 content and who runs the risk? Dynamics of teacher change in teacher–researcher
5 collaboration. *Research in science education*, 48, 963-987.
6
7

8
9
10
11
12 Hargreaves, A and Fullan, M. (2012) *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in*
13 *Every School*. Routledge.
14
15

16
17
18
19 Heinz, M., and Fleming, M. (2019). Leading Change in Teacher Education:
20 Balancing on the Wobbly Bridge of School-University Partnership. *European Journal*
21 *of Educational Research*, 8(4), 1295-1306.
22
23
24

25
26
27
28 Jones, M., and Charteris, J. (2017). Transformative professional learning: An
29 ecological approach to agency through critical reflection. *Reflective Practice*, 18(4),
30 496-513.
31
32
33

34
35
36
37 Konopasky, A. W., and Sheridan, K. M. (2016). Towards a diagnostic toolkit for the
38 language of agency. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 23(2), 108-123.
39
40
41

42
43
44
45 McLaughlin, C., and Black-Hawkins, K. (2007). School–university partnerships for
46 educational research—distinctions, dilemmas and challenges. *The Curriculum*
47 *Journal*, 18(3), 327-341.
48
49
50

51
52
53
54 Ministerio de Educación. (1 de abril, 2016). Ley N.º 20903. Crea el sistema de
55 desarrollo profesional docente y modifica otras normas. Diario Oficial de la
56 República de Chile, Núm 41.421.- Año 139 – N.º815.596 (M. R.), pp. 1-24.
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 <https://www.diariooficial.interior.gob.cl/media/2016/04/01/do-20160401.pdf>
4
5
6
7

8 Montecinos, C. (2014). Análisis crítico de las medidas de presión propuestas para
9 mejorar la formación inicial de docentes en Chile por el panel de expertos para una
10 educación de calidad. *Estudios Pedagógicos (Valdivia)*, 40(ESPECIAL), 285-301.
11
12
13
14

15
16
17 Oates, C., and Bignell, C. (2022). School and university in partnership: a shared
18 enquiry into teachers' collaborative practices. *Professional Development in*
19 *Education*, 48(1), 105-119.
20
21
22
23

24
25
26 Oolbekkink-Marchand, H., Oosterheert, I., Scholte Lubberink, L., and Denessen, E.
27 (2022). The position of student teacher practitioner research in teacher education:
28 teacher educators' perspectives. *Educational action research*, 30(3), 445-461.
29
30
31
32

33
34
35 Penuel, W. R., Allen, A. R., Coburn, C. E., and Farrell, C. (2015). Conceptualising
36 research–practice partnerships as joint work at boundaries. *Journal of Education for*
37 *Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 20(1-2), 182-197.
38
39
40
41

42
43
44 Price, J. N. (2001). Action research, pedagogy and change: The transformative
45 potential of action research in pre-service teacher education. *Journal of curriculum*
46 *studies*, 33(1), 43-74
47
48
49
50

51
52
53 Priestley, M., Biesta, G., and Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological*
54 *approach*. Bloomsbury Publishing
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Sandoval Jr, C., and Van Es, E. A. (2021). Examining the practices of generating an aim
4 statement in a teacher preparation networked improvement community. *Teachers*
5 *College Record*, 123(6), 1-32.
6
7

8
9
10
11 Schon, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action* .
12 Basic Books.
13
14

15
16
17
18 Spante, M., Varga, A., and Carlsson, L. (2022). Triggering sustainable professional
19 agency: using change laboratory to tackle unequal access to educational success
20 collectively. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 34(2), 162-175.
21
22
23

24
25
26
27 Sutherland, L. M., Scanlon, L. A., and Sperring, A. (2005). New directions in
28 preparing professionals: examining issues in engaging students in communities of
29 practice through a school–university partnership. *Teaching and teacher*
30 *education*, 21(1), 79-92.
31
32
33

34
35
36
37
38
39 Tanner, H., and Davies, S. M. (2009). How engagement with research changes the
40 professional practice of teacher-educators: a case study from the Welsh Education
41 Research Network. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 35(4), 373-389.
42
43
44

45
46
47
48 Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (Vol. 5). sage.
49
50

51
52
53 Yuan, E. R. (2016). The dark side of mentoring on pre-service language teachers'
54 identity formation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 55, 188-197.
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Zeichner, K. (2010). Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field
4 experiences in college-and university-based teacher education. *Journal of teacher*
5
6
7
8 *education*, 61(1-2), 89-99.
9

10
11
12 Zeichner, K., Payne, K. A., & Brayko, K. (2015). Democratizing teacher education.
13
14
15 *Journal of teacher education*, 66(2), 122-135.
16

17
18
19 Zumpe, E. (2024). School improvement at the next level of work: the struggle for
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

collective agency in a school facing adversity. *Journal of Educational Change*, 1-45.