

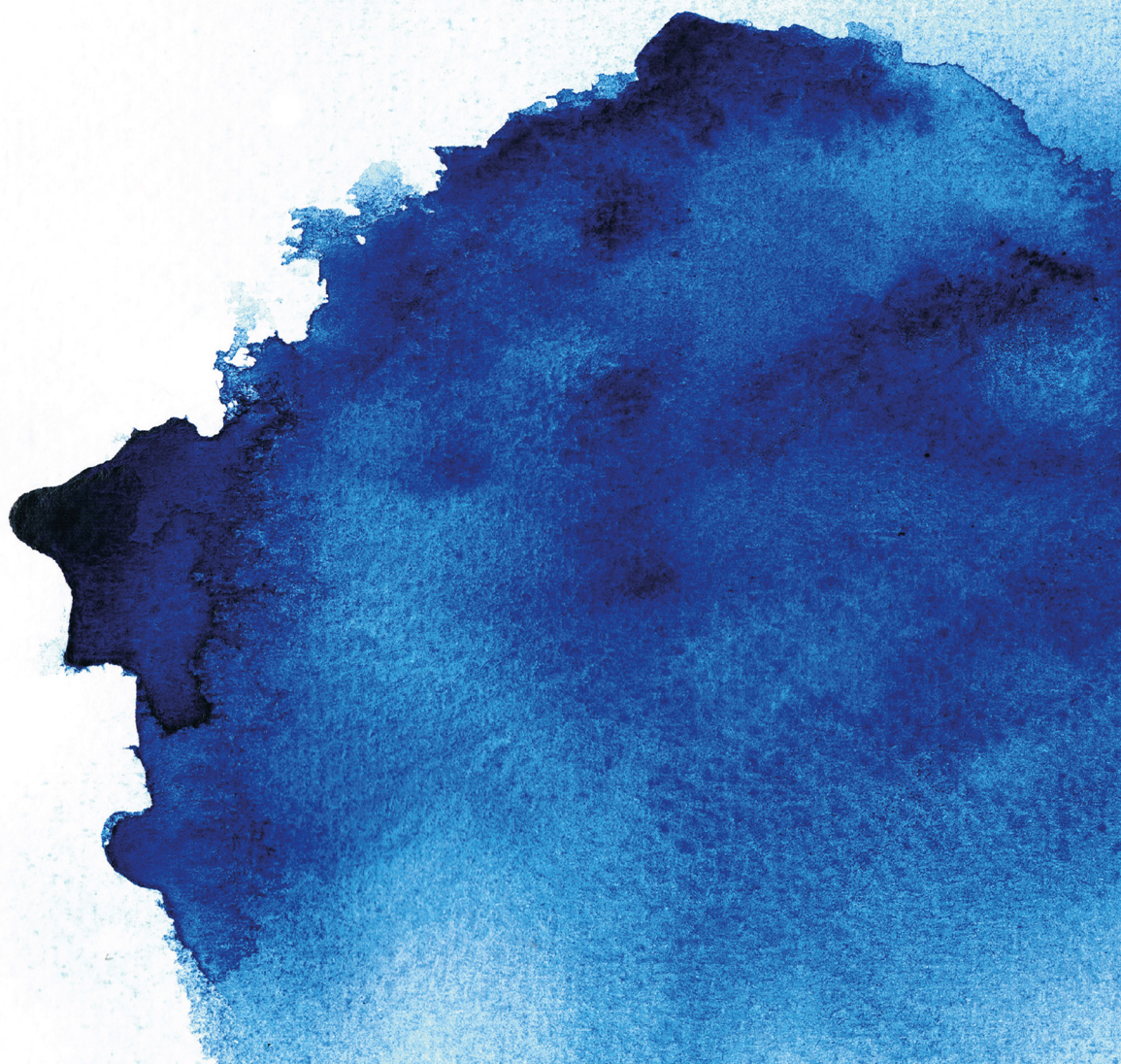
TEACHER QUALITY AND
SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT



SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION

The Promise of Change

CHRISTOPHER DAY, QING GU AND ANDREW TOWNSEND,
WITH CATHERINE HOLDICH



“Too often we have seen a divide between, on the one hand, theoretical and academic research led by universities and, on the other hand, down-to-earth and pragmatic research led by schools. This timely book shows just how much this is a false dichotomy. Schools and universities need each other – not in some hierarchical sense but through trustful collaboration. The authors argue that there is positive power to be found in the differences between schools and universities and that we need to make the most of the constructive tension that this can create, as both learn from each other. The book is honest about the problems and issues, but refreshingly positive about how the challenges can be overcome. Like its rationale for strong university and school partnerships, I found this book to be relevant, challenging, insightful, sometimes discomfiting and ultimately very rewarding.”

Steve Munby, former CEO of the National College for School Leadership, England.

“We are in the midst of a “sea change” regarding the value placed on academic research as a source of guidance for practice in education. This is the case even in organizational cultures aiming to be strongly “evidence based”. Growing appreciation for the critical influence of context as an explanation for the success of improvement efforts has a lot to do with this sea change. While many academics remain embroiled in debates about which research designs produce the most robust generalizations, others have begun to see generalization as the problem. Practicing educators need to know a lot less about what works in general and a lot more about what works in their classrooms and schools. This book offers considerable insight about how improvement efforts in schools can be enriched by the development of synergistic relationships between collaborating members of practice and research communities. It should be considered a “must read” for any leaders aspiring to develop a school/university partnership.”

Kenneth Leithwood, Emeritus Professor, University of Toronto.

“This book makes the compelling case regarding the value and benefits of school-university partnerships. The authors argue that the value of partnerships lies in their potential to inspire, add momentum, or ‘kick start’ new ways of thinking, doing, and leading teaching and learning in schools. Using evidence from the scholarly literature and their own research the authors guide us to understand the intricacy and complexity of partnerships. By providing examples of effective partnerships, the authors help practitioners and policy makers understand the conditions required for partnerships to be developed and sustained in order to thrive.

In some respects, this book could be retitled ‘What you need to know about School-University partnerships but were too busy to ask’. It is a comprehensive, accessible and an important scholarly contribution to the field of education practice.”

Judyth Sachs, Higher Education Consultant, Co-Convenor ANZ TMP Program Advance HE UK, Sydney, Australia.

“In a global pandemic year that has presented the world with novel problems, Christopher Day and his colleagues remind us that “changing circumstances” demand “changing roles”. In this new work, they thoughtfully outline what is needed more than ever—creative collective solutions that can emerge when educators put aside their differences, pool their knowledge, and stretch beyond the boundaries of the status quo to embrace common goals through partnerships of learning. This volume is timely and welcome because it offers possibility; we need to be inspired by school leaders who see opportunity in adversity and can build “trustful collaborations” with teachers and researchers to make meaningful change happen.”

**A. Lin Goodwin, Dean and Professor, Faculty of Education,
The University of Hong Kong.**

“This book is an important contribution to the thinking on school-university partnerships. The authors argue persuasively that “convergence of school policy and university reform, together with successful school leadership research has . . . provided new opportunities for the more regular formation of school-university partnerships to the benefit of both.” They argue for a new form of mutually beneficial, evidence-informed partnership characterised by the ‘democratisation’ of knowledge creation which combines the expertise and knowledge of educators and academics. There is so much that is worthy of our attention – not least of all how we build trust and collaboration across people and institutions. This book gives us a powerful ‘promise of change’ analysing the social and intellectual assets that increase schools’ capacities to enact change for improvement. I wholeheartedly commend this to any educator or academic curious about how we work together to create a great education system.”

**Leora Cruddas, Chief Executive Officer, Confederation of School
Trusts (CST), UK.**

SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION

This book provides new knowledge, insights and experience about school-university partnerships. Drawing upon evidence from international research of the world's most improved systems, and learning from a UK research council funded 'knowledge exchange' project, it reveals that when the profound differences between the *practice* worlds of schools and the *theoretical* worlds of university academics are embraced and cherished, rather than eschewed, school-university partnerships become exciting avenues of learning which connect, challenge and transform the thinking and practice of all those involved.

Over its eight chapters, the book explores uncertainties, challenges and possibilities faced by those who seek to create, develop and sustain school-university partnerships that aspire to improve the practice and understanding of the leadership of teaching and learning in schools. It explicates and elucidates precepts, principles and practices for achieving such successful partnerships between higher education and school leaders, and contextualises these in terms of policy wide developments internationally.

This book will appeal to school leaders internationally, leadership training organisations, and academics who lead postgraduate leadership and management programmes.

Christopher Day is Professor of Education at the University of Nottingham, UK.

Qing Gu is Director of the UCL Centre for Educational Leadership and Professor of Leadership in Education at the UCL Institute of Education.

Andrew Townsend is Professor of Education at the University of Nottingham, UK.

Catherine Holdich was a primary school teacher for many years. She moved into educational research and promoting evidence-based practice after completing a PhD in 2004.

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The Promise of Change

Christopher Day, Qing Qu, Andrew Townsend, with Catherine Holdich

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The Promise of Change

*Christopher Day, Qing Gu and
Andrew Townsend, with Catherine Holdich*

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Christopher Day is Professor of Education at the University of Nottingham. He is also Professor of Educational Leadership, University of Sydney, Australia; Chair Professor of Educational Leadership, Beijing Normal University, China. During the last 20 years, he has led national, European and international research and development projects in the areas of teachers' work and lives and school leadership and collaborated in these with colleagues in Europe, the United States, Brazil, Chile, China and Australasia. His publications have been translated into several languages, and include: *Teachers' Worlds and Work: Understanding Complexity, Building Quality* (2017); *A Decade of International Research on School Leadership* (2016); *Resilient Teachers, Resilient Schools* (2014); *Successful School Leadership: Linking with Learning and Achievement* (2011); and *The New Lives of Teachers* (2010). In recognition of his work internationally in the field of continuing professional development and successful school leadership, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Linköping, Sweden, in 1993 and, in 2010, the Michael Huberman Award for Excellence in Research on Teachers by the American Educational Research Association. In 2009, he was awarded a D.Litt by the University of Nottingham; in 2012 he was elected as a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences (FAcSS); and in 2018 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the Education University of Hong Kong.

Qing Gu is Director of the UCL Centre for Educational Leadership and Professor of Leadership in Education at the UCL Institute of Education. She is Honorary Professor in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the Education University of Hong Kong; Distinguished Professor at Beijing Normal University, China; and Research Associate in Centre for the Study of Resilience at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. She is the Past Chair of the British Association of Comparative and International Education (BAICE), Associate Editor of the *International Journal of Educational Development*, and Co-Editor of *Teachers and Teaching*:

Theory and Practice. Professor Gu has directed and co-directed many government, research council and independent charities funded projects in the areas of teacher professional development, school leadership, school improvement, and systemic reform and change. She is currently leading a £1.9m UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) project entitled *Schools as Enabling Spaces to Improve Learning and Health-Related Quality of Life for Primary School Children in Rural Communities in South Africa*.

Andrew Townsend is Professor of Education at the University of Nottingham. He is especially interested in the participatory features of leadership, research and change. He is the coordinating editor of the journal *Educational Action Research*, and sits on the editorial boards of the journals *Leadership in Education* and *Educational Research for Social Change*. He has written on the subjects of action research, practitioner research and participatory change and has also edited several texts on these subjects. The interests which have guided his work as a consultant and academic are informed by his experience as a teacher of science over a period of nine years.

Catherine Holdich was a primary school teacher for many years. She moved into educational research and promoting evidence-based practice after completing a PhD in 2004. Since then, she has worked on numerous research projects for a variety of clients, produced a large number of research resources and tools for schools, and supported many leaders and teachers in carrying out their own action research in a range of contexts.

FOREWORD

When I think of building a school university partnership, it always reminds me of the song from *Candide* ('We'll build our house and chop our wood and make our garden grow'). It is about working with and working on the preparations needed to connect the practices of teaching, and the organisation needed to build collaborative relationships between school-based and university-based educators. This is clearly easier said than done. Yet when both schools and universities are open to building relationships (and open to their differences), both groups deepen their understandings of yet another view of learning and the possibilities of improving educational practice.

Those of us who have been in partnerships, and tried to organise them within and across both schools and universities, learn quickly that they demand tremendous commitment, patience and resilience to engage in a process long enough for both groups get to know each other, trust each other and become more comfortable in learning to work together, explore new ideas, take risks, and eventually build collective knowledge which is informative, relevant to needs and contexts, useful and usable, and mutually beneficial. Collaboratives like this are powerful ways to deepen the learning of both university and schools.

The authors of this book provide a wealth of knowledge, insights and experience about the values, relationships and actions which enable reciprocal learning in partnerships between schools and universities to form, grow and take effect, through 'critical friendships', 'relational connectedness', the growth of 'trustful collaboration' and impactful principal leadership. They share insights and experiences which reveal that when the profound differences between the practice worlds of schools and the theoretical worlds of university academics are embraced and cherished, rather than eschewed, school-university partnerships become exciting avenues of learning which challenge, connect and transform the thinking and practice of all those involved.

Establishing the relational, intellectual and emotional connectedness *for* reciprocal learning in any partnership is by no means an easy task. The academics have to think creatively and work hard to make their research knowledge accessible, relevant and usable in contexts that are often deeply unfamiliar to them. School leaders and teachers have to scaffold their existing practical knowledge in the context of new research understandings in creating and participating actively in ongoing, sustained opportunities for professional learning and development, which may challenge the ways they think about and enact their practices as ‘curators’ of learning. The authors of this book write powerfully about the conditions and processes that are necessary to enable the deep learning to be created, developed and embedded in partnerships which result in success. Each chapter illustrates the care with which the foundations of the successful partnership house must be laid, and how skilfully the different elements for a strong and lasting structure must be selected and combined, so that the house becomes a meeting place for all the partners, as together they plant, tend and grow a garden in which the promise of change for the betterment of schools, their staff and, most of all, their students may be achieved.

Ann Lieberman
Stamford University

INTRODUCTION

School-university partnerships are not ends in themselves. Their value lies in their potential to inspire, add momentum, or 'kick start' new ways of thinking, doing and leading teaching and learning in schools. Partnerships of any kind are not easy to establish, and they can be even more challenging to sustain, particularly those between academics and school-based educators whose everyday working cultures and commitments are profoundly different. We do not claim that school-university partnerships are all necessarily 'transformational'. Whilst this may be true for some, for others, changes are more likely to be 'incremental'. Not all partnerships succeed in bringing about their intended change either. Often this is because they lack strong leadership to nurture collective purpose; or they do not attract the active support and engagement from teachers and school leaders; or the partners lack understandings of and empathy for one another; or the partners hold different views about the relevance of the knowledge in use, and so fail to harness adequate resources and build the individual and collective trust that are necessary for collaboration to take root.

What we have learned is that the best partnerships, those which are the most productive and fulfilling for all partners, are those which challenge and overcome what were described long ago as practice-centred barriers to knowledge creation and development:

The barriers to practice-centred knowledge creation and development ... are most likely to be overcome if higher education is prepared to extend its role from that of creator and transmitter of generalisable knowledge to that of enhancing the knowledge creation capacities of individuals and professional communities. This would involve recognising that much knowledge creation takes place outside the higher education system, but is nevertheless limited by

2 Introduction

the absence of appropriate support structures and the prevailing action-orientation of practical contexts.

(Eraut, 1994: 57)

Successful school-university partnerships are *partnerships of learning* in which deep, dialogic thinking and reasoning of the knowledge in use inspires curiosity and fuels enthusiasm in all parties to commit themselves to improving the quality of practice and, through this, further knowledge creation and development which meet schools' own interests, needs and concerns in their contexts of use. In these partnerships, existing personal and practical knowledge of school-based educators and the research knowledge held by university-based educators are regarded as complementary in their contributions to the success of the partnership's purposes. In short, partnerships between university academics and school practitioners are more likely to achieve success when they are rooted in mutual respect and shared values, and when research and development processes are based on intellectual and social 'heterarchical' rather than 'hierarchical' relationships. In this way, successful partnership projects are those which aim to integrate expertise in order to enhance the joint creation of knowledge so that it may become nested in the ongoing improvement agendas of schools.

We do not claim that school-university partnership work should be the priority for all schools. What we do argue from our own and others' experience, however, is that genuine, collaborative partnerships can enrich and energise the professional learning and development dialogues in schools and, through these, excite and satisfy their curiosity about how leadership and teaching and learning can be further developed in the service of the progress and achievement of all the students.

This book is about *successful* school-university research and development projects led by school principals, as 'curators' of colleagues' professional learning and development. At its centre we provide, as an exemplar, a narrative of a one-year research and development 'knowledge exchange' project, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), in which a small team of academics partnered with principals of schools serving disadvantaged communities in leading and conducting projects designed to transform their schools. Over the eight chapters, we discuss uncertainties, challenges as well as possibilities faced by those who seek to create, develop and sustain school-university partnerships that aspire to improve understandings and practices of teaching and learning in schools.

Chapter 1, 'The rise of school-university partnerships: Changing circumstances, changing roles', details the purposes, underpinning principles and practices of those who form and participate in school-university in-service partnerships designed to bring knowledge 'about' education produced by academics outside schools and knowledge 'of' education produced by school-based educators for the purpose of enhancing the quality of school leadership, teachers and teaching and learning. It suggests that the growth in many education systems of forms of school autonomy, and new configurations of school governance has provided school principals with explicit responsibilities for:

1. the promotion of 'collegial' as distinct from 'individual' autonomy of teachers;
2. the development in every classroom of data-informed decision-making about students' progress and achievement; and
3. within-school, and school-to-school collaboration.

In short, teachers within and across schools internationally are becoming more attuned to collecting, analysing and using data systematically to inform their improvement efforts. Parallel to these, university education academics have become more aware of their responsibilities to ensure that academic research is shown to be relevant, useful and impacts upon the improvement work of teachers and schools. At the same time, school leadership research has revealed that successful school leaders place a great deal of emphasis upon encouraging and participating in professional learning and development. They are not 'oppressed' by policy emphases on 'performativity', 'functionalism' and 'managerialism', but are led themselves by sets of broader humanitarian values. This convergence of school policy and university reform, together with successful school leadership research has, we suggest, provided new opportunities for the more regular formation of school-university partnerships to the benefit of both. Whereas over the past 30 years and more, partnerships between pre-service university educators and schools have existed, and in many countries and jurisdictions flourished, there are fewer examples of those between in-service university educators and schools; and even fewer which work directly with school principals.

Chapter 2, 'Successful partnerships: Opportunities and outcomes', focuses upon the positive power of differences between universities and schools. It finds that despite early enthusiasms, maintaining and sustaining partnerships has proved to be difficult, often because of inherent differences in the cultures of schools and universities, working conditions, and the expectations, responsibilities and accountabilities placed upon those who work in them. Despite this, however, there are many examples of success when partners see them primarily as opportunities for learning. In this chapter, we argue that partnerships are more likely to achieve success when they are rooted in mutual respect and shared values, when they are 'heterarchies', rather than 'hierarchies', when there are shared purposes, fit-for-purpose structures, trusting relationships, planned collaborative activities and positive impacts on practice; when all participants feel a sense of ownership through participation in decision-making processes, and experience intellectual, affective and practical support throughout. The chapter identifies five 'truths' which characterise successful partnerships, and three 'falsehoods' which need to be challenged.

Chapter 3, 'Research and development as a shared endeavour', focuses attention on the status of knowledge produced by 'insider' and 'outsider' researchers, the 'democratisation' of knowledge generation and production which successful school-university projects represent. We argue that 'insider' research is a legitimate and important part of teachers' commitment to lifelong learning, and a feature of the best teaching and learning processes. We juxtapose this with the often external, 'alien-to-teachers' research conducted by many university academics. We suggest,

however, that the ‘democratisation’ of knowledge creation through combining the expertise, knowledge and skills of both is likely to enrich what we later term ‘the stock of intellectual and relational wealth’ in schools (Chapter 8). When such knowledge is embedded in school-university partnership work, it is likely to generate findings which contribute to greater understandings, and more likely to result in improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Central to the chapter and to successful partnership work is the notion of ‘curiosity’, a state of mind geared towards a desire to question and understand our environments and which, we argue, provides the impetus for change. The chapter suggests that schools can nurture individual and collective curiosity through six ‘layers’: creating opportunities to be curious; establishing cultures of reflection; developing inquiry as stance; building collaborative communities around common interests; establishing a systemic, organisational component of inquiry; and networking inquiry beyond schools.

Chapter 4, ‘An exemplar project: Working with schools serving high-need communities’, presents extracts from case studies of schools which participated in the ESRC project. It discusses the project the rationale, principles, structures and activities, providing examples of the school-based research and development activities. The chapter concludes with ‘ten strong messages’ about achieving successful school-university partnerships.

Chapter 5, ‘Building and sustaining critical friendships’, extends the discussions in Chapter 4, identifying four key areas of activity in which partners need to engage concurrently:

1. strategic planning and development;
2. knowledge brokerage and utilisation;
3. supporting the ongoing conduct of school-based projects through sustained interactivity; and
4. communication and reach.

It argues that whilst establishing and carrying out the *functional* tasks of knowledge broker, in leading seminars, managing schedules for group and individual meetings, school visits to principals and participating teachers, in successful school-university partnerships, academics engage in continuing ‘critical friendship’ dialogues which go beyond the functional by providing *emotional* support. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the importance of relational resilience.

Chapter 6, ‘Schools on the front line: Principals as curators of professional learning’, discusses why increases in school autonomy have placed more formal responsibility upon principals for the range and quality of their own and their teachers’ professional learning and development. It argues that there is a strong case for ensuring that research is a regular part of the PLD agenda of every school and that, within this, school-university research and development projects can play an important, though not continuous, part. For reasons of time and resources, the vast majority of such partnership projects will be ‘temporary’, time-limited learning interventions in the busy teaching and learning lives of schools. For these reasons,

we do not claim that they will all be ‘transformational’. However, there is much evidence internationally that successful school–university partnerships do provide incremental value through the added momentum for self-reflection and change in thinking and practice that outsider knowledge can bring over a sustained period. For such success to be achieved, however, universities in partnership with schools must reflect shared core values, managing project continuities and discontinuities, and issues of distance and power.

Chapter 7, ‘From relational connectedness to trustful collaboration’, focuses upon two features reported widely by researchers as being central to the success of school, school-to-school and school–university partnerships – trust and collaboration. We argue that there are close associations between them, such that levels of trust established between partners will directly influence the quality of collaboration. We explore the meaning of trust in relationships, how trust is developed, and how and when it can become what we call ‘trustful collaboration’. We show how this can be achieved, and how partnerships may be sustained when things get tough, and when other pressing needs threaten to interrupt or even destroy the flow of their development.

Chapter 8, ‘The promise of change’, revisits, reinforces and extends our view of successful school–university partnerships as intellectual and social enterprises of change, arguing that the rewards and benefits far outweigh the challenges and frustrations caused by institutional differences. Successful partnerships create and enable access to new learning activities and opportunities for productive change by individuals and organisations as they seek to improve their artistry and craft. In the chapter, we explore the interaction between four interconnected change forces which are likely to influence, positively or negatively, the degree of success achieved through partnerships. We discuss the importance of co-construction, minimising potential power differences within partnerships, building and sustaining powerful intellectual and relational dynamics, managing policy dynamics. Finally, we draw attention to the important contribution which school–university partnerships may make to schools’ stock of ‘relational wealth’, the social and intellectual assets and resources that increase schools’ capacities to consider, plan, and enact change for improvement.

Successful partnerships flourish when given time to grow through sustained contact, communication and interactivity, when partners are able to establish deep professional bonds, and when participating teachers and academics work either alongside or with the explicit moral and practical support of the school leadership. They succeed, also, when the focus is determined by the school-based educators, when ‘quick’ wins become changes in thinking and practices which last, when processes of learning reflect both ‘functional’ and ‘person’ development needs, just like the best classroom teaching, when academics put publishing needs demanded by their own institutions on the ‘back burner’, without abandoning them. It is our hope that policy-makers, school-based educators and university academics will find their own experiences reflected in the pages of this book, and that others who have not yet felt the deep joy of working with school-based educators will be encouraged to do so.