

## **Piloting Teacher Education Practicum Partnerships: Teaching Alliances for Professional Practice (TAPP-Tas)<sup>1</sup>**

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*Abstract: This paper reports on a practicum partnerships pilot project between local schools and a teacher preparation program in a medium sized regional university. Whilst addressing recent governmental recommendations for improvements in the teacher education practicum, the project also sought greater suitability by connecting the professional skills of experienced design technology practitioners to school capability requirements, and flexibility by moving from an established block time model to negotiation between school needs and part-time student availability. Despite some local success, the project raised questions of scalability and sustainability, and more significantly transferability to a fully online environment with geographically dispersed students. The findings have implications for providers of teacher-education programs as they seek to enhance graduate capabilities and respond to national accreditation pressures.*

### **Introduction**

This paper reports the initial findings from a small-scale study into the requirements for, and implications of, a practicum (referred to as Professional Experience, or PE) partnership between schools and initial teacher education (ITE) students from a medium sized regional university. The study was motivated partly by the PE criticisms and the partnership recommendations contained in the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) (2014) report *Action Now: Classroom ready teachers*. However, it also sought to examine the potential for a PE process that would mutually benefit schools and a cohort of experienced vocational education and training (VET) practitioners upgrading to school teacher registration standards. In moving away from the established block placement PE model, the study identified considerations and areas for further research if the TEMAG (2014) recommendations are to be implemented successfully and satisfy future accreditation demands. Whilst the small-scale study achieved a measure of success, it raises questions of scalability and resourcing when applied to fully online students dispersed across and beyond Australia. It also questions whether the recommendations of TEMAG (2014) might encourage providers to reconceptualise PE partnerships, and to consider more flexible practicum models that respond to the diverse needs of schools and ITE students.

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<sup>1</sup> Although initially abbreviated to TAPP in the project, the acronym in this article has been altered to *TAPP-Tas* to avoid confusion with the Victorian Teaching Academies of Professional Practice school-university partnerships program that uses the same acronym.

## Background

The Bachelor of Education (Applied Learning) [BEAL] is a 4-year fully online teacher preparation degree focusing on students who want to become teachers in the Design and Technology curriculum area in Australian schools. Most of the student cohort are already working as teachers in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, mostly commonly in TAFE colleges. Teaching within the VET sector requires a vocational qualification in training and assessment (the Certificate IV TAE), whilst schools require a four-year undergraduate (or two year post-graduate) education degree. The BEAL, therefore, provides professional development as well as a pathway for VET practitioners to teach in schools on graduation.

With current experience in classroom teaching and management as well as interpreting and implementing syllabus documents, BEAL students are essentially *in-service* rather than pre-service teachers. There is plainly an immense difference between a 21-year old who has come straight to university from school, and a 40 year old who has had a career in construction, been teaching for 10 years, and who has substantial experience in working with diverse students. Nonetheless, BEAL students are categorised as *pre-service* because they have not completed an accredited teacher-education degree.

Consequently, and consistent with other ITE courses, BEAL students must complete 80 days of PE in schools. Anecdotal feedback from the initial cohort undertaking their PE was of colleague schoolteacher (CT) asking “Why do you have to do PE?”, whilst eagerly taking advantage of their classrooms skills not normally expected with a regular teacher-education student. This prompted university staff to consider how best to integrate PE within the units of study for the BEAL cohort, ensure that students were challenged on placement, and also to offer the most value to placement schools. Given that most BEAL students combine study with their (often full-time) role as VET teachers, an additional consideration was a process for PE to be completed in a logistically viable manner, such as an extended part-time basis rather than the established block placements at this university.

## National Imperatives in Teacher Education

As course staff considered how best to structure PE for both students and schools, the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) (2014) published their report *Action Now: Classroom ready teachers*. This report judged that “Providers, school systems and schools are not effectively working together in the development of new teachers. This is particularly evident in the professional experience component of initial teacher education, which is critical for the translation of theory into practice” (TEMAG, 2014, p. ix). It noted that “provider support to pre-service teachers undertaking professional experience has significantly eroded” (p. 28), and that “close working relationships through effective partnerships between providers and schools can produce mutually beneficial outcomes” (p. 31). The report argued for “Greater flexibility in the timing of placements in the school year...[to achieve] exposure to a variety of elements of school life...[and to]...lessen the pressure on schools” (p. 29), and that “every program provider should establish formalised partnership agreements with placement schools” (p. 32). In particular, Recommendation 19 exhorted “Higher education providers [to] deliver integrated and structured professional experience throughout initial teacher education programs through formalised partnership agreements with schools” (p. xiv).

Teaching Alliances for Professional Practice (TAPP-Tas) was devised to respond to the BEAL practicum challenges and address these questions through matching experienced

VET teacher professional capabilities to school curriculum needs and, given the co-existing role of student and teacher, negotiating attendance days based on mutual availability and convenience. Although planning for TAPP-Tas preceded *Action Now: Classroom ready teachers*, implementation soon after publication of that significant report meant that TAPP-Tas became an opportunity to examine the university-school partnership concept with a unique teacher education cohort, with the aim to add usefully to the current discussion about how teacher-education providers might respond to the TEMAG (2014) recommendations. Specifically, the research questions framing the project were:

1. What is the potential for, and viability of, a professional experience structure that matches BEdAL student capabilities with school needs?
2. What are the planning, coordination, and assessment requirements for such a negotiated professional experience system?
3. How can BEdAL experienced VET teachers contribute best to schools, and maximize their own learning during practicum placements in traditional school settings?

To begin with, relevant teacher-education literature was reviewed to establish factors impacting on effective PE, and to define the concept of practicum partnerships.

## Issues in Literature

### Theory-Practice Dissonance

The TEMAG (2014) recommendations highlight the theory-practice gap that has figured regularly in teacher education discourse since Dewey in the early 1900s, with literature suggesting that “there is only, at best, a tenuous relationship between the theoretical knowledge of teachers and their developing practice during their pre-service and initial teaching years” (Allen & Wright, 2014, p. 138; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006). Thomson (2000) defines this theory-practice gap as a binary relationship between the university as a place to learn *about* teaching, with the school as the place to learn *how*: “Pedagogy is the main game of both teacher educators and school teachers, albeit situated in different sub-field, but the binary works to render relatively invisible their similar concerns, shared beliefs and pedagogical practices” (p. 70). He further suggests that what should be a cooperative joint venture of praxis is subverted by what Bourdieu (1990) calls a “dialectic of distinction”, where the theoretical dimension of the university and the “real world” of schools each struggle for dominance. Korthagen, Loughran and Russell (2006) express concern that “contradictions persist between theory and practice within teacher education institutions and, in many respects, little progress has been made through several generations of rhetoric about teacher education reform” (p. 1036). Wong and Chuan (2002) suggest this may be because tenured academics in higher education, metaphorically at least, look down on both the status and knowledge of their school colleagues. However, a more useful explanation might be a mutual lack of understanding as the longer term research focus of academics comes up hard against the immediate daily classroom responses required of teachers, particularly where the academic has no “chalkface” experience (Grundy, Robison, & Tomazos, 2001). Darling-Hammond (2010, p. 40) approaches the issue from a more practical perspective, arguing that traditional teacher education represents a haphazard, and additional rather than integrated, arrangement of clinical practice in schools. Others have noted that classrooms that are totally divorced from the abstractions of the front-loaded coursework in universities (cf., Choy, Wong, Goh, & Low, 2014; Zeichner, Payne, & Brayko, 2015). Zeichner (2010) criticizes the traditional approach further by pointing out that, on one side, the classroom teachers have minimal knowledge of the structure and content of the campus courses, whilst, on the other,

academic faculty are content to leave the matter of teaching practices to students and their CT in what becomes a *caught* rather than *taught* process.

For students, this dissonance manifests in their university promoted – but not necessarily practised - contemporary theoretical constructivist views of education confronting traditionally organised classrooms where compliance to established transmission teaching is more likely to yield a successful grading from CT few, if any, of whom have mentoring expertise (Castano, Poy, Tomsa, Flores, & Jenaro, 2015; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006). Also, there is the clear distinction in some cases between what are considered theoretical university and practical classroom learning requirements, accentuated by the extraction of practicum from within teaching units in some courses (Allen, Ambrosetti, & Turner, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Keogh, Dole, & Hudson, 2006; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006). Thereafter, inadequately defined roles and poor communication between stakeholders contribute to a situation where the administrative requirements of placement availability receive greater attention than student learning needs (Allen & Wright, 2014). Korthagen, Loughran, and Russell (2006) captured the common reality as:

*while the traditional program structure appeared to give lip service to close cooperation, the reality was that teacher candidates arrived at three different points in the school year, stayed for 3 weeks during which they might be visited by a faculty member, and departed to return to the university. The routine was familiar, the rationale had long been forgotten, and cooperation was anything, but close (p. 1035).*

It is significant that these practicum issues relate to genuine pre-service teacher courses, where the student may have nothing other than their own school years as a reference point. Because most BEdAL students have both life and teaching experience, the potential for dissonance increases markedly. Not only could there be a disjuncture between university theory and classroom reality, but both could clash with their own teaching experiences and practices.

### **Practicum Partnerships**

The concept of practicum partnerships is not new. Although not proposing a model, Thomson (2000) advocated the concept of teaching as a practice to break the binary relationship and draw more equally on the strengths of both universities and schools. Wong and Chuan (2002) report a National Institute of Education in Singapore Practicum Partnership Model initiative wherein schools were allocated a broader role in teacher education, induction, and mentoring. Brady (2002) reported cases of university staff collaborating with primary teachers in developing pre-service teaching curriculum, alteration of course structure in response to partnerships, and initiation of joint research between academics and teachers. Anagnostopolous, Smith, and Basmadjian (2007) advocated the adoption of Engestrom's (2003) concept of horizontal expertise to resolve the binary challenge and "reenvision the institutional boundaries that mark teacher education's multi-organizational terrain as potential resources for organizational learning" (p. 140). They report joint construction of a rubric to assess student teacher practices in two core areas of teaching English, through which "University and secondary teachers began to view themselves as partners rather than competitors. This helped resolve many frustrations and tensions" (p. 150). However, these researchers noted some resistance to the project by students who were left out of the process. In outlining their seven principles underlying teacher education programs, Korthagen, Loughran and Russell (2006) include as number six "Learning about teaching requires meaningful relationships between schools, universities and

student teachers” (p. 1034), thus including all parties. They meanwhile caution that “Close cooperation in the name of supporting learning about teaching requires the ability to hold three different perspectives simultaneously: the perspective of the individual learning to teach, the perspective of the teacher in a school, and the perspective of the teacher educator in the university setting. Not everyone is willing and able to do this” (p. 1034).

Kruger, Davies, Eckersley, Newell, and Cherednichenko (2009, p. 10) reported on university-school partnerships in response to the “Top of the Class” 2007 inquiry into teacher education by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training. They stressed the need for any partnership to focus primarily on school student learning with trust, mutuality, and reciprocity as the key supporting principles (Grundy, Robison, & Tomazos, 2001). Essential elements were identified as school principal support, an agreed school need, and adequate resourcing of teacher and academic involvement. Most significantly, they argue that “university-school partnerships cannot be left to individual initiative” (p. 13), but must actively be supported by governments and systems if they are to remain sustainable. However, they also stressed that “successful partnerships bring the stakeholders around personalised and localised interests in learning” (p. 10); one size should not try to fit all.

Darling-Hammond (2010) makes a strong case for teacher education having to confront the challenge of “how to foster learning about and from practice *in practice*” (p. 42). She advocates an overhaul of university-school relationships, saying that

*Teacher educators must be prepared to create partnerships with schools in their communities, confront and dismantle those regularities of the university that prevent investments in strong academic and clinical training, and behave as members of a profession. This will mean embracing a new form of professional accountability that leverages universally strong practice in all programs that prepare teachers (p. 45).*

Zeichner (2010) at the same time argues for the “creation of hybrid spaces in preservice teacher education programs that bring together school and university-based teacher educators and practitioner and academic knowledge in new ways to enhance the learning of prospective teachers” (p. 92). Notably, he argues for greater effort and expenditure in the United States to establish boundary-spanning and hybrid programs to encourage innovative teaching, as opposed to increasingly elaborate accountability measures. Gursoy (2013) advocates that courses be redesigned “so that the [practicum] process provides more opportunities for feedback sessions where CTs [cooperating teachers], [university] supervisors and STs [student teachers] join at the same time” (p. 422), to yield increased beneficial direct feedback and enhance the depth of student reflective learning.

Other research suggests that effective practicums are constructed around genuine school-university partnerships where the responsibilities and roles of both school staff and university lecturers are clearly defined, and where communication between these stakeholders is genuine, frequent, and meaningful. Furthermore, linking school professional experiences to assessable university coursework represents a valuable opportunity to integrate theory and practice that in turn can promote ongoing professional learning among graduate teachers (Allen, Ambrosetti, and Turner, 2013; Allen and Wright, 2014; Kruger, Davies, Eckersley, Newell & Cherednichenko, 2009).

With respected teacher educators and research outcomes pointing over many years to the benefits of university-school partnerships to resolve the dichotomy between the theoretical content of teacher education courses and the realities of the classroom, the recommendations of the TEMAG (2014) report should not have come as a surprise. However, university financial pressures and inertia seem to play their part in hindering change (Allen and Wright, 2014). This statement by Zeichner (2010) seems prophetic: “One

of the most difficult challenges for me over the years has been to mobilize the intellectual energy in my department around strengthening what our student teachers do in their school and community placements and the rest of their teacher education program” (p. 90). To change is to invite additional work in an environment where research output attracts greater rewards than teaching quality.

### Teaching Alliances for Professional Practice (TAPP-Tas) – Overview

A mail-out to Tasmanian schools introduced Teaching Alliances for Professional Practice (TAPP-Tas) as a PE model where the skill set of the VET teacher could be aligned to school curricular needs within mutually acceptable timings. The examples presented were a qualified chef placed prior to the school fair, or a metals teacher supporting a school technology teacher with a welding unit not available normally within that school. Five schools responded positively to the approach. A BEdAL lecturer then personally briefed school PE coordinators on the TAPP- Tas concept and the BEdAL student skill sets on offer, and provided a copy of a unique procedures and protocols document that defined expectations and responsibilities of all parties; the university, placement school, and VET employer. Once participation was secured, the school and BEdAL student were then free to negotiate directly the scope of, and timing for, the placement. Even in its implementation, TAPP- Tas differed significantly from the established block placement model as in the following table:

Characteristics	TAPP-Tas	Established Block
Placement approach	teacher to teacher discussion	university PE office staff remote contact
Timing	negotiated	university scheduled
Management	negotiated - BEdAL student as partner	transactional - student as candidate supplicant
Procedures	collegial consensual	procedural bureaucratic
Workload characteristic	professional asset = student learning enhancer	inexperienced neophyte = perceived CT burden
Expectations	negotiated	dictated
Academic assessment	integrated	separate
Relationship	partnership	transaction
Benefit	mutual	primarily university

Table 1: TAPP-Tas compared to established block placement model

The TAPP-Tas model was different to the established PE procedures in the Faculty that specifically directed no academic assessment was to occur during placements that were rigidly scheduled in the semester timetable. In other programs, academic work was scheduled for completion prior to placement, and subsequent PE assessment responsibility relegated to the school colleague teacher, except in cases of *At Risk* poor classroom performance. University theory learning and classroom practice were clearly and physically segregated by both content and responsibility. Conversely, BEdAL placements included an assessed learning task in the form of a *PE blog* where students were expected to reflect on a daily and weekly basis on the application of their professional and pedagogical learning into the school classroom. In addition to complementing the colleague teacher assessment and moderating student outcomes, the *PE blog* mitigated the theory-practice dissonance by regularly involving lecturers in blog discussion of practicum achievements and challenges. This was further supported by a flexible semester program where classroom experienced BEdAL students could achieve learning outcomes regardless of their placement timing. Although the

lesson planning module was established as a prerequisite, this planning flexibility also benefitted genuine pre-service candidates.

## Methodology

TAPP-Tas was conducted as an action research project because it sought to trial concepts and practices that were likely to lead to further questions and modification of the initial concept (Klein, 2012), and because the results likely would impact on both the planning and delivery of both the BEdAL and other initial teacher education programs at this university (Ming-Fai & Grossman, 2008). Furthermore, course staff needed to respond to a range of variables, such as translation of VET pedagogies into a school setting within the framework of the Australian Curriculum, and the potential for reemergence of the professional class struggle between school and VET teachers that had anecdotally poisoned the *Tasmania Together* educational reforms. Staff considered TAPP-Tas not a panacea, but rather a first tentative step on a learning journey to develop the best practicum for students, underpinned by research and responsive to contemporary demands.

For the pilot project, seven experienced VET teacher BEdAL students undertook TAPP-Tas placements in four different schools, including a public high school and college, and an independent K-10 school. Prior to the placement, a lecturer briefed deputy principals and PE coordinators, sought concurrence to a protocols and procedures document, and informed them of the research dimension of the project. At the conclusion of the placement, PE coordinators, colleague teachers, and BEdAL students participated in semi-structured interviews about their TAPP-Tas experiences. The completed interviews were transcribed for analysis. Because the researcher occupied multiple roles during the data collection – supervisor, manager, teacher colleague, and lecturer – and would be doing so thereafter, particular care was taken to ensure that the authentic voices of classroom participants spoke to the research questions.

## Findings

Overall, both schools and BEdAL students responded positively to the TAPP-Tas placements. Schools appreciated the prior negotiation about the capabilities and experiences of the BEdAL students; “It is about finding out who they are and what they're interested in and what we're trying to achieve together. So that conversation prior to placement was really good” (School 1, PE Coordinator). One colleague teacher particularly was keen for more information: “What are they interested in? What do they like to do? I'd like to know that. What are their hobbies?” (School 1, PE Coordinator).

Three key themes emerged in the interviews: placement timings, professional relationships, and behaviour management.

### Placement timings

In two schools, the negotiated timings either mattered not at all, or were seen as beneficial:

*It doesn't matter...It doesn't matter at all. (School 1, Teacher A)*

*You can plan for that day, pick a day that works well to have an extra pair of hands...it's not as intense as having someone there the whole week and adding to your workload (School 3, Teacher)*

However, in another school, the curriculum and timetable presented some challenges: *They weren't there that five-day procession of days...And so that continuity wasn't there. Especially at [this school], because everything moves so quickly, and one week looks nothing like the week before. It was like entering a whole new world every single week (School 2, Teacher A)*

*One week she'd be walking into a [Science] lesson and the next week be walking into a history lesson. To be prepared to then work on what she was interested in, which was learning support, for her to be flexible enough to go from science to math to literacy, within a week's time, without sometimes knowing. That's where we probably could have been better in communicating back and forth (School 2, Teacher B)*

*She learned that some Fridays, that didn't happen, and then some Fridays she couldn't come. So it was always a give and take. We'd be lined up ready for her to come, and then something would happen with her work (School 2, Teacher B)*

For one school, the scheduling of a longer PE later in the year – when it generally suits the university - was a challenge in providing the best learning experience:

*I think if it had been a bit earlier it would have been more beneficial for [him] to actually see the kids in a more, I don't know, absorbent way if you like when they were earlier and fresher in the year. This time of year for my subjects especially, kids are working on folios. (School 4, Teacher A)*

The difference in responses suggests that any model such as TAPP-Tas needs greater levels of liaison between the university and school staff; to identify curriculum and timetabling challenges in advance, to find the best times for placement, and to establish the longer term implications of changes to PE. One model might not suit all school situations. School preferences, flexibility, and limitations for placements appear to be key considerations for effective PE partnerships. BEdAL students identified particular benefits from the negotiated timings:

*Because I've done one over two terms, having been there for a longer period of time, it's allowed to me to develop relationships with the people in the school... I've been able to actually see [student] projects from planning right through to exhibition and then come back the next term and go, "Well, you didn't do that last term, so let's make sure you do it this term." I've actually been able to implement and help them implement changes over time (School 1, Student A). I think if you do weekly, if you're going for say a two-week block, you meet the kids and you sort of... It takes a week to get to know them and then you do a week and then you're gone. But if you do it every day a week, say for two semesters, you start to build a bit of a rapport. You start to get to know the kids, and get to know what they're about, and I think they see you more as part of the community, rather than just a student teacher coming for a few weeks (School 2, Student A).*

### **Professional relationships**

Once alerted, schoolteachers soon recognised, appreciated, and valued the professional skills of their VET practitioner colleagues, and then managed the practicum to maximise outcomes for all concerned.

*The biggest difference was that these people are coming in with maturity and a work experience, which they are trying to extend, and the placement has to respect that aspect (School 1, PE Coordinator).*

*We knew that the teachers that are being placed with us were actual professionals already in their field. We knew that because of that, we had a lot of leeway in how they could come in and work with us.....we understood that we were dealing with professionals that were already quite experienced in their own fields. Many had never been in a middle school position before but they had that background [in teaching] (School 2, Teacher B).*

*I knew she was a highly skilled teacher, and that she just had an interest in our setting. And as our setting presents, it's something quite different to mainstream schools (School 4, PE Coordinator).*

*It's much more an equal relationship than a top-down, teacher/student relationship (School 2, Teacher A).*

BEdAL students identified dealings with their school colleagues as more collaborative than in their initial block placements where their existing skills and experience had not been identified. This led to the sharing of teaching approaches and techniques rather than the transmission of basic classroom techniques. BEdAL students also felt that school colleagues recognized their organizational and administrative skills.

*I was really impressed that when I first went to the school I met with the deputy principal who had been briefed by you and understood what the program was about, and we spent about half an hour looking at where I would fit the school and where the school would fit me, rather than me being dumped into a classroom ... that was really good (School 1, Student A).*

*I felt really welcome from day one. I felt like I was another teacher walking into the school, not a student (School 1, Student B).*

*I think they also picked up very early on the fact that we knew all of our ethical responsibilities, and all of that sort of stuff... we're all on the same page with permission forms, with who was going to be supervising, who was going to be dropping off....all of that (School 1, Student A).*

*I must admit, overall, I did feel like I was a colleague rather than a student teacher... I think one of the things is that they asked me for feedback as well. It appeared that we were on the same level (School 3, Student A).*

*There was an incident...with a student, and my colleague teacher said, "Come for a walk for five minutes. What are we going to do with this kid? How would you handle this kid?" So they were actually treating us as equals in that professional dialogue (School 1, Student A).*

### **Behaviour Management**

A common preliminary concern in almost all TAPP-Tas schools was how BEdAL students would transfer adult pedagogies and classroom management skills to an adolescent environment, but these appeared to dissipate quickly. Whilst any teacher is likely to experience some adjustment in a new school or classroom situation, behaviour management did not predominate as a concern for BEdAL students in the same way as the majority of their pre-service peers. Rather, BEdAL practitioners quickly adapted their own behaviour management philosophies and styles, drawing again richly on teaching experiences in their own varied settings. School colleagues acknowledged this in the interviews:

*To be in with the 6s and 7s, was a bit of an eye-opener, I think. But, again, he worked through them really nicely. We spoke about little things that arose and came up during the lessons at the end of each lesson. He was right on top of it. He did a great job (School 1, Teacher B).*

*One of those classes is reasonably challenging, the Grade 7 class. There was a behavioral incident. Just [her] capacity to manage that forward and not take it personally, but still be quite assertive in her response, is something . . . that the TAPP-Tas students come with, that we're not actually having to build. With [her] it was just . . . She was just checking with us her procedures.... not kind of doubting herself because there's been a behavioral thing. TAPP-Tas people know that it's not about them. They know it's about working with young people who are still developing their own skills (School 1, PE Coordinator).*

The capacity of the BEdAL students to respond well to behaviour issues in school settings could be attributed to not just life and classroom experience, but also to dealing often with challenging situations, such as transition programs for disengaged and disaffected youth, and in some cases prison education.

*Because she had been dealing with a whole bunch of prisoners whose illiteracy had been fundamentally part of the cause for why they were in prison, there was an element of urgency there, and an element of 'I need to help these kids' (School 2, Teacher B).*

*I've taught inmates at the prison, people with low socio-economic backgrounds, people that have been previously disenfranchised with the education system. I think it went well, and the teacher gave me feedback to say that I did handle the situations very well (School 4, Student A).*

One BEdAL student reached down into her own internal strengths and background to defuse a potentially threatening situation and establish rapport for engagement.

*I had a boy come up to me and push me and threaten to hit me, and also the relief teacher, so I spoke to him, and I actually didn't take it seriously. I'm just like, 'He didn't hit me.' The next day he came up and apologized to me, and we had a little chat. When they knew that they were going to have a relief teacher, they turned around and said to me, 'Can you be our teacher today? We would like you to be our teacher' (School 1 Student C).*

## Discussion

The TAPP-Tas pilot can be considered successful in that it demonstrated clearly the potential for a negotiated practicum partnership beyond the established centrally scheduled block placement model. It demonstrated how BEdAL students appreciated being treated as professionals able to contribute positively to student learning, and how schools are keen to utilize placement student additional capabilities and knowledge. As one school colleague commented, "We probably got more out of [him] than [he got out of us]!" (School 1, Teacher B). This finding is relevant not just for experienced VET practitioners, but also career change teachers who may bring unexpected benefits to schools during PE, but who to date have been portrayed and treated as equivalent to their inexperienced colleagues, and identified on PE as just another pre-service student.

Success of the pilot rested heavily on personal engagement with the schools, and the shared principles and procedures document. Personal advocacy by the enthusiastic registered teacher BEdAL lecturer facilitated understanding and reinforced the mutual

benefits of the TAPP-Tas model. The research follow-up underscored that TAPP-Tas was focused on developing genuine partnerships to maximize future returns for both schools and student teachers.

A number of issues remain unresolved and form part of an ongoing action research project to address the specific needs of this unique student cohort in a rapidly changing pre-service teacher education landscape. These include:

- Examining the potential and mechanisms for scalability to a larger program, particularly through involvement of distance program partners such as TAFE Queensland.
- Applicability and transferability of the findings and literature guidance to a fully online program with students in diverse locations, particularly through the use of connective learning technologies
- Resolving the sustainability issue. A partnership such as TAPP-Tas demands investment in staff and time to implement, develop, and sustain the system and associated relationships.
- Examining how to engage school systems and governments in a new paradigm of teacher education where participation in the practicum is valued and encouraged through organizational and financial support.

## Conclusion

Although a very limited entry into the world of PE partnerships, TAPP-Tas has yielded valuable learning for the Applied Learning team at this regional medium sized university. We feel justified in experimenting with a new approach to benefit both our students and schools, and by extension school students, rather than comfortably adhering to the established traditional model. Rather than find *the solution*, we have identified further directions for experimentation and research, in particular the challenging issue of PE partnerships for online distance teacher education. Recent accreditation under new AITSL guidelines provides an additional impetus for further experimentation that should continue as the TEMAG (2014) changes continue to be rolled out. Thinking beyond our particular program, we are left wondering whether teacher education institutions might develop multiple forms of partnership influenced by the level of the program – undergraduate, postgraduate, and non-traditional – and the form of delivery – on-campus, blended, or fully online. The future is unclear and uncertain, but in a rapidly changing teacher education world, perhaps the motto of the Special Air Service may be most appropriate – *Who dares, wins!*

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