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Crossing Boundaries: Challenges of academics working in professional experiences

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Abstract
One of the perennial challenges for academics working in the area of professional experiences (practicum) is how to negotiate the constantly moving and contradictory boundaries around their work. A number of questions arise. Firstly, how do they cope with the 'shifting, changing landscape' (Clandinin, 2008) of the university and at the same time cope with the shifting, changing landscape of schools? Secondly, how do they juggle the competing demands of schools and universities? For example, how do they increase their research outputs and at the same time develop productive relationships and 'partnerships' with schools? It will be argued in this paper that academics working in professional experiences would benefit by taking up Clandinin's (2008) challenge "to learn to be in a middle space."

The paper draws primarily on a year long self-study which was conducted by two professional experience academics at the University of South Australia focusing on the graduate Bachelor of Education (Primary) program. It also draws on findings from a post-practicum evaluation of 52 pre-service teachers and early findings from an investigation into the role of the school based professional experience co-ordinator involving 6 school leaders. The studies are based around two professional experiences which are framed around the notion of learning communities. These professional experiences have been restructured to aim for an intimate linking of on-campus, on-line and in-school learning with an explicit commitment to strengthening partnerships with school-based colleagues. There is a strong appreciation of the critical nature of professional conversations for ongoing professional learning and pre-service teachers have time and space structured into their professional experiences to engage in learning relationships with a range of colleagues, including their peers, mentor teachers, other school based colleagues and university mentors. Findings from the studies have illuminated many benefits for reframing professional experiences around the notion of learning communities. One finding in particular will be explored in this paper and that is that the university mentor role involves complex cognitive, emotional and interpersonal work in schools (Le Cornu, 2008). The challenges and dilemmas associated with this work are presented, as are a number of implications. The discussion centres on the notion of the professional experience academic as a 'crosser of multiple boundaries'.

Introduction

For those of us working in professional experiences (or 'practicum') in pre-service teacher education, the context continues to be very challenging. On the one hand professional experience is still seen as key to pre-service programs (see recent Teacher Education reports including *Ramsey, 2000; Teaching Australia, 2006; Parliament of Australia, 2007*) and is unequivocally rated by pre-service teachers as the most important component of their initial teacher education. On the other hand the domination of practical and pragmatic concerns for academic staff involved with professional

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experiences continue amidst the realities of the difficulty of getting quality placements, increased academic and teacher workloads, increasing casualisation of university staff, intensification of pre-service students' lives and the press for flexibility, accountability and standards. Some of these difficulties reflect the "changing landscapes" (Clandinin, 2008) of schools and universities, which we were alerted to at last year's ATEA conference. Clandinin highlighted other influences on these landscapes including the increased foci on research and internationalisation (universities) and changing demographics, reshaped families and standardised assessment (schools), to name a few.

Clandinin made the point that being a teacher educator in today's context, means needing to attend to the 'shifting landscapes' of both schools and universities. Whilst I don't know if this is necessarily the case for all teacher educators, given how they position themselves and/or are positioned within their institutions, I believe that this is most certainly the case for teacher educators working in professional experience. For those of us working in professional experience, our role necessitates working in both settings – schools and universities and we need to actively engage with the changing landscapes in order to negotiate the constantly moving and often contradictory boundaries around our work. How might we do this? What are the challenges and dilemmas? This paper looks at these questions based on a number of studies which have investigated a reconceptualised model of professional experiences around the notion of learning communities. The paper starts with some background information including details of the studies and then presents some key findings followed by a discussion about the role of the professional experience academic as a 'crosser of multiple boundaries'.

Background

In a number of the programs and courses in the School of Education at the University of South Australia, attempts are being made to reconceptualise 'the practicum' around the notion of learning communities. Changes have varied across programs but generally have included changes being made to how the practicum is structured and to the roles of the various participants involved. Alongside of these changes have been corresponding changes in the nomenclature; practicum has become professional experience; student teachers are now called pre-service teachers and university liaison are now referred to as university mentors. The term 'mentor teacher' remains the same.

This paper is based on the Graduate Bachelor of Education (primary) program which is an eighteen month program that includes three practicum courses, each having a series of on-campus workshops, an online component and a practicum which consists of four – six individual introductory days over as many weeks preceding a two - five week block. It is necessary to provide a brief description at this stage of each of the major changes to understand how the notion of learning communities is being implemented. The following changes have been made:

- Professional experience course teams;
- Clustering in schools;
- Mentoring/site model of support;
- Learning Circles.

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Professional experience course teams
Professional experience course teams have been developed where each lecturer is responsible for the teaching, learning and assessment of their workshop group of twenty five students in relation to the on-campus, on-line and in-school components of the course. This enables each lecturer to foster a community atmosphere in the workshops on campus even before the pre-service teachers go out into schools. This approach differs markedly from what was done previously where a number of staff would teach the on-campus component of the professional experience courses and then sessional staff would be employed to supervise out in schools.

Clustering in schools
The notion of community is further developed during the pre-service teachers' time in schools, as they are clustered in schools, with a minimum of four mentor teachers per school involved. In many of the schools the pre-service teachers are paired as well which often means that there are groups of six-eight pre-service teachers in a school. Clustering allows for pre-service teachers to support each other, mentor teachers to support each other and because each university mentor has a smaller group of schools to work with, it enables a stronger relationship to be built between the university mentors and school based teacher educators.

Mentoring/site model of support
We have moved to a *per site* model of support to replace the *per student* model, where each visit includes the university mentor spending as much time with the mentor teachers and site co-ordinators as with the pre-service teachers. During each school visit the university mentor conducts a 'learning conversation' with the group of pre-service teachers to enable them to reflect on their learning and also talks with the mentor teachers and co-ordinators. Where it can occur, university staff involve mentor teachers in collaborative learning conversations about the role of being a mentor teacher but this is very contextual as it often depends on whether or not the teachers can be released from their classroom duties.

Learning Circles
The term Learning Circles is used to describe learning communities of pre-service teachers who are placed together in the same on-campus workshop and in the same school for their practicum placement and who meet regularly throughout the practicum for professional dialogue. Pre-service teachers are informed at the beginning of their professional experience courses that participation in Learning Circles requires a dual commitment from them. That is, that the task of each participant is not only to share their experiences and learning but also to listen actively to their peers and ask enabling questions that will assist their peers to explore on a deeper level their own understandings of what they are learning.

The Evaluations

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Evaluation of the range of initiatives is ongoing and thus far has included an evaluation of Learning Circles (see Le Cornu, 2007), a self-study of two academics and their role as *university mentors* (see Le Cornu, 2008), an evaluation of peer support offered by and to the pre-service teachers, as well as other forms of support (see Le Cornu, 2009) and an investigation into the role of the school based professional experience co-ordinator involving 6 school leaders (forthcoming). Findings from each of the studies have illuminated many benefits for reframing professional experiences around the notion of learning communities. They have also illuminated a number of challenges and dilemmas for the various stakeholders and it has become clear that when changes were made to how professional experiences were conceptualized and structured and to how roles were enacted, many 'taken for granted' assumptions were brought into question and both traditional and non-traditional boundaries were crossed. A closer look at both the data and findings from all four evaluation studies has revealed an interesting insight which is the focus of this paper and that is the notion of the professional experience academic as a 'crosser of multiple boundaries'. The following section draws both on original data sources from the studies as well as a number of papers which have been written recently to present the analytical findings.

Findings

One of our findings from the self-study about the university mentor role in a learning communities model of professional experience is that it involves complex cognitive, emotional and interpersonal work in schools (Le Cornu, 2008). We have also learnt that there are challenges and dilemmas associated with working in this way. Both will be considered in the next section.

1. Intensity and complexity of the work:

The main difference in the way we work in schools in the learning communities model of professional experience is that each school visit involves us, as the university mentor, facilitating a 'learning conversation' with the group of pre-service teachers at that school. From our self-study data it was clear that this role is "highly skilled work …requiring committed staff with not only highly developed interpersonal skills but with a sound professional knowledge base about learning to teach" (Le Cornu, 2008, p. 11). The self study shed light on the following aspects of what was required to facilitate these conversations;

- listening
- asking questions about their learning e.g. "What have you learnt from this?"
- responding e.g. "You feel…because…"
- giving reassurance e.g. "You can do this" and "Look how much you're learned"
- reframing e.g. "Another way to look at it is…" and "What's another way you might view it?"
- making links with the reflective framework that was introduced on-campus e.g ."What, why, for whom?" and "What assumptions are being made?"
- assisting with problem solving e.g. "What do you want to do about that?" and "What can you do about that?"
- reinforcing key messages from the on –campus workshops e.g. flexibility, reflective attitudes, reciprocity

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- supporting participation in reciprocal learning relationships i.e. "What questions can you ask to challenge…(peers)?" and "Did you notice what …just did?" (Le Cornu, 2008)".

The pre-service teachers valued highly the learning conversations with their university mentors during their placement. In the 2007 study which focused on 52 graduate pre-service teachers, 86% of them felt supported by their university mentors and over half of them, highlighted the role that the university mentor played in extending their learning. For example, "*I felt that … was keenly involved with my professional development…She journeyed with me and bridged the gap between our learning in the university environment and its application at school*." Two thirds of the pre-service teachers highlighted the role the university mentor played in reinforcing key learnings from the on-campus workshops. For example: *"She always tied our learning conversations back to being reflective and not making assumptions which acted as a good reminder for us."* Another aspect of the university mentor work which was highlighted by the pre-service teachers, was the role they played in reframing – that is, challenging traditional conceptions around learning such as seeing mistakes as learning opportunities and asking rather than waiting for feedback. One student wrote; *"She told me that it's OK to see I'm wrong, it's Ok to be confused how to teach a subject and I'm not so important to a student that they will be destroyed by me trying to get them to do their work and they cry. This was new and important learning for me."*

We expressed many different feelings over the course of the self study and what surprised us was the juxtaposition of both positive and negative feelings within a relatively short space of time. For example *"I felt inspired this week seeing …(the student teacher) grow but frustrated when one of the mentor teachers did not want to talk to me because she perceived her student teacher to be 'doing fine'."* The most common sets of feelings were satisfying/frustrating and challenging/mundane and how we felt very much depended on the pre-service teachers and mentor teachers with whom we were working. We came to appreciate just how much we relied on the goodwill of mentor teachers and co-ordinators when we were *"in their space"* in regard to our interactions with them and indeed, the student teachers. Moreover, there were often times when both planned and unplanned school events had to take priority over anything we might have had planned and we had little control over this. This *"lack of control"* over what actually occurred in our school visits contributed to us feeling very frustrated from time to time.

Our self- study highlighted the *intensity* of our work in schools and the intellectually and emotionally demanding nature of the work. We came to appreciate that conflicts were inevitable. This did not just refer to interpersonal conflicts although these certainly occurred but it referred also to conflicts between beliefs or with assumptions that had been made. Moreover, we were frequently placed in situations when we had to *"think very quickly on our feet"* and make the best decision we could at a particular point in time which added a level of discomfort to our work at times.

2. Challenge and Dilemmas

The feelings we experienced were exacerbated by the many challenges and dilemmas associated with the university mentor work in schools. One of the greatest challenges

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and one that was responsible for many intense feelings was having to constantly negotiate our way through a plethora of needs and issues including the sometimes competing demands of schools and university requirements. We often described ourselves as feeling like we were *"stuck in the middle"* or *"walking on many tightropes"*. We came to accept that *"you cannot please everyone"* and came to understand that *"Sometimes you're positioned negatively by the student teacher if you're perceived to have taken the mentor's side and visa versa. And there's nothing you can do about it"*. (Le Cornu, 2008).

There were many challenges and dilemmas which we identified throughout our self-study. Some of these we recognized as pertaining to the role of university mentor regardless of how they worked. For example the challenge of working with mentor teachers who do not really want to have a pre-service teacher, being 'stuck in the middle' between pre-service teachers and mentor teachers, differing perceptions of the purpose of professional experience and everyone's roles, giving constructive feedback without damaging relationships and managing conflicts. However there were two which were identified as relating specifically to the role that we enacted in this model and one which pertained to the tenured staff member only.

2a. Facilitating worthwhile learning conversations for student teachers.
The main ongoing challenge throughout the professional experience blocks was to do with facilitating worthwhile learning conversations for pres-service teachers. The following three aspects were particularly challenging; the quality of our responding skills, asking effective questions and modelling.

2a (i)Responding skills
Our listening and responding skills were put to the test often during our facilitation of the group learning conversations. We found that we needed to be *"on the ball"* and responsive to whatever the students chose to share. This was difficult because at times we didn't know what we were going to be asked to respond to. This is a very different situation to that which you can have prepared a response beforehand. Gauging how the student teachers were feeling played a large part in our responses. There were times when we could tell that they felt uneasy or uncomfortable when they had to question and debate their own and others' practices and controversial teaching and learning issues. This then meant we had to demonstrate empathy and understanding whilst at the same time encourage them to delve deeper into an issue. Sometimes we felt we were more successful than at other times!

We also had to learn to become comfortable with silences. We realized that we had a tendency to want to rush in and fill the silences which resulted in us dominating the time together.

2a (ii) Questioning skills
We found that at times it was difficult to get the student teachers to talk about their *learning*. They often wanted to provide descriptive accounts of their day and talk about what they did or did not do and so we were constantly challenged to bring the

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conversation back to their learning and get them to reframe this as to what they had learnt as a result of what they had done or had not done. A useful guiding question was; What did you learn about yourself/teaching/being a teacher?
A problem encountered at times was that the students did not want to talk at all. As one of us said at a meeting; *"I sit there sometimes and don't know what to ask and then I just muddle my way through".* We then found it useful to frame the conversation around the following guiding questions: *What's the most positive thing so far in your teaching? What's a challenge/dilemma you've had? How did you resolve it? What's something that has surprised you?* We also used the following questions at times; *What's been your most significant learning so far? Why is this significant for you? What's been your most significant teaching moment? Why was it so? Who was advantaged/disadvantaged?* Having prepared questions helped us to cope with those moments when we weren't sure of what to ask and also helped us not to be seduced into discussing general issues that did not require any reflective work on their part.

2a (iii)Modelling
One of our biggest challenges was to model the skills that we wanted the pre-service teachers to develop in their interactions and group meetings with each other. Not only did we need to try and remember to model what we were wanting in the learning conversations, but we also needed to point this out to the students as we were doing it. This proved quite a challenge. We wanted students to learn to support each other and therefore it was important for them to recognize empathetic responses. But we also wanted them to learn how to engage in dialogue which was challenging. And so we had to remember to point out to the students what we were doing, for example, when we asked specific questions or when we reframed things. An example of this was when we reframed their perceptions of difficult and upsetting experiences as learning opportunities. We also pointed out instances of them doing it for each other too. For example, when they confronted each other with seeming contradictions in what was said we acknowledged what they were doing and affirmed the risk they were taking.

2b. Time to meet with mentor teachers
The second major challenge was finding the time to talk with mentor teachers. Because we believe in the benefits of collaborative reflection for teachers as well as student teachers we tried to arrange to meet with them as a group. However it proved to be very difficult for a group of mentor teachers to be released from their classroom duties simultaneously and so the most common times available for group meetings were recess and lunch breaks and before and after school. None of these times were ideal given problems with yard duties, other meeting commitments and tiredness, to name a few. When we did conduct meetings with them in these times we felt some pressure to 'perform', as indicated in the following; *"I felt I needed to make the time useful or at least perceived not to be a waste of time."* We came to accept that our conversations with mentors largely occurred individually and focused mainly on the progress of their student teachers. We wanted to engage them in conversations about their role as teacher educators but we found that this did not happen as we needed to *"go with what teachers are talking about and respond accordingly."* It was clear that we found this aspect of our role frustrating as indicated in the following; *"If you try and do the job well, you try to*

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build up relationships in the school and you try to develop people's understandings and skills but time is always the issue."
What we did do was ensured that during each visit, we allocated some time to talk with the school co-ordinator, the person who was responsible for the the pre-service teachers n the school. We also held meetings with the group of co-ordinators at least twice a semester to develop shared understandings around professional experience and to enable them to share supportive strategies with each other. The time spent with co-ordinators is certainly proving beneficial to the acceptance of our professional experience model, as indicated in the recent interviews conducted with six school leaders who have been involved with our program for at least two years. The following comments reflect their connectedness and commitment to our program; *"It feels like we're part of a program, not just a placement"* and *"We continue to be involved because the program is coherent and highly organized. You set targets and objectives that we can relate to. We are supported. It is very much a partnership as you give us a say in the process…"*

2c. Positioning within the University
In the questionnaire that the academics completed as part of the self-study, they were asked 'How does the investment in practicum supervision affect you professionally? The sessional staff member commented on the benefits of being involved including the enjoyment of working with schools and pre-service teachers. The tenured staff member however, noted some of the difficulties associated with the role, including feeling undervalued by the university and the effect that this has on her at times. For example, she wrote *"It makes me doubt myself (professionally) sometimes as I feel 'on the edge' of both academia and schools…."*

Discussion
The findings from these studies have highlighted the notion of the professional experience academic as a 'crosser of multiple boundaries'. These boundaries did not just include the obvious boundaries such as the physical spaces of schools and university, but were related to the complex cognitive, emotional and interpersonal work that was involved in carrying out the university mentor role in a learning communities model of professional experience. The construct of border crossing which is used to frame this discussion is based on Giroux's seminal work. Giroux (2005) used the construct to examine power relationships and knowledge and pedagogy in multiple contexts. In defining the concept, he wrote; "Border pedagogy is attentive to developing a democratic public philosophy that respects the notion of difference as part of a common struggle to extend the quality of public life" (p. 20). As it pertains to preservice teacher education, Bradbury & Koballa (2008) recently used this concept to conceptualise and explore the tensions that arise in mentor-intern relationships. They concluded that it was a useful way to broaden our understanding of the complex interactions that constrain and promote these relationships. I want to build on this and argue that it is a useful framework for understanding the complexity of the professional experience academic's work in schools.

The most obvious border or boundary to cross was the one separating the physical spaces of schools and universities. This is of course no surprise given the nature of a professional experience academic's work. We also know that there has been a long

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established call for school-university partnerships in the literature (eg Bullough & Kauchak, 1997; Goodlad, 1998; Peters, 1997, 2002; Yeatman & Sachs, 1995) and government reports (eg Ramsey, 2000; Parliament of Australia, 2007). The recent House of Representatives Report on the Inquiry into Teacher Education, *Top of the Class*, for example, cites teacher education as flawed through "the lack of investment in building partnerships that would bridge the gap between theory and practice, particularly for the practicum" (2007, p. xxi). However, most recently, a number of writers have made us aware of the unproblematic presentation of discourse of partnerships (Cardini, 2006; Bloomfield, 2008). Cardini (2006) wrote;

> Although theoretical definitions present partnerships as a cluster of symmetrical and complementary sector partners, in practice partnerships tend to show asymmetrical and unbalanced relationships between different members… (p. 398)

Bloomfield (2008) also argued that the development of 'partnerships' was not easy and highlighted the complex work of negotiating and establishing the legitimacy of different fields of knowledge and practice across universities and schools.

The studies cited in this paper have illuminated some of this complex work and the multitude of boundaries that need crossing by the professional experience academic. In analyzing our work in facilitating learning conversations for groups of pre-service teachers, it was clear that we explicitly sought to help pre-service teachers make links between what they were learning in schools, what they learnt from their on-campus workshops and online materials in professional experience, their learning from their other academic courses and how they made sense of all of it in relation to their own educational experiences and beliefs. Not only were there different fields of knowledge but often there was the potential for many conflicting messages about learning and learning to teach. Martinez (1998) described this phenomenon as pre-service teachers being "adrift on a sea of knowledges" (p. 1). Such a predicament has only intensified in the last decade given the increased role of technology and the internet. More than one principal I have worked with recently has referred to the notion of "learning to teach by googling!"

There were also several invisible boundaries needing to be crossed, by both the university mentors and the pre-service teachers during the learning conversations. These boundaries related to the teaching and learning processes in which they were all engaged that required them to cross the boundaries between cognitive, meta-cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. For example, in pointing out to pre-service teachers what we were doing, we needed to firstly be aware of it and then to be explicit about it. Similarly, pre-service teachers needed not only to explain their thoughts and feelings but also to explore why they thought or felt the way they did. In challenging people's thinking, exploring things from different perspectives and getting people to be explicit about their emerging understandings, there is a fine interplay between thoughts (at a variety of levels) and feelings. We know from the literature on critical reflection that the process is challenging and at times can be very uncomfortable or unsettling for those involved (Smyth 1993 cited in Brown, 1995; Tremmel, 1993).

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Still other boundaries to cross were those of conventional social norms around conversations such as turn taking and 'being polite.' For example, on occasion it took great effort to allow what appeared to be uncomfortable silences in order for sufficient time and space to be given to participants for reflection. Grossman et al (2001) highlighted these social challenges;

> Forming a professional community …new ways of thinking and reasoning collectively as well as new forms of interacting interpersonally ….Learning from colleagues requires both a shift in perspective and the ability to listen hard to other adults, especially as these adults struggle to formulate thoughts in response to challenging intellectual content. (p. 973)

As university mentors we also needed to cross boundaries between being a learner and being a facilitator and to feel comfortable with this positioning. What was obvious in our data were the challenges to our self confidence as a result of our new way of working with the pre-service teachers. This happened for example when we doubted our capacities to facilitate a productive conversation or when we constantly analyzed our modelling of certain behaviours in the group situation. It required a lot of affirming self-talk and support from each other in our shared reflection sessions to ensure that the boundary crossing between the interpersonal and the intrapersonal was productive rather than destructive.

Moving away from the facilitation of learning conversations, we can see more examples of boundary crossing in our work. For example, we needed to be sensitive to the fact that often mentor teachers were just too busy or unable to meet with us and given that we were in 'their space' we were unable to do anything about it. There were many times when it would have been easy to feel devalued in our role simply because of time not being available but again it required some 'boundary crossing' in our minds, to reframe what was happening, taking account of the context. 'Reframing' has been found to be a very powerful strategy to manage stressful emotions (eg Peters & Le Cornu, 2006). In a study of successful school leaders, Peters & Le Cornu (2006) found that when confronted with difficult or upsetting experiences, they were able to reframe such experiences as learning opportunities. Another way we resolved the problem of not having opportunities to engage meaningfully with the mentor teachers was take a decision to work with co-ordinators. This then led to crossing other boundaries, for example, moving from a classroom to a wider school focus and also from working primarily with teachers to working with school leaders.

At this stage it is helpful to introduce Clandinin's (2008) notion of 'learning to be in a middle space' as a conceptual frame for understanding professional experience academics' identity. By 'middle space' I don't think she envisages us 'sitting in the middle between university and schools' which is just a variation on the theme of 'being caught in the middle between the two'. Rather I interpret the 'middle space' to mean a third space completely – one that takes account of both school and university changing contexts (and indeed technological contexts) and one where teacher educators can forge their own identity. In this space, the professional experience academic can cross a whole

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range of traditional and non traditional boundaries by working collaboratively with a diverse range of people and building capacities for productive relationships.
In adopting the idea of a 'middle space,' professional experience academics need also to nurture the notion of *and* in their thinking, rather than *either/or*. This means that rather than talking about the theory/practice divide or talking about being a teacher *or* being a learner as though they are diametrically opposed, a more holistic and inclusive discourse around professional experience needs to be adopted. Such a discourse would reject the provocative establishment of oppositional binaries that has occurred traditionally which has seen the implicit hierarchy within teacher education programs position 'academic' work above 'practical' work. A discourse of professional experience, which reflects the realities of being a teacher *and* a learner or working with theory *and* practice allows for the shifting, changing landscapes of schools and universities. It also enables a legitimate space for professional experience academics to be established. If professional experience academics were to become comfortable with being in a middle space then it might mean the end of them feeling like they are on the edge of both academia and schools. Rather, they could position themselves, and be positioned by others in academia, as being right at the centre of initial teacher education.

The context for initial teacher education is clearly changing. Zeichner (2005) made the point that in the United States, frequently the work of supervising students in their field placements is "farmed out" to adjunct staff who often have very little connection to the rest of the teacher education program. And Clandinin (2008) noted that in Canada, pre-service teacher education is largely taught by sessional and post-graduate students and these are the people who go into schools. A similar disturbing trend is occurring in some parts of Australia. I would argue that now more than ever before, given the changing landscapes of both universities and schools, there is a need for *professional experience academics* working within a learning communities model of professional experience. Moreover, there is a need for us to become much more engaged in high profile scholarly work and disseminate our findings widely, given that "teacher education in general is still seen as a low-status field of study in many research universities" (Zeichner, 2005). We need to remember what Martinez argued a decade ago, "…the practicum presents a rich site for investigation of the lived out impact of our work as teacher educators" (1998; p. 104).

Implications: Create 'sustaining spaces'
Clandinin (2008) highlighted the role of 'sustaining spaces' for teachers and teacher educators to cope with the changing landscapes. Three 'sustaining spaces' have been highlighted for me as a result of my work: self-study; work with school co-ordinators and teacher educator research communities. Each of these sustained my efforts to 'do practicum supervision' differently and made a space for researching my work.

There is no doubt that conducting a ***self study*** helped to combat some of the discomfort associated with the plethora of boundary crossing described in this paper. Having support from a trusted colleagues and opportunities to talk and to reframe enabled us to gain confidence in the different way of working in schools. We have learned though that

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high levels of risk taking and trust are needed to successfully conduct a collaborative self-study. Pinnegar & Russell (1995) call self-study 'high risk' research because it reveals participants as both educators and human beings through documentation of successes as well as shortcomings. And Louie et al (2003) argue that one needs to consider one's disposition to confronting contradictions and taking risks in evaluating readiness for self-study. They wrote;

> Willingness to reveal and confront self are necessary preconditions to self-study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Moore, 1999; Northfield, 1996). Because of the intimate nature of the findings in self-study, intellectual honesty and emotional maturity are needed as researchers recognize both positive and negative self interpretations (Cole, 1994; Northfield, 1996). p. 159

Similarly, developing a supportive group of ***school co-ordinator colleagues*** with whom we could discuss and explore issues and practices enabled us to develop a shared purpose and to break down some of the traditional barriers between schools and universities (often referred to as the schools-university divide in Teacher Education reports). This then set the tone for ongoing learning conversations to ensure shared understandings about the role of professional experience in learning to teach and the associated roles of the various stakeholders. By prioritizing school co-ordinators we are not saying that we should not be working more closely with teachers in preparing them for their mentoring roles, as advocated in the *Top of the Class* Report. However given the difficulties with releasing mentor teachers from their classroom duties and the lack of current resources to provide opportunities to "support the extended conversation needed to create a shared agenda" (Bullough & Kauchak, 1997) it seems realistic to target school co-ordinators in the first instance.

Finally having access to ***teacher education research communities*** continues to sustain my work in professional experience. Attending annual conferences such as the Australian Teacher Education Association conference, the Australian Association for Research and Education conference and their international equivalents, provide what Clandinin (2008) referred to as 'temporal spaces', 'relational spaces' and 'world traveling spaces', all of which support and sustain us as teacher educators. Local research communities are also important for this purpose. For example, the School of Education at the University of South Australia has had a professional experience scholarship group operating for the last four years and has just recently formed a professional experience research group.

Conclusion

It has been argued in this paper that academics involved in professional experiences framed around learning communities, are 'crossers of multiple boundaries'. They not only cross the traditional boundaries of universities and schools but they also cross many other less visible boundaries which are found in the intense cognitive, metacognitive, affective, interpersonal and intrapersonal work in which professional experience academics are involved.

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It has also been argued that to sustain such complex work, professional experience academics need to adopt Clandinin's notion of 'learning to be in a middle space'. In this space, professional experience academics can actively engage with the changing landscapes of both schools and universities in productive ways whilst simultaneously shifting and sustaining their identities as teacher educators.

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