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Professional Development of Teacher Educators: A Cross Border Story

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a collaborative project between the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney, Australia, and the School of Education at Can Tho University, Vietnam. The project aimed to develop a model for the professional development of teacher educators in the context of educational innovations in Vietnam. Sixteen participants (2 from University of Sydney and 14 from Can Tho University) were permanently involved in the project. In addition, 10 other staff members from University of Sydney provided input.

The study followed a qualitative approach in which workshops and training sessions on re-forming initial teacher education programs at Can Tho, in addition to presentations, written documents and formal evaluations were main sources of data collected and analysed.

The project was a big success: Models of good teacher education programs and good teachers in the Vietnam context were developed; and participants developed their knowledge and skills in redesigning their teacher education programs as a response to educational reforms in Vietnam. In addition to the success determined through the achievement of measureable outcomes, this project illustrates the importance of human relationships and mutual understanding. This paper will exclusively focus on the emergence of collaborative, collegial partnerships, active learning and trust, respect and reciprocity between the partners as important outcomes which led to the successful development a model for professional development of teacher educators.

Professional Development of Teacher Educators: A Cross Border Story

Every project has its own special story. This story began eight years prior to the development of the project when a staff member from the School of Education at Can Tho University went to the Faculty of Education at the University of Sydney to undertake a Master of Education degree. This led to one of the Sydney authors being invited to attend the 40th anniversary in 2006 of the establishment of Can Tho University. During this visit he met with staff from the School of Education, beginning a very special relationship between the two institutions.

This review of the project and its outcomes is presented within a framework of continuing professional development for teacher educators (Villegas-Reimers, 2003) and the concept of ‘an activist professional’ (Sachs, 2003). Data were generated through a study of the email messages between two of the authors over a period of eighteen months, notes taken and observations made during the three visits to each others’ institutions, official evaluation reports, journals kept by some participants, and on-going discussions among participants.

The Professional Development of Teacher Educators: Some Relevant Literature

The role of teacher educator is acknowledged as a key player in the educational process (Turney & Wright, 1990, p. 3):

The quality of teaching depends in large measure on the quality of the teachers; the quality of the teachers depends in large measure upon the quality of their professional education; the quality of teacher education depends in large measure on the quality of those who provide it, namely the teacher educators.

However, as Berry (2008, p. xvii) writes:

It is a common experience of teacher educators around the world that there is no formal preparation for their role as teachers of teachers. Many are successful former school teachers who have found themselves transformed almost overnight (Dinkelman, Margolis & Sikkenga, 2006) into their new situations. The nature of this transition is largely under-researched (Zeichner, 2005). As a consequence, many new teacher educators struggle to know what to teach their students about teaching and how to teach in ways that will effectively support their learning as new teachers.

In most parts of the world there is very little literature or research reported on the professional development of teacher educators (Sachs, 2003; Smith, 2003; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The aim of this brief review is to identify some appropriate concepts which can form a framework for analysing and understanding how a collaborative international project involving teacher educators from a university in Australia and one in Vietnam resulted in developing and sustaining collegial relationships while achieving the project outcomes.

Although it is acknowledged that teacher educators have important roles to play in the initial and continuing professional development of school teachers, Smith (2003) points out that there is very little knowledge about how teacher educators themselves develop professionally (p. 202). She further argued that this is a particular problem as many of those working in the field of teacher education have never been formally educated for their roles. She acknowledged that many teacher educators have strong academic backgrounds within the disciplines in which they are preparing future teachers, however, they do not necessarily have a sound current understanding of schools, school systems and teacher roles and responsibilities. Many have no experience in working as teachers in primary or secondary schools upon which to draw when preparing young people for complex and very demanding work. Many of those who do have experience working with school students have little training in working with adults. It can be argued that teacher educators require knowledge and skills in the teaching of both adults and children, the educational context, the objectives of schooling within their society, in addition to academic qualifications in appropriate discipline areas.

In a wide-ranging international review of the teacher professional development literature Elenora Villegas-Reimers (2003), drew mainly upon literature in English and Spanish. She concluded that the professional development of teacher educators does not differ greatly from that of primary and secondary school teachers (p. 138) and that consideration should be given to the content of the professional development activities, the processes through which the professional development occurs, and the context within which it takes place.

Villegas-Reimers identified a number of characteristics that the 'new perspective' of professional development of teachers, and hence teacher educators, should focus upon. Rather than be based upon a 'transmission-oriented model' there should be an emphasis on active learning and constructivism. The context within which professional development takes place should be linked to educational reform, and professional development should be a collaborative process within which the participants see themselves as reflective practitioners (2003, pp. 13-4). In elaborating these characteristics she emphasised that there is no one best way of providing professional development, there are many, and context, content and process need to be considered in planning for effective

professional development. She argued that teacher educators need to acquire professional knowledge of both subject matter and pedagogy, to develop skills and techniques for teaching, and to develop attitudes and understanding of ethical principles that underlie teaching (p. 138).

In 2003 Judyth Sachs coined the term ‘the activist teacher professional’ and argued that the new professionalism demanded that teachers must become change agents with the objectives of improving the quality of education, improving student learning outcomes, and improving the status of the teaching profession (p. 54). She based her notion of the activist teacher upon Anthony Giddens’ notions of ‘active trust’ and ‘generative politics’. She argued for the need to reconceptualise teacher education on a different set of assumptions and social relations. The basic values that would drive this reconceptualised approach to teacher education were identified as enquiry, development, engagement and improvement (p. 58). She emphasised the importance of ‘partnerships’ (p. 65) and ‘joint endeavours’ (p. 66), and of ‘enhanced professional dialogue’ (p. 67).

Sachs considered the new teacher education should develop from a shared set of assumptions and focus upon learning, rather than teaching and content to be taught. She argued that the pedagogy, the course content and structure, and organization and delivery of teacher education programs should be integrated through a social reconstructionist approach (p. 71). The importance of social relations was emphasized through informal and formal cultures of collaboration and partnership. Sachs was writing about the preparation of activist teacher professional through these new initial teacher education programs and the continuing professional development of teachers. However, if we accept a previous statement by Villegas-Reimer concerning the similarity with the needs of teacher educators it can be argued that any professional development of teacher educators should reflect similar elements. Such acceptance emphasizes the importance of negotiated expectations, collaborative planning, shared expertise, the acceptance of diverse viewpoints and perspectives, and the development of trust (Sachs, 2003, p. 75).

Servage (2008) argued for transformative professional learning, which is “is able collectively to imagine other possibilities for itself.” This may be achieved through the development of a Professional Learning Community characterized by a number of core beliefs: (1) that staff professional development is critical to improved student learning; (2) that professional development is most effective when it is collaborative and collegial; and (3) that collaborative work should involve inquiry and problem solving in authentic contexts of daily teaching practices.

The concepts of “collaborative, collegial partnerships”, “active learning”, “trust, respect and reciprocity” emerge from the literature reviewed. These concepts will be used to provide a structure for the analysis of the data generated through the project. They will reflect an emphasis upon the desirability of adopting a social reconstructionist approach to the content, process and context of the professional development experience. The necessity of having an agreed upon focus for the professional development activities is paramount to useful outcomes being achieved.

Our cross-national collaborative research allowed us to examine our differing teacher education contexts and create a cross-national learning community. The principles which guided our planning and the development and implementation of the project were the desire and intention to develop a collaborative, collegial partnership based on mutual trust, respect and reciprocity, and the involvement of all participants in an active learning process designed to assist participants to reconceptualise and develop new approaches to teacher education for the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam.

The Context

Early this century the Vietnamese Government embarked on a ten year plan (2001-2010) to provide quality basic education for all children in Vietnam, an initiative which aims to ensure that all citizens are able to participate and share in the country's rapidly changing economy and society. Whilst primary education enrolments are almost universal across most provinces in Vietnam, secondary enrolments remain low. The national development strategy, "Education for All", aims to address the quality and efficiency of primary and secondary education, increase educational participation in disadvantaged provinces and regions, improve curriculum, and develop the skill base and management capacity of in-service teachers. Universal participation in secondary education is a further goal of the "Education for All" initiative.

Despite universal participation in primary education, the World Bank has identified that an irrelevant curriculum and under-qualified teachers have resulted in low internal efficiency within schools, leading to high repetition and drop-out rates at the secondary level. Today international funding support is focused on improving the quality and performance of teachers through pre-service programs as well as ensuring the relevance and improvement of curricula. Increased in-service teacher training initiatives and strengthening educational management practices are also a priority.

The Participating Institutions

Can Tho University is the premier university in the Mekong Delta with a mission to assist newer universities and colleges, particularly in regard to teacher education. The School of Education (SOE) was founded as a College of Education in 1966 and now comprises ten departments (Vietnamese Language and Literature, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, History, Geography, English, French and Educational Psychology). The SOE offers fourteen different degree programs, to 4,500 fulltime students at CTU, 1,000 fulltime students at community colleges, and 4,500 part-time students at CTU affiliates through Mekong Delta provinces.

The University of Sydney is Australia's first university with a proud history of over 150 years. The Faculty of Education and Social Work offers initial teacher education programs through Bachelor of Education and Master of Teaching programs. Through its Division of Professional Learning it provides quality continuing professional development programs for local and international teachers and educational leaders.

The four authors of this paper were the drivers of the project. Each has considerable experience in working in an international context and is committed to educational improvement through intercultural communication. They collaborated in the design of the program, while involving many others in actual presentation of the content and the activities of the reflective workshop sessions.

The Project

In 2007 the two Sydney authors invited the School of Education at Can Tho University to participate in a collaborative project around the theme of re-forming initial teacher education programs. This invitation was quickly accepted and after a successful application to the International Programs Development Fund of the University of Sydney it was decided that the four authors of this paper would be able to visit each other's institutions during 2008 to progress the project.

Fortuitously, encouragement to apply for, and success in, being granted Australian Government's Australian Leadership Awards Fellowships led to not only the two Australian authors being able to

visit Can Tho on two occasions, but for fourteen senior personnel from the School of Education at Can Tho University to visit Sydney for two weeks in August 2008.

Once the theme of “Re-forming initial teacher education programs” (RITEP) had been agreed upon it was necessary to identify specific issues that were important to the School of Education. The aim of the program was to transfer key skills and knowledge regarding pre-service teacher education to senior academic staff within the School of Education for the purpose of developing a new initial teacher education model and curriculum in the Mekong Delta region. Through capacity building in this area the Can Tho team would be able to review, develop and evaluate their existing teacher education curriculum and contribute to the achievement of the overall educational development goals of the Vietnamese Government. The first phase of the program took place in April 2008 during which time the Sydney team was informed of the work of each Department in the School of Education. Through open and collaborative discussion areas of concern were identified by the Can Tho team and these were then used to construct the two week workshop in Sydney. The issues included: implementing the credit point system, linking unit outcomes with student assessment, teaching and learning in higher education, professional development of staff, and the concept of the good teacher. Activities and inputs on each of these issues formed the basis of the second phase of the project.

The agreed structure of the Sydney workshop was for the provision of opportunities for input from Sydney participants, but adequate time for the Can Tho team to discuss, by themselves, the implications and appropriateness for the Vietnamese context of what was presented. During this phase trust and openness developed between the Sydney and Can Tho team. The opportunities in the program for the Can Tho team to reflect and discuss (either in English or Vietnamese) the applicability of ideas presented during input sessions brought about changes in the personal and professional relationships within the Can Tho team. It is not common to sit and discuss issues in an open fashion in the Vietnamese context, but in Sydney differences in opinion were aired and team members began to understand commonalities and differences. Much reflection and discussion (in Vietnamese) continued long after the completion of scheduled workshops. Each morning the outcomes and issues raised through reflection and discussion were shared with the Sydney team.

The third phase of the project involved a return visit by the Sydney team to Can Tho where further discussions were held about the changes that had been introduced since the Can Tho team’s return to Vietnam. The manner in which the Can Tho team had used the results of their reflection and decision making was remarkable. In each Department groups worked upon the same issues that formed the basis of the Sydney workshop and were very proud to share the results of their efforts with the Sydney team. A number of the Can Tho team had adopted the approach used in the Sydney workshop as a model for the way in which they organised professional development for their own staff and the staff of other regional universities. The University Rector requested that the Sydney team make a presentation to senior staff from all Faculties of the university on an outcomes-based approach to course design and how outcomes could be linked to student assessment.

The chronology of the project indicates the necessity of a considerable time period to plan, develop and implement a successful project, especially one involving international partners:

- May 2007. Agreement by both institutions to be involved in a project focussed on the improvement of initial teacher education programs.
- June 2007. Sydney team applies for funding from the University’s International Programs Development Fund to allow two visits to Can Tho University and one visit by two staff members from Can Tho to Sydney for two weeks.
- August 2007. Sydney team receives notification of the success of the application for IDF funding. Both institutions agree to apply to the Australian Government for funding through Australian Leadership Awards Fellowships (ALAF) to fund all Heads of Departments plus

the Dean and three Vice Deans (a total of fourteen people) to come to Sydney for a two week workshop.

- February 2008. Application for ALAF funding submitted.
- April 2008. Visit by Sydney team to Can Tho to gain and understanding of teacher education programs and to negotiate the format, structure and content of the Sydney workshop.
- May 2008. Notification of success of ALAF application
- August 2008. Visit by 14 ALA Fellows to Sydney
- November 2008. Return visit by Sydney team to review the program outcomes and plan for future projects.

To judge the efforts of all team members by the major events identified in the dot points above fails to acknowledge the intensive negotiating and correspondence which occurred continuously from the initial agreement to work on the joint project. Two particularly important elements to be included in the Sydney workshops were developed from face-to-face meetings in Can Tho in April 2008 and dozens of email exchanges. These were sessions on ‘the ideal teacher education program in Vietnam’ and ‘the concept of a good teacher in the Vietnamese context’. Follow-up discussions led to the agreement among the Can Tho team to strive to develop their programs along the principles developed during the Sydney workshops. The approach adopted in these sessions contributed greatly to the development of a closely knit Can Tho team, something which did not exist prior to the Sydney workshop.

Methodology

The methodologies used in the study of the process of developing, implementing and conducting a professional development program for teacher educators were qualitative in nature. The main sources of data were email messages, notes taken during workshop sessions, official evaluation reports, and personal journal entries. Data contained in written documents were processed using content analysis based upon the themes identified from the literature review. Members of the core team discussed and coded the documents. In the Results section below a selection of examples of the themes is provided. In addition to document analysis a discourse analysis was undertaken to gain a better understanding of the form of language used within the documentation.

Results

The following section presents examples drawn from the data to illustrate the concepts of “collaborative, collegial relationships”, “active learning”, and “trust, respect and reciprocity” selected from email messages, formal evaluations of the program, participant observations, participant journals and discussions of the planning team.

The Emergence of Collaborative, Collegial Relationships as a Result of the Partnership

Initial communications between the two partner institutions illustrates the beginnings of a strong collaborative relationship. One of the Australian authors wrote:

We wonder whether you would be interested in joining a project that a colleague and I would like to set up.

(May 9, 2007)

In response to that invitation for collaboration, the Vietnamese author replied:

Thank you for your invitation. We are more than happy to join your project. What we can do during the process of preparing the application, please let us know, I am happy to get involved if I could be of help.

(May 9, 2007)

Taking the language use (e.g., *whether you would be interested in, more than happy*) and the time taken for the reply to the invitation (e.g. within the same day) in consideration, it becomes clear that at the beginning of the project, willingness to work together and to share responsibilities with each other have been manifested.

After the application to the IPDF at the University of Sydney was successful, the Vietnamese wrote to express his appreciation:

Thanks very much Kevin. My pleasure working with you.

(November 2, 2007)

The developing collaborative relationship led to the expansion of the project through an application to the Australian Leadership Awards program, in order to obtain funding to bring a group of all School of Education leaders to Sydney. The Australian partner was very supportive of the project. In an email he shared:

We are very hopeful that our application will be successful.

(November 2, 2007)

The established collaborative and collegial relationships had become so firm that when the School of Education gained some financial resources for staff professional development, the Vietnamese side thought of sending one person to Sydney to study for a Masters' degree. An email from Vietnam stated:

The School of Education has gained some financial support from the Vietnamese Government to serve our professional development. We would like to ask for your idea to send one language/linguistics candidate to your university.

(October, 2007)

When planning for activities on the visit of the two Australians to Can Tho University in April 2008, the two parties worked in collaboration towards achieving shared common goals. The Vietnamese partner wrote regarding what aspects of teacher education programs offered in Can Tho University the Australians would be most interested in gaining further insights into:

...I am sorry that I forgot to ask you which activities and things concerning teacher education you would be interested in and what time would best suit you...

(December 2007)

After email exchanges in relation to the time and activities conducted the Australian partner demonstrated constructive negotiation involving caring social relations. He wrote:

I hope this would be acceptable for you...

(February 11, 2008)

It was revealed from his email that the necessity of agreed foci for professional development activities is vital to outcomes being achieved. Interestingly, the way of communication of the Australian towards agreed foci in this collaborative relationship has been transferred into the way the Vietnamese worked with colleagues. In one of the emails he sent to the Australian, the impact of working with the Australian on this collaborative relationship with his colleagues demonstrated a social reconstructionist approach to the professional development of teacher educators:

We are working on the information you requested. It is almost done; we are having some staff members read and give us feedback.

(February 13, 2008)

The concluding activity of the first visit by the Sydney team to Can Tho was a meeting with the SOE Dean and Vice Deans at which the activities and goals for the Sydney workshop were agreed. These included: the concept of the good teacher, teaching and learning in higher education, reforming the credit point system, linking program outcomes with student assessment, and new approaches to teacher education.

After the visit of the Sydney team to Can Tho, and upon being informed of the success of the Australian Leadership Awards application, the Vietnamese partner expressed his ideas about this collaboration via the email he sent to his Australian partner:

.....Please send our thanks to Lesley and Kristy for their support. I am very happy about our collaboration.

(May 14, 2008)

Not only did the emails address project-related activities and issues, but also some comments of a more personal nature:

..... We very much appreciate your support and your personal relationships with us. The story about drinking the wine you received from Tra Vinh (Vietnam) is a remarkable story for our on-going cooperations and collaborations

(May 15, 2009)

As can be seen from email exchanges, a special interpersonal relationship was developing between the two partners. According to Sachs (2000), these social relations through cultures of collaboration and partnership are important for teachers' professional development.

This sense of collaboration and partnership emerged even stronger after the Can Tho team of fourteen attended a two-week workshop for their professional development in reforming initial teacher education programs. In the summative evaluation of the group from Vietnam the following was expressed:

... Via this project, the relationship between the two institutes is strengthened; we plan to work on other projects relating to management, leadership in higher education and professional development for in-service teachers. The project enhances linkages between the two institutes and the two faculties, which will lead to future collaborations and more mutual understandings....

(August 2008)

An intensive review of individual perceptions of the training course in Sydney revealed encouraging impacts of the project on the development of collaborative and collegial relationships. The results indicated that whichever position the participants hold in the School and whatever program she or he teaches, the project has left positive effects on a very special collaborative and collegial relationship between the two partners. The Dean of the School of Education shared her ideas in her evaluation of the project and acknowledged the contributions of Sydney partners in assisting colleagues from other cultural contexts develop their professionalism:

...I like to work with people in Sydney. Kevin and Lesley are nice and caring. This project is one of the best projects we have ever had in terms of interpersonal relationships and impacts on professional development. Our fellows have gained more insights into how academic staff in University of Sydney work and contribute to the learning of communities...

(August 2008)

One staff member from social sciences education commented:

.... After the course, we have more than professional knowledge, we have good friends as well...

(August 2008)

One staff member from natural sciences education perceived:

The project helped us understand each other between Australian and Vietnamese instructors. We have developed cooperative projects between the two faculties and two universities and developed our team work skills.

(August 2008)

It can be seen that the project has resulted in an evolving development of collaborative and collegial relationships between the partners. Participants have learned to develop their skills in working with their team members, which is one of the social skills that Vietnamese learners should further develop.

Very strong interpersonal relationships have been established which are illustrated through thank-you emails to the Sydney team when the Can Tho team arrived safely in their city:

.... Today we come back to our daily work but our minds are still in Sydney. We spent two wonderful weeks in Sydney with helpful and great friends... We have developed and established new linkages with academics in University of Sydney. We talked about our trip to Sydney with the management staff of the School of Education and planned what to do next.

(August, 2008)

One of the Australian authors of this article showed her feelings at the closing ceremony of the training course in her journal:

Nam used the photos of the Australian Friendship Bridge in Vietnam and then the Sydney Harbour Bridge. She said how we have all crossed

bridges in our friendships and professional linkages. And it was so moving and I cried....

(August 22, 2008)

These touching and sincere words the partners sent to each other are more than specific indicators which any projects could have ever measured. These collaborative and collegial relationships make this partnership a special joint endeavour (Sachs, 2003).

Active Learning as an Outcome of the Project

The impacts of the project were more than how pre-service teacher education programs in a context like Vietnam could be re-formed. Participants learned much more than the planned outcomes. The way in which the Sydney workshop was planned around key inputs on the selected issues followed by time for individual and group reflection resulted in deeper understanding of the issues confronting teacher education programs in Vietnam and stimulated a desire to implement appropriate changes.

The social reconstructionist approach to the design of the Sydney workshop provided an approach to active learning which the Can Tho team adopted on their return to Vietnam. One Australian author of this article, who worked as a workshop trainer, noted how active the fourteen learners in the group had been:

....Active learning like this, working slowly through my document, deconstructing every aspect little aspect, was the only way I could see that I could show them what exactly I understood in my context about linking outcomes to assessment...

In response to the expectation and work ethic of the trainer, learners confirmed:

....I learned how to construct an education program in which outcomes should be linked to assessment. I also learned that a good program should be based on legal documents, standards and criteria for constructing and evaluating a program...

In addition to the main content of the training course, participants learned to transfer the knowledge and skills in developing and organising seminars and workshops to share what they have achieved with their colleagues in Can Tho:

....I have also learned how to organise seminars and share what I have learned with teachers in my Department.

Another Vietnamese participant added:

I have learned how to collaborate with my colleagues and work in a team and I will encourage collaborations and team work in my Department

I have learned a lot from the course. I like the way how the course was structured: from input to practice.

Without active engagement in their own learning, the Can Tho team would have not benefited as much from learning activities offered in the training course. It has become obvious that in addition to understanding the content of the program, which aimed to develop the Vietnamese participants' knowledge and skills in reforming pre-service teacher education programs, the learners gained

additional knowledge and skills, which will certainly contribute to their professional development as teacher educators. It is also evident in the Can Tho team's evaluation of what they have learned, the concept of learning to transfer newly acquired knowledge to their own context (e.g. I will...) and learning of the benefits of collaborating with colleagues has been developed. In this light, this cross-border partnership between the two institutes has developed collaborative and collegial relationships between the members in the Vietnamese team as well as between the staff in Vietnam and in Sydney.

Trust, Respect and Reciprocity as an Outcome of the Partnership

Reflecting on communications, negotiations and the process of decision making during the span of the project, a strong impact of this partnership on mutual trust, respect and reciprocity can be observed.

Upon the success of the receiving Australian Leadership Award funding, one leader from the Vietnamese university asked the Vietnamese co-ordinator of the program whether it would be possible for someone other than the SOE team to join the Sydney workshop. This would have resulted in one of the Heads of Department being unable to participate in the project because of lack of funding. On the other hand, it was important that a senior administrator should not be seen to lose face. This placed a member of the SOE planning team in a very difficult position. Trusting and respecting the Australian partner, one Vietnamese author wrote to seek advice from the Australian:

....In my communication with one of the leaders in my University, he asked me if it could be possible that an administrator from our university joined the project... So, I told him that I would ask for your advice. Please give me your advice.

After receiving the advice from the Australian partner, the Vietnamese replied:

Thank you very much for your time reading and giving me insightful advises. I need to learn more to improve my reasoning and communication skills so that I will be able to deal with job problems better. I am sorry that I have bothered you too much... And I have learned much from the email you sent me.

The benefits from this collaborative project have not all been in one direction. One Australian expressed how reciprocity has been achieved in this project when she reflected on the outcomes of the project:

Honestly, if they knew how much we learn from their context and how their systems work. It is really a win-win collaboration for both sides. I just wish I spoke more Vietnamese to show how much I respect them. I shall make a promise to myself - If we win the British Council grant, I will learn more Vietnamese.

The results of the review of email exchanges, face-to-face communications and activities conducted during the project, the language used, and the open expression of feelings sent to each other showed great respect and understanding. Both partners always asked the others for ideas, using expressions as:

.....I hope that would be possible for you...

Would it be fine if.....

or the ways of expressing thanks to each other show mutual respect:

Thank you for your prompt reply and thank you for your enthusiastic response.

I would like to thank you for being sincere, supportive and helpful to me.

We are impressed by the kindness, well-organised activities and the friendliness of the staff at the Faculty.

Without this trust and willingness to share ideas, as well as concerns, in an open and honest way the cultural differences between Australians and Vietnamese participants may have inhibited the success of the program. The strategies used to overcome differences in the use of language, and the encouragement to always seek clarification when uncertain of the meaning of some words and phrases from both sides did much to support openness and trust.

Conclusions

This paper has presented the emergence of collaborative, collegial relationships, active learning and trust, respect, reciprocity as outcomes of the project. These qualities have come from activities which partners from both sides planned and conducted during the project: negotiated expectations, collaborative planning, shared expertise and the acceptance of diverse viewpoints. In her speech at the farewell to delegates from the School of Education, CTU, one of the Australian authors commented on the activities of the project, “We structured the program to respond to the needs of the delegates, they have been able to teach us so well. This is just the beginning of a wonderful relationship.” (Sydney University World, 2008)

The success of this project was reported in responses made in the evaluation reports to the funding bodies. The sustainability of the impetus this project provided for participants to actively engage in re-forming their programs can be demonstrated through such frameworks as “Reforming Initial Teacher Education Programs at CTU”, “Education in Vietnam with Special Reference to Teacher Education”, and the development of “Professional Teaching Standards”. These were developed collaboratively by the Can Tho team upon their return to Vietnam. In addition, participants on their return worked with colleagues in their departments to rewrite course outlines to reflect the reforms identified in official Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training documents.

The concepts of collaborative, collegial relationships, active learning and trust, respect, reciprocity which have been illustrated throughout this paper are core to the successful achievement of teacher professional development programs, not only in cross-border project like ours but within any learning organisation. The model of a professional development program which was adopted allowed for the total control of the final decision regarding content to be determined by the participants over a period time prior to the conduct of the actual workshop. Those designing the workshop were given the opportunity to discuss with other workshop participants and staff members of the Departments the structure of their programs and the issues which concerned them most. The senior management team of the School of Education met with all local participants and decided upon the key focus issues. These issues were then conveyed to the Sydney team who drafted a program involving key personnel from the Faculty who could make challenging and interesting input to the proceedings. The final program for each phase of the project was negotiated and agreed upon by the planning team, after consultation with all participants. During the workshops adequate time was provided so that participants could meet and discuss the input and

how this may be adapted to their particular context prior to reporting back to the Sydney team. The third phase of the project allowed the Sydney team to return to Vietnam to hear how agreed upon plans had been implemented and to provide assistance and support as required, as well as to celebrate the achievements of the project. In this way both the Can Tho team and the Sydney team had ownership of the program and were able to develop trust and openness through collaboration and consultation.

At a time when the success of a project is often determined in terms of the achievement of measurable outcomes, this project illustrates the importance of human relationships and mutual understandings. Not only were the stated outcomes achieved, but all participants, from both universities, have developed strong friendships which will sustain successful collaboration in the future (Sydney University World, 2008).

Members of the Can Tho team, since their return home, have addressed other Schools and Departments in their university, as well as other universities and colleges in the Mekong Delta region. In this way the model of professional development developed during the project has had a greater impact than was initially conceived.

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